

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

David Everard Tatham, CMG, 1991

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British Diplomatic Oral History Programme

Recollections of David Tatham CMG, recorded and transcribed by Martin Lamport, 18 February 2017

Early Life

DT - I was born in 1939. My father was in the army. My mother had been a nurse before she married him. I was born in York, just before the outbreak of war. Because my father was in the army we seemed to move around a lot and I spent many of my early years in Nottingham or in Ireland. My father went out to Burma in 1944 and we moved to the outskirts of Dublin as my mother was Irish and we lived there for two years. Then the war ended and things settled down and we moved out to India, so I had 15 months in India at age seven and eight, which left quite an impression.

ML – Whereabouts were you in India?

DT – I was at school in Darjeeling in a sort of English public school called St Pauls, up in the hills. I was there on the very day of Independence. I suppose it was the first political event I remember. We all lined up round the “maidan” of the school, the big central quadrangle and they ran up the new flag.

Then I was in Bombay for about six or seven months, doing remarkably little, but that was great fun, swimming and sailing. And then we came back to England in 1948 and I went to a minor public school, called St Lawrence College in Ramsgate. I went through the prep school and the public school and did A level history and got into Wadham College Oxford on a scholarship and read the history course in Oxford. I had no idea how one joined the Diplomatic Service, there was no history of the Foreign Office in the family. I was quite interested in politics and ‘abroad’ as a subject, but it was not until my last year that I found out that one sat the Civil Service exams and entered that way. So that is how I came in, but I failed method B, the interview and committee exercise method. I did not get past the preliminary paper on that, rather to my chagrin, but I passed on method A, which was the very academic method. It was rather like doing a degree all over again. I did that in June 1960 and in September I was told I had got in. It meant that I joined the office six weeks later than all my contemporaries, except for the half dozen others who had done method A, so I missed all the introductory courses, which was a pity really.

I was then sent to Germany to do a three month German course, living with a German family in Karlsruhe and that was absolutely super. I could not get over the fact that I was being paid for studying and getting a little foreign allowance and everything else. It was a very happy episode for three months. I never had another German-language posting.

Atomic Energy and Disarmament Department 1961-62

I came back and started in Atomic Energy and Disarmament Department early in 1961. I had a junior job in the department which was helping to establish the European Launcher Development Organisation (ELDO). What had happened was that the Government had commissioned the Blue Streak rocket to carry nuclear deterrents, but then Blue Streak had turned out to be impossibly expensive and impractical. So, rather to save face, they said, "We'll make it available as a space launcher and see if we can persuade others to go into it with us".

So they approached the various European powers, quite a wide range, not just the Common Market powers, but part of the object was to show that politically we were terribly committed to Europe, although we had been held back. I don't think we had decided at that point to come in, it was a way of earning European Brownie points. It was supposed to impress everyone with our European sentiments. Well, as happens on first postings, I moved on long before the project came to fruition and I don't think ELDO lasted very long, although its sister body, the European Space Research Organisation had a reasonable life in front of it. I think Blue Streak was dropped eventually.

But it was interesting to get to know how the Office worked and so on and to see the political tensions. There was a tension between posts in Europe, who tended to get terribly excited about this project and run with the ball, and the Office, which was slightly holding them back and saying, "steady on, we do not want to put too much credit into this and spoil our relations with anyone else. This is supposed to win friends, but you are not to be too importunate on it". I remember, the Department pushing it was the Ministry of Aviation, and of course they really wanted to get a nice use for their rocket and get established in space.

ML – Can you remember who was in charge of the Ministry of Aviation?

DT - Well the Minister was Peter Thorneycroft, but the person running it was a very gifted civil servant called Denis Haviland, who was a very suave, but very pushy character. This was all a bit above my head really, but he was always pushing the thing and if posts got too

enthusiastic we had to write to them and say, “hey, steady on ...”. In fact we had one case where this came unstuck because in those days in the Office every paper had a separate folder, you might put a second paper in with it, but basically the folders were all separate. In posts abroad they had running files, like we had when I left the Office, so all the papers ended up on the same file. So Haviland went to Rome for some reason in pursuit of this objective and asked to see the papers. In the file he found a letter from our assistant Head of Department, Christopher Gandy saying, “Steady on Embassy, we don’t want you to go overboard on this”. I remember he quoted the verse, “Thou shalt not kill, but need not strive officiously to keep alive” - ie don’t kill it but if it is going to die anyway, don’t feel you have got to save it. Haviland saw this paper and was absolutely livid – he hit the roof and it needed some very high level emollients applied to calm the Ministry of Aviation down.

UKMIS New York 1962-63

From there I went to New York as third secretary, private secretary to the Ambassador, which was quite a good job, but it was one which I didn’t enjoy at all. I do not think I really understood the UN and I got on alright with the ambassador, but I do not think I really understood private secretary work. The ambassador was Sir Pat Dean, who was a very nice man and not at all difficult to work for, but I do not think I quite realised what private secretary work involved.

ML – Can you remember the Secretary General?

DT – The Secretary General was U Thant because Hammarskjold had just died, a couple of years earlier.

ML – What were the big issues?

DT – The big issue I suppose was the Cuban crisis, which happened when I was there and that was nerve racking. One felt that the whole thing might blow up. There were successive days of tension and then relaxation and then tension again. Then by the end of the week we had won, so to speak and the Russians had backed down. It was all reflected in New York because there was a lot of public diplomacy there, but the nuts and bolts were obviously between Moscow and Washington. One got the impression that Harold Macmillan was chipping in occasionally, trying to keep a foot in the door, but he was really irrelevant. I do remember, the only time in my career I actually had to decode a telegram by hand, it was some message from Macmillan to Kennedy which was fairly bland actually. I do not think it

added anything to the scene, but I remember sitting down with the PA and going through the numbers and spelling out this rather banal message.

I was moved from there, rather to my relief, after nine months and went home and got married.

ML – How did you meet your wife?

DT – I met my wife Valerie in London on my first posting. She was nursing and a cousin of mine who I was very fond of was also nursing with her so that's how I got to know her and I proposed just before I went to New York and I came back and married her.

Milan 1964-67

Our first posting was Milan; I was vice-consul commercial. It was actually quite an interesting post. It was the only full time commercial work I have ever done. I had a very good boss, a man called Bill Maxwell, who was helpful and I think restored my confidence. After UKMIS I was feeling slightly deflated. Milan was an isolated post. It was entirely working to the Board of Trade and had nothing to do with the Foreign Office at all. I remember I had been there about a year before we persuaded the embassy in Rome to copy their political reporting to us. There were [diplomatic] bags. They used to come in from London on the Orient Express and one used to go out to the central station to the very end of the platform and there would be the first class coach and you would exchange the bags and then return to the office. In the commercial section we didn't deal at all with Italian political life, which I regretted, but it wasn't our job, it was the Consul General's job.

ML – What was going on in Italy?

DT – Italy was in its usual state of semi paralysis. They had just begun, what was called the 'opening to the Left', where the Christian Democrats, who were a right wing party, had gone into coalition with the Socialists, who had been fellow-travellers and who then gradually pulled back towards the centre of political life, away from the Communists. This was a terribly positive development and should have led to a lot of dynamic, progressive government in Italy, solving their sclerotic bureaucratic problems and so on; but it didn't. It all just continued as before. The Socialists didn't make much impact and the Christian Democrats continued really to run the show. It didn't worry us. It was a centrist government, which suited us quite well from a foreign policy point of view. Prime Ministers changed

every six or nine months and were succeeded by one of their colleagues and they cobbled together a fresh coalition and went on with it.

ML – And that was before we joined the Common Market, wasn't it. Did that make much difference at the time?

