

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Adrian John SINDALL **(b. 5 October 1937), CMG 1993**

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ADRIAN (JOHN) SINDALL, CMG

interviewed by Malcolm McBain on Tuesday 22 April, 2008 and 26 August, 2008

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Decision to join the Foreign Office, 1956

MM: Mr Sindall, could we please start by your giving us a little bit of information about your education and your parents, and how you came to join the Foreign Office?

AS: My parents both come from East Anglia but they settled in London by the 1930s. They were from a modest background. My father was at that time working with the Pullman company that did catering for the railways, and he became a junior Civil Servant later on. He was a rather unsuccessful man, but an intellectual manqué, I suppose you might call him. I went to Battersea Grammar School in south London. I was keen to move on to make my own life. I decided not to go to university but to establish myself independently. I took all the Civil Service exams at executive grade level, and was lucky enough to come out near the top, which was useful in giving me a choice of which Ministry I might go into. My first choice, because I liked languages and travelling – nothing more profound than that – was the Foreign Office, so I was invited for interview at the Foreign Office, and accepted, and joined the Office as an Executive Officer, or B5 as it was called in those days. I joined Conference and Supply Department, housed in rather elegant but decaying surroundings in Carlton House Terrace, and run by a rather striking gentleman called Brigadier Steele whom I always remember for holding most of his office meetings lying flat on his back on the conference table, since he had back trouble and liked to be horizontal rather than vertical.

We were, in my Section, dealing with the Middle East. We were doing accommodation, security and the general refurbishment of the Diplomatic Estate, as it was. We were next to the other part that did the conferences for the Foreign Office, but we were fairly self-contained, and it's rather extraordinary, looking back on those days, how bureaucratic and cumbersome the administration was then. If you were in, say, the British Embassy in Baghdad and you needed a new

armchair, you wrote to me and I passed a copy of your letter on to the Ministry of Works. By some budgetary process, they decided whether you could have a new armchair or not and I then wrote back to you saying, Yes, you can have a new armchair. This process was amazingly cumbersome and took months. One tiny example of a breakthrough was that, after about a year, the Ministry of Works said that, rather than going to the bother of writing and sending a letter about this armchair, it would be sufficient for us to send them a photostat of the letter that had come from the post, and they would actually 'action' that. So that was a measure of the way the world operated in 1956-58.

Arab language training at MECAS, 1958

Towards the end of my time there, the Foreign Office advertised for people to go off to learn Arabic at the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS) that the Foreign Office ran in the Lebanon. This seemed to me to be an interesting and attractive thing to do, giving me an opportunity to go back to further education. So I applied, and was accepted and, by September 1958, found myself heading off to the Lebanon as a language student at MECAS. It was an interesting time to go because this was, in the late 1950s, the heyday of Arab nationalism. This had been the movement which challenged the French-created political system in Lebanon. The US Marines had landed in the summer to preserve the status quo and western interests.

MM: This is post-Suez.

AS: Yes, two years post-Suez. There had been some fighting, as there often was in the Lebanon throughout the years as I knew it in Beirut. By the time I arrived, life had gone back to normal and we all settled down in our school and spent eighteen months of intensive language studies. One did actually work very hard. At that time, we were housed in a rather ramshackle building which had started life as a silk factory. Mulberry trees grew around which suited the silkworms. It had then, for some years, been converted into an orphanage and, when it got too bad for the orphans, they gave up and it was acquired by the Foreign Office to house the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies, which of course, you will

remember, had originally been in Jerusalem at the end of the Second World War, and moved over in 1948-49.

MM: This was always described as the Spy School.

AS: Particularly by the Syrians who were always suspicious of it.

MM: But in fact you were just doing language studies.

AS: I was just doing language studies.

MM: Who was the Director?

AS: The Director in my time was Donald Maitland who was immensely active, amazingly enthusiastic and passionate about the language, but also about giving MECAS a sense of identity and purpose, and character. He was famous for one day putting a note round saying, 'we need to have some MECAS traditions. Can somebody please propose some traditions that we can create?'

Anyway, it went very well, and people were very enthusiastic, and we had an interesting range of people there. We already had some diplomats from other European Foreign Services; we of course had a lot of Service Officers, the Army, the Navy and the Air Force; and we also had a couple of American missionaries, even in my day, one of whom started every morning by saying, 'A fine day for a fine language!' I did the full advanced course. Most people who graduated from MECAS would almost all go down the Gulf or to Saudi Arabia, which, of course, particularly the Gulf, was the main market for British Arabists. Before the independence of the Gulf States, the British were effectively administering the Gulf and there was a big need for Administrators.

But I rather unusually didn't do that and went to Baghdad instead.

MM: Could I at this stage ask you how you came to be selected for MECAS? I don't think it was usually something that was extended to the Executive Grade.

AS: There was a small number of Executive B Grade Officers who went, but you're right, they were in the minority. When I was at MECAS, there were three of us from Branch B. The selection process was simple. A circular came round inviting applications to go to MECAS and asking applicants to give some indication whether they had linguistic prowess, and of course I had good A Levels in French and German, and was interested in going. My memory is that that was about it. A week or two later somebody rang me and said you are off to MECAS. All this, I remember, was rather late in the day because I also remember I only had about three weeks' notice to get out of London and go to Beirut. And so that's how it started.

Third Secretary (Commercial), British Embassy, Baghdad, 1960-62

MM: And then your next assignment was to go straight from there to Baghdad.

AS: We had a bigish Commercial Department. The main Embassy was in a strange building which had been the Ottoman Turkish Governor's Residence. We had a down-town Commercial Office on the other side of the river which I ran with local staff. I went to work every morning from the Embassy across the river by the Embassy launch, which we sported in those days.

This was a very interesting time because, just as I was talking about the changes in the Middle East when I first went to the Lebanon, by the time I went to Baghdad this was two years after the revolution which had overthrown the Hashemite Monarchy. We were under the grip of the dictator, General Abdul Karim Kasem, a strange man with scary eyes who had mounted a coup and ran the country. These were difficult times for the British except for an interesting example of how the character of an Ambassador can affect political life. The Ambassador, Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, had either the good fortune or the ability to get on to amazingly good terms with Kasem. The relationship had been helped by the fact that when the young student, Saddam Hussein, attempted to assassinate Kasem in Rashid Street he wounded him. The wound was not serious but Kasem had his arm in plaster for a number of weeks. I think that within a

week or so Sir Humphrey Trevelyan had fallen off a horse and broken his arm. General Kasem was much taken by this, and constantly used to talk to the British Ambassador about 'our accidents together'.

This curious relationship had one or two strange outcomes. The biggest political crisis to occur during my time in Baghdad was when Britain granted Independence to Kuwait in 1961-62. The Iraqis had a territorial claim. They claimed that Kuwait was a Province of Iraq. They were deeply unhappy about the fact that the British had granted Kuwait independence, and threatened to invade. The British sent an aircraft carrier and troops to repel any such invasion, and the Iraqis then said that, if any other countries were to recognise Kuwait diplomatically, the Ambassadors of those countries would be declared persona non grata in Baghdad. A series of countries did recognise the existence of the new State of Kuwait and their Ambassadors were duly sent packing. The only Ambassador in these circumstances who was not sent packing was Sir Humphrey Trevelyan, whom Kasem liked so much he was not happy to see him go! So all these doleful Ambassadors – they were always either doleful or angry – said, well, I'm being sent away; why is Trevelyan still allowed to be here?

That relationship also meant that we were one of the few Embassies whose national day was attended by General Kasem, who normally didn't go to parties. But he liked going to the British Embassy for the Queen's Birthday Party, which was held in the early evening in the large gardens of the Residence. In the afternoon the Iraqi army swept the garden for mines. The set piece was Kasem's arrival surrounded by an armed escort. There were two armchairs and a sofa set out in the middle of the lawn on carpets, at which he would eventually sit and talk with the Ambassador before circulating.

MM: Am I right in thinking that Humphrey Trevelyan was formerly Indian Civil Service?

AS: Yes he was.

MM: That was an interesting route in many ways.

AS: It was because of course some of the Gulf States were administered by the British in India and not from London.

MM: The Indian Political Service.

AS: That's right. And of course it was Humphrey who, having retired, was brought out of retirement when Aden was in serious trouble to be appointed Governor and to oversee the departure of the British from that place.

Anyway, just to finish my little story, Kasem would sit with Humphrey and chat for twenty minutes, and then they and the armed group (rather reminiscent of all the Chinese guarding the Olympics flag the other day, it suddenly occurred to me) would parade through the cocktail party. Humphrey would peer between the armed guards and spot somebody, like me or one of his staff or a businessman, and summon him through for two minutes' conversation with Kasem. And then eventually Kasem would thank the Ambassador profusely for having been at the party, and off he would go into the night.

MM: This must have caused immense jealousy amongst other Missions.

AS: Well, it did. They were bemused by the fact that there was this uniquely strange relationship between this dictator and the British, given everything else that had gone on. It was an example of how the British relationship with the Arabs is a complicated one. Other Ministers, I always remember, would give violent anti-British speeches at rallies. One Minister in particular attacked us and then – this was over a weekend – when he'd finished speaking at the rally, drove to the Embassy, demanded that the Consul be brought in to give him a visa because he wished to go to London the next day for some medical treatment and recreation; and he would brook no refusal.

So it was a strange world. I, of course, was watching this partly, I suppose, from the margins as I was mainly doing my commercial work as a very junior diplomat in those days. We had an interesting range of colleagues there, including the

Counsellor Peter Hayman, later Sir Peter Hayman, who tragically faced disgrace for paedophilia but in those days was a rather jolly, enormously engaging, clever, large Robert Morley type figure. He loved playing a party game called Teapots, which was a sort of guessing game. Eventually his triumph, I always remember, was to get the Iraqi Foreign Minister to dinner and make him play Teapots. I mention these things because it was indicative of the strange fabric of relationships that we had in those otherwise tragic and difficult, troubled times.

MM: Did Humphrey Trevelyan take a particular liking to you? Or was he like that with all the members of his staff?

AS: He was genuinely very nice to everybody. He took a particular liking to me, I think, as one or two people told me afterwards, because I'd married young and my wife had my first child there. Morning office meetings were very formal but he was extraordinarily nice. He ran quite a vigorous and tight ship. Mere Third Secretaries were not normally expected to contribute very much; but there was one morning when he turned his gaze on to me and said, have you got anything for us to-day, Adrian? And I said, Yes I have, Ambassador! I've just had a baby daughter! And the whole meeting erupted in laughter and ever since that moment somehow Humphrey Trevelyan was always rather benign towards me, which was extremely nice of him.

So I did my eighteen months or so in Iraq and left very shortly before Kasem was overthrown, so I wasn't witness to any of that. I then moved on to Morocco.

Second Secretary, British Embassy, Rabat, 1962-67

AS: That was in 1962. It was a strange posting in a way because we had not really had a policy of posting Arabists to Morocco, which of course was a largely Francophone country. Occasionally somebody might turn up there who happened to be an Arabist, but it was then decided that we should strengthen the Arabic-speaking side of the Embassy, so the FCO had created, just before I went there, a post of Assistant Information Officer. I went there as Third Secretary

(Information) and again I worked downtown in the Information Office convenient for the press, radio and television.

I have to say, when I look back on it, that it was something of a sinecure because there really was not a sufficient content to either UK-Moroccan relations, or the size or quantity or quality of the Moroccan media to justify two UK-based officers; there was a Second Secretary (Information) and a Third. I endured a year or so of a somewhat boring life. There was really very little for me to do. But there was then a reshuffle in the Embassy, in Chancery, and the Second Secretary who was Political Officer in Chancery moved on somewhere else, and the Ambassador, Sir Richard Beaumont, decided that it would be good for me to leave this wasteful Information Office and come and do a Chancery job as Second Secretary. I was promoted to Second Secretary about that time. Of course that was, for me, an act of great kindness and goodness on his part because it gave me a political job in Chancery which is fairly unusual for a Grade B Officer.

So I buckled down to this task. We were living in a still very Francophone world. Although I had gone there because of my Arabic background, I virtually used no Arabic at all, with one exception which I'll come back to in a moment. Morocco was essentially Francophone as a country and was also full of French even to the most modest level. I remember one of my heaters caught fire in my house one day, and the fire brigade came up with four people on it, three Moroccans and the chief of the fire engine was a Frenchman. That was an eloquent example of the extent in which the French administered their colonies, even down to junior levels of administration.

When, somewhere towards the end of my time, the Moroccans with great enthusiasm introduced legislation for the Moroccanisation and Arabisation of the legal system, they had to put it into abeyance within three months because they couldn't find enough Ministers or senior officials who had enough Arabic to conduct their affairs in Arabic. So that was an eloquent example of the potency of French there.

We had, I suppose, a pretty modest observer role there. Morocco had started off on independence fostering African links. But by the 1960s it was turning away from that and more towards Middle East relationships. So it was a time of some change, and a time of incipient attempts to introduce some modest form of democracy, all stage managed and led by His Majesty King Hassan II, who was a fascinating combination of 15th century feudal monarch and a French intellectual all wrapped up together. I suppose he was more feudal than French in a way.

MM: I can't quite remember the dates, but was there not trouble in Algiers in connection with desire for independence by the Algerians?

AS: Yes, the main Moroccan problem with Algiers at that time was that there was a disputed border strip between Morocco and Algeria. Troops massed on the borders at a place called Tindouf now threatened, and journalists appeared. There was a fairly fiery relationship for some time between Morocco and Algeria. But war was avoided.

The other great event was the famous disappearance in Paris of the Moroccan leftwing opposition leader, Mehdi ben Barka, who, it eventually turned out, had more or less been bumped off by French agents at the bidding of the Moroccan Security Services. This caused a major crisis in relationships between the de Gaulle government in France and Morocco, and I think was the major event which began finally to shift into a whole new world the relationship between the two countries which, when I was there, had been pretty cosy in a colonial sense.. Here was another set of tectonic plates shifting in the Middle East.

We had one or two amusing visitors; we had Barbara Castle who came through at one point and was clearly not enamoured of the King but thought she ought to call on him. I always remember Barbara Castle coming back from her interview at the Palace where she'd arrived slightly late because she had had to have her hair done. She said to the Ambassador – I happened to be there at the time – the King exuded enormous charm, but, she said, 'I wasn't going to let that bastard put it over on me!' So she was clearly a woman who was determined to stick to her principles.

MM: You didn't go with her?

AS: I didn't go with her, no, but I was back at the Residence because I was taking her on to some other appointment afterwards.

And then we had a brief visit by the Duke of Edinburgh who came to play polo. The Moroccan Royal Guard were great polo players, and it's another sort of whiff of the past world. We were able to negotiate to borrow Barbara Hutton's polo ponies from Tangier to bring down for the British side to use in their match with the Moroccan Royal Guard.

This 1962-67 period was one where Dick Beaumont and I and other people were looking with increasing concern at problems elsewhere in the Middle East. Although we were a long way away, we were becoming aware that the problem with the Arabs and the Israelis and the Palestinians was beginning to build up. This culminated in the end with the 1967 War, which happened about the time that I left. There had been one Arab summit in Casablanca in an attempt to get the Arabs together to confront this problem of Israel. So again one was looking at a whole range of issues that were working their way through the Middle East political system there in the 1960s.

I was wondering what I should do next when the then Head of Near East and North Africa Department, Denis Speares, who died tragically young of leukaemia, came to Morocco on a parish visit. I gave the main reception for him to meet Moroccan politicians, people in the Moroccan political world. Fortunately it was remarkably well attended. Lots of people came and this proved to be a particularly interesting and insightful evening. I think it was perhaps largely on the strength of that visit that when I told him I was about to be posted and indeed perhaps I was going back to London that he said why don't you come into my Department? So again I was very fortunate. I was then posted back to London and found myself as the Desk Officer for the Sudan in NENAD in late 1967.

First Secretary in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, 1967-70

AS: The situation at the time that I came into NENAD was immediately post the 1967 War; a humiliating defeat for the Arabs. One product of that had been the propaganda put out by elements of the Arab media, particularly the Egyptian, saying the reason they had suffered this defeat was that the Israelis had had some military help through communications aircraft carrying messages from the British and others. This was known as the Big Lie. But it was sufficiently believed at the time by a number of Arab governments that it induced them to break off diplomatic relations with the United Kingdom. So our relationships with a number of Arab countries were in a poor way. Ambassadors were sent home to London and they didn't know when they were going back. And there was one of those phenomena, which one has met from time to time, of these poor Ambassadors, who hadn't got a post, haunting the corridors of the Foreign Office popping into Departments to see if there was any news about their job. As months go by, the whole ambassadorial visitation becomes a little more forlorn. They become a little more depressed, and hard-working officials who have lots of other things to do, with the best will in the world but perhaps sometimes not, find it a little less agreeable to give time to some poor chap who's still hanging about.

Meanwhile, the challenge was how to restore these Middle East relations. The difficulty was how to engage the government in question in such a way that it didn't feel humiliated at having to accept that the "big lie" had been just that. We had to find some presentational way to get back into dialogue. This was a delicate process, depending which country it was. It involved the use of some intermediary or somebody well connected who could pass messages. That was a process that was going on when I inherited the Sudanese Desk and eventually, after some time, it all came good; there was some delicate footwork on everybody's part. But relations with Sudan were restored.

MM: Did we still have an Embassy or simply a mission?

AS: We had a mission; we didn't have an ambassador. It was the ambassadors that had gone; we hadn't broken off. Well, in some cases we broke off completely.

Damascus – the Syrians threw everybody out. In Khartoum we had a Mission; we certainly had at that time a Sudanese Embassy in London.

One of the things I thought that I might mention links up to what I said about Denis Speares coming out to Morocco and shows how much the world had changed. At that time, there was no presumption that if you were the desk officer for a particular country, you had any need to go and visit it. Even when you were a Head of Department, as Denis Speares was, you were allowed, with generosity, one visit in your tour of duty of three years to each of the countries for which you were responsible as Head of Department. Thus you had no chance whatsoever of visiting countries with which you were dealing as Desk Officer or indeed even when you were Assistant Head of Department. I spent this curious fifteen to eighteen months of my life as the desk officer for the Sudan and, over that time, acquired an enormous amount of knowledge about the Sudan, about its economy and its politics and its political figures, but never from that day to this have I ever set foot in the Sudan. I've met a lot of Sudanese because a lot used to come to London, even though we didn't have diplomatic relations. But it didn't stop the Sudanese coming to London in great numbers, and indeed there was a poignant moment when the Sudanese Prime Minister suffered a stroke, and he was immediately medivaced to London. I went out to Heathrow with a surgeon from Bart's. The Prime Minister came out of the plane on a stretcher and we were whisked off in the ambulance to Bart's and tucked him up. There he was for a month. Happily he recovered well and with that UK-Sudanese relations recovered brilliantly. We climaxed the medical treatment with a brilliant celebratory dinner at the Dorchester.