DT – No. I think it had already been stated that our objective was to join. People assumed that we would join eventually, but it didn't colour things one way or the other really. The Italians were very nice to work with and all terribly pro-British. They had this rather caricature view of the British as stalwart people, whose goods were brilliant and who were dependable and honest and trustworthy. It was rather flattering and you were aware that our own economic situation was not brilliant: our exports to Italy were fine, but the big economic problems remained, as they have been there for my whole career. Really the country has never succeeded in paying its way in terms of exports against imports. And I remember in the 1960s, when one used to wait for the monthly trade figures, and they were usually pretty depressing. Sometimes they were totally depressing because BOAC had just bought some air liners and the import figures had leapt.

ML – It was a big feature, wasn't it, the balance of trade.

DT – The balance of trade, exactly.

ML – Then it seemed to fade a bit.

DT – Well it faded because of oil I think. We got our own source of income, but it certainly was a big feature in those days.

The main excitement in the post was a big British week, which we did in Milan in, I think 1965. That was a fairly major effort and we circulated all the stores and arranged shows and there was a visit by the Royal Ballet and all sorts of lectures and performances. And that was fun. We did that and then the next year the embassy in Rome was approached by the good merchants of Florence, who said that they also wanted a British week. So I was sent down there for three months and that was a very pleasant posting. I think that was probably the time I got most integrated with Italian life because I was on my own. My wife was at home, her father was ill, and I was really living with almost entirely Italian staff, I mean local staff in the consulate and dealing with shop keepers and so on. It was a good time in the autumn

of 1966 and then afterwards, I think it was in October 1966, the dreadful flood struck Florence, but I had moved on by that time and gone back to Milan.

I said Milan was an isolated post, but I thought it was quite an efficient post. It had a Consul General and three consuls, then about half a dozen vice-consuls. But I don't think we had a pukka admin section. If we wanted to do something, we went out and did it. If you wanted to rent a house you went out and rented it. You didn't ask the admin section for advice or get them to do it for you. There was one car, which was the Consul General's. There was no fleet of transport or anything like that. So I think it did quite a cost-effective job. There was always discussion about whether Milan or Rome should be the central post for commercial work in Italy and we had a very dynamic Commercial Counsellor in Rome called John Ford, who ended up as High Commissioner in Ottawa. He was forever producing brilliant ideas, solutions to various commercial problems, most of which were very impractical. To start with I would draft letters for my boss, the Commercial Consul. He had served in London with John Ford and knew that John was a person of instant enthusiasms. He used to say, "Don't do anything. Just wait". Sure enough another enthusiasm would overcome the previous one, which would sink quietly. So it was a little lesson in administrative practice, that some problems you can just sit on and they will go away and this was rather what happened to all these plans for re-jigging commercial work.

ML – Well, they were always re-jigging commercial work, weren't they?

DT – That's true.

ML – Do you really think it made much of a difference, all the commercial work? My father did quite a bit of it and he always used to say it was the only way they could justify having absorbed the Commonwealth Relations Office into the Diplomatic Service, that happened round about then didn't it, and basically it had far too many people, so in order to justify the budget to the Treasury and the House of Commons they were able say, "Ah, but x percent of them are engaged in commercial work, promoting exports, which is so important because of our balance of trade."

DT – I don't know. I think it did a useful job, but in the last resort the real exporters were the people who could do it themselves anyway, the Rolls Royces of this world or the whisky exporters. So you were in a way helping those who were "challenged" as we would say nowadays, the small companies and so on, who hadn't set foot abroad. It was a useful

education for the people who did it, seeing the commercial point of view. And the trade promotions were great fun; lots of activity, running round in circles.

Treasury Centre course - Language Training - MECAS 1967

I went back from there and they said would I like to do a hard language? I said yes, Russian or Japanese or Persian and fourth choice Arabic and they said right, Arabic it is then. And so I was pencilled in for MECAS in the autumn of 1967. But before then I had the Treasury Centre course in Regents Park, which was a good and interesting course, but it was then followed by eighteen months of Arabic, so it was rather overlain.

ML – I've never heard of the Treasury Centre course. What happened in that?

DT – It was a six month course and the first three months were basically macro and micro economics and bringing your maths up to date. My maths had stopped at O Level. It was teaching you a bit about calculus and things like that. Really so you could understand the economics and statistics. There were a lot of statistics. The tuition was very good. We had Maurice Peston, who is the father of Robert Peston, as one of the economics lecturers and a man called Marty Feldman, who taught us statistics, later became an economic adviser to the White House. So the first three months were rather theoretical and then the second three months you went off and visited specific industries or you went abroad to see how a country dealt with particular problems. That was very interesting. On my course we did the docks, so we went down to London docks and Felixstowe and saw the problems they were facing and how they were trying to cope with them. Then we dispersed to various peripheral European countries, Austria, Switzerland, Ireland. I went to Ireland, only for a week, but it was interesting and quite useful.

But as I say, the Arab / Israeli war of 1967 happened in the middle of it and then we departed for MECAS.

MECAS 1967-69

MECAS was fun. It was hard work and I got amoebic dysentery during my first term and got very depressed, thinking this is no good, I shall never manage Arabic. Because having learned German and Italian fairly easily, I thought I had a gift for languages, but you quickly realised when you confronted Arabic that wasn't so. But you did gradually get there and I passed the first exam. There were a lot of colleagues of the same age and then people from oil

companies, and other companies such as the British Bank of the Middle East and Standard Chartered who were good company. And you could get around Lebanon. It was still very placid really and there was the night life. There were restaurants everywhere and you could walk in the hills.

ML – Well, of course it had a reputation didn't it, because it was not long after Philby and Maclean. When were they, mid 60s?

DT - When was Philby? His final defection from Beirut was mid 60s. MECAS had this reputation as a spy school and all the Arabs believed that it was training spies and so on. So it was always slightly suspect and indeed during the June war, the 1967 war, just before we got out there it had been under threat because there was a Palestinian Liberation Organisation base quite nearby and they were supposed to be intending to go and clean up MECAS, but it never actually happened, fortunately.

MECAS ran a good course, but I actually think the language tuition could have been better. We had a very gifted linguist teacher, Leslie McLoughlin, who I see has been on this programme dictating his memoirs, in my first year. He was succeeded by a Cambridge don and the don was really much too donnish and was very good on Arabic literature and the Quran, but not so good at getting people to learn their verbs and practice for their oral exams.

I was always slightly piqued that I failed the advanced exam by two points. There was an 80% pass mark and I got 78%. I felt that if they had deployed their best teachers to their borderline cases I might have had better results. But as it was the teachers I had were nothing special, indeed most of the teachers were originally primary school teachers. They didn't really understand us very well and they weren't very good at actually teaching languages. For all that, you did leave with a good knowledge of Arabic.

ML – Did you have any particularly notable colleagues?

DT – The course ahead of us was very much a new entrants, administrative grade course, so they all went on to major embassies – Andrew Green, John Shepherd, those sort of people. They all had very successful careers in the Service. My course was older. People who had done one posting and some of them did very well. Graham Burton, who had been in the executive grade was a very bright man. He bridged and ended up as High Commissioner to Nigeria, which must have been a demanding post.

ML – He was the second in command in Tripoli when I was there.

DT – Really. He was great fun. Someone I had enormous admiration for. But the rest of us were not so brilliant. We all had run of the mill careers, but there were no stars. Your old boss, Vic Henderson was extremely good as an Arabist, a very bright linguist and of course ended up in Sana'a, which was a post for an Arabist if ever there was one.

Jeddah 1969-70

I went on from there to Jeddah, which was not a great posting. If you were lucky you'd go from MECAS to Amman, or Beirut or Cairo, some interesting, lively city or the Gulf posts Dubai and Abu Dhabi, where you had a lot of freedom and a lot of interest. Anyway we ended up in Jeddah. There were good things about Jeddah, the expat community was very lively and amusing and fun. You could spend your weekends at the beach and you could go camping in the interior. But the work was pretty depressing really. Saudi was run by the royal family. There was no freedom of expression. It was very difficult to meet Saudis socially. They were not particularly interested in coming round to see you and anyway if there was going to be drink at a party they wouldn't turn up to that, either because they were prejudiced or for fear of being blackmailed by someone else there.

ML – You were able to get drink in were you?

DT - Yes, we could get drink in. The trouble with a complete ban on alcohol is that the premium goes to the strongest alcohol, so it was economic to get whisky in, but it was not terribly economic to get beer in because the volume of alcohol was less.

ML – Did people brew their own beer?

DT – The Embassy didn't. I think the community did. They brewed their own beer and people distilled their own alcohol. It was a major industry in some of the American companies. The spirit was called 'Sadiki', Sadiki being Arabic for 'My friend', but we never had to rely on it, fortunately. We could always get our whisky or gin. It did cast a sort of shadow over your whole life. You seemed to become much more interested in drink because it was forbidden than you would otherwise have been. I remember when I got back to England afterwards my son, who must have been about eight, said to me, "Dad, when you were in Saudi, where you were not allowed to drink, you were always drinking and now you're back here you don't drink at all".

ML – Yes, I think the saddest thing is to be posted as a tee-totaller to one of these dry countries, because the entire subject of conversation of everybody else is alcohol. I knew someone who was very miserable.

DT – I was Information Officer and I used to go around and try to place COI stories about British achievements in this, or British achievements in that, and occasionally if they were sufficiently anodyne they would get picked up, but I can't think they really did much good. The one episode I really remember was that we used to distribute a magazine, which the BBC produced in Arabic, called "Huna London" – "This is London". It was a sort of cross between the *Radio Times* and *The Listener* and it had articles, which were usually quite inoffensive. But one month they had quoted a passage of Keats translated into Arabic in praise of a glass of wine:

"O for a beaker full of the warm south
Full of the true the blushful Hippocrene
With beaded bubbles blinking at the brim
And purple stained mouth."

Although it didn't actually mention wine, the censors spotted it and said "This cannot stand, you must withdraw the whole issue". We replied: "Please let us distribute them, people like them". So they said "You can do it so long as you black out that paragraph" I think we distributed about 5,000 copies so we and our local staff solemnly had to sit there with markers blacking out the offending four or five lines. That was information work in Jeddah.

Political work was not much better. It was a bit like Kremlinology. You tried to judge the relative positions of the royal family, the princes, by how prominent they were in the newspapers and things like that, but it wasn't an exact science at all. Government was very much a family business and what went on in the closed councils of the royal family you really didn't know. The only way you could get information was second hand. You could talk to people like Aramco, the oil company, who were very important because they provided all the money for the country, but they also employed several thousand people, so if the security police started arresting some group, by the law of averages you would notice this in Aramco's sample population. Then people like the British Military Mission to the National Guard would see things happening and might be able to tell you things. But otherwise, talking to ordinary Saudis, they wouldn't say a word.

ML – Was the famous “Death of a Princess” episode in your time there?

DT – I’ll come to that later. That was 15 years later. I can show my scars on that one. One of the most interesting things that happened when I was there, politically, was a rumour of a military coup to displace the royal family, which was going to be spearheaded by the Saudi air force. They presumably were going to shoot down a royal jet and remove the king. It was a great time for military coups in the Arab world. The Libyan coup had just happened. We reported this home of course and we were always on the lookout for coups. We did quite a lot of research on this coup and we did get a long list of names of officers who had been arrested and some were probably executed. What was interesting, looking back on it, was that many of these came from a particular tribal group in the western highlands, the Bilad Ghamid, and several of them had the surname, Ghamdi. In 2001 there were several Ghamdis involved in the attack on the Twin Towers, so they must have been a long term disaffected group. I have never seen anyone make that link, but I think could be there. It must be a particularly disaffected part of the country.

ML – That’s interesting. Probably near Yemen.

DT – Yes, down there towards Sa’ada, but not quite as far down as that. But that was about the one political thing of interest that happened.

I was posted home to the Middle East desk, the Arab / Israel desk and I went back via Jordan and Jerusalem and Tel Aviv. Jordan had just suffered awful bloodshed, I think about five months previously, when there had been a big confrontation between the Palestinians and the king’s army. The army had crushed them. Then in the middle of this fracas the Syrians had invaded with tanks and had been beaten back by the Jordanians and the Israelis had started manoeuvring on their border to make it clear to the Syrians that they had better back off. So the embassy at that stage was on a high really. They had come out of this crisis and there was a team there from the Ministry of Defence looking at the impact of Centurion tank shells on the TU 55s and TU 62s or whatever it was that the Syrians had put opposite them.

I went across the Allenby Bridge to Jerusalem. A car from the consulate general in Jerusalem met me at the bridge and I couldn’t decide whether the driver of the car was Israeli or Arab. I was too sensitive to ask him direct. When I got to the consulate I decided he must be Arab, so I said very fulsomely to him in Arabic, “Thank you so much”. I closed the door on the car and the Consul General met me and said “I’m afraid he’s the other side”. So I had totally

mis-called it. The chap was actually Jewish, from the consulate in the Jewish side of Jerusalem. I told that story to Tony Parsons and he said “Oh my God! When I was in Palestine [this was about 1947] the Jews all looked like north Europeans.” They were tall and blond and quite distinct. Of course they were all European Jews. By the 1960s there was a big admixture of oriental Jews. But it was very interesting to see it all and then to go down to Tel Aviv.

I always remember being invited round for drinks by Neville Mandel my opposite number in the embassy in Tel Aviv, the Third or Second Secretary. He was a Jew and he had asked round about six people, but they were all important and significant commentators and one of them Haim Herzog later became President plus a couple of people from the Foreign Ministry and a couple of journalists. It was the sort of gathering I could not have dreamt of attracting in Jeddah. In Saudi Arabia those sort of people had nothing to say and they certainly wouldn't say it in front of a diplomat. I thought I really had been wasting my time in the political job. But, funnily enough the said Neville Mandel actually left the Foreign Service a few years later and joined the Israeli service.

Near East Department (NENAD) 1971

Then I went back to the Near East Department, to the Arab / Israel desk and I didn't enjoy that work at all. I found it very theological. Words were always terribly important and I always felt rather at a disadvantage with words and forms of words. I much prefer facts and events and people.

ML – So that's what you meant by “theological”.

DT – Yes. There were certain things that you could say, apparently innocent remarks, that meant that you had taken a pro-Arab line or a pro-Israeli line. There were whole formulas that went to one side or the other. When you were drafting your statements you had to weigh these and balance them. The statements would then be pored over by each side to decide whether the British had moved a little this way or a little that way. I found the Head of Department, Richard Evans, a very pernickety man to work for. Every draft would come back in shreds. I thought this was just me but then the Assistant Head of Department complained of the same thing.

From there I had a brief spell in Commodities Department, which was rather dull work. The department was really closing down with our entry into the Common Market.

Middle East Department 1972-1973

Then I went to Middle East Department, which had been Arabian Department, which dealt with the Arabian Peninsula and that was really an ace department. The head was Patrick Wright and the previous head had been Antony Acland. Both went to the top of the Service and became PUS. Almost everyone in the department spoke either Arabic or Persian. I remember Patrick saying to us, “I want my desk officers to be the expert in the UK on Oman or the Yemen Arab Republic or Qatar or Kuwait or Saudi Arabia” and with that calibre of desk officer that was quite conceivable. They were really good and they tried to keep on top of the literature, although I don’t think there was much cross fertilisation with the academic world.