I was thinking about this time in NENAD the other day, and one incident crossed my mind. After the debacle of the 1967 War and the humiliation of the Egyptians, President Nasser resigned with a great flourish. George Brown, who was the Foreign Secretary at the time, called an office meeting to discuss the implications of the resignation of Nasser. Denis Speares always told the story of how he and other people buckled down to write short, elegant and incisive papers about what was now going to happen, and alternative ways forward for Egypt. The meeting assembled. George Brown looked at the submission and he put it on

one side and said, “Has it never crossed any of your minds that this may simply be a piece of political bluff on the President’s part? I have a feeling he’ll be back in power in three days.” Denis said it was a wonderful example of how the instinct of a politician is always in a sense unerring in a way that perhaps, however gifted a practitioner of diplomacy may be, he might not have the gut instinct of a politician. Whatever else George Brown did or didn’t have, he had a nose for political motivation.

MM: He had plenty of instinct.

AS: Anyway, I then switched over as desk officer for Libya, another country I have never managed to visit! Again, this was part of a pattern of the British relationship with Arabs. At that time we had two major bases in Libya – an RAF base at El Adem – and this was important for the British for varied and many reasons, one of which was desert training ranges. British jet fighter pilots could fly over the desert practising letting off their ordnance and attacking tanks and charging around. It was an important asset for the British. We had this close relationship with the Libyan Government. We were engaged in a programme of major new arms sales to Libya, both to the Libyan Army and also to the paramilitary National Guard, which I suppose King Idris thought was a form of possible reassurance in case there might be trouble from the Army. The National Guard was an alternative fighting force. And there was a major task force led by a British General who master-minded the arms sales negotiations. The Libyan Generals would all come over regularly for meetings and this great process went on which was going to be of significant value to the British defence industry.

MM: You mentioned King Idris. Surely he was long before your time?

AS: No, he was the monarch who was overthrown on 1st September 1969.

MM: Gaddafi was actually functioning as ...

AS: He was a major in the Army. There was great ignorance as to his existence at all.

MM: Sorry, I completely forget Idris had lasted as long as that ...

AS: Oh he was there. The coup, which we'll talk about in a moment; he was actually on holiday in Turkey or somewhere – I can't remember exactly where. Anyway, these Generals all used to come over and, as so many Arabs did and do, lived the life of Riley. I always remember the Ministry of Defence being astounded one morning when there was a meeting which I happened to be attending where one of the Generals came in at the start of this meeting full of bonhomie and, to their astonishment, said he'd had an absolutely wonderful night, and that he had woken up in bed that morning with a girl on either side of him! I was like the meat in the sandwich, gentlemen! General King harrumphed and we then got on with the meeting.

All of this was of course about to change because there followed the memorable moment when, on 1 September 1969, I was at home and it was a Bank Holiday Monday. The telephone rang at home and it was the Resident Clerk in the Foreign Office saying we've just had a Flash telegram from the Embassy in Tripoli saying that there seemed to be rather more soldiers on the streets than normal. So I thanked him and asked him to keep an eye on it. He rang again about half an hour later and said we've just had another telegram saying there's something going on. There are even more tanks and soldiers around. I think you'd better come in. So I got in the car and drove at 8.30 in the morning ...

MM: On a Bank Holiday!

AS: On a Bank Holiday – into the Foreign Office, and I left the Office at 2am the next day having had the most extraordinary day. The telegrams began to pour in, and it became apparent that something serious was afoot. As the day went on, more and more people emerged from their Bank Holiday into the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office at ever-increasing senior level because we realised by the late afternoon that we had a major crisis on our hands. And indeed, there had been a major coup.

And of course, in the same way, the American Embassy in London started to fill up with people through the day and there were lots of anxious faces

So there was this day, 1 September 1969, and the two questions which immediately presented themselves were: who is behind this coup? Who has organised this? And secondly what is going on and what, most importantly, should our response be? As the day went on and some announcements were beginning to be made on the radio and elsewhere, none of the names that began to emerge clearly meant anything to anybody at all. Every name that was quoted was never ever more senior than a Major in the Libyan Army: Chalhoub or Gaddafi. By this time we were all trying to sit down to coordinate in the Foreign Office or the MoD what we knew about the instigators of this coup, and people were then being drafted in to the Ministry of Defence and into the Pentagon, and everybody was rifling through their records to see if any of these young officers had ever come to notice in any way. I think, by late afternoon, we had identified three or four of them as officers who, as a Second Lieutenant or Lieutenant or junior Captain, might have come to the United Kingdom on a training course – a three-month artillery course or signals or whatever it was. The most that one knew of any of them was that Captain Chalhoub or Gaddafi was a good officer, moderately attentive, behaved himself fairly well, attended his course; no particular characteristic; signed off, got his certificate and went home. That really was the sum total of our knowledge about all these people who had mounted this extraordinary coup.

That had an implication that I'll come back to in a moment. But of course the other question is that, since we were sitting there with our Forces in two bases in Libya, what should we do in response to the coup, and what were the Libyans doing? Was there going to be any counter-reaction from those senior elements of the Libyan Army presumably loyal to the King and, equally if not more importantly, what about all those National Guard paramilitary police forces who were supposed to be there as a counterweight to the Army?

Well, two things became apparent over the next day or so: first of all, whatever was going on in Libya, there was absolutely no prospect of there being any

counter-activity on the part of the establishment military, if I can call them that, against the plotters. The young plotters were of course calling on the great Arab nationalist concept of Nasser, and they were aligning themselves with the great thrust of Arab nationalism of the late 1960s and 1970s, establishing their political credentials very patently in that sort of way. The British Government understood from the beginning – I don't think there was ever any serious debate about this - that, in these circumstances, there was absolutely no way at all that British Forces in Tripoli or Benghazi could attempt to intervene in any way to act as the counter to an Arab national revolution. That was ruled out from the beginning. After about a week or so, when the dust had begun to settle – but of course the Libyan establishment was absolutely bruised – we did have a senior Libyan General who came into the Foreign Office, to see Michael Stewart and specifically, formally asked the Foreign Secretary if the British would intervene using the Forces which they still had in Libya to put the monarch back on the throne. Michael Stewart simply had to say that that was not a course of action which the British Government felt able to contemplate and our concern was to maintain whatever relationship we could with Libya under the new regime, and to continue with our relationship and co-operation and so on. And that was the end of that.

MM: Can you remember what Forces we had there?

AS: We had Army bases in Tripoli and Benghazi, and then we had the RAF base at El Adem which was used as the main RAF training place.

MM: Did we not have an air force base at Castel Benito?

AS: Pass! The other by-product of this coup was the question that given the depths of our military co-operation programme with the Libyans, how could it have been that we had no whiff that any of this was being planned? As part of this military sales and training and co-operation programme, not only did we have British Forces in the bases in Libya in their own right, but we had considerable numbers of what are known as Loan Service Personnel who were working with the Libyan regiments and living in Officers' Messes, doing training and co-operation with the Libyans. The question was why had none of these young British Army

officers ever picked up any whiff of any dissatisfaction or dissent at all. And that resulted in an enquiry, from which I think two interesting things emerged. They were that, in a rather quixotic way, the Ministry of Defence had never thought that Loan Service Personnel should do anything other than fulfil their training and co-operation role; it was somehow not acceptable that they might be given some intelligence role however informal or unstructured that might be and, when one debated this in the Ministry of Defence, there was a range of opinion which I suppose went from, What a good idea; why didn't we think of it? to people who thought it would have been unacceptable to mix that sort of function with the training programme, to others who thought it just would not have been cricket to do that sort of thing!

That is an attitude which, interestingly, in spite of the Libyan coup, in my judgement lasted some time in the Ministry of Defence. Many years later, I was High Commissioner in Brunei where there was no apparent political instability - one wasn't worried about the future of the Sultan - but we had a defence relationship, a commitment to protect Sultan. We had a good number of Loan Service Personnel working with the Bruneian Armed Forces. The Bruneian political and military world is opaque and difficult to penetrate. When I arrived as High Commissioner, one of my first questions was to ask to what extent did the British Loan Service Personnel working in Brunei have any remit, formal or informal, at least in some modest way to keep their ear to the ground as to what gossip there might be in the Armed Forces about anything at all. Again, I was fascinated to discover that the answer was that they didn't really have that remit, and they were not at all happy at the thought that they might be given it. So there was a sense in which that attitude that the British should not use their undoubtedly useful position for any slightly underhand self-interest still remained; perhaps less potently than it had in 1970 but there was still something of that attitude twenty years later.

Anyway, there we were: the coup happened in Libya and there was no going back and my task during my remaining time in the Department was the process of coming to terms with the new reality and of finding a way of managing the inevitable closure of the bases. That was when Donald Maitland appeared as the

new Ambassador to go out to Libya. He was as ever active to a degree. He was no respecter of time. I can remember from two or three occasions at home my telephone rang at 11.00 at night and it was Donald saying he'd just heard on the BBC World (or Arabic) Service a bulletin making some wildly inaccurate comment about the Libya; would I get on to the BBC and immediately organise a correction! So he really was a twenty-four/seven Ambassador! But he gave great commitment and he was very sensible about the realities of what one could or couldn't achieve at that time. I'm sure his Arabic also helped with the Libyans.

MM: That was a fascinating interlude.

AS: Can I indulge myself in one other little anecdote? At some point in my time in NENAD, we invited the Egyptian President's Foreign Affairs Adviser, Mahmoud Fawzi, to London for a goodwill tour. As I was a young Arabist in the Department, I was told that I was to be his guide and minder for four or five days and accompany him on all his calls. This I did. I tell this story because it was one of these moments that gives you a reflection of how other people are. One of the functions of this programme was that I was to take Mahmoud Fawzi to call on the Opposition, and so I and the Special Branch detective who was also accompanying us called first on Ted Heath at the Albany. The same evening, we took him round to see Alec Douglas-Home at his flat just off Victoria. It was a fascinating contrast, it has to be said, because, when we arrived at Ted Heath's flat at the Albany, the door was opened by Douglas Hurd, who was at that time Ted Heath's private secretary. It was a mark of the style of Ted Heath's world that Douglas Hurd thanked us for having delivered Mr Fawzi and he immediately whisked him into the drawing room where, presumably, Ted Heath whom we never saw was seated. We were left standing in the corridor for forty-five minutes with nowhere to sit, no cup of coffee, nothing. We were left there until Mr Fawzi was delivered back into our hands and on we went. I was wondering how we might get on when we called on Alec Douglas-Home that evening. The contrast is interesting; the front door was opened by Lady Douglas-Home who warmly took our coats from us, took all of us, Mr Fawzi, the Detective and me, and all of us sat down in the drawing room with Alec Douglas-Home who personally gave each of us a glass of whisky and soda with his own hand! He sat

us all down together *en famille* for an hour, and we chatted. He then helped us on with our coats and off we went. These sorts of private persona stories about our public figures sometimes do have an extraordinary element of truth to them.

First Secretary, British Embassy, Beirut, 1970-72

AS: Let us move to Beirut. I was posted to Beirut, and of course I should say the other significant that happened to me in my time in NENAD was that the Foreign Office then invited me to take the bridging exam to be promoted from the Executive Class to the Administrative Class. So, in the middle of my ventures, I went and did a two- or three-day Civil Service Commission course and subsequent interview and was fortunate enough to be inducted into Branch A. So, by the time I went off as a First Secretary to Beirut, I was really as advanced in my career as a First Secretary as I would have been had I come into the Service at degree level. So I was lucky enough in my twenties to be looked after by seniors and given an opportunity to show and develop such skills as I might have had.

Off I went to Beirut in early 1970-72. I suppose my three years in Beirut were years of Beirut at its most stylish, self-indulgent, and magnificent. I went twice to the Baalbek Festival and heard Ella Fitzgerald singing at the Temple of Jupiter.

But more seriously, of course, the clouds were beginning to gather because of the frustrations of the 1967 War and the growing realisation on the part of the Palestinians that, if they had ever thought that their destiny could be improved by putting their fate and their faith in the hands of Arab governments to solve their problem for them, then they were grievously mistaken. They had to start assuming responsibility for their own individuality and their own cause. This had caused tremendous troubles in Beirut the year before I was there. By the time I arrived in 1970, the Lebanese Government, particularly through Walid Jumblatt, had managed to reach a sort of accommodation with the PLO who made life not too intolerable in Beirut. But the refugee camps were still there, and the problems of Palestinian dissatisfaction were still there as well.

The propensity of the Lebanese to fire weapons at each other or in the air in copious quantities was evident all the time. One lived there with a sort of backdrop of gunfire. I woke up one morning, to the sound of gunfire all over Beirut. We couldn't work out what it was but I decided to venture forth and drive to work. I hadn't gone three or four hundred yards when I saw there were dead storks on the roadside. What had happened was that a huge flock of migratory storks had, tragically for them, lost their way and flown over the main city of Beirut, whereupon every Lebanese who had a machine pistol or revolver under his bed rushed out onto his balcony to try and kill them. And the city was covered in hundreds of dead storks. Pride in this massacre was at least followed by a sense of national shame that the Lebanese could have behaved like this.

Three or four months before I arrived the Second Secretary, who was doing Overseas Development Aid, had had a little bump on his car going home at lunchtime. A Lebanese had got out of his car and shot him dead, and fled to the hills. Towards the end of my time, this chap had been captured and was brought to trial, and I used to go to court as the Embassy representative watching proceedings.

It was in my time in there that President Nasser died, and I had the misfortune to be living in an apartment block behind which was the Egyptian Embassy. For three days, my apartment block and the nearby streets were surrounded by thousands of wailing people letting off machine guns in the air, day and night. Spent cartridge cases rained onto my balcony (I don't exaggerate). The air was full of the sound of gunfire and of the sirens of ambulances forcing their way through the crowds to pick up people who had been wounded. There were barricades all over Beirut; you had to have a black ribbon tied to the aerial of your car or you couldn't get through to the Embassy.

I suppose the climax for me in this was the enterprise planned by the PFLP under their George Habash, who died about six months ago, to mount this complex hi-jacking of aircraft to Dawson's Field in Jordan, which is a desert area of flat salt pans on which, surprisingly enough, you could land jet aircraft. This had been preceded by a failed hi-jack of an aircraft where one of the hi-jackers, a woman

called Leila Khaled, had been captured and was now in jail in London. There was a co-ordinated hi-jacking programme organised by PFLP in order to bring pressure on western governments, and in particular the British Government, to release Leila Khaled. Three aircraft – TWA, a Lufthansa plane and a BOAC VC10 – were all hi-jacked and flown to Dawson’s Field. I think that I should tell you this story because it is a fascinating example of a world into which you, as a young British Diplomat, get drawn.

My telephone rang at about 9.00 o’clock one morning. There was a distraught BOAC official on the telephone saying that one of their aircraft that had just taken off from somewhere in the Gulf, and had been hi-jacked. They had just discovered that in an hour and a half’s time it was going to land at Beirut airport. Panic stations! The background to this is that about three or four days before, a PanAm Jumbo jet had also been hi-jacked somewhere and it had landed at Beirut airport, and had then flown on to Cairo, where all the passengers were dropped off. The plane had been blown up on the edge of Cairo International Airport. It transpired afterwards that this had been possible because, when the PanAm Jumbo was at Beirut, the Palestinians, because of the lax nature of Lebanese security, had been able to bring the explosives and put them on board before the plane went off to be blown up somewhere-else. This was a source of absolute mortification to the Lebanese Government who were determined not to be caught out again by the Palestinians. The outcome was that, as this the BOAC VC10 flew to Beirut, I went to the airport with the Ambassador, and we found ourselves taken straight to the control tower – quite a large area – and in one corner were the Ambassador and I, and in another corner there was a Palestinian co-ordinating PFLP group, none of whose names we ever discovered. In the third corner was the Minister of Public Works, Pierre Gemayel and his team. Pierre Gemayel came up to us and said that he wanted to reassure the British Government, in the form of the Ambassador and me, that of course the Lebanese Government had absolutely nothing to do with this hi-jacking; they were all there only in respect of trying to save life and limb; and he also wanted to reassure us that there was absolutely no question whatsoever of any equipment or explosives or any other thing being loaded onto this plane on this occasion. We were partly there to satisfy ourselves that that was being done.

So we all sat around and waited. The VC10 arrived and taxied into a certain position, it was agreed that more fuel could be put on. I have to tell you of an unedifying moment when somebody came from the Embassy saying that the British Government had sent a message which the Ambassador and I were to convey to the Captain of the aircraft. The Ambassador said to Pierre Gemayel that he had this short message that our Government wanted to send, and he showed it to him, and he asked if that was all right; it was not provocative or anything. The Captain came on, somewhat hopeful that there was news of the hi-jack being resolved and ended. But not so. There was a banal message, and I cannot remember the exact wording, but it was something like, "Be of good cheer! Our thoughts are with you in this trying time." I was embarrassed to sit there – God knows what Alan Edden felt like having to read it! The poor Captain said, Oh! I see! Good-bye! clearly nonplussed and disappointed.

At this point, the Lebanese brought over to the Palestinian group one man and one woman, in their early twenties. They had two packages in brown paper. The Lebanese said to us that the hi-jackers want these two people to join the aircraft, and to take on these two little parcels which 'only contain a set of pamphlets and literature about the Palestinian cause and children's drawings about bombs on Palestinian camps and so on.' The PFLP were anxious that the passengers should read something about the Palestinian struggle; why they had been driven to this sort of behaviour. The Lebanese official who had checked the parcels out said to my Ambassador, I tell you, it's absolutely safe, and he dropped this package at the feet of the Ambassador. Huge bang! And poor Alan Edden jumped, as we all did, and the official said, "There you are! There's nothing wrong with this." The minister, Sheikh Pierre Gemayel, then came up to the ambassador and said: "I would like you to accompany these people to the aircraft to assure yourself that nothing else is being loaded on the aircraft. We have positioned a set of steps about fifteen yards away from the plane, and you should go out and not only accompany these people but also inspect the steps to make sure that no parcels have been hidden at all." The Ambassador looked round and said to me, I think this is one for you, Adrian! Yes, Ambassador!