ML – Did you notice much difference according to the colour of the British government?

DT – It was Home, before the Wilson government came back. I was there in 1972 and 1973. No, it was a perfectly easy relationship with the Secretary of State. Lord Balniel was the junior minister and he was a sensible person to work with. Tony Parsons was the assistant under secretary and he was just fantastic. When I first heard the term ‘role model’, I thought I don’t really have any role models in the Service. And then I thought, Oh yes, Tony Parsons, he’s the one. He was brilliant to work for and a lovely person too.

It was a fairly placid time in the Middle East. Then there was the Arab / Israel war of 1973, but that didn’t affect us directly because that was NENAD, not us. There was quite a lot going on in the Yemen, where we had just got our first ambassador in. In Oman the insurgency in Dhofar was going fairly full gear.

ML – Yes, that was kept very, very quiet in the British press wasn’t it?

DT – It was. We knew what was going on very well. The decisive battle in the Dhofar war took place in 1972, when I was in the department. The battle of Mirbat, when a very large group of rebels tried to seize a coastal fort, which was held by the British Army and some Omani troops. By a couple of lucky coincidences a reserve group of British Army happened to be in Salalah, 20 miles away and within helicopter reach. The rebels had expected to capture the fort fairly easily but of course a) the calibre of the military and b) the reinforcements meant that they were absolutely minced up and suffered terrible casualties. That really was a turning point in the war. It was interesting that the Sultanate, although they had had this tremendous victory, said absolutely nothing about it. And eventually I

mentioned it to Richard Johns, the *Financial Times* Middle East correspondent, who was a very serious figure and a very reputable journalist. He put it in the *FT* quoting a source from the Sultanate's armed forces, which in fact was myself. It was good news and it should have been leaked. Releasing it didn't do any harm.

We then had a great saga about the bodies of the rebels who had been shot. They were going to be taken and exhibited on the street corners of Salalah, the capital of the southern region. The Office absolutely ran a mile at this and said "On no account must this happen!" So the embassy went into bat and presumably dissuaded the Sultan from doing it. We did our best to keep it reasonably quiet and then, of course you could prevent any journalist going out there and producing great scoops.

The great propagandist for the opposition was an academic called Fred Halliday, who was a good Arabist and who had been out on the Jebel with the rebels. He wrote a book called "Arabia without Sultans". Funnily enough he moved right across the spectrum and ended up lecturing to the Oman new entrants' foreign service course.

Then we had South Yemen, which was perpetually fractious. They seemed to be up to no good in this country and we didn't know quite what they were doing. We tried to keep an eye on them.

ML – They had a huge melt down at some point.

DT – I'll come to that, because it was during my time in Sana'a. In those days, 1972, it was only about five years after independence and the place just seemed to be going from bad to worse, becoming more and more extreme and getting Soviet and Cuban military assistance. We were very concerned that they were trying to use their influence on the Yemeni population in this country and keep them under control. I remember we expelled one man who turned up in the embassy and whom we were assured, from secret sources, was bad news. We let him arrive, because he was not the Head of Post and we could not say we didn't want him, but when he did arrive we PNGed him.

In Middle East Department I was dealing primarily with Oman and the two Yemens. It became clear that the post in Oman was a really interesting embassy with a lot to do and I knew that the Head of Chancery post was coming up shortly, so I applied for it. I asked Patrick Wright to mention it to the then Ambassador, Donald Hawley, which he did and I got that post.

Oman 1974-77

I went out there early in 1974 and it was a great post: I enjoyed it enormously. It was very busy. There was a lot going on the political side, the military side, commercial work, everything was going full tilt. The war in Dhofar was clearly being won and every winter there was a succession of senior British officers who linked up with the Defence Attaché and went down to see what was going on. It was encouraging. I went down quite a lot and it was fascinating. One could go round the Jebel area where the fighting was happening. The civil aid programme was just getting underway. There was a very dynamic former army officer who was motivating the tribesmen to build their own schools and build their own water points for the cattle.

ML – That was under Sultan Qaboos was it?

DT – Yes. Sultan Qaboos was an absolute ruler, but he had a cabinet government, which functioned like most cabinets and ministers had reasonable responsibility. The Foreign Ministry were quite a good bunch to deal with. They were all new to the job because the country had been totally under-developed when Qaboos took over from his father, so they were all Omanis who had had a little bit of education or they had been educated abroad, because their parents had been exiled and had come back. But we had a small aid programme, which was useful and earned us good will. Really the keynote was set by the Ambassador's relations with the Sultan and Donald Hawley, my first ambassador there, had very good relations with the Sultan. There was a certain amount of having to keep our end up, because it had been a British protectorate, jolly nearly, so there were a lot of British companies there, who suddenly found that with the more open society, other people were moving in. International Air Radio had run the airport and suddenly found that Pan Am had taken it over, because some minister had got the agency for Pan Am and was starting to move the Brits out. I think Cable and Wireless managed to survive, but Cable and Wireless were certainly under attack. Then there were lots of big construction companies, Taylor Woodrow, Wimpey, Costains and so on, who all had major contracts there. They represented a very substantial British presence and were responsible for a lot of exports too because they tended to furnish the palaces or airports or whatever they were building with British equipment. It was important to try and keep them in place.

The big deal, when I was there, was the air defence scheme. When I had been in London on the Middle East desk, the Sultan had said, "I want an air defence scheme" and the MOD had

sent out a team to assess what was needed. They came back and said, “You don’t need one that badly and actually you can’t afford it.” Which I think the Sultan was a bit piqued at. But at the end of that year, 1973/74, with the Arab/Israel war, the price of oil quadrupled and quintupled so the Omani budget quadrupled and suddenly all sorts of things became possible that had been beyond dreaming of a year previously. So they then went back to the idea of an air defence scheme and British Aerospace picked it up, thanks to a lot of lobbying and no doubt friends in the right places.

ML – We used to operate something on Masirah, didn’t we? Was that under Oman?

DT – Yes. Masirah was a BBC operation. It was the Indian Ocean relay and they took BBC programmes and rebroadcast them in Arabic and Urdu and English and everything else in the Indian Ocean region. We used to visit them occasionally. And there was still an RAF staging post and an RAF contingent on Masirah island with a couple of transport aircraft, but V bombers or other more exciting aircraft also used to stage through on their way to Australia or the Far East.

There was too an RAF station at Salalah, the capital of the southern region, which was under attack during the Dhofar insurgency. That was a pukka RAF station, defended by the RAF Regiment.

The Dhofar war continued and the Shah decided that the Iranians should become involved. The Iranians first sent a small military unit, about a company I think and finally they sent a brigade. This brigade built a great fence across the province of Dhofar and manned it, effectively making it impossible for the rebels to move deeper into the country. The Brits were always rather scathing about the Iranians and I am sure they were not as good as the SAS, but they were a large number of armed men and if they were told to hold somewhere, they would stay there. They would restrict the rebels getting across. Finally the war came to an end, I think about the end of 1975. There was rather an impressive operation where the Sultan’s Armed Forces closed the border effectively. They expanded the outposts they had on the border to cut the main supply route and the revolt withered on the vine. The enemy couldn’t get any more supplies and ammunition and had to withdraw and take refuge in South Yemen. So it really was a very successful operation, largely thanks to the military and the couple of hundred seconded British officers, who were serving with the Sultan’s armed forces.

Political life in Oman – there was a lot going on in the sense of development, building new hospitals, building new roads etc and we followed all that closely and tried to get jobs for British companies with reasonable success. My job was to keep track of what was happening. Donald Hawley left after I had been there about eighteen months and he was succeeded by Jim Treadwell, who'd come down from Abu Dhabi. Jim's great achievement in Abu Dhabi was that he'd managed to get on very well with Sheikh Zaid, the ruler. They'd had a very close relationship and I think Jim hoped he could do the same in Oman with the Sultan. And he simply couldn't. The Sultan was not that open a character. He was much more reserved, much more on his dignity, less Arab in a way than the Sheikhs of the Gulf. But it was still a very successful operation - we kept close to him and to his ministers.

At the end of the war there was a slight difficulty. The Sultan split what had been the Sultan's Armed Forces, the army, navy and air force, it had been a joint command and he divided that into three separate services. I think to ensure that there was no military threat to him, i.e. that the various arms of the services balanced each other. There was also the Royal Oman Police, who were a fairly heavily armed bunch. So between them he balanced the various armed units in the country, which I suppose was sensible. It was rather sad that this well working unified command should be carved up, but that's what happened.

ML – Were there tribal considerations?

DT – No, I don't think there were in Oman. I think they managed to keep clear of them. In the south of Oman where the military had organised irregular units, those were on a tribal basis, but in the regular army, in the Sultan's Armed Forces, they were not tribal. I think they would have avoided that for obvious reasons.

It was a great post Oman really. We did a lot of travelling in the interior and climbing the mountains and sleeping under the stars. Omanis are among the nicest of the Arabs – nature's gentlemen, very pleasant to be with, very hospitable.

ML – Did the splitting of the commands result in us losing some influence?

DT – I don't think so. Because then instead of a Commander of the Armed Forces the Sultan introduced a Chief of the General Staff, which was rather a grand title. I wasn't there when this happened, but CGS was an officer called Johnny Watts, who was a former British Army officer and politically very astute; good at winning friends and influencing people. He was very successful. And of course the Omanis needed us. They needed the supply of trained

pilots and trained officers. A fair number of British officers were killed in the war you know. There was quite a high casualty rate among the regimental officers there.

ML – Did the embassy have to get involved, or did the military take care of all that?

DT – Not at all. Even if a British officer got killed in a road accident I don't think we were involved. It was all taken care of by the military.

ML – Well, I suppose it's a success story when it has carried on as a reasonably stable bit of the Arab world when so much of the rest of it has gone to hell and high water.

DT – Yes. What is interesting is that the Omanis have pursued quite an independent foreign policy. They have stood back slightly from the Gulf Arabs, who have been completely on the American side. They have kept lines open to the Iranians, which I rather respect. It would have been much easier to say, "We'll do everything you want, United States", but they did carve a slightly more independent line.

ML – Religiously they are Sunni?

DT – Well, there are some Shia among the merchant communities along the coast, but it is not a problem really. I suppose because the merchant communities don't aspire to political power. They know their place and they do very well. They are very rich. So that was not really a problem in Oman. The Sultan is still alive, but he is said to be very ill.

I was quite pleased while I was in Yemen in 1986, the Arab states had some big conference in Oman and all the Yemenis came back and said, "My God, have you seen Oman, it's incredible, everything works and it is neat and tidy and clean." I said, "Yes I do know Oman, it's just like that". I felt quite proud, they'd done very well.

The Sultan had an environmental adviser, who was formerly from the Colonial Service in Aden and he did all sorts of things that no other Arab state had done at that stage, encouraging the school children to think of the environment and preserving, not exterminating the few remaining gazelle and things like that.

ML – Are they still a significant oil and gas producer? Qatar has done very well out of gas hasn't it?

DT – Yes, Qatar has gained a lot of soft power out of things like Al Jazeera, and the football is going to be held in Qatar, unless somebody blows the gaff and they take it away from them.

Middle East Department 1977-1980

I left Oman and went back to become assistant head of Middle East Department, which I was pleased about because it meant continuity, which is rare in the Office. Near East Department, Middle East Department, Muscat and then MED again did mean I actually knew quite a lot about the subject. It was a very busy job. It really divided into before and after the Iranian revolution. I said in my notes, damage limitation in our relations with the Arabs and the Shah. There just seemed to be an incredible amount of rather unimportant agro', which the foreigners took very seriously. Arabs would get involved in traffic accidents and things like that – silly things, but they expected you to pull strings on their behalf and so on.

“Death of a Princess” was the prime example of that on the Arab side, the film that was made in Egypt by an English producer for I think Channel Four. We had been warned by the embassy in Cairo that this chap was out there making a film. I read the letter and assumed that what they meant was a movie film because Cairo is the centre of the Egyptian film industry. I thought very interesting, but how does it concern us? Then we suddenly got word that Channel Four were about to show this programme and what could we do about it? There really wasn't very much we could do. David Owen was the Foreign Secretary and he was very much against intervening with the British press to protect Arab despots. We had had a couple of brushes earlier. I cannot remember the exact details, but I know we were feeling fairly scarred by attempts to go in on behalf of Middle East rulers and get the press to be silent. So in the end I think we decided there was nothing we could do. We couldn't ban it and if we had tried because it might upset the Saudis, Channel Four would have simply made another story of the hushing-up and even more people would have watched the programme. So the programme duly appeared and it was pretty wounding really. It was a terrible story. This daughter of a very senior prince had become involved with a man and she'd been executed as a result. I can't remember whether she was pregnant or not. But it was even worse than that because the prince whose daughter she was, was Prince Mohammed, known as “The Father of the Two Evils”, because he was the most terrible drunk and he'd been taken out of the line of succession because he was not fit to be king. All this came out in the programme and the royal family's dirty linen was being hung out and

washed in public. There was not a breakdown in relations, but James Craig, the Ambassador was asked to go home on leave, which he did and he was very upset with us for failing to take a stronger line. Looking back on it I'm still not sure there was anything we could have done. It might have been possible if we had realised earlier, but even then I doubt it because the people who were making the film were the sort of people who would revel in a public spat with the Foreign Office, which would have been to their advantage. I must say, it was a well-made film. I remember one particular bit where the British journalist asked his Saudi source a question and it was translated and the Saudi replied with an absolute stream of invective in Arabic, which wasn't translated. The interpreter just said, "He says these are matters we will have to consider". I thought this was so true and unless you spoke Arabic you would not get this at all. The chap had said "You bloody journalists, you come here and stir the shit" and so on at length. So it was a well-made film and it was a true story. But could we have done more? I'm not sure. People do bend a lot of rules in favour of the Saudis. I think it would have been difficult with David Owen at the helm.

ML – Well, it's still relevant isn't it, with our assistance to them and the war in Yemen.

DT – Indeed it is. So that was the prime example of damage limitation in relations with the Saudis.

The Yemeni Prime Minister, who was a nice man, came to England as an official visitor and we had arranged a really good programme for him. He went to see oil rigs in the North Sea because Yemen's oil was about to come on stream. But his departure was simply my worst evening in the Foreign Service ever, because I was driving to the airport to see him off with the official Meeter and Greeter and when our car got to the VIP lounge there was a check point outside and the policeman said, "We're having a spot of bother here Sir". The Yemeni PM's airliner had been distrained upon, or whatever the term, it had been confiscated effectively because their airline Yemenia had unpaid debts. What could we do? It was absolutely awful and it was quite late at night so no one was going to be obtainable in their offices, no one was going to move. Eventually Government Hospitality kindly said they would pay for another night's accommodation for the PM and his party and they were taken back to their hotel. And the next day they left on an ordinary commercial Saudia flight for Yemen via Jeddah. We were aware that Yemenia owed British Midland money for chartering work that British Midland had done for them, but British Midland had told the junior desk officer that they were not going to pursue the matter while the PM was here. So

they simply broke their word. It was a major row. Looking back on it I suppose the right thing to have done would have been to say to the RAF, find us a VC10, put the PM on board and fly him back at once and his face might have been saved.