So I went off with these two Palestinian hi-jackers and their little parcels and we went down in the lift. I remember saying to them that you could not just land the VC10 on the salt pans without being sure it was safe to do so. You might kill yourselves and everybody else on board. And they said “if it has to be like that, it has to be like that. So many of our people have died over the last twenty years for Palestine. That is what the world has to understand.” And that was all they said.

So we went out across the tarmac and it was like High Noon! All the buildings were covered with figures from the Lebanese security forces; rifles, guns trained; absolute silence. And there was the aircraft and the set of steps. The only other thing the Palestinian said to me was when we get to the steps, you should walk all the way round the steps to be absolutely sure there is nothing on them. But do not try to walk between the steps and the aircraft because somebody inside it may shoot you. It would be better to stay as near to the steps as you can.

So that’s what I did; walked round and then they went off to the aircraft and I walked all the way back alone across the tarmac with my back to these people into the safety of the building, up to the Control tower just in time to see the aircraft take off in the distance. The sense of impotence was profound because there was nothing I could have done. And of course we know it went off to Dawson’s Field and everybody landed, and they were all taken off. The planes were all blown up and there was a negotiation as a result of which Leila Khaled was indeed released from British custody and handed back to the Palestinians.

About four months later, I was walking down Hamra Street in Beirut and looked into a café and there was this girl sitting having coffee with a friend! She looked at me and I looked at her, but I think we both judged it prudent not to acknowledge each other, so I passed on!

It was at this time that the PLO challenge to King Hussein’s government in Jordan erupted into war ... into Black September. Problems in Jordan in an odd way impinged on me because it so happened that my then mother and father-in-law were on holiday in Jordan before coming on to visit us in Beirut. They were unfortunate enough to be in a hotel where all the tourists were captured by a

group of Palestinian guerrillas. They were held in custody for about four days at this hotel. Eventually, happily, they were released and they came over to Beirut to resume their holiday. Some weeks later civil war erupted in Jordan which prompted the evacuation from Jordan to Beirut of the British community. So we had this huge refugee processing operation. That is the only time I have sat on the telephone blithely hiring aircraft! Amman or the FCO would tell me what the numbers were and I remember on one occasion I rang up somebody saying, Yes, I'll have another Boeing 707 on Thursday morning please, which was then processed by the Foreign Office. I remember all the Embassy teams were going up there to take all these families in and accommodate them and then lay on the onward transit. There were major senses in which the Palestinian attempt to assert its cause impinged upon all of us.

The curious thing again about the Lebanon, a very open society, was again the sense that the British were still thought of as influential and important in Middle East politics. This sense was still quite potent in the Lebanon.

MM: Was it the case that the British were thought to be more important than the French?

AS: Oh yes. I don't have the impression that the French politically, in the 1970s there, were regarded in the significant way that they had been in Damascus. The Americans, of course, were in pride of place. But the British had very good access to Lebanese ministers. I was First Secretary then, doing my bit on the political scene and I had access whenever I wanted it to any Lebanese I wanted to meet there; it was automatic. They would invite me to their house. Every Tuesday morning I used to go and have breakfast with Suleiman Frangieli, the Minister of the Economy, and then six months later he was President of the Lebanon. But he was happy to see me; I would call in and have a coffee on my way to work. I ran an arrangement where, on a certain day of the week, it was known that, from 6.30 to 8.30pm, I held open house and you could come and talk. Each week there would be ten or fifteen Lebanese Members of Parliament, journalists and politicians who would always come up and call in at my house, have a drink and something to eat, and see who was there for a chat. It also

became apparent to me comparatively fairly early on that one of the people included in the social scene who was expected to hold an Iftar party during the fasting month of Ramadan was me, a Christian First Secretary in the Embassy. So I had to go to one of those smart restaurants and book an Iftar meal for seventy people and send out invitations and, sure enough, seventy prominent Muslims, Lebanese politicians, came at sunset and broke fast at my party.

The sort of pattern, I suppose, of life really was that the Ambassador tended to be taken out, most of all by the smart, wealthy Christian set; all those elegant dinners to which the Christian glitterati liked to have the Ambassador. I tended to be the person who was mostly taken up by the Sunni Muslim population; we had a Counsellor but he was doing other things with the British Community and didn't get particularly involved in politics. But there was an Information Counsellor who, like me, did get involved in the politics. What was interesting, in retrospect, is that, though Lebanon was really run by this alliance of Christian and Sunni Muslim with the Druze on the fringe, the people who were on the outside were the Shia; and nobody particularly saw the Shia. I knew one or two Shia politicians but they didn't have any expectation of mixing particularly in Western circles. They were of course the neglected part of Lebanese society and even now when the Shia might account for fifty percent of the population of the Lebanon, they still don't have fifty percent of the power and influence. One of the constants through Lebanese politics in the last thirty years has been the suffering of the Shia; The Lebanon would be invaded by the Israelis in South Lebanon; the Shia were coming up as refugees, not being looked after by the Sunni and Christian establishment and were deeply resentful. That was one of the origins of Hizbollah. That world of frustration on the part of the Shia still goes on. So these dynamics of the Lebanon which I knew and lived with in the 1970s haven't in a sense changed greatly, despite the Civil War. There is a lot about the Lebanon which is still familiar to me when I go back nowadays.

The other thing I would just say is there was this whole world of Palestinian self-assertion acting in the way I've described but accompanied by a presumption on the part of the British Government that it was politically unacceptable to talk to the Palestinians in any organised sense, partly because they were 'terrorists.' You

weren't allowed to have contact with them. You had to steer clear of the organised political branch of the PLO. Although that began to change in certain circumstances over the next twenty-five years, it has to be said that our unwillingness and inability to have full dialogue with the Palestinians, in my judgement, has been one of the failings of the British foreign policy. One saw a bit of that in those early days, in the early 1970s. You can see it now vis-à-vis Hamas.

So anyway, there are some of the aspects of life in the Lebanon.

First Secretary, British Embassy, Lima, Peru, 1972-76

AS: It had been, quite sensibly I think, the policy of the Foreign Office that Arabists needed to be taken out of their specialist environment from time to time; otherwise they were in some danger of developing some sort of tunnel vision. Arabists had over the years been given different sorts of postings. It had been the fashion at one time to take Arabists out of the hot-house of the Middle East and give them a posting or two to countries like Switzerland or Scandinavia, to Stockholm or Oslo. Arabists had found this a less than wholly satisfactory solution because, however frustrating or difficult and wearing life in the Arab region was, it had been a world of warmth and informality, and they found it difficult to accommodate themselves culturally to the rather cold, formal, structured world of Scandinavia or Switzerland. A number of Arabists said that they were naturally keen to have a respite from the Middle East, but could they go somewhere else other than these over-structured worlds the Foreign Office was sending them to. We weren't yet in the great world of the European Union, EC and so it was proposed to send Arabists to Latin America, where they could acquire a new perspective on life, that was also still rather warm and unstructured, and fun. I was part of that philosophy and so, when I left Beirut, I found myself being posted as Deputy Head of Mission to the British Embassy in Lima. I was interested to discover that I was the second or third Arabist to be in the Embassy. One of my chums was down in Santiago in Chile; there were several of us around elsewhere in Latin America.

I turned up in South America as a complete beginner. I spoke no Spanish, so my first task was to buckle down and make myself fluent in Spanish because not much English was spoken in Peru at that time.

That was an interesting and different posting apart from the cultural change. Peru was unique in the early 1970s. The backdrop was the Cold War. The Americans were using their influence to encourage right-wing regimes to stand up against the left-wing guerrilla movements of Che Guevara and other revolutionaries and against the malign influence of Cuba. Peru was odd because it had had a left-wing revolution designed to destroy the power and influence of the traditional land-owning oligarchy, but the revolution had been conducted by the armed forces, normally in Latin America a bastion of right wing orthodoxy but who in Peru had developed a left-wing intellectual posture. I lived in a strange Peru where the newspapers had been taken over by different Army groups, and there would be long series of articles every Sunday on the thoughts of Hegel, and the origins of Marxist Leninism. Ministers were almost honorary members of the Cuban Government, and all Ministers had been to see Castro in Havana and had come back, each given a present of a sub-machinegun embellished with a silver plate with their name on it.

By the middle of the 20th Century Britain had surrendered her political and economic influence in Latin America to the United States. In the 1960s there had been an attempt to refocus our activities with South America. The Queen undertook State Visits to a number of these countries. Funding was made available for Latin American studies at British universities. That process was beginning to peter out in the 1970s but there was still something of that flavour in the air when I went to Peru. One of our main activities was a very significant technical co-operation programme. We had experts doing a wide ranging programme from tropical cattle breeding in the jungles of the Amazon to fish husbandry and marketing on the northern coast of Peru. We had a big co-operation programme, which of course enabled one to travel widely round this beautiful country. But it was a strangely isolating life, I think, because the nature of the left-wing military regime meant that the Western countries offered development aid but Peruvians didn't want to consort with any of us. Former

members of the old regime had lost their lands, but had been allowed to keep their industrial plants and businesses and were still quite wealthy. But they thought it prudent to keep well away from the British and other Western embassies. So one lived in an unusually isolated world for a diplomatic mission and Peru is a diplomatic posting where I got to know fewest of the local population. I did make one or two friends. There was the editor of the one political satirical opposition magazine who became a good friend of mine. Just after I left, he was deported because he'd written one article too many against the regime. I happened, a year later, to go on an official visit to Buenos Aires and re-met him there, where he was living in exile in a sad hotel room. We had a rather emotional dinner together. That was the price you paid in those days for having a politically opposing voice in Peru.

MM: He was a Peruvian, and they deported him?

AS: Yes, he was. But they still threw him out of his own country. We watched with interest in Peru as the coup took place in Chile, when Pinochet replaced Salvador Allende. We watched with interest the situation as the last days of the Peronista regime in Argentina slipped by. So there was a sense that you were part of a changing world in Latin America, of right-wing/left-wing politics and passions. And Peru had this strange regime of its own where issues like human rights didn't count although the revolution claimed a revolutionary purity. One does wonder now to what extent the military regime, however left-wing, ill treated people. I suspect rather worse than any of us realised at the time. But it was an interesting and busy posting in terms of bi-lateral issues, like running the aid and the trade programme. We had few visitors from London. One I can remember briefing was Julian Amery, who was Ministry of State at the FCO. I always remember him because when he arrived in Lima the first thing he wanted to do was to go to a cock fight! We somehow found out where there were cock fights somewhere outside Lima. And off he went accompanied by an unhappy looking ambassador! And there was the extraordinary poverty. The Peruvian economy had collapsed as a result of the economic and managerial incompetence of the military left-wing regime. Food was rationed. Meat was available only one day in four. You could use your car only every other day. Most commodities were in short supply. One

struggled on as best one could. It was not as bad, I have to say, as it was in Chile. When a friend of mine from the British Council in Santiago came up to Lima for two or three days' R and R he wanted to go and buy food to take back with him. I told him where the supermarket was, but when he came home later that day he said the supermarket was shut! Of course it was not shut. It was half past four in the afternoon. And he suddenly realised he had thought it was shut because there were no queues outside!

So those were the slightly harder, more difficult sides of contemporary life. But history could now and again intervene. I was suddenly rung up one day when I was Chargé to be told that the Peruvian Navy was about to unveil a statue of the English Admiral who had founded the Peruvian Navy. In the 19th century the whole of the Latin American liberation movement had been aided and abetted by the English who were anxious to see the Spanish defeated in Latin America. A British Admiral of French origin called Guise had helped found the Peruvian Navy. This was the only occasion, I think, where the Peruvian Forces allowed a British diplomat to visit their premises. I was taken onto the naval base to unveil the statue. This concession came from the fact that the Peruvian Navy was the most pro-West and pro-British of any of the Armed Forces. One of the significant features of Peru and other Latin American countries is that they still demonstrate the characteristics of the Spanish period, the domination of the Europeans, the down-grading of the coloureds and the blacks. If you went to the Peruvian National Day Armed Forces march-past, it was for example an extraordinary piece of colour-coding; when the Navy marched by, led by their Admirals, they looked like Europeans marching out of Portsmouth. Then the Air Force came by, who had suddenly developed a certain coffee-coloured bloom. And when the Army marched by, they were black and negroid. The Navy was upper class, the Air force was middle class and the Army was working class, showing its African slave origins.

Assistant Head of Latin American Department of the FO, 1976-79

My posting to Peru turned out to be another turning point in my career. When I came to leave Peru, I was going to return to a posting to London and of course

had thought that this was the moment when I might reintegrate myself into the Middle East mainstream. But I found myself going back to London to become the Assistant Head of Latin American Department with particular reference to the problems that had just arisen over the Falkland Islands.

Before I started work in London, the Foreign Office had asked me, on leaving Peru, to go on a parish tour round Latin America en route home. By then, the Foreign Office had understood that it was helpful to visit countries that you were dealing with, unlike earlier days! So I set off to tour Chile, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay and Paraguay. The day I had left Lima, there had been a military coup d'état in Buenos Aires and the military had come to power, throwing out the last remnants of the Peronista Government. When I arrived in Buenos Aires, forty-eight hours later, Argentina was still under strict military curfew and the Army was everywhere: in the streets with road-blocks and so forth. I got from the airport to the Residence where I was staying with the Chargé d'Affaires, John Shakespeare, and the next morning we set off to the Foreign Ministry for a courtesy call on the Head of the Antarctica and, most importantly, the Malvinas (Falkland Islands) Department. Buenos Aires was in a state of some confusion and the roads were blocked, and we couldn't find our way to the Foreign Ministry. So we stopped at a road-block on one of the main avenues and asked the Army how we could get to the Foreign Ministry. They directed us up the parallel side street to where there was another road-block. In the car were the Chargé d'Affaires and me and, in the front two seats, the driver and the English SAS bodyguard of the Chargé d'Affaires. Because Argentina had been particularly lawless over the preceding year or two, most senior diplomatic representatives and others had armed bodyguards to protect them.

When we arrived at the checkpoint and asked for directions, we were amazed to find that we were all immediately ordered out of the car, hands on roof, and we were all frisked, whereupon they found the revolver, which was being carried by the SAS bodyguard. The next moment each of the four of us had a rifle stuck in our backs and we were marched seventy-yards down the road to where there was a convenient large brick wall against which we were placed with our faces to the wall. The whole Army platoon then retreated ten to twelve feet behind us and

stood there aiming at the four of us against the wall; not a happy moment, as you can imagine. We were attempting to explain who we were, and we were being shouted at and told to shut up. After about quarter of an hour, when the situation was getting tense, a senior police officer hove into view. We managed to attract his attention and we explained what was happening. He just shook his head and said the Army was in charge and he could do nothing!

Fortunately a senior Army officer passing by saw what was going on and he put an end to this dreadful situation. He ordered the soldiers to take us back to the car, and we were more or less kicked back into the car and off we went.

One of the things that had been significant during this event – one is always in a state of disbelief that this happening to you – was that John Shakespeare and I had noticed that the SAS bodyguard was looking particularly nervous as this thing went on and so, in a slightly post-crisis jocular way, we said, Well, how extraordinary that you're supposed to be the trained guy looking after us and you were looking even more nervous than we were. He said to us that was because he knew something which we did not know. When he was on guard duty, he always travelled with his revolver cocked and with the safety catch off because he might need to take action. When they took the gun from him, he did not know why it never went off. It could have gone off at any time and, had it done so, they would have panicked and shot the lot of us. And so we were quite a hair's breadth from death. So that was a fairly dramatic introduction to life in the Argentine.

Anyway, I went back to London and took up my new post as Deputy Head of Latin America Department. The main issue which confronted us at the time was the new crisis in 1976 over the issue of the Falkland Islands. The British Government had been attempting, ever since the decolonisation period in the late 1950s, to reach some accommodation over this difficult sovereignty dispute with Argentina. This arose from when George Brown was Foreign Secretary and had agreed, that the Falkland Islands issue could be considered by the Decolonisation Committee of the United Nations. There had been an attempt in the late 1960s to negotiate an agreement with Argentina, conducted on the basis of confidential discussions behind the backs of the Falkland Islanders. The hope had been to

produce a package for the transfer of sovereignty accompanied by various guarantees for the continuation of the Islanders' way of life. The Islanders would then be told what had happened and would be asked to agree.

Those negotiations had gone on tolerably well but, unfortunately for the British Government, before they had reached a conclusion and before there was a package which could be put to the Islands, the whole story leaked out. There was pandemonium in the press, the House of Commons and in the media. Lord Chalfont, a junior Foreign Office Minister, was sent out to talk to the Islanders and there were major debates in Parliament. This crisis ended in a situation in which the British Government was unable to carry forward the negotiation with Argentina. More significantly for the future, in the course of these debates, Foreign Office ministers were forced to say in Parliament that, henceforth, not only would HMG have full regard for the interests of the Islanders, but it would have total regard for the *wishes* of the Islanders. That apparently small piece of semantics in effect gave a veto to Falkland Islanders over their future because anything that didn't meet with their wishes the British Government could not pursue. So when, later on, the question of negotiations came up again, the British Government was constantly bedevilled by this commitment to meet the wishes of the Falkland Islanders.

Life in the Falklands had trickled on since the collapse of negotiations in 1968-69 and there had been various attempts to organise arrangements to improve the lot of the Falkland Islanders and their quality of life with the help of the Argentines in the hope of creating a better relationship between the two. This had worked fitfully and there had been a Commission set up to try and plot a new economic strategy for the Falkland Islands to be conducted by Lord Shackleton. Life was pottering along tolerably well, I suppose, when, in January 1976 just before I left Peru, the Argentine Navy attacked and attempted to sink a ship of the British Antarctic Survey sailing in South Atlantic waters. There was now a new crisis on the stocks between Argentina and the Falkland Islands.

That was the scenario which greeted me when I came back to take over this job. The Department had said to the then Foreign Secretary, James Callaghan, that the

time had probably come to grasp the nettle of substantive sovereignty negotiations with Argentina, and that was the moment on which Jim Callaghan said “I do not wish to pick up this poisoned chalice.” Shortly after this Callaghan moved on to become Prime Minister and Tony Crosland became Foreign Secretary. The Foreign Office now had to decide how and in what way it would be possible to launch negotiations.