ML – I think the RAF might have jibbed at that.

DT – In those days it was before oil income had really started to come on stream in Britain and we were desperately short of money. Everything you did had to be pared and cut down. Ensuring that no financial liability was incurred was the first reaction to any proposal or measure that was taken. So anyway the poor old PM was kept a day and then sent back and the Yemeni press were incandescent about it. Not that the Yemeni press were a free bunch of men, but they were clearly egged on by their government. And the Yemenis were genuinely outraged and said this is an act of piracy, how can you behave like this? Our poor Ambassador, Julian Walker, went through a very difficult patch. Eventually they settled it, I can't remember how, but some deal was done and the airliner was released. The airliner was released fairly quickly against a bond I think, then the bond was somehow sorted out. It was a profoundly embarrassing occasion and undid all the good we had done by inviting him as a guest of government. Those were the sort of damage limitation issues that seemed to crop up.

And then, of course we had the Shah, whose throne was beginning to totter. But we were not really aware of it and he certainly wasn't aware of it because he did not relax his "folie de grandeur" and was for ever finding something to complain about: the British press were being rude; the BBC Persian Service was his sworn enemy. The BBC were picking up a lot of opinion in Tehran and broadcasting it back, so they were not doing him any favours. We kept saying, "It's important we have this free broadcasting and you'll be grateful in the end." It was just one series of complaints after another and when the Shah complained he threatened to cancel contracts and so on.

ML – Nobody saw the fall of the Shah coming did they?

DT – No, not really. Not in the way it came. We were conscious of the danger of a military coup with the enormous armed forces he had, but we simply didn't appreciate the Islamic dimension in Iranian internal politics, partly because we were all Arabists and the mosque is much more powerful in Iran than it is in the Arab world. In the Arab world there are individual preachers who are impressive and important, but there is less of an organised church, so to speak, there's less of an organised set up of religious leaders. So we weren't

really aware that there was all this bad blood in the Shia hierarchy against the Shah. It gradually accelerated over the year. First there was a demonstration and some people were shot and then forty days later there was a formal remembrance service, not a burial, but a commemoration and that was the occasion for more demonstrations and then more people were shot. So you had this sort of accelerating drum beat of turmoil coming up and finally the whole country went on strike. They went to work, but they didn't do any work. The Shah tried to send the tanks in against the demonstrators. The air force mutinied and he sent the tanks down to the airport to crush the lot of them and tanks were stopped by snipers on the roadside who fired into the periscopes and immobilised them. These were his British Chieftain tanks.

At the start of the trouble, as Assistant Head of Department I did what they call a pastoral tour of Iran and Iraq and Kuwait, because they were countries I had never visited. In Iran they had just had a demonstration and they'd had some strikes and I remember saying to Tony Parsons, "Isn't this rather worrying?" He said, "Oh no, for God's sake, we have strikes every day in England. Strikes are strikes, not a revolution." But of course it was a revolution and it just accelerated. We thought in terms of a coup or something that happened overnight. The army seize the broadcasting station and a colonel takes command. But this was a genuine revolution and a popular revolution and finally Khomeini returned to a triumphant welcome. So we were caught out by it. It was partly the emphasis the Office had given to commercial work after the CPRS review, which had said these chaps ought to spend much more time doing commercial work and Tony Parsons, whom I have enormous admiration for, caught the flavour of the month and said: "Right, this will be a commercial embassy. We will push sales of tanks and whatever else". He was very conscious that if he started to meddle in internal politics and chatting up either the left wing opposition or the religious opposition the Shah would take it out on Britain. He would retaliate by cancelling contracts or making sure we were disadvantaged.

ML – No other western country saw it coming either. The Americans were blindsided as well.

DT – That's right. Even the Israelis I think, though the Israelis said they did expect it. We were all aware that people didn't like the Shah. But the people who didn't like the Shah that we knew about were mostly leftists. They were either communists or socialists, some of them perfectly respectable people. When the Shah fell the embassy for a brief period had

very good contacts with them. But of course they were the people who Khomeni chopped as soon as he got in. There really wasn't much point in talking to the religious people because you had nothing in common with them.

ML – What were they called again those Iranian leftists?

DT – The Tudeh party was the communist party, but I think there were socialists of one sort or another. In fact the man who was said to be the spiritual father of the Iranian revolution was an Iranian intellectual living in London, whom we never knew anything about.

ML – Well, we're very good at having spiritual fathers living in London.

DT – We are, like Karl Marx. It was sad really, but you can only meet them with a larger and better resourced Research Department, which contacts all these exiles and people living in London and knows what's going on. Because the poor old desk officers are much too busy to do that.

That was the real event of my time, the one world-historical event I have been directly involved with. It ended with the siege of the American embassy and taking all the hostages.

ML – Then Johnny Graham took over didn't he and I heard the whole story from his perspective.

DT – Johnny took over and by that time I think the Shah had already gone or at least the die was cast. We all said "For God's sake, why are we getting rid of the Ambassador at this crucial stage?" But Personnel Department were quite inflexible and actually it wouldn't have made any difference. It was probably better to have a new man there than someone who was so associated with the Shah.

ML – I think he was delayed a few months, until the Shah had finally gone.

DT – Yes, but of course the Iranians always had this exaggerated view of Britain's power in the Middle East and Britain's power in Iran and seemed to imagine that not a dog moved in the bazaar without us telling it to.

That was damage limitation on a grand scale. Then with Iraq, the Iraqis had a very lavish embassy in London, but they also had a nasty habit of sending assassins over to smudge out Iraqi exiles who were not supporting the regime. This was very difficult.

ML – Were there any specific cases that spring to mind?

DT – Yes, there was a case where some Iraqi chap, whom we knew had a security background, applied to read a PhD in some Scottish university and we thought, why not if he wants to improve himself? Well, he master minded the assassination of an Iraqi in the Hilton Hotel or maybe on the doorstep. I think we arrested him at London airport. He fingered the emigré whom he must have invited for a cup of tea and identified him to the assassin, who shot and killed him outside the Hilton. David Owen was really very cross about this indeed and we arrested the assassin. I think we arrested the assassin, but the security man got away. We threw out a number of the more thuggish members of the Iraqi embassy. Of course the Iraqis promptly arrested a British businessman and a Scottish missionary, people working in Iraq. The great lesson I learned from MED was that those who do the damage don't necessarily pay for the damage. The governments you're dealing with will always be more thuggish than you can be and you may think you have put them right but they will take it out on some innocent Brit.

ML – Our concept of the rule of law and their concept of the rule of law are totally different.

DT – Who can say whether the British businessman was absolutely squeaky clean, but certainly the missionary was. They were put inside for months and then gradually some sort of accommodation was reached and everyone was let out of gaol. Saddam's government were a pretty nasty lot to deal with, but had a terribly active embassy, always protesting about things, but always ready to take you out to lunch.