Two things happened: first I, as Deputy Head of Department, was sent out to the Falkland Islands ostensibly on a familiarisation visit and to meet the Governor. But the real purpose of my visit was to gauge to what extent the Islanders might be receptive to some form of new accommodation with the Argentine. So I spent my time on the Falkland Islands going from settlement to settlement in a tiny aircraft, which was the only way to get around the island in those days, and came home and wrote a report for the Secretary of State in which I concluded that I thought that the majority of Islanders were still not at all disposed to make an accommodation with the Argentines. But wiser heads among the Islanders were beginning to realise that some change of circumstances was probably going to have to be on the cards sooner or later, and I thought that just about gave us enough of an opening to start a process of discussion and debate.

The second issue was to find out in what circumstances the Argentines themselves were of a mind to reopen discussions with the British. So we arranged for a back-door meeting with the Argentines where we both met in Paris and used the Embassy in Paris as our venue. We met them there for very informal talks, and we were looking for ways of demonstrating to the Argentines our willingness to put everything on the table, including sovereignty. We knew that, if we weren't prepared at least to talk about sovereignty, the Argentines would not talk to us at all. On the other hand, we were not in a position to say sovereignty explicitly. That was a word too far. So we used circumlocutory phrases like ‘the full range of economic and other co-operation measures in the South Atlantic.’ When the Argentines said to us, Does that include sovereignty? We said we were quite happy to discuss the full range of activities and issues. They said they took that to mean that indeed sovereignty could be explored. We did not demur but declined to use the ‘S’ word.

We then had a confidential second meeting in Buenos Aires and, as a result of that, the Argentines and the British concluded that we had enough commonality and understanding to inaugurate another round of negotiations. Two things came out of that. First of all, unlike in 1968, we had to have the Islanders on board from the beginning. So, before we got anywhere at all, the Minister of State, Red Rowlands, and I and Hugh Carless, Head of Department, went out to the Falkland Islands to tell the Islanders that we were going to talk with the Argentines about everything, but that nothing would be decided without consultation with the Islanders. On that basis we secured the grudging acceptance on the part of the Falkland Islanders that we could go ahead with these talks.

Before that particular visit happened, the British Government had needed to consider what inducements we could offer the Islanders to bring them to a frame of mind where they would be prepared to accept negotiations with the Argentines? Of course an element, if you like, of bribery in a way, or encouragement, was beginning to emerge from the Shackleton Report including the building and the opening of a new airport and runway. Tony Crosland, the new Foreign Secretary, had taken the position that he was not going to tackle every tricky problem simultaneously. He had to work his way through them and set priorities. He said he had got more pressing matters to master than the Falkland Islands at that moment; so would we just defer submitting papers for a month or two. The Argentines were not unhappy about that because their regime had to get its own feet under the desk and therefore they weren't themselves in a desperate hurry.

Eventually the moment came when Tony Crosland said he was ready to consider the Falkland Islands. So I and others prepared a package of papers – including my own visit report about the attitudes of the Islanders. He took this great package of papers home over one weekend and he read all about the Falkland Islands. We all assembled in the Secretary of State's office on the Monday afternoon, and he held a meeting at which it became clear that he had put in a lot of work and understood the main issues clearly and in detail. It also became clear that he wanted to tackle the Falkland Islands problem head on. He was not

inclined to give anything at this stage to the Islanders without their moving forward themselves. So he was realistic and determined. It was an encouraging sign that we had the backing and the interest of the Secretary of State. So it was doubly tragic that he succumbed to a fatal stroke so shortly after taking office. His tragic death occurred two or three days after Ted Rowlands, Hugh Carless and I arrived in the Falklands. We had a Royal Navy frigate positioned out there that we would live on and move round the islands, and in fact on our first day we were just coming ashore from the frigate when the signal came through that Crosland had died. A depressing start to our trip.

The other piece of background that I suppose I should add into the backdrop of the conduct of these negotiations is that Ted Rowlands was the youngest Member of the House of Commons ever. One of his first memories as a junior backbencher was watching Michael Stewart being almost torn limb from limb in the House when the previous Falkland Islands negotiations had suddenly leaked and become public. Ted Rowlands told us that he never thought he would find himself as the FCO Minister leading on the Falklands. He had memories as a junior backbencher of the only two foreign affairs subjects which threatened the Labour Government. They were Vietnam and the Falkland Islands. Bracketing those two together gives some idea of the potency of the Falkland Islands issue. Life at the FCO was not made any easier for Ted because his new Foreign Secretary was David Owen; tough, abrasive, difficult, and there was little love lost between Ted Rowlands and David Owen. David Owen was insulting about Ted Rowlands. I remember a situation when we were coming back from a meeting and Ted said to David Owen, 'Well, if we did this, I'm not quite sure I can sell that point to the House.' And David Owen said, 'If you haven't got the guts to do it, you can shelter behind me, Ted. I'll do it.' David Owen delivered this put-down to Ted in front of officials. I don't know whether Ted or I and my colleagues were more embarrassed. I remember some years later, long after all this was over, a TV documentary about the David Owen phenomenon. Ted Rowlands was being interviewed about this great man and somebody said to him, And tell me, Mr Rowlands, what do you think about David Owen? And Ted Rowlands replied, I've only got one thing to tell you; he was an absolute bastard!

That was a relationship which in a sense perhaps coloured some of the background to the negotiations.

We and the Argentines pursued these negotiations between 1976 and 1979 when the Callaghan Government eventually collapsed. Throughout the negotiations, our proposals for economic co-operation in the South Atlantic focussed on fishing. There was a strong incentive to work together on fishing. The existence of the dispute meant neither the Argentines nor the British could establish a fishing zone, and the Russians and Poles were sending their fleets to Hoover up all the fish in the South Atlantic. We used to say to the Argentines, that cannot be to either of our country's advantages. Surely we can at least agree "without prejudice" to the sovereignty issue. Although the Argentines looked with some favour on the possibility of some sort of economic co-operation, they were never really prepared to let the UK duck the sovereignty issue. We were always having to spin the talks out and try to persuade them to look at other issues than sovereignty. We always met in third countries because we thought it would be too provocative to meet either in Buenos Aires or London, so we met in Rome or New York. After each session, we would go back and brief the Falkland Islanders and we would secure some grudging acceptance to take matters forward. We also tried to explore with the Islanders, on a theoretical basis, some possible sovereignty accommodation, but as time went on it became apparent that there was not much appetite for this. I always remember sitting in a shepherd's bunk house with Ted Rowlands; we were talking to someone who I don't think had ever been to Port Stanley let alone anywhere else, and we were talking about a possible accommodation with the other side. The shepherd suddenly said to Ted Rowlands: I've something I really want to tell you about the Argentines! Ted was really rather excited hoping he had found a political opening. But the shepherd simply said: I don't 'alf 'ate those bloody Argies! And there, in one small sentence, was the problem, and the difficulties that one was going to be in if ever one tried to move forward with Argentina.

As these negotiations evolved, two things began to queer the pitch. First, the Labour Government's slender majority became ever more tenuous. We were not in a position where the Government of the day could attempt something that was

so contentious as this issue was in Parliament. So the Labour game was to play the negotiation as long as they could, and keep the Argentines in play without ever coming to a point where we would have to take any unpalatable or controversial decision. The second problem was that, as the Argentine military regime tightened its control over Argentina, stories began slowly to emerge of human rights abuses, of the Disappeared and the iniquitous crimes that were being visited by the military on the left-wing opposition in Argentina, the dimensions of which were really not at all clear at that point. But there was a whiff of sulphur in the air, to put it mildly, and that also made life more difficult on the negotiations front. This was not the sort of regime that was pleasant to deal with.

One was also aware that there was an air of impatience building up in the Argentines. About a year before the invasion, we discovered that the Argentines had occupied a tiny little island called Thule in the South Atlantic. This tiny little outcrop in the middle of nowhere was one of the Falkland Islands Dependencies. I should recall that the dispute not only involved the two main Falkland Islands, but it also involved the Falkland Islands Dependencies, a string of islands in the South Atlantic stretching from the Falklands towards where Antarctica starts. We had had no idea that the Argentine had occupied Thule. We were then faced with the problem of whether to treat that as some sort of *casus belli* or provocation. We were not in a position to be entirely robust about that. The Argentine played it as part of a scientific exploration programme, and tried to reassure us that they were going to move and there was nothing sinister. But we all knew what the name of the game was and it was going to be tougher. We had no option, however, but to tolerate the situation as far as we could, and keep them in political play. There was a situation by around Christmas 1978 which I think has now been documented elsewhere when we were nervous that the Argentines might be moving against us. The Secretary of State agreed that we should deploy a nuclear submarine to the South Atlantic over the Christmas and New Year period so that the British could riposte if the Argentines tried anything on.

So the situation was beginning to get slightly fraught when we then arrived at 1979 and the demise of the Labour Government. I left the Department at that

point. The last thing that I did before I was posted was to write the first draft of the Position Paper on the Falklands Islands dispute for the incoming government. I don't know how my draft might have been altered at the end of the day, but I do remember what I said in my first draft. This pointed out that there were only unpalatable choices ahead of us in relation to the Falkland Islands. We either had to go for a settlement, which had to involve a cessation of sovereignty, and that would require an extraordinary expenditure of political time domestically in Parliament, with the press, the media and the potent Falklands Islands lobby. Or we had to go for the Fortress Falklands policy. We had to reinforce significantly because, if we could not move on sovereignty there was a growing risk the Argentines would run out of patience and move against the Islands militarily. There were no other real choices. I remember very clearly drafting that.

In this period it had been of constant concern to the Ministry of Defence that the Government's policy of withdrawal East of Suez and the diminution of force levels generally should not be thwarted by new commitments in the South Atlantic. Our military defence at the time of these negotiations was a small Royal Marine garrison of about forty or fifty men and the occasional visit by HMS *Endurance*, the Royal Navy Antarctic patrol ship. When we were launching negotiations in 1976-77 and we were packaging them with economic co-operation on fishing and oil exploration, energy, the first reaction of the Ministry of Defence was utter dismay. They could see that, if we negotiated a fisheries regime, we could not have that without fisheries enforcement. They feared that we would come along asking for some fisheries enforcement. Ministry of Defence officials would come to my office before we went out for a round of talks, and they would say to me, as they had told me on many previous occasions, that they wished to remind me and other colleagues at the Foreign Office that we were to enter into no commitment in these negotiations which would involve any increase in defence activities in the South Atlantic. The Ministry of Defence were of course every year, even in my day, trying to withdraw HMS *Endurance*. An annual exercise during the two or three years that I was engaged in these matters was the arrival of a letter from the MoD asking if they could pay off HMS *Endurance*? It was my task to draft the submission that said, No you cannot, and to submit the terms of a letter for the Foreign Secretary to send to the Defence

Secretary stating that it would be intolerable to upset the balance of negotiations with Argentina and that the MOD had to keep HMS *Endurance* on station. As you know, that situation pertained until 1980-81 when the Foreign Office was very reluctantly forced to agree to withdraw HMS *Endurance* when John Nott was the Defence Secretary. That was one of the issues that made the Argentine Junta think that they might at last have had the British on the run.

The fundamental difficulty for the British Government was their inability to master British public opinion in favour of any political solution that involved concessions to Argentina. The Falklands Islanders, I have to say, were extraordinary in that they had the capacity to set up a public relations campaign via the Islands Government Office in London which, when I look back on it, completely outsmarted the Foreign Office. They ran an impressive public relations press campaign among Members of Parliament which stymied the British Government at every turn, and the Foreign Office, I think, was not really seriously geared up to the public relations implications of that. Hugh Carless, who was the Head of Department, who had some information background, did, to his great credit, from time to time try to suggest to Ministers and others that we should write letters to the Press and try to rebut some of this propaganda but we never got many takers for this. So the context in which we were working was never very helpful and I suppose that that was probably true afterwards when the Thatcher Government came to power.

It was a complex and difficult time. I think that it was much to the credit of the Foreign Office that it managed, not only in my time but thereafter for another two years, to spin this negotiation out for as long as it did, because clearly, until and unless a government was going to grasp the nettle of respecting the interests – but not the wishes – of the Falkland islanders, we had no policy to offer Argentina that had any hope of acceptance and of avoiding conflict. The Foreign Office kept the Argentines in play from 1976 to 1982, which was in my judgement a considerable achievement; making bricks out of very little straw. And we ended up with Fortress Falklands.

AS: The other issue which came to prominence in my time in Latin American Department was human rights. Human rights in that period began perhaps for the first time to become a serious part of policy. Evan Luard, who was the Minister of State at the Foreign Office at the time, was one of the architects of a first attempt to introduce a human rights dimension to British foreign policy. This was long before Robin Cook's ethical foreign policy stand some years later. Luard was the architect of a quite extraordinary and at times surrealistic episode where we were to chart, on a comparative basis, a scale of the human rights status of all countries. A huge exercise was embarked upon under the guidance of planning staff whereby a set of definitions in respect of human rights was set up: freedom of expression, freedom of the Press, the right to a fair trial, trade unionism, women's rights etc. This set of criteria having been established, every Embassy in the world was invited to mark its country on each of these criteria on a scale of one to ten, and send the results back for further evaluation in the Foreign Office. The difficulty from the outset was that many of these markings were subjective because, if you have an Ambassador who was of a particularly liberal persuasion, he would be inclined to mark his country more robustly than one who believed in the smack of firm government. And of course certain parts of the world were more susceptible to rigorous interpretation of these issues than others. Latin America was in the spotlight as was black Africa. And it was in these countries, of course, that problems arose. There was no difficulty in marking Canada or Australia but, when you came to these countries, there were all sorts of issues.

So the first stage was that we got our scores back from our Ambassadors in Latin America, and we had a look at them and, to the extent that we thought it proper to do so, we slightly adjusted them to take account of what we thought in our judgement was the reality and how well that had been reflected by our Mission's report. These results were then sent back to the planning staff, who then did a second filter exercise. They did a certain amount of remarking in terms of how they saw these realities. At the end of this exercise, Evan Luard poured over these markings and eventually a league table was produced that had, I suppose, Norway – I can't remember – as Number One and Uzbekistan or somebody at a hundred and something, and other countries somewhere between the two. This was then supposed to be our guide to how we should conduct our foreign policy.

We did quite a lot of work to try and get a fair picture, but of course one was always bedevilled by prejudice on the part of whoever it was. In the case of my Department, a particular problem arose almost immediately. We had a project to give something like £15m or £18m worth of equipment to the Bolivian mining industry because Bolivian miners were working in the most abject, appalling conditions, dying like flies and needing new equipment. We had come to the conclusion this would help them, and it would also boost the Bolivian economy.

This project had gone a good deal of the way through the evaluation process when the then ODA Secretary, Judith Hart, spotted this and said that Bolivia was Latin America, Latin America had a dreadful record of human rights, and no way was she going to sanction this aid project to Bolivia. An enormous debate ensued. The Ambassador in La Paz, who I think was Hope-Jones, unusually for those days, even wrote a letter to *The Times* deploring the attitude of the ODA, which I suppose made the ODA dig its heels in. So when Judith Hart's view that she would not go ahead with the project was exposed, she then said that she could see merit in having a project in mining and she was then of a mind to make this money available for a copper mining project in Zambia. The Foreign Office pointed out that, admirable though that might be, Zambia's position on the league table of human rights was worse than Bolivia's. She emphatically said, Be that as it may, that is where the money is going. I, and others who were working on this, were quite sympathetic in a way but of course realised that our attempt to introduce human rights into policies was always going to be subjective, and there was always going to have to be a trade-off between whatever the human rights reality was, what our other interests might be and where the political fashion of the day might lie. It was a policy fraught with difficulty. I think that that has been the core of all subsequent attempts by governments of all persuasion to bring the human rights element into the conduct of foreign policy.

I should touch upon the fact that the other issue that this Department dealt with, which was just beginning again to become rather important, was Antarctica. There were two reasons. Firstly, the British Government had been very active in bringing about the 1959 Antarctic Treaty and also the subsequent fisheries and other minerals regime which flowed from that Antarctic policy. There was

always a sort of cross-fertilisation in the sense of twinning what we were doing in the Falkland Islands and Dependencies and how that impinged on Antarctica and the sovereignty claims there. Secondly, sitting alongside these other interests in the Antarctica Treaty were the British and the Argentines, who were also in dispute with Chile on the same sector of Antarctica.

All this was even further bedevilled by the conflict going on between Argentina and Chile over sovereignty of the Beagle Channel and the implications of this for sovereign exclusive economic zones in the South Atlantic. This dispute had become a quite oppressive problem.

MM: Could you just say where the Beagle Channel is?

AS: It's right in the bottom of South America and there is a dispute over its sovereignty between Argentina and Chile, right down in Cape Horn. It is also significant because, where the Beagle Channel comes out into the sea, certain maritime zones get generated. The problem, essentially, was that there was a sort of presumption that Chile could have maritime rights on the Pacific bottom end of South America and Argentina would have all the maritime rights on the Atlantic side. Because of the geographic configuration of the Beagle Channel, it was possible for Chile to claim some maritime rights in the Atlantic, which was not to the liking of the Argentines at all. This dispute had been given to the British Government to adjudicate on, I think in the late 1960s or 70s. The British Government, sensibly realising that because of its own sovereignty problems with these two countries in the South Atlantic, clearly thought that it would not be right or prudent to run this adjudication itself and that it would be much better to organise an international tribunal.

This it proceeded to do, and there came the fateful day sometime in 1978 when the award was finally produced by the British Government and transmitted to the two governments, and it fell to me to hand these bound volumes respectively to the Diplomatic Representatives in London of Chile and, later in the day, Argentina. The difficulty of course was that, whatever the outcome, it wasn't going to be pleasing to one or other party. Unfortunately for the Argentines, the

jurisdiction went in favour of Chile, which didn't help the British in terms of their relationship with Argentina over the Falkland Islands, although the Argentines understood that we had simply managed an adjudication and it wasn't necessarily our own verdict. But that caused another set of tensions, which in turn led almost to war a year or two later between Argentina and Chile. There was another adjudication, this time run by the Vatican, but that also coloured Argentine's perceptions of Britain's dispute with them over the Falkland Islands.

So it was a very tangled web of issues down there. I've rehearsed these matters because all of us who were dealing with these issues were constantly having to pick our way quite delicately through a complex and conflicting range of inter-relating issues in what was a labyrinthine process.

The other issue, just before we leave the Falkland Islands, was of course the curious quality of life in the Islands. Governors had a difficult relationship there because they were asked both to represent the political views of the British Government to the Islanders, but also to govern the Falkland Islands and represent the views of the Islanders to the British Government. Most Governors found it very difficult to square that particular circle and they would either become great advocates of the Islanders to the despair of the Foreign Office in London, who thought that they were supposed to be telling the Islanders what to do, or they would be robustly telling the Islanders what the Foreign Office or the Government wanted to the despair of the Islanders, who would then be very unhappy about the Governor. I don't think any Governor got this absolutely right, one way or another. When I was involved in the negotiations in 1976-79, for most of the time we had a Governor who straddled that divide reasonably well. His predecessor had not enjoyed the sympathy of the Islanders, and had tremendous trouble with them.

There was one particular incident involving a well-loved Falkland Islander, who was a qualified pilot, and flew the little Beaver seaplanes that were the communication system. He went out flying one day with the resident British doctor, and they crashed. The pilot was killed, and the doctor only managed to save himself because they had landed just off shore. He managed to get ashore,

understood hypothermia and wrapped himself up in seaweed and survived. There was a civil aviation investigation, and the Governor, who was extremely unhappy about all this, felt that the Islanders weren't happy with him. He rang me up at my flat in London to say that he thought the Islanders were going to sack the Residence. He had deployed the Royal Marines around the Residence and, every half an hour, I would hear through the Resident Clerk how the governor was making his defence dispositions. Fortunately, the Islanders never attacked and in the end it came to nothing. But it was an example of the difficulty of the isolated circumstances of running a very complicated job like that. Of course Rex Hunt was perhaps arguably the other end of the spectrum and became an effective supporter of the Islanders.

MM: I think Rex Hunt had actually got a Colonial Office background.

AS: He had.

MM: And he knew what the duties of a Governor are in relation to the people whom they are sent to govern (although govern is perhaps not quite the right word).

AS: That's right. He saw that as his prime responsibility.

MM: Which it was, constitutionally.

AS: Indeed. But, as I say, the difficulty always was that the official who was the Governor was also sent as a Diplomatic Representative of HMG and he was used as a channel through which the views of HMG were conveyed to Legco, which he chaired. That was where, in a situation like the sovereignty case, it always put the Governor in an invidious position. Very difficult indeed.

But the Falkland Islanders lived an extraordinary life. They weren't even much improved by the fact that, in that period in the early 1970s, we had established an air link between the Argentine mainland and the Islands, so that they were not restricted to the occasional ship to be able to reach the outside world. That was only of marginal interest to them. Their determination to live a life of privation

was quite extraordinary. I remember, for example, when I was on a visit to the Islands, I was at a settlement with the Deputy Governor and I had to get back to London. A radio message came that on another settlement, a shepherd had broken his leg and had to be flown back to Port Stanley using the Beaver which was to take the Deputy Governor and me back to Port Stanley. But the Deputy governor would now have to be left behind. Because there wasn't enough space, the plane would take the shepherd, the doctor, the pilot and me. When we arrived to collect the shepherd we taxied towards the jetty. Jetties on Falkland Island settlements are where ships moor to take off the wool crop, and the water level is probably something like 15' to 20' above the edge of the jetty. We were on this tiny little plane, 15' below the jetty, standing on the floats, and at the top there was a shepherd, semi-conscious, strapped to a stretcher. He was lowered down the jetty to the pilot and me who were trying to keep our balance on the seaplane. We then had to negotiate the 6 foot stretcher through the 6 foot 5 inch door of the plane. Happily we did not drop him in the water. Now that was the quality of life that people put up with there, and was in a sense one that they had no difficulty with.

It was a very feudal life. One of the things that Ted Rowlands found, when he was visiting as a Labour Minister, was that the Falkland Islands settlements were really run by the chaps in the landlord companies in London, and they were pretty feudal. There was the big house where the farm manager lived, and then there was a second house where the foreman lived, and then there were two or three bunkhouses. The farm manager was probably the only member of the settlement who was allowed to use the manager's front door. The foreman would come, but everybody else had to go round to the kitchen door at the back. Ted Rowlands, a solid leftwing minister, had to defend this feudal way of life and suggest it shouldn't be changed in any way. He had an interesting political sense of some angst, I think, about this issue.

Appointment as Head of Chancery and Consul-General, Amman, 1979-82

AS: Anyway, I then found myself going back to the Middle East, as Counsellor and Deputy Ambassador to Jordan. It was interesting how different

aspects of one's life catch up because, later on in my time in Amman, I found myself as Chargé d'Affaires, when we discovered, two days before we were about to receive an official visit by Lord Carrington, the Foreign Secretary, that Argentina had invaded the Falkland Islands. At the time, Jordan happened to have a non-permanent seat on the Security Council and therefore, when the British Government decided to take the issue to the Security Council, Jordan's vote was important. By then Lord Carrington had resigned and wasn't coming out at all, but my telephone rang one morning and it was the Foreign Office saying that they were gathering as many votes as they could in support of the resolution the British wanted to put to the Security Council, and Jordan's vote was going to be rather key. King Hussein was one of the Heads of Government whom Mrs Thatcher was likely to ring in the next few hours. It really was essential, for me to get in to the King to give him some preliminary briefing before Mrs Thatcher rang. By chance I was probably the only person in the Kingdom of Jordan who knew anything about the Falkland Islands, having just come two years previously from that job in London. I knew that the King had no idea about the Falklands, and nor did anyone else in the Jordanian Government.

So I rang the Palace and I said I had to speak urgently to His Majesty. The palace staff said that the King was on his way to Aqaba by helicopter. If I were to get down to the airport quickly, he would be there for a little while. They would ring the airport to tell them that I was on my way. I was to go to the Royal Suite at the airport and somebody would take me to speak to His Majesty. So I went haring off to the airport and I found, when I got there, that His Majesty was not in the Royal Suite at all; he had been seduced into looking at the engine repair workshops. I was taken there and I was wandering around the aircraft engine repair work when I suddenly met King Hussein. He and I were both amazed to find the other in this situation and of course one of King Hussein's most endearing traits was that he always called those he met 'Sir', so you always had moments when you said, "Good morning, Sir," and he said, "Good morning, Sir," back to you. So he said to me, "Good heavens, Sir! What are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, Sir, I've come here to see you because Mrs Thatcher is about to ring you and I really need, if I may, to give you a little background to what she'll be talking about." "Ah! Fine!" So we stood in this aircraft engine repair

workshop where I gave him an instant briefing on the Falklands Islands problem and our response to the Argentine invasion and so on. He listened attentively and said, “Thank you very much. I really have got to go now but I’ll bear all this very much in mind.” And off he went. I think he’d just got to Aqaba when the telephone rang, and indeed the conversation with Mrs Thatcher took place.

MM: How very fortunate.

AS: Yes, and there was no resident Argentine Ambassador; the nearest one was in Damascus. There was a sort of curious feeling among the Jordanians at that time. There was something quite attractive for Jordanians in seeing what the Argentines had done. It was the British lion having its tail tweaked and we were not quite the power we had been. Those days that I talked about in Beirut and elsewhere in the 1960s and 1970s where the British were regarded as somebody of some significance, had eroded. But it came as a shock to a lot of senior Jordanians, who had not understood that decline is relative. We may have declined from where we were, in their estimation, a few years ago; but we were still a serious country to reckon with. And they were astounded that we could still mount an expedition of this magnitude on the other side of the world. It was a sobering moment for a lot of opinion formers in the Middle East. It was important to take the Arabs on a little bit, because they were inclined to be slightly – how shall I put this – in favour of tweaking us. So I simply used to say to them that I was surprised that they took the line of sympathy with Argentina because I had thought that in terms of their commitment to the cause of Palestine, they would not be attracted to the thought of people infringing other people’s sovereignty and taking over their land. But they seemed to have no difficulty about this in the case of the Falkland Islands. Did that mean, I continued, that they were less concerned by this logic in terms of Palestine? That was perhaps a cheeky line to take, but it did have an effect. I talk in this way to the editors of the two main Jordanian newspapers. And they did shift their editorial line a little.

Falklands apart, it was, sadly, business as usual in the Middle East with a backdrop of increasing anxieties. This was the period when the Iraq-Iran War started. The Lebanese civil war was reaching its climax. The Middle East was in

some turmoil, but not directly affecting Jordan, which was still in a fairly comfortable position. Because of earlier Arab commitments to what were called the frontline states, Jordan was still enjoying quite considerable subsidies from the Gulf States. The British political role essentially was to maintain a close dialogue with Jordan and to preserve our historical friendship and see what, with King Hussein's encouragement, we could do to help maintain stability in Jordan.

MM: When was Glubb Pasha sacked?

AS: Glubb Pasha had been sacked in the 1960s, a long long time ago when the King was a very young man.

We also had an active defence relationship with Jordan. Indeed, the King had just said to the British that he needed a new set of tanks for his Army, and asked us to supply them. As it happened, the British were able to make a number of tanks available to him because the Shah of Iran had had a large tank contract with Britain before he was overthrown. We had produced, for the Shah, a modified version of the Chieftain tank, so we sold a large number of these to the Jordanian Armed Forces. This was not the happiest of stories because, not long after these tanks came into service, we discovered that there was a design problem with the gearbox. Here were these wonderful new, shiny tanks going round and suddenly, after about a hundred miles, the gearbox would burn out. One of the phenomena which I began to observe in my last year at the British Embassy in Jordan was the regular appearance in the office of a Brigadier in the Ministry of Defence who was a tank expert. He would appear with his briefcase. I would hear him say in the corridor, "I've got this new clutch which I believe is going to help enormously." Six years later I found myself seconded to the MOD which was still trying to solve the problem of the gearboxes.

At the moment, I think I should move on from Jordan because the diplomatic accounts of the various ups and downs of the Middle East are very familiar from other accounts and of course our concern was mainly to keep King Hussein on side, and talk to him. We had a very helpful interlocutor in Crown Prince Hassan with whom I got on very well indeed. I knew his wife, Princess Tharwat even

more because, again by one of those coincidences, when I had been a junior diplomat in Morocco, the Pakistanis sent as their Ambassador the Begum Ikramullah, who was the widow of one of Pakistan's first Foreign Ministers, partly as a sort of grace and favour, although she was a very highly intelligent woman. She had the most beautiful, stunning sixteen-year-old daughter whom all bachelor members of the Diplomatic Corps thought they might make their own. But Tharwat was too young and the mother was having none of it, but we became very good friends of the mother, and we also got to know Tharwat when she used to come round to our house to borrow books and so on. Years later Tharwat, this Pakistani girl, met Prince Hassan of Jordan at Oxford and married him. So, when I appeared in Jordan, there was this girl I had known as a teenager now Crown Prince Hassan's wife. Begum Ikramullah used to come and visit her daughter and the Crown Prince, so it was a nice family relationship to pick up on. It also meant that one was lucky enough to have a particularly good relationship with Crown Prince Hassan, on whom one was constantly called on to make visits with Members of Parliament and visitors and so forth. That was a bonus, if you like.

Head of South American Department in the FCO, 1982

Anyway, when my time in Jordan was over, I was due to go and have another change of scene and I had been appointed to go to the British Mission in Geneva. I had always been rather keen to have some multilateral job, and it was agreed that I would come home and do some training, and then go to Geneva. About a week after I was appointed, the telephone rang and somebody said the Geneva job was all off. After our victory in the Falkland Islands, the Latin American side of the Foreign Office was being restructured. There was going to be a separate department only dealing with the Falkland Islands. I was asked to come back and become the Head of the South American Department, given my past experience in these matters.

So I then found myself again back in the Foreign Office and focussing on our wider relationships with Latin America. The main thrust of one's job at that time was rebuilding bridges with the countries of South America. My Minister of State at that time was Lady (Janet) Young, a delightful woman with whom we

were lucky enough to become quite friendly. She was determined to put her best efforts towards reconciliation with South America, so she determined on a quite vigorous programme of visits to Latin America. She and I and her Private Secretary travelled a lot over the next few years within Latin America, up and down the continent, talking to all sorts of people: President Pinochet and so on. We put a lot of time and effort into that. Our efforts to rebuild our relationships in Latin America were helped by another and rather paradoxical situation in that, there was a major Latin American debt crisis. Latin America, for a variety of reasons which are again familiar and I don't really need to rehearse here, had borrowed billions of dollars from America that they couldn't possibly pay back.

The great exercise that we were all engaged in was therefore the resolution of this major Latin American debt crisis which brought so many of the economies to a crashing halt and also was pretty bad for the profits of the number of British and American banks who had lent very irresponsibly over the previous decade to Latin America. But the positive spin off, was that it reinforced in the eyes of the Latin Americans that Britain did indeed still have a significant part to play in their economic life, since a lot of the debt crisis was managed through the City of London. In the context of repairing our wider relationships with South America after the Falklands, it was in a strangely ironic way helpful to have this otherwise catastrophic debt crisis as a way of reinforcing the point that there was indeed real substance to British/Latin American relations.

MM: How was it resolved?

AS: By a series of complicated and harsh debt negotiations, also involving the IMF and the World Bank with a lot of debt rescheduling and restructuring of the economies by the Latin Americans.

MM: What part did you play in debt rescheduling and all that?

AS: Most of the frontline policy of the Foreign Office on this issue was actually run from Economic Relations Department, as it was called (ERD). There were economic and other financial World Bank disciplines that were, as it were,

inevitable, but the input which we needed to make from South America Department was in two areas: first was the socio-political consequences of these remedies and their impact on other wider political issues and relationships and also, given that we were in this rather delicate stage of restructuring our political relationship, the way in which we handled the economic negotiations had, understandably, an impact on the political side. We put a lot of effort into the political regeneration process. You couldn't really run these two operations in isolation; there was a real crossover. Although the bankers, the IMF and the Treasury were not going to take a romantic view of the dramatic collapse of Latin America just to be nice to people, there was nevertheless a practical realisation that, there were ways of dealing with the harsh necessities: economic dialogue needed a political dimension if it was to have any hope of success, so the input that we could make was actually quite useful.

I also just wanted to mention before we left Latin America a separate issue. I mentioned earlier, when talking of my time in Peru, that there had been major national focus on Latin America in the 1960s. A great deal of government money, time and effort was put into this enterprise either through the founding or the strengthening of Latin American studies faculties at four British universities. It is, I suppose, in the nature of life at Whitehall that these great enterprises are engaged upon and then, a decade or so later, they have disappeared into distant history. I realised when I became Head of South America Department that nobody could remember the last time anyone had spoken to the four universities in question about their Latin America activities. So I made it my business to go and see them all. This was a source of some surprise to them since they hadn't seen or heard from anybody from the Foreign Office for years. I had a very sticky start when I went to Liverpool because, I later discovered half way through the day, they had assumed that the only possible reason I had appeared was to cut their funding. It was only when they discovered that I was actually there to look at new ways of working together with them that the sun came out from the clouds, and we had a useful meeting. First of all, they were dealing with a lot of the underlying issues involving Latin American economics and politics. My Desk Officers were dealing with the more immediate problems, and I thought that it would be quite helpful for them to go and spend a day or so at these universities

and get some of the background to the issues that they were dealing with. By the same token, some of these universities might not be as up-to-date with knowledge of current affairs as we were. Of course, academics visit overseas countries in the course of their research, and often have contacts and interlocutors who may be less accessible to the embassy or visitors from the Foreign Office, because of political sensitivity.

So it seemed to me that it was important for the Foreign Office to see whether, and in what way, it could take advantage of university activities in the field of foreign affairs. I've always had a slight feeling that the Foreign Office can become a little over-complacent about its own mastery of facts and contacts, and slightly ivory-towerish; not perhaps as aware as it should be that there are other people working in these fields with whom it would be profitable and beneficial to engage in rather closer dialogue. We certainly do this with journalists but I'm not sure that we've done it as much as perhaps we ought with academics. After my experience with Latin America, this seemed to me important. When I went to a new post, one of the things I asked to be included in my briefing programme, was a visit to universities in the UK who were specialising in studies of the area or the country to which I was being posted. I found that beneficial when I went to Brunei and also subsequently when I went to Syria.

Appointment as Consul General, Sydney, 1985-88

When my time in the South America Department came to an end, I went as Consul General to Sydney in Australia, which was an entirely new and different part of the world for me, and also was my first, and only, post in the First World rather than the Third World. So that was, in a sense, a culture shock. I was lucky because Australia was at that time under the Prime Ministership of Bob Hawke, the famous Labour politician. In New South Wales there was an equally powerful Labour Government led by Neville Wran. By happy chance, my wife was at that time the Private Secretary to James Callaghan who very kindly wrote letters of introduction to Bob Hawke, Neville Wran and a couple of other prominent Labour people in Australia, and that was extremely helpful in opening all sorts of doors there. I was much in his debt for that.

Sydney was an interesting vantage point from which to observe the complicated way in which Australia runs the balance between federal power and the parallel powers of the individual States. I was in a way almost accredited as an ambassador because New South Wales was a state with its own bicameral Parliament and a Government with Ministers and a Premier (as opposed to a Prime Minister), and a whole set of values, attitudes and relationships which were conducted quite separately from the areas where the Federal Government's power was exercised. It was a complicated relationship. Sydney was also the major centre in Australia for the press and the banking system. The three Armed Services had their operational headquarters in New South Wales, although the Chiefs of Staff sat in the Defence Ministry in Canberra. So the Consul General in Sydney was in a curious intermediate position between national and state politics and I had, I think, perhaps a slightly special relationship with the High Commissioner in Canberra compared with my colleagues in Perth or Brisbane or Melbourne, so one straddled a lot of their activities. In my first month, I found myself, as it were straight off the plane, having a visit from the UK Minister dealing with energy, coal resources and the coal-mining industry, Peter Bottomley arriving as Transport Minister wanting to talk about patterns of traffic control in urban situations, and to find out what the Australians did about drink-driving, followed by the UK Chief of the Air Staff who turned up and spent most of his time in Sydney rather than in Canberra. So those three or four weeks were an interesting introduction to a job that brought one into quite a wide spectrum of vigorous activity and into an understanding that there was still an enormous amount of content in the UK/Australia relationship.