I said in my synopsis, that was the year of the four heads of department. It must have been 1979 I think. We had four heads of department for various reasons, because Personnel Department wanted them for other jobs. Ivor Lucas had been in the department for three years and had a very good understanding of the Middle East. He was followed by Alan Munro who was another very gifted Arabist. I always thought he was slightly hyper-active. But then about four months into his term, he was succeeded by David Hannay, now Lord Hannay, who was a very able operator and was a Persian speaker, but not particularly in tune with the Middle East. Then he was wanted for some European job. (Alan had been wanted for a personnel job). David Hannay was succeeded by David Miers, who I think did spend quite a lot of time there. But it was a strange way to run a ship really. Carrington took over from David Owen about half way through, which was a relief. I remember, after the Iranian revolution David Owen said, "We've slipped up on this, we must have an analysis of it. I

want you (the department) to do a paper on what went wrong in Iran and I need it by next Tuesday.” I thought that was typical – instant answers to instant questions. In the end we did two sides of paper on what we had done wrong and what we had failed to see. But actually it spawned a tremendous survey by Nick Browne, who is now, alas, dead. He was a Persian language speaker and had been a member of the embassy. He did a survey of about 150 pages of British policy towards Iran, which was extremely good and I don’t think they have ever released it, which is a shame. I said as much to his son Nick, who was a junior minister at the Foreign Office, because it was a very thoughtful piece and could be reprinted as a public document. Certainly there was nothing confidential in it, or nothing that’s confidential now. [It is now released].

I do remember, shortly before the Shah actually left, we were still agonising over a case before the British courts where someone had been accused of bribery to get a contract, and the person accused had summoned the paper for libel. This case was going on and the empire was falling. It was extraordinary. We were still agonising over this and finally it was succeeded in the popular press by a very lurid sex case and this luckily took the main headlines and our concern drifted down the page. What was interesting was that the Iranian embassy was still going on about this and a few weeks later their staff revolted, the ambassador fled and their wine cellar was being emptied down the gutters of Prince’s Gate.

ML – And then you were still there for the siege?

DT – The siege of Prince’s Gate – yes I was. That was a very interesting experience indeed. A group of terrorists, probably inspired by the Iraqis, seized the Iranian Embassy. I sat in on the COBRA meetings, which were a good way of going about things, but the problem was that we were not going to compromise. The rule of law was there. These people had committed criminal offences, breached diplomatic immunity and so on and there was not going to be a deal where they would get off. They would get a fair trial, but that was not what they wanted. They wanted to get off. They wanted to make their point and get away. So there was never really any scope for compromise. I sat through those meetings thinking, in the end it’s the SAS who are going to save us; as they did very effectively. It was interesting because the Arab diplomatic corps in London decided that they must play a mediating role and the Syrian ambassador, who acted as a sort of shop steward and spokesman for the Arab diplomatic corps, kept ringing up COBRA and I was sent out to talk to him. He would say, “If you just do this....if you just do that...why can’t you agree to do

the other?” Finally the SAS went in and we had a microphone down there so in COBRA you could hear the shots and the screams and at that moment the Syrian ambassador rang again and one of the most satisfying moments of my career was being able to say, “Ambassador it’s too late. The army have gone in. Listen!” And I just held the mouthpiece to the speaker – shots, screams and that was it. We ended the conversation.

ML – In the sequencing, was that before or after the US hostages? You put it before.

DT – It was after. We rescued the Iranians, who had been held up by these thugs and then we wrote a very statesman-like letter to the Iranian Government, saying look, we’ve just done this for all your hostages. Why don’t you do the decent thing and release the Americans? But of course they just laughed - nothing doing.

ML – Johnny Graham told me how much we had been involved with some of the US diplomats who had remained at liberty.

DT – Oh yes. Have you seen the film? [Argo]

ML – It didn’t mention it in the film.

DT – That’s right we had. Because in the film the hero or someone says “Oh the Brits don’t want to know.” People resented that, because it simply was not true. The Brits had actually helped quite a lot.

What struck me about the siege of Princes Gate was there was this long table in COBRA. Everyone sat there from the SAS at one end to the FCO and the police at the other and in the middle sat the three junior Ministers of State. Well it had been going on for a long time and finally the hijackers shot someone and threatened they were going to shoot someone every hour. So it was pretty clear we had reached crunch point. But the three ministers shuffled out of the room to an ante room and must have discussed it there among themselves and came back and said, “Right, OK, we think we have got to go in”. And everyone else said, “Yes, there’s nothing else for it”. So that was that.

NATO Defence College 1980-81

I was then posted in September 1980 to the NATO Defence College in Rome for six months, which was a standard course. The Foreign Office always provided one officer of Counsellor grade and the MOD produced another civil servant and then there were about half a dozen

British army, navy and air force officers. That was very agreeable. Personnel Dept described it as “decompression” after the excitements of MED. It was in a strange suburb of Rome called EUR which was built during Mussolini’s time. The course was pleasant enough and involved endless lectures on international politics and then a series of large tours to a region. Ours was southern Europe, Turkey, Greece, Italy and then all the standard countries, France, Germany the Netherlands and so on. We spent two or three days in each country, rather more in the States, and it was very interesting. I did not feel it was particularly illuminating on the political side, because most of what the lecturers had to say was the sort of stuff you would read in the *Economist* or the newspapers. But I did find the more military lectures interesting. The British participants were mostly about my level; none of us went on to great things. Whereas some of the other smaller countries appreciated it more and their members ended up as generals. I was amused to discover that as soon as the military met each other they started assessing who was going to go on to two star or three star or what level he was going to reach. I thought this was not so noticeable in the Foreign Office, although of course on the appraisal sheets you are asked to say what you think the officer’s terminal grade will be. But it was not a thing that obsessed us whenever we met a colleague. But because the military pyramid narrowed in middle age with a lot of retirements I suppose they were all busy keeping an eye on each other.

Dublin 1981-84

After that I was posted to Dublin, which I was slightly uneasy about, because I had family there and I did not know whether that might be a complication. Personnel Department queried it with the embassy and the embassy said, “No problem”.

ML – What position?

DT – Head of Chancery, so No2 in the embassy. We had a lovely house and conditions were fine and the Ambassador, Leonard Figg was very affable.

ML – Can you remember the dates?

DT – It was March 1981. When we had got to Dublin I made no secret of the fact that I had come from the NATO Defence College, because it was not in any way related to the posting. The Office had been looking at Delhi as a posting for me, but it ended up as Dublin. What I had not realised and I do not think anyone in the embassy had noticed, was that this was a particularly sensitive pedigree for someone going to Dublin, because at that stage the Irish

Prime Minister, the Taoiseach, Charles Haughey had half suggested to Margaret Thatcher that Ireland might join NATO if they got the north of Ireland and the left wing of Irish politics were wildly sensitive about neutrality. Neutrality was a sacred cow and anything that threatened neutrality was completely taboo. Here was I appearing from Britain, with this NATO background supposedly a sort of evangelist for NATO to complete the seduction of the innocent Irish neutrals. In roughly the Irish equivalent of the *Observer*, which was called the *Sunday Tribune*, about three Sundays after I got there the main headline was “Britain posts NATO expert to Dublin”. Suddenly the fact that I had been to NATO Defence College, which to me was simply decompression on the part of the Office, became deeply sinister and significant. Following on from that there was a death threat, which I did not locate, I didn’t know where it came from but the Garda Special Branch picked it up, so it was a threat. They heard someone plotting, and from then on I had a Garda escort, so this was quite a disruption to life. We had a little garden shed put in front of the house and there were always two or three armed policemen there. Then when I drove into the office there was always a police car following me and one had to vary one’s route. So that was quite a life changer really and even when we went out walking in the hills, a couple of them would be following. They were very nice lads and there was no problem with them at all but it was an inhibition.

ML – And it gets you down after a time, knowing you are a potential target the whole time.

DT – Yes, it does. The only thing I was lucky about was that generally political conditions improved in Ireland. Because when I arrived the serious hunger strike was just beginning in the Northern Ireland prisons. Early one morning I was woken by someone in the Northern Island Office to say that Bobby Sands had just died and I had to ring up someone in the Irish Foreign Ministry and pass this on. People in Ireland were very conflicted, mixed up about it, because they could see that most of these people were not great patriots; that they were people who had killed other Irishmen or Englishmen for political reasons and that they should be in prison. But at the same time the nationalist tradition very much saw them as freedom fighters and martyrs if they had succeeded in killing themselves. So you found that people were very upset about it and would beard you at cocktail parties and would make an unpleasant scene. That continued the whole of that summer - Margaret Thatcher never gave way on this. Eventually the prisoners themselves, with their priests, worked out a way round it where once they were thought to be in danger of dying they came off the fast, or their families asked for them to come off the fast. There was a lot of sophistry in it, but eventually it stopped. I cannot remember, there were about seven or eight fatalities and then it stopped.