We had not had as full a UK/Australian political relationship as perhaps we might have done because there was a perceived tension of there being a Labour Government in Australia and the Thatcher Government in London. So it was particularly interesting that, when John Coles came as the High Commissioner towards the end of my time there, he brought with him the particular pedigree that he had been working for the last two or three years as the Foreign Office Adviser at No 10 Downing Street, very close to Margaret Thatcher. John came to the decision that the Australians might be deeply gratified to have a lot of attention

paid to them by the Thatcher Government, and he was I suppose uniquely placed to bring that to pass because he could just ring up No 10 and go straight to the Prime Minister. She agreed with John Coles that she would love to come on a visit to Australia herself, and that she would be four-square behind his efforts to arrange a whole series of senior Cabinet Ministerial visits. All that took place in a very vigorous way and of course the Australians loved it. One suddenly realised that Australians had a very ambivalent relationship with the Poms and that they really rather liked to be taken notice of. I am not sure that that vigorous new surge in the relationship would have happened otherwise. I once asked John Coles if he could have achieved this improvement in the relationship with Australia if he had not been at No 10? He said he was sure he could not. It was a very good example, I think, of one of one's senior colleagues getting the best advantage out of a unique relationship with No 10.

MM: How about royal visits?

AS: Royal visits are complicated because the Queen is not only the Queen of the United Kingdom but is quite separately in parallel the Queen of Australia. The first thing that you discover as the British High Commissioner or Consul General in Sydney is that it is entirely inappropriate for you to have anything to do with the British Royal Family at all because these are the Australian Royal Family, and it is for the Australians to decide how, when and on what basis their Royal Family should come to Australia. So when the Queen or Prince Charles or any member of the Royal Family is coming to Australia, it is a point of pride in a way on the part of the Australians to make sure that, of all people, the British High Commissioner or Consul General is rather kept out of the way.

That said, much to my surprise, when the Queen came to Australia in 1988 on *Britannia*, the New South Wales Premier was asked to provide the guest list for dinner on *Britannia*. He and I had a particularly close relationship and I had been very active with him when he was in opposition. To my surprise, and in fact to my embarrassment, I then discovered that he had included my wife and me on the guest list for the Australian dinner on *Britannia*. When I appeared, Her Majesty looked at me with a rather ironic smile and said, "How nice to see you, Mr

Sindall. I have to say I was slightly surprised to find you here this evening! You're more than welcome nevertheless." Of course the dinner was essentially for the good and the great in Australia and I think everyone was surprised at the extraordinary and unusual presence of the Sindalls at the royal table! It was quite surprising that often the Australians themselves had not entirely understood the distinction between the Queen as Head of State of Australia and of the UK. I remember in that same visit the Lord Mayor of Sydney rang me one morning, trying to get me to lobby for the inclusion in Her Majesty's programme of something to do with Sydney, and I had to explain to him that I was really the one person he should not be talking to about this; what he should be doing was ringing the Governor, who was the representative of Her Majesty and in whose hands all these matters lay.

The other major event of my time in Australia was that I was in the happy position of being Consul General in Sydney at the time of the Australian bi-centenary of the founding of Australia. Most of this major national celebration involved New South Wales, which was the first colony. So the Australian Bi-centenary Headquarters were in Sydney, and most of the great events were focussed on Sydney, and the British/Australia Committee, run by Sir Peter Gadsden, the former Lord Mayor of London, were regular visitors to Sydney. Lord (George) Harewood came out regularly because he had been asked to be the Director of the Adelaide Festival for the bi-centenary. Again, most of the good and the great in the arts world were in Sydney, and George and Patricia Harewood stayed with us frequently. It was a wonderful experience for us because that is a wonderful opportunity to invite every opera singer, dancer, theatre director and filmmaker to our house. So we were much enriched by being there at that time.

The other key issue of the bi-centenary was what should Britain give Australia as her gift. It was decided to give a youth sail training ship, which was called the *Young Endeavour* after Captain Cook's ship. By an amazing process of competition, twelve young Australians and twelve young British people were recruited for the crew, which sailed *Young Endeavour* from Cowes, where she was seen off by the Queen, to Australia, all the way round Australia calling in at

various ports, until she triumphantly entered Sydney Harbour, with thousands of vessels hooting and crowds as she sailed past the Opera House and under Sydney Harbour bridge. It was one of those quintessential bonus moments of one's life and the fate of your job in the Foreign Office that puts you on board *Young Endeavour* as you go into that extraordinary harbour. She was handed over by Prince Charles and Princess Diana to the Australians. So it was a very memorable and poignant time.

MM: That was a wonderful experience. You must have thoroughly enjoyed Australia.

AS: Well, it gave one a quite extraordinary range of excitement and activity. I remember a stream of people came through. It was fascinating to see Margaret Thatcher at the height of her powers. When she came on her visit in the bi-centenary year, we arranged a lunch for her in Sydney where she was going to meet a cross section of about twenty of Australia's top business men. Now those were the days when people like Alan Bond and other great Australian entrepreneurs were at their height, and they were men who dominated business and the political world and took no prisoners at all. We organised the lunch in one of the major hotels in Sydney, on the basis that there would be two tables of twelve; Margaret Thatcher would be at one table and Denis at the other, and I would be at one table and the High Commissioner at the other. Half way through the meal, the Thatchers would swop so that all the Australians would have the opportunity to speak to her. They were like excited school children before her. They were in awe of her. It was an extraordinary moment showing the potency that Margaret Thatcher had internationally at that time. They sat at the table and said to her, "Tell us about how you see the secret of success, Mrs Thatcher!" and she would say, "You must have your eye on your main objective and not be deflected!" And they would look astounded, and drink this in! She would repeat the same sort of thing: "You should make sure that, before you start, you know where you want to get to, and maintain your course!" And you could see them almost scribbling all this down! It was the most fascinating example of the potency of Mrs Thatcher at the height of her powers, and the renown that she had with these people who weren't, in any other world, impressed by anybody at all but themselves.

Secondment to the Defence Export Services Organisation 1988-91

After Sydney, I was asked by the Foreign Office whether I would be willing to have a secondment and go to the Ministry of Defence to join the Defence Export Services Organisation (DESO) as the Regional Marketing Director for the Middle East. I was the third Foreign Office incumbent in this post.

It was both fascinating and an extraordinary culture shock. We had seen the culture shock sometimes when Defence Attachés suddenly found themselves for the first time in an Embassy dealing with the cultural reference points of the Diplomatic Service. But it was equally, if not more of, a potent change to find oneself in the Ministry of Defence. You come from a relatively small organisation and find yourself in an enormous organisation with thousands of people. The internal telephone directory of the MoD is the size of one if not two volumes of the London telephone directory. It is also utterly bewildering because all military officers call themselves by initials and not names, and your telephone rings and somebody says, It's G21X here, good morning! You have no idea, of course, who he is, and you then have to ask his name and what he does. They clearly regard you as a creature from outer space. So it was an extraordinary change of scene and one which was bewildering but intriguing.

UK defence sales were on a high at this time because we had not so long before signed the mammoth Al Yamamah arms contract with Saudi Arabia. Most of my time at MoD involved dealing with Gulf States and Saudi Arabia. I was one of the few Arabists who had spent all my time in the Levant and North Africa, so there was a secondary learning curve, if I may put it that way, dealing with the intricacies of the Gulf States.

However, the first major task that I found myself entangled with when I took the job was not so much the Gulf States, but trying to resolve a deeply embarrassing problem that we had got ourselves into with Jordan, as I noted earlier. In 1979 King Hussein had bought a large number of tanks from the British. As I mentioned before, these tanks were a version of the British army Chieftain tank.

It had become apparent very early on that this tank had a faulty gearbox. I also mentioned the MoD Brigadier visiting the Embassy in 1982 and regularly claiming the gearbox problem was solved.

You will imagine my amazement when I flew direct from Sydney to London to go almost directly from Heathrow to the first day of the Farnborough Air Show. I had hardly walked into the British DESO headquarters when the first person I saw as he walked by me was the same Brigadier whom I had known in Amman saying, “I think we really now have the gearbox part for the tanks in Jordan!” I regarded this with some dismay and of course, sure enough, when I got into the job, I discovered that the gearbox problem had still not been solved, seven years later. The Jordanians were now quite rightly becoming angry about this. The papers had been going round the MoD for ages about what to do about this. In the Foreign Office, if you are a head of a political department, you probably see your Minister of State almost on a daily basis. Ministers in the MoD, this enormous organisation, are treated as strange, God-like creatures and you can meet quite senior people in the Ministry of Defence who can go through their whole career without ever having met or spoken to a Minister on the sixth floor sanctum of the MoD. One of the advantages I think I brought with me to this job was a capacity to breach this MoD culture and, if there was a problem, to ring up the Private Secretary and say the Minister ought to know this is the problem, and he ought to think about it. So I wrote a paper and rang up the Private Secretary, and said we really have got to have a ministerial meeting to talk about this tank gearbox problem. Fortunately, Lord Trefgarne, who was the Minister of State at the time, was very receptive to this, and it was then agreed – and I have to say it was not quite the right decision, which would simply to have spent £30m or £40m and given the Jordanians a completely new gearbox for each of these tanks – we took the fateful decision that we would spend probably still about £15m or so, and we would bring the great expertise of the MoD together and do a tank gearbox redevelopment programme with the existing gearboxes. So Lord Trefgarne and I went to Jordan and we were taken out to the Army headquarters in Zarqa, and there, laid out before us, were the burnt, twisted metal tank gearboxes. It was deeply embarrassing. Lord Trefgarne said he saw why I wrote my paper. “My God! Look at this!” And we launched a programme of gearbox

development trials in the UK and got the best brains working, and in the end we slowly solved the problem. But it was a depressing experience.

The other important thing which happened was that, before the end of my time in this job, the First Gulf War occurred. Soon after, Saddam Hussein had invaded Kuwait. I found myself going on every ministerial visit to Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States, with either Tom King, the Secretary of State, or the Minister of State who was the egregious Alan Clark at that time, on the basis that the equipment needs of our allies were going to be significantly important. The issue was that we did not want to go into this war simply as the Americans, the British and the Westerners. It was extremely important in Arab politics to have their Armies with us. For example, we wanted the Kuwaitis, such as they could, to muster some of those in exile. They had a few aircraft they had managed to fly out, and a few tanks. They could fly their aircraft and use their tanks as part of the operation. The Saudis, the Egyptians, the Syrians, had been brought into the Alliance. All those Arab allies needed us to provide them with ammunition, spare parts, or one or two weapons systems if they were going to do anything at all in the battle ahead. As we were sitting in meetings with whichever the Minister of Defence it was, they would say, We need X, Mr King, and Tom King would say, Adrian, you make sure you have a note of that. We must let the Kuwaitis (or the Saudis) have some equipment. So I would come back to the UK with a shopping list. In this immense quartermaster mechanism in the UK MoD – half the people in the telephone directory – staff were garnering equipment from Germany or from stockpiles in the UK for the British Army. Because of budgetary cutbacks over the years, the MoD was finding it difficult to equip the British Forces. And there was the wretched Sindall ringing up some Brigadier, saying in effect, I wonder if I could nevertheless let us have 50,000 rounds of something or other for the Syrians or the Saudis or the Egyptians. The Ministry of Defence was not, after defence cuts, so flush with resources and equipment that it could lightly say, Of course, dear boy! You must have anything you want. There would be great resistance to letting anything go because, they would explain that the lives of British soldiers might be at risk here if they let some of this material badly needed by us go to somebody else. I would have to say that I absolutely took that point, but there was a political requirement for a little of this

material to go to the Arab allies. There were several occasions, if I go back to my earlier point, when there was no point in my arguing with a Brigadier somewhere. I would say, Thank you very much, Brigadier, put the telephone down and ring up the Minister's Private Secretary and say, that I was having great difficulty securing the release of material. I fear you or the Minister is going to have to press the right button to get it released. He would say, Absolutely fine! We'll do that. It therefore came through. So playing the MoD machine was a difficult skill.

I went out on a whole series of visits as the campaign got under way. On my first visit to Saudi Arabia the total British military presence was only about a hundred people, an advance party, living and sleeping in a warehouse at one of the Saudi ports. Their task was to launch the logistic process of opening up Saudi facilities to manage the eventual arrival of a full British armoured brigade. And as one went back, one saw this material arriving from Britain and the United States; wall to wall lorries, tanks, armoured cars; the most extraordinary sight which you ever saw. My final visit was with Tom King. The British Armoured Division were doing their final pre-war exercise. The whole Armoured Brigade had set up a desert war scenario reproducing what it was going to meet in a few days when the war started: building the sand walls, the barbed wire defences, lighting fires; all these tanks and armoured cars were going through this obstacle course. There were four of us in the party together, and we were helicoptered out into the middle of this exercise where we met in a tent with Brigadier Patrick Cordingley, who briefed us all.

The next stage of the operation was that Tom King was going to do a major press conference in the desert. The press had been trucked out to this place, which was about ten or twelve miles from where we were, and Brigadier Cordingley said to the Secretary of State, the Private Secretary, to me and to the Under Secretary, "Your transport is outside, gentlemen." We of course thought that we were going to get back into the helicopter but not a bit of it: there were two Challenger tanks and two Warrior armed fighting vehicles, one for each of us. We all just stood in the turret of our respective vehicle and we were given a pair of headphones and goggles, and we just went through probably one of the last ever great British

Armoured Division exercises. It was rather like being on *Young Endeavour* going past Sydney Harbour bridge. You suddenly find yourself in this extraordinary position that the fate of the diplomatic career has brought you to.

We arrived at the locale of press conference officials. Tom King, with the cameras of the world on him, paraded round in front of all the journos in his tank and then gave a press conference. Later, we met the Kuwaiti Government in Exile, who were staying in Taif, not far from Mecca. They were now cock-a-hoop. We had seen them three or four months ago, dejected, humiliated, saddened, despairing, and they were now absolutely cock-a-hoop because they knew that the liberation process was about to start. We had our final meeting with the Kuwaiti Government in Exile, and then we got back into our plane and flew back to the UK and twenty-four hours later the war started.

So that was an extraordinary vantage point from which to see something of the war; also to experience how the Ministry of Defence's amazingly elephantine organisation in peace time can change when a crisis like this happens – or when the Falklands happened – into an organisation that can somehow improvise and achieve miracles which you wouldn't have expected it could do.

I would also mention, before we move on, that the other issue which took up much of my time was that of sale of arms and equipment to Iraq and Iran in the aftermath of the Iraq/Iran War. There was an embargo but of course once the war had finished, British industry had hoped that it would be able to resume British arms sales to either the Iraqis or the Iranians. I have to say from my experience in that period, the control was still pretty strict. I had constantly had sales directors from various companies coming in and going away a bit depressed because I had to tell them that the chances of sales were virtually nil. Not a lot of stuff went through. The political determination not to see a whole lot of weapons systems going into a fairly volatile area was still pretty strong. It was in that context that British Aerospace had conceived the idea that they should be allowed to develop a project to assemble and build the Hawk fighter trainer in Iraq. They lobbied enormously for this enterprise, and one of the supporters in this was of course MoD Minister of State, Alan Clark, who thought this was a rather exciting idea

and was very keen on it! He was the great driver and architect, and absolutely insisted that this should go to Cabinet. So up the scheme went to the relevant Cabinet Committee where of course it lasted about two minutes because they looked at it and Margaret Thatcher was alleged to have said, What on earth is this about? Crazy! Put it away! and that was that. So it had a very brief life, but it was symptomatic of the fact that there was no pushing of open doors on arms sales.

So my time in the MoD ended up being rather more dramatic and of more content than I had expected or envisaged. But it was from that background which then, in turn, led to my next job, which was when I went as British High Commissioner to Brunei.

British High Commissioner, Brunei, 1991-94

AS: I suppose to some extent it was my defence background which qualified me for the job of British High Commissioner to Brunei, since our relationship had a distinct defence flavour. We enjoyed the jungle warfare and other training facilities of Brunei; and thanks to the Sultan, we could afford to maintain a British garrison there. We had a large loan service team helping to train the Brunei Armed Forces and the Bruneians also ran a separate organisation called the Gurkha Reserve Unit, which was formed of former Gurkhas and British Gurkha officers. This was a support back-up defence unit for the Sultan if ever his regular Armed Forces caused trouble. We had hopes at that time of securing a significant new defence package with Brunei. So my arrival from the MoD was hoped to be quite propitious. The Sultan had only recently, just before I arrived, gone to visit units of the Bruneian Defence Forces and had been ...

MM: You mean the Royal Brunei Malay Regiment?

AS: It wasn't called that any more. He had been so struck by what he regarded as their military incompetence in dealing with the equipment that they had, that he had effectively said: "You don't know how to keep your rifles clean; the chances of your being able to use new and complicated equipment in action are nil. So

I'm really not interested in acquiring weapons systems until the general standard of competence has improved." So I didn't really achieve a great deal on defence sales during my time. But the military element there was still very central because the garrison was under the military control and command of British Forces, Hong Kong. But the political role that the garrison played in Bruneian life and society was my direct responsibility as High Commissioner. So the Senior Commander in Hong Kong and I worked very closely throughout my time. I was frequently at the garrison and had to take the salute at military parades and various other occasions.

MM: By 'the garrison', do you mean the headquarters of the British Gurkha Regiment stationed in Seria?

AS: I mean the British garrison headquarters in Seria. There were also other elements of the British Army running the Jungle Warfare Training School and the administration of the Garrison.

I learned very early on, not even having done National Service, that I was not versed in the minutiae of formal military ceremony. So, throughout my time as High Commissioner when I was invited to take the salute, I always had an absolutely brilliant young Lieutenant seated either behind me or very close to me whose task was to hiss into my ear, Stand up! Sit down! Salute! or whatever, and I survived these lovely events put on by the military during my time.

The defence relationship was really quite important. The Sultan paid for the garrison, which supported the British, and the Jungle Warfare Training facilities. He regarded the cost as an acceptable price to pay for political and security reassurance. It was not only worries about internal politics. There was also a hangover from earlier problems with Malaysia and Indonesia. The Sultan knew that the Bruneians had walked away from the proposal to become part of Malaysia, to keep their independence and their major oil and gas revenues. They were always a little worried that Malaysia might re-open this issue. There was always a slight sense of suspicion and unease arising from the background of

problems in the previous generation with Indonesia. In that sense, the British garrison was in a way a psychological comfort to the Sultan.

We then also had a profitable share of the management of Brunei's overseas assets. And the British education system also benefited quite a lot from a constant throughput of young Bruneians either at schools or at universities in Britain, paying substantial fees. There were also substantial contracts in Brunei because most of their educational system was run by a whole system of teachers imported by various specialist organisations from the UK teaching in Brunei secondary schools. So the UK/Brunei relationship was actually quite important.

MM: Did we not also supply loan service officers for the Brunei force?

AS: We did indeed. We still had a substantial loan service personnel group who were in Brunei, and were well integrated into the Brunei Armed Forces and were a key element in training and education.

I think we might just stay with that for a moment. I think I've mentioned earlier on that one of the curiosities of the coup in Libya was that we had a significant loan service personnel presence in Libya and none of them had picked up any whiff of impending trouble in the Libyan Armed Forces, and the MoD had not liked the idea of loan service officers having a sort of international role. It was interesting that, when I appeared many years later in Brunei, that philosophy had really not changed. I asked very early on to what extent there was there any background briefing to the High Commissioner by the various loan service personnel; this was a question which was regarded with some dismay. They thought that somehow this was really rather inappropriate, that it was not quite cricket to do this. I said that I was not asking them to go around being subversive or anything but that it was part of the national interest that we had some reassurance about security or instability within the Bruneian Armed Forces and the Sultanate. After all, we had a defence commitment to the Sultan of Brunei to come to his aid in times of trouble, and it would be rather nice to know if there was any likelihood of any scenario emerging in which the Sultan might call upon us to exercise what he regarded as our commitment to him. But I wasn't sure that

any of my arguments fell on fertile ground. So it was interesting that this culture of not using Loan Service Personnel seemed not to have changed very much over the years.

Anyway, there we were in this rather key position, and it's a very strange world dealing with Brunei because of course everything is entirely dependent on the Sultan. Nobody could do anything without some sanction from the Royal Palace. To give a tiny example I often use, there was a moment during my time there where we were mounting a large theatrical production in the Residence gardens for a charitable enterprise and we wanted to borrow a movable spotlight from the television studios. I discovered, after several conversations with the director of Brunei Television in whose gift this was, that he felt unable to lend me a spot for the British High Commission without getting the sanction of the Sultan's Private Secretary at the Istana. The thought of all decisions of that modest nature going up to the Palace led one to understand rather forcibly why the decision-making process in Brunei was so slow and so painful. So of course the corollary of all that was that there was a respect in which one's success or failure as British High Commissioner in Brunei partly turned on how well or badly your relationship ran with the Sultan. That of course was part of the function of whatever skills or charm you could exude but of course it was also partly an issue of human chemistry. If the Sultan had for some reason decided that he didn't like the cut of your jib, you would never get anywhere with him; you would have done nothing untoward, inappropriate or wrong but maybe he didn't fancy you.

Anyway, I was fortunate in that I think I managed to establish quite a good relationship with him, and I always had access to the Sultan whenever I wanted.

The Sultan of Brunei's other close relationship was with Singapore, with Lee Kuan Yew. My Singaporean High Commissioner colleague had been injudicious enough to think that he could then slightly strut his stuff on the strength of this and became slightly vice-regal in his conduct. I came back from leave one day to find that he'd been unceremoniously sent packing by the Sultan because he'd stepped a bit too far out of line. So it was a very salutary business dealing with the Sultan; although you did have a pretty privileged position, you should never

take it for granted and should always tread very gingerly. It was a subtle game to play.

I suppose that the potency of that came very much with the issue of the Sultan's State visit to Britain. When I arrived in Brunei, I went through the extraordinary ceremony of presenting my credentials to the Sultan, which was a ceremony of unparalleled complication. We had to go for a rehearsal of protocol in the morning, and I think I worked out afterwards that there were something like twenty different occasions when you had to bow, walking either forwards or backwards. One had to hope to get it right and I just managed to scrape through. When I then sat down to talk to His Majesty, he immediately said he was rather anxious to embark on a programme of formal overseas visits but he was anxious not to go anywhere until he had paid an official State visit to Britain. The background to this was that Her Majesty had been some years before to Brunei, so it was in a sense our turn to invite the Sultan to the UK. But there had been problems like the Harrods sale, Mohammed el Fayed, which rather put the brakes on. Anyway, I then said to the Foreign Office that I thought the time had come when we really had to grasp this particular nettle. Happily, we were fortunate enough that a slot was found for the Sultan to pay his State visit to Britain.

This was fortuitous in a way because the State Visit also coincided with another great ceremony. I can't remember if it was tenth or twentieth anniversary of the Sultan's accession to the Throne, but there was another huge set of ceremonies going on in Brunei at the same time, so it was a particularly happy coincidence in a way. But of course the difficulty was that this was the early winter slot, the October/November slot for the British State Visit and the Sultan's own anniversary celebrations would take place only a couple of weeks before he left for London. I was in London at the beginning of the year and went to Buckingham Palace to talk to everybody there about advance planning. There is of course a timetable for the preparation of State visits, and Buckingham Palace said to me that what they did was to get the first draft programme printed in May, that by August, the programme would be placed and printed out six weeks ahead of the visit taking place in October or November. I said that I was very sorry but I had to tell them that there was absolutely no way that they could organise a

State visit with the Sultan on that basis. With all the other celebrations going on in that year, the chances of his Majesty's taking any substantial decision on a complicated programme before the summer were virtually nil! They said that could not be. I said, I did not want to be difficult or destructive, but I had to tell them that that wasn't going to work. They said they would talk to the High Commissioner in London. As the year went on, it turned out that it was indeed extraordinarily difficult to get any decisions out of the Sultan at all. This is in a sense what I mean about all relationships always somehow depending on the personal chemistry because, as the weeks went by and messages were flying from the Palace – quite properly, in my opinion – became evermore distraught, I would have to go to the Sultan and beg. In the end I thought the only way to do this was for me to make a joke of it; I would say to His Majesty, “You have to give me something on that or otherwise I will be taken to the Tower of London and beheaded. I've got to have something! Is there something you can tell me?” He thought this was terribly funny, and he would chuckle and say, “OK.” So I could at least report home with another little bit of the jigsaw. This desperately difficult process went on throughout the year. The final stumbling block which we never won was that you were also, as the incoming Head of State, required to say who the members of your accompanying suite would be. This had to be built into the protocol and into the programme and had to be flagged up well in advance. But the Sultan was adamant that, although there were some members of his suite that he was prepared to decide upon, there were others that he was only going to decide at the last minute. Plead and cajole as I did with His Majesty, I never got the names out of him until two days before his departure for the UK. I was flying home a couple of days ahead and I went to see him at the Palace just before I left, and I got one more name.

MM: You actually saw him and spoke to him.

AS: Oh yes, regularly. I was up at the Istana I should think, as this year went on, about once every ten days, chipping away. It was a very delicate process. I think the last couple of names of the Sultan's suite appeared only after I'd left. They said to me at Buckingham Palace that sadly this was the first occasion when they had had to print a programme for a State visit with some names left blank. One

of the people he brought with him was of course Prince Jefri, his wilful, wild, extravagant younger brother. We all appeared on the first day of the visit for a private lunch at Buckingham Palace, and I was surprised not to see Prince Jefri around. So I said to the Sultan, "Where is His Royal Highness?" and the Sultan replied that he had seen his rooms at the Palace and had decided they weren't quite his style. So he had gone off to stay in town where he would be more comfortable. He had decided he would be much better off at the Dorchester. Also, of course, he would be much freer to do whatever he wanted.

MM: Ah, the girls!

AS: So I think that this was an unusual State visit! I have to say that, on the whole, it went well. The Sultan was extremely good; he did everything. It wasn't anything like the troubles the Palace had had with King Hassan of Morocco; the Sultan was impeccable through the whole programme and of course it got enormous coverage.

MM: Did he bring Prince Mohamed with him?

AS: No he didn't. He had Prince Jefri, and then a couple of his senior Ministers and his protocol group, but the Foreign Minister was left behind to run Brunei in the Sultan's absence.

Brunei also presented some unlikely challenges because it had then become quite Islamic. So another sort of curious and slightly unexpected bonus for me in was that, if you knew about Islam and could speak some Arabic, you were a source of some wonderment and interest to the Bruneians. The Minister for Religious Affairs was highly amused that I could go in and talk with him in Arabic. He would chuckle and pat me on the back. But other Ministers were less easy about that. In a sort of way, you could understand that they were the practising Muslims and there was this white foreigner who spoke better Arabic than they did. My French colleague, who was also an Arabist, had a couple of uneasy run-ins with Ministers over this. One had to tread so terribly carefully. The Islamic wave was running fairly strongly in Brunei. Alcohol was banned and one of the

subsidiary issues that I was having to negotiate with the Sultan was an alcohol allowance for the British garrison, so that they could drink in their messes. Because he was very interested in military matters, he was quite happy about this, But then I was also having to organise a drinks system for Shell because of course Shell was the other major British presence in Brunei and all the oil production was in the hands of Shell, both on shore and off shore. Although Shell were by definition very well placed in their relations with the Sultan, they thought that drink was too tricky an issue. The Managing Director of Shell thought it might be slightly easier if I did the drink negotiations, so again I found myself having to go back to His Majesty to organise a drinks system for Shell. Fortunately the Sultan, who was quite religious but I think saw some irony in all this, went along with it.

But occasionally Islamic fervour was too much for the Sultan. There was one deeply embarrassing moment when the Sultan was paying his usual pre-Christmas visit to London. In his absence, one or two of the rather more extremist members of the Islamic establishment raided the hotels and took away all the Father Christmases and other seasonal displays. There then appeared a news item in *The Times* saying, "The Sultan of Brunei bans Father Christmas!" That was not amusing to the Sultan at all, and the word winged its way back from London that this nonsense had to stop. So people were allowed their sleigh bells and reindeer. When I later talked about this with the Minister for Religious Affairs and other Ministers to a man they all said to me, "It was nothing to do with me. It wasn't my decision." They had rather a difficult time with the Sultan on that.

His potency with the Bruneians was absolutely astonishing. I'll give you one other example: Mrs Thatcher came to Brunei while I was there, having at that time left office. She was now travelling as a private individual and one of her reasons for coming to Brunei was that she was looking for funds to set up an International Affairs Foundation. She had been to Brunei years before as Prime Minister, and she came back again as a private individual for a day or two. She was put up in one of the best Brunei official guest houses. I did a dinner for her and helped her with the programme. She was going to make a formal call on the

Sultan, quite a private affair, but the Sultan then gave a small lunch for her afterwards. One table with His Majesty, Mrs Thatcher and me and his two most senior Ministers, who were Bahrin and Isa both of whom had been educated in Britain and were fluent English speakers, very sophisticated. And there was another table with Mark Thatcher and some of the other senior officials. Of course the Sultan is a charming man but I have to say conversation is not his fort . Whenever he used to come to London, he always called at No 10 and I always remember a note coming back from Charles Powell, who was Mrs Thatcher's Overseas Private Secretary at the time, saying that the Sultan was "in an unusually loquacious mood on this occasion. The Prime Minister had only 85% of the conversation!" The first thing about this lunch was that neither of the Bruneian Ministers said a single word the whole lunch; they sat there in total silence in the presence of the Sultan and made no contribution at all. So the conversation was left entirely to the Sultan, to Mrs Thatcher and to myself. What actually happened was that Mrs Thatcher would talk and ask the Sultan various questions; the Sultan's answers were mostly monosyllabic or very short. I soon realised that even Mrs Thatcher was beginning to run out of inspirational questions! So it was rather like a relay race; I took the baton and asked the Sultan a number of questions to keep the conversation going and, when Mrs Thatcher thought that I in turn was beginning to falter or she had thought of something else, she would take the questioning back from me. Somehow we got through this lunch, but this extraordinary sight of these two Bruneian Ministers sitting like stuffed dummies around the table is another example of this extraordinary domination of the Sultan of Brunei and the awe in which he is held.

It was also another example, if I may say so, of the overseas potency of Mrs Thatcher. The Sultan had arranged a day for her to go to a village on the outskirts of the capital where they had put on a huge display of folklore and village handicrafts; all the locals were pounding corn, weaving and this, that and the other. The Bruneians are, as you yourself know, not given to overt display of emotion of any sort; they are very restrained and can hardly bring themselves to touch you when they shake hands. But when Mrs Thatcher came to this village, they were like Arsenal Football Club supporters at Highbury. I have never seen Bruneians in the whole of my three years so vociferously excited. Little old

ladies were kicking each other out of the way to get near Mrs Thatcher; she was like some international legend come to visit. There had been that occasion when she had been worshipped by the Australian bankers and business tycoons. I then saw her two years later in the back woods of Brunei, and you couldn't have had two more contrasting occasions. What did they have in common? This wild enthusiasm for the Mrs Thatcher phenomenon.

MM: Before we leave Brunei, should we not just say a word about ASEAN?

AS: Yes. I think it's worth saying that Brunei, by now, had become a member of ASEAN. One of the attractions for the Bruneians was the provision that all members of ASEAN should respect the territorial integrity of all the other members. That of course was the international mechanism which should have given the Sultan and the Bruneians assurance that, whatever designs the Indonesians or Malaysians may have had on Brunei in the early years, that was all a matter of the past. Brunei could be self-confident within ASEAN because of that protection that ASEAN membership gave to her. So it was interesting that, nevertheless, old memories die hard; the Sultan still, although he was now inside ASEAN, saw the desirability of having this extra dimension of assurance from the existence of the British garrison, and his relationship with the United Kingdom.

But as for ASEAN itself and its functioning as a regional political organisations, I suppose one has to look back and say that it was a talking shop opportunity for the leaders of the region to get together on a regular basis. But one never had the impression that anything very significant or useful came out of the functioning of ASEAN. This was particularly important in the case of Myanmar (Burma) where there were increasing areas of international concern about the policies and activities of the Myanmar regime, those of us in the West who were increasingly concerned about the situation would ask ASEAN to see in what way they could bring some pressure to bear on the Burmese regime. In a way they were probably in a better place to do it than we were as outsiders. It was a depressing experience in the three years that, every time I went to see the Permanent Secretary at the Bruneian Foreign Ministry or occasionally talked to Prince

Mohamed the Foreign Minister, I was given the same mantra in reply that the most appropriate way to deal with Burma was in the context of discussions within ASEAN, and that would be a much more effective way of bringing about prudence in Burma than the sort of pressure which a Western view and other powers were pleading with ASEAN to enforce. Of course, sadly as we have all seen over the years, this talking shop produced nothing but talk, and ASEAN had absolutely no effect on the activities of the Burmese regime at all in any way; a sad and disappointing business.

MM: Do you think that ASEAN would have been at all effective in relation to the offshore islands in the South China Seas, the Spratleys and the other one?

AS: I think if the issues involved with oil exploration and economic zones in the South China Seas had become acute, ASEAN probably was a potential forum for containing conflict, in the sense that at least it was a form of regional safety valve. I think tensions could perhaps have been defused through ASEAN. In fact in my time, none of these issues in the South China Seas ever came to a head in any way that tested ASEAN.

MM: I think then we could move on to Syria.

Her Majesty's Ambassador to Syria 1994-96

AS: On to Syria where we come a full circle. Having started my professional life as an Arabist, I ended up going as Ambassador to Damascus. It was a very interesting but difficult and intriguing time for two significant reasons: first of all, Syria had only recently emerged from international isolation because she had at an earlier stage in her fortunes, espoused an almost exclusive relationship with the Soviet Union and the Communist Bloc in the Cold War period. I think this was a sort of protest at what was perceived as American/European pro-Israeli/anti-Arab policies throughout the 1960s and 70s. She had been armed and supported by the Soviet Union and her life depended very much on the Soviet Union. It would be difficult to think of any country, apart from Cuba, that was probably as bereft as Syria was when suddenly the Cold War came to an end and the Soviet Union

collapsed. Syria was beached. It was surprising to go to a country in the Middle East in the early 1990s and to find, for example, that of all the Syrian Cabinet there were probably only two or three Ministers out of fifteen who spoke any English. Every Minister you met could speak either German or Bulgarian or Hungarian because they had all, because of that political background, gone to do their studies in Moscow or Belgrade or East Berlin; they had done their doctorates there and had acquired all these languages and cultural reference points. They knew nothing about the English or the West. When the Eastern bloc collapsed, the Syrians were suddenly faced with the dilemma of how to understand and get onto terms with the Western world, which they had been out of touch with for two or three generations.

MM: Who was the President?

AS: President Hafez al-Assad.

MM: Did he not have English?

AS: He had virtually no English at all. He had a little but all his Ministers, as I say, were virtually bereft apart from Farouk al Shara'a, the Foreign Minister, who had actually worked in London at one time and spoke fluent English. They were very disadvantaged in that sense in dealing with the Western world. So that was one of the major issues, this readjustment and of course, out of that, was coming the fact that they had also been running an effectively Marxist-style command economy. That I think had gone right back to the time in the 1950s with socialist Egypt under Gamal Abdul Nasser who had engineered a short-lived union between Egypt and Syria, the United Arab Republic. Part of that brief experiment in Arab unity of course had been the nationalisation and socialisation of great chunks of the Syrian economy just as had happened in Egypt. The Syrians, as it were, never looked back after that, and maintained that central socialised economy right until the bitter end. Even now they are finding it very difficult to dismantle that.

That was one of the backdrops to the early 1990s. The other one was what was Syria to do about the Middle East Peace Process? She had been a great Arab nationalist champion of the Palestinians, and, as she saw it, the Arabs' self-respect. She had devoted the larger part of her economy to the defence of the Arab and Palestinian cause, and had armed herself with the help of the Russians and others to the extent that it virtually bankrupted her, all in order to protect and promote Arab honour and dignity, a subject dear to Syrian hearts. Syrians have always seen themselves in a very romantic way as the heartland of the Arab world and felt it was their manifest destiny to preserve and promote the national Arab cause. By the early 1990s, they had had a very chequered career with the western world and much of the Arab world and they were in a very difficult position. They had now, as a result of the first Gulf War, been reaccepted by the Arabs. They had become our allies in the Gulf War and so had resumed relations with people like the British and Americans. We had broken off relations in the late 1980s on terrorism grounds because the Syrians were seen to have been involved in the Hindawi Affair. This involved somebody trying to put a bomb on an El Al airliner at Heathrow. Mrs Thatcher, Prime Minister at the time, had absolutely insisted that we totally break off all relations with Syria, which we did. We had only come to be re-engaged with the Syrians when President Assad decided that he would throw in his lot with the Allied Forces who were against Saddam Hussein, and that he would contribute to the resolution of the invasion of Kuwait. That was an important turning point for Syria in the sense that the came back into some sort of relationship with the West, and with some of the Arabs from whom they had been estranged.

Two other Arab political body blows had grievously affected the Syrians. First, although they had striven, as I have said, to support the Palestinians, Yasser Arafat and the PLO had gone off behind the Syrians' backs to sign up to the Oslo Accords and to treat with Israel. The Syrians found that a total betrayal. Worse, or if not worse then equally bad, in the aftermath of the Gulf War and the attempt to resolve the Middle East problems, King Hussein (of Jordan) had signed a peace treaty with Israel, and the Syrians thought there was another man who had betrayed the Arab cause. So by this time the Syrians were feeling pretty upset. They were bemused because they did not know how the West worked and they

were bruised because the Palestinians and the Jordanians had, as it were, walked away, as the Egyptians had done years before, from the great pan Arab cause. The Syrians then came to the conclusion that, if that had happened, why should they not now seek their own accommodation with the Israelis. This was an enormous psychological turning point in the destiny of Syria. They were prevailed upon, as part of the structures that were put in place after the Gulf War against Saddam Hussein, to follow a Syrian track. The idea was that, after the Gulf War, the Americans had undertaken, as the price of getting other Arab States to join in with them, to make a renewed effort to resolve the underlying issues in the Middle East, and relationships in the Arab/Israel dispute and all the other associated problems. Several parallel negotiating mechanisms called “tracks” had been set up: eg the Syrian track; or the Jordanian track. The Syrians weren’t joining this with any enthusiasm, but the game was up really. They had to seek a form of accommodation with the West.

By the time that I arrived in Syria in 1994, three things had happened. First, the Syrians had embarked on their first ever serious negotiation to try and find accommodation with Israel. Secondly they were slowly stumbling towards some form of accommodation or understanding with the West and Europe because the Soviet business was behind them. Thirdly, in a bilateral sense, it had been the decision of Assad to join in with the Allies in the first Gulf War that had led in turn to resumption of the bilateral relationship between Britain and Syria. My predecessor, Andrew Green, had been the first British Ambassador to Damascus since the break, and my predecessor had two priorities: first, just to get the show back on the road again, get the Embassy up and running and so on; and secondly to be the pivotal point of the Syrian decision, as part of their tactic to re-establish relations with us, to facilitate the release of the British hostages held in the Lebanon: John McCarthy, Brian Keenan, Terry Waite. These hostages were eventually handed over to the British Embassy in Damascus, from where they departed to their much longed-for freedom and were shipped back home.

So there was a sort of coming together of these different paths by the time that I arrived as Ambassador. And now the process of dialogue between the Syrians and the European Union began. I remember the Foreign Minister sitting with the

European Ambassadors before he went on his first visit to Brussels, and saying to us all, Before I go any further, are you serious in this enterprise of wanting to build a relationship between the European Union and Syria? We said why at this late stage are you still asking this question? He said we had to understand that changing the direction of the Syrian regime was a task of enormous complexity and difficulty, and he did not want to waste his time involving himself in such an enterprise unless absolutely satisfied that there was some point in it. We also had to be patient because it was going to take a long time to achieve.

But over and above that my prime concern was to develop our bilateral relationship with Syria. For the first time in many years, we had the makings. I was the first British Ambassador for decades fortunate enough to be at work in Damascus when there was wind in the sails of a bilateral relationship with Syria. We had regular meetings of either the Syrian Foreign Minister coming to London or the British Foreign Secretary coming to Damascus to develop the relationship, to talk to Assad and also to use dialogue to see where we could make a contribution to the Middle East Peace Process and to the dialogue developing between Syria and Israel.

I realised one day that Douglas Hurd was in the region. He had been to Saudi Arabia and a couple of the Gulf States and was shortly about to fly home. I asked the Foreign Office if it would be possible for the Secretary of State to divert en route to Damascus Airport for two hours to talk to Farouk al Shara'a? To my surprise and gratification, Douglas Hurd said he would like to do that, and he flew in to Damascus. So I was able to ring up the Syrian Foreign Minister and say that the Secretary of State would like to come on his way home and look in and talk to you. The Syrians were both gratified and slightly surprised at this and we had a very good meeting. Later, Malcolm Rifkind came out, and Farouk al Shara'a went twice to London. It is a measure of how the Syrians had shifted their perception of their relationship with the Israelis, which I'll talk about in more detail in a moment, that they started off, having decided to embark upon this process, with an extraordinary degree of optimism. I went out to Syria in the early part of 1994 and in November/December of that year Farouk al Shara'a came to London. He had a lunch at Lancaster House with Douglas Hurd, who

asked him how he was getting on with the Israelis? And Shara'a said he thought he would probably have an outline agreement within the next three months on a Peace Treaty. We were all slightly taken aback at that, but he had this air of confidence at that point. It was not to be, but these sentiments showed how perceptions had shifted. There was a taste in Syria for peace. They'd had enough of sacrifice for the ungrateful Palestinians and Jordanians and Syria wanted to get on and do something different for itself.

Of course the Israelis had made their negotiation with the Palestinians their top priority. But that was getting difficult because the Palestinians were beginning to have expectations and to make demands in certain areas which were difficult for the Israelis to satisfy.

So I think the Israelis took the decision to back pedal on the Palestinian track and instead to focus their efforts on the Syrian peace track. Although the Golan Heights are of strategic importance for Israel, they are not at the heart of their existence as a State in the way that the West Bank is. They could get out of Gaza, and could – as they almost did in the 1990s – in certain circumstances get out of the Golan Heights. Whether Israel would ever be able to bring itself to get out of the West Bank is entirely another matter. So both the Israelis and the Syrians had some reason to talk.

Against that backdrop, it was an active time for the Syrian/British relationship. The bilateral relationship, as I said, flourished. We had frequent ministerial visits. The BBC Arabic Service actually came to Damascus in a red double-decker bus; and the BBC set themselves up in the heart of the annual Damascus Trade Fair using the bus as a recording studio. Endless Syrian businessmen and Members of Parliament came and did interviews with the BBC Arabic Service. All this was in the middle of Damascus, which would have been unthinkable in the previous decade. It was really the shifting sands of life there; there were trade delegations and a big Syria/CBI conference in London. We then had the most amazing cultural phenomenon where we put on the first ever Western opera in Syria; we performed Dido and Aeneas in Damascus, and in the Roman amphitheatres in Palmyra and Bosra in southern Syria, all received with

overwhelming enthusiasm. The opera was a joint British-Syrian artistic effort. One of the Syrian Ministers said to me after the final performance – and he was a senior Ba’ath Party Member – one of the things we’re grateful to you for, Ambassador, is that you have reminded us that, if we put our minds to it, we can be good at something. That was most gratifying but it was also a terrible commentary on the paucity of achievement in Syrian life at that point and said a great deal about the barrenness of life over those years when they were tied in to the Soviet Union.

MM: Did the Soviets have a diplomatic presence while you were there?

AS: The Russians had of course lost their major presence and influence. The Russian Ambassador who spoke fluent English and was a new modern Russian, said to me and to my colleagues that, when he first arrived, these endless old-style Syrians and Ba’ath party officials were demanding to come and see him in order to remonstrate about the betrayal that they felt from Russia. He said that, after three or four months of this, he said to his staff, “I’m not going to spend my time talking to these ghastly people. *You* see them! I’m not talking to any of these people any more. I’ve got other things to do with my life. We have a new sense of priorities, and they are yesterday’s men”. He was of course in the difficult position of having to try to represent Russia at a time when domestic life was in chaos; when the thrust for the Middle East Peace Process was entirely run by the Americans at that time, under Warren Christopher and Bill Clinton, and with a certain amount of competition from some of the Europeans up to a point. There was really, at that period, very little for the Russians to do. They had very little credibility. They were handicapped by the total collapse of their country. So the Russians had very little impact on any of the conduct of Middle East policy at that particular time. It was a sorry business for all their old clients in Syria.

So the Syrians embarked upon these complex and difficult negotiations with the Israelis and they stumbled along for two or three years. There were great watershed moments like, for example, the first occasion when the Syrian Chief of Staff met the Israeli Chief of Staff. The thought that these two senior generals could meet together was an extraordinary change of scene. At the first meeting,

the Israeli Chief of Staff was Ehud Barak, and it was a catastrophic meeting. Barak blustered and was very difficult. It is one of those ironic moments in history that, seven years later, Barak, who had then become Prime Minister, was the man, to the chagrin of President Clinton, who failed in the end to deliver the Syrian/Israeli Peace Agreement. He couldn't grasp the last nettle, which was a compromise on sovereignty of waters round the back of Lake Tiberius. That was the moment when Assad was persuaded by Clinton to go to Geneva. Prior to this Barak had told Clinton he could offer an acceptable agreement on Lake Tiberius. So Clinton immediately said to Assad that the Syrians could go to Geneva in confidence since we had got the Israelis on side over the final element of the Peace Agreement. Of course, when they all got there, Barak couldn't deliver and Assad stormed out of the meeting after twenty minutes and went home. That was the collapse, tragically, of what could have been a very major turning point in Middle East politics.

Earlier on in the negotiations the Americans had been able to prevent Barak torpedoing the talks on Israel. After Barak had been replaced as Israeli chief of staff the US set up another meeting between his successor and his Syrian counterpart. This went much better. The point at issue was always to find ways of accommodating the security problem. If the Israelis withdrew from the Golan, if peace broke out, what guarantees could there be that the Israelis might not come under attack by the Syrians? The Israelis said that they would withdraw from Syrian territory in the Golan Heights, but that they wanted to leave early-warning stations behind. The Syrians said, 'No, no! This is sovereign territory and you can't have that. However, we can have aerial patrols along both sides of the borders.' There had to be some concept of trust, and it had seemed that both Israelis and Syrians had decided to accept aerial security patrols.

So all these issues were a source of great travail and problems over two or three years. But the caravan slowly moved forward: Warren Christopher, the American Secretary of State, came out to Damascus I don't know how many times. Every few months he was back, pushing because, if you don't do that, there is never any momentum in the process at all. Bush was never willing to put that sort of effort in and consequently the peace process foundered. It is encouraging that President

Assad seems ready to make another, determined long term effort. Although the Clinton process took a very long time, slowly the Syrians were beginning to understand that peace could be a possibility. It is ironic now, in 2008, when Syria has been rather demonised again, to think back to the time when I was in Damascus in 1995-96 when it was absolutely commonplace to sit at dinner with Syrians who would say, Goodness me! I wonder how I'm going to feel the first time I drive down the road and see the Israeli flag fluttering over their Embassy in Damascus, the way that you do if you go down to Amman in Jordan and see the Israeli flag fluttering over the Israeli Embassy there. They assumed that that would be part of the deal; it was an expectation that they had built in.

So the process was going forward quite well. But of course life is as ever unpredictable in the Middle East. There was a tremendous shock when Rabin was assassinated in 1996. This was a source of great dismay to the Syrians, not because they had believed, as the West believed, that he was the great peace-maker. They were always rather suspicious about Rabin. This was partly because of the way the Israelis negotiated. The Israelis never gave up any concession unless it was absolutely wrung out of them at the last minute. They were never quite sure whether Rabin was entirely committed to peace and when there were all these rows about leaving early warning stations on the Golan, they would say is he negotiating for peace or is he preparing for the next war?. But when he was killed, they were then in a state of some shock because they realised how different he was. When Perez took over and professed that he wished to push forward the peace process, they weren't sure whether or not to believe him.

At that critical moment, by one of those strokes of timing, Malcolm Rifkind was on a Middle East visit and scheduled a visit to Damascus, having the previous week been in Israel when Rabin was killed. Rifkind was the first international statesman to come into Damascus in the immediate aftermath of the assassination of Rabin. He was the first person the Syrians and President Assad had talks with. So it was a very useful, timely visit because he was able to make the point strongly to the Syrians that they were not to give up. They had to carry on the dialogue.

So that was again an interesting example where the content of British dialogue enabled us to make a contribution in a modest way to the wider issues, and we were perhaps better placed than we had been for some time.

The Syrians, as I say, were never entirely sure of motivations. Perez decided that he would try to establish his credentials by calling elections; he was defeated by Netanyahu and this put the whole peace process back. The Syrians had never really understood Israeli politics, and the Israelis had never really understood what went on in Syria. Trying to get each side to understand what the other was doing was extremely difficult and all of us had been telling the Syrians not to think that they were going to be better off with Netanyahu, and that they should really be making more effort with Perez: if they could do anything in these negotiations to help Perez along, that would be a good thing. The Syrians would tell us that they could not accept that Perez was not serious. They also knew, they told us, when the Israelis and the Egyptians signed the Peace Agreement, that actually it was the right-wing Likud-type parties that actually had the muscle to sign an agreement rather than wishy-washy Labour. So they reckoned that it was good if Netanyahu took power. They would not be persuaded out of this amazingly ill-judged view until almost the day before the election when, at the last moment, the Syrian Foreign Minister gave a press conference in which he said for the first time a few sweet things about Perez and their hopes for continued dialogue. This was all too late. Netanyahu came to power, and that in the end was that.

The other reason for there being hope that the Syrians would settle up with Israel was that there was an enormous need for Syria to dismantle this Soviet-style Marxist style command economy. This would require a great structural readjustment in Syrian society and governance and would mean great sacrifice and problems for people. I think the regime thought you could not simultaneously have this huge change visited upon you by negotiating a Peace Agreement with Israel, which was contrary to everything the regime had been saying for the last thirty years, and at the same time introduce a great structural reform of society. But if they could get the Peace Agreement under their belt, one source of agony at a time, then the Syrians could begin restructuring. But of

course, in the end, neither came to pass and this was the dilemma against which the Syrian regime struggled. President Assad was getting older and people worried about succession because the son, Basil, who was going to be successor to his father, had killed himself in a car crash, and his other son, Bashar, who was a much more diminutive figure, was living in London studying to be an ophthalmologist. Bashar was suddenly hauled back home to be trained into the arcane mysteries of power, to be the 'di-capo' of the Ba'ath Party, how to lead the Army, how to deal with Syrian and ME politics. He was an intriguing figure and, as he learned his trade, he was kept absolutely at arms' length from everybody. I spent my last nine months as Ambassador trying to find some way of getting to meet Bashar, and failed. I think that it was a year after my successor had been there before he ever met Bashar.

So I think I was in a sense quite fortunate. Ambassadors to Syria had often had very fruitless times because, in the old days under the Ba'athist Soviet regime, there would have been very little access to the regime. I remember James Craig, who was one of my illustrious predecessors, telling me: "When you get one of those telegrams from the Foreign Office saying, 'Would you ask the Government to which you are accredited about something or other,' a few hours later the telegram in reply from our Ambassador in Amman would say, 'I rang the Foreign Minister who immediately invited me round to his house for a cup of tea in the garden and briefed me fully. In my case, as the Ambassador in Damascus, I would find that after a week I eventually got some Second Secretary in the European Department of the Foreign Ministry who was prepared to see me but could tell me nothing.'" I was luckier than that. I had some modest degree of access, there was some content in the relationship, some commitment to work at it from London, and of course there was the Middle East peace process going on.

The role of other Governments is also a salutary one. For example, in 1996, there had been major problems in southern Lebanon involving Hezbollah and Israeli Defence Forces. The Israelis embarked upon a major operation called the Grapes of Wrath, one of their earlier attempts to try by invading the hapless Lebanon to deal with the problems of Hezbollah. That invasion of south Lebanon was bad enough in terms of refugees and problems of the people living in the south of

Lebanon, as we saw in 2006 on a more recent occasion. It was in the middle of the 1996 campaign that there was that dreadful moment when the Israeli Defence Force shelled a United Nations camp at a place called Qana in the South Lebanon, in which was the mostly Fijian-run centre of the United Nations Observer Force down there. The Israelis shelled this camp and killed something like a hundred and ten refugees and four Fijian soldiers. This caused such an outcry that there was a huge attempt internationally to resolve the problem and to find another way of accommodating this Hezbollah South Lebanon problem. Again Warren Christopher came back and there was a week or ten days of deep negotiations. The French have historic ties with Lebanon so the French Foreign Minister decided that France leap into the fray. He flew to Damascus and he set himself up at the French Embassy for about eight days, and ran the French Foreign Ministry from the Residence of the French Ambassador in Damascus. From there, he would negotiate with the Syrians and, through them, with the Iranians, and through both, with Hezbollah. He also commuted to Beirut to talk to the Lebanese and try to get Tel Aviv to talk to the Syrians. Warren Christopher, I think, never met him at all or, at best, he had one brief social, modest meeting with the French Foreign Minister. The Americans didn't at all like the French meddling in what they saw as their patch. So the US virtually snubbed the French. But in fact, when the crisis was resolved, and a monitoring group was set up, the French succeeded in becoming members of this monitoring group. So it was an interesting example of the French playing quite a flamboyant role on the ground, a marked contrast to the more reserved style of British international diplomacy.

MM: What about the EU? Was it unified in its approach?

AS: The EU was not, I think, directly involved in these negotiations; they were really run by the Americans and the EU was really at the margins.

MM: And the French?

AS: As I say, the French came in on this particular event in South Lebanon because they saw themselves as having a particular relationship with the Lebanon. But it was essentially an American run process.

The Arab/Israel problem aside, the EU was in parallel trying to help the Syrians to go through an economic modernisation and restructuring process. The Syrians were slowly being drawn into a parallel programme of activity in the context of a European endeavour called the Euro-Mediterranean programme. This was an attempt to forge a relationship between the European Union led by the countries who bordered the Mediterranean and the Arab countries, and Israel, who bordered the Mediterranean. This was an enterprise launched by the Spanish, the French and the Italians who were known in the trade as the Club Med, to counterbalance other European activities led by northern members of the EU such as Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. There was a whole series of association agreements being signed up to by the countries bordering the Mediterranean. Syria was properly part of this but all the structural adjustments within this machinery of closer economic and social cooperation required, by definition, a socio-economic reform programme on the part of partners bilaterally to match the way Western Europe operates. Now for some countries that was not a great problem. In the case of Syria there was a fundamental incompatibility between the Syrian Marxist style of command economy and the liberal Western economic model. So the only way that any of this was going to work was if and when the Syrians began to reform their structures totally.

In a way this Euro-Med programme was important to Syria because it was the one vehicle which was open to the Syrians to use as a mechanism for reform. We gave them a lot of economic help to do this, and the Syrians, to the extent that they had achieved any structural change at all, probably did more in that direction through this mechanism of the Euro-Med programme than they would have done if they'd just been trying to do it as an internal reform process. It was a very slow and very difficult business, and of course, when you had a regime like the Ba'ath Party and so many fingers in so many pies and so many traditional forms of institutional corruption that there were few who expected that system of self-indulgence dismantled overnight. It takes a very long time.

Anyway, there was an interesting and fascinating way for us to spend three years out in the Middle East where I'd started off thirty-four years ago.

MM: Thank you very much for a very interesting contribution.