But it had a serious effect on the North of Ireland. Sinn Fein gathered enormous support from it and Mrs Thatcher was portrayed as a brutal and obdurate woman.

ML – Was that before the Birmingham bombings?

DT – No. It was after the Birmingham bombings which were in the mid Seventies I think.

ML – But they were still in prison.

DT – Yes. But that case had not got much momentum behind it at the time. It was only really picked up by the more extreme nationalist fringe. I think it accelerated later on.

The Northern Ireland question was the great question for the embassy and went on and on and occasionally there would be some alarm, say as a policeman took a wrong turn and turned up fully armed in an Irish town south of the border. This was atrocious the Irish would say and what were we going to do about it? So there were these series of hiccups and murders. But by and large, most of the Irish civil servants we dealt with were men and women of good will. They were not trying to exacerbate relations, they wanted to smooth over the problems and were working to find their way towards some sort of a solution. We never got very far when I was there. The hunger strike came and went in 1981.

The second year I was there, 1982, was enlivened by the Falklands war, which you would not expect to have repercussions in Ireland, but it did because some Irish saw it instantly in Irish terms with these Catholic Argentinians, whose land had been taken away from them by the brutal protestant British. So this was replayed and the nationalists were very much on the Argentine side and there were long articles in the papers saying this was a war the British could not win, they were going to get defeated and go away with their tails between their legs. There was a lot of ill feeling around and certainly Charles Haughey, who was Taoiseach at the time, stoked it up as an anti-British event. But it was over by 14 June and the military victory boosted our prestige. I remember at one stage during the war our Deputy Political Director, Alan Goodison, came over from London. He was being grilled by a team from the Irish Foreign Ministry and they said “Aren’t you worried that if you win the war your name will be mud, you’ll have a difficult time in the UN?” He said, dryly and bluntly, “No country has ever lost prestige by winning a war”. And of course he was right. Alan later returned to Dublin as Ambassador; Leonard Figg came to the end of his term and Alan took over and was very good.

So the second year was the year of the Falklands. Then there were a series of Irish government changes. The governments seemed to last about six months and the two Irish political parties seemed to alternate between them and it was always nearly a hung Dail [Parliament]. After one of the elections I remember an Irish journalist said, “We have the headline we really want now, ‘Hung Dail – Balance held by nutter’”. Because there was actually a very eccentric Dublin man who had got himself elected on a populist ticket and he held the balance.

ML – He was called Nutter you mean.

DT – No, no, he was very eccentric. He had added ‘Rockall’ to his Christian names because some Irish thought Rockall, the rock in the North Atlantic which the British had landed on in 1955, really should have been theirs because of arguments about where base-lines were and which was the nearest land. It was nearer Scottish islands, but not nearer the UK mainland. These were theological discussions about international law and they did not interfere with our relations, but this individual got very excited about them. He was a one off.

So we kept alternating between these two governments, one led by Charles Haughey, which was fairly anti-British, or not as constructive as it could have been, and the other led by Garrett Fitzgerald, which was much more seeking a solution and not trying to exacerbate matters. Garrett was a very reasonable man to deal with and a thoroughly nice person. Eventually he launched the All Ireland Forum, where he collected a lot of intellectuals and politicians and others to discuss the state of Ireland and what should be done. They eventually produced a report, which was fairly banal. It didn’t actually get very far, but that kept us busy for my third year. After that the situation rumbled on until the IRA decided that this was an unprofitable row to hoe and they made approaches through the Secret Service to HMG and gradually the whole peace process got going. John Major and Tony Blair gave it their full attention.

ML - All this time you were in Ireland with Mrs Thatcher as PM, was it after the Brighton bombing?

DT – No, it was before. [The bombing was 12 October 1984] There was certainly a very nasty bombing in London when they put a bomb under a band stand in Regent’s Park and they were blowing up Household Cavalry patrols. That was very depressing. But it was a very lively time to be in Dublin and you had tremendous access. Ministers would summon

you and tell you they disliked the editorial in the *Daily Telegraph* or something and you just said, “Well you know – what about the editorials in the *Irish Press*?” It was the sort of thing you expected with Arabs, to have complaints about the British press. You didn’t really expect it in a democratic western country.

It was a subject, Ireland and Northern Ireland, in which really only we were interested. Other diplomats were not at all concerned. The Americans a bit, but otherwise scarcely at all. At the weekends we usually left our escort behind. You did not need permission, you just explained to the Garda what you wanted to do and they would drop off at the outskirts of Dublin and you would agree to meet them the next day. So that side of it got better, the escorting was less oppressive and they ended up just escorting me on the way to work.

Sana’a 1984 - 1987

Then I was told I was posted to Sana’a, which I was very chuffed about because it was my own embassy. It wasn’t promotion, but it was my own post. I knew quite a lot about it because I had been in Middle East Department only four years before. Yemen was a difficult country to deal with politically. It was a fascinating country to be in – very folkloric, romantic and physically and architecturally beautiful. You could go out at the weekends and camp or visit places and stay with aid projects. We had several aid projects and several volunteer NGO projects. But actually doing business with the Yemenis I found very frustrating because they were very suspicious and, avaricious is not quite the right word, but foreign policy was basically fund raising, trying to get money out of foreigners. Our aid programme was not devised in that sort of way. The ODA, as it then was, determined our policy and set out its budgetary limits for the next five or ten years and if a minister came out he could not just say to the Yemenis: “Right, I’m giving you a new secondary school, here have a million quid.” That was just not how we worked.

ML – Very much how they worked. Was it Ali Abdullah Saleh at that stage?

DT – Yes. You saw him on public occasions. I can’t think I actually spoke to him much after my presentation of credentials call. He amused me by saying, “Do you have elections in your country?” I said, “Yes, we have elections coming up.” He said, “Who do you think will win? Will it be the Republican party?” At that stage the Foreign Minister broke in and said, “No, no it’s Mrs Thatcher, the Iron Lady.” The President said, “Oh yes the Iron Lady, yes”.

Then we moved onto some other subject and afterwards I thought: he has only just heard of Mrs Thatcher, but I'm sure she has never heard of him.

I had been told that Yemeni ministers had been ordered to report any conversations they had with foreign diplomats; this was the system they had in Aden. Aden had this iron Communist regime with East Germans advising the police. But I did not think it was true in Sana'a. Then I was talking to the Minister of Agriculture and I noticed he was solemnly writing on the back of my visiting card the subjects of our conversation, so I realised it was a pretty closed society. The great minister was a man called Abdulkarim Al Iryani, who was a doctor of chemistry from Yale. An extremely brilliant man he was foreign minister and he had a world outlook. He had all the right qualities, he was honest and progressive, a thoroughly nice man and he you could have sensible conversations with, but most of the other ministers were not terribly interested. Even the aid projects were not particularly gratefully received because they were intended to get money to the poorest, farmers and people like that - generally people who did not have much political influence. If they were not directed to the particular area where the President's tribe came from, then, for the Yemenis, where was the interest?

ML – Not enough opportunity for brown envelopes I expect. There was a small group of Yemenis called the Yemeni British society.

DT – Generally Yemenis who had married English women you could have a conversation with. Then if you had a chamber of commerce visit a collection of ministers and merchants would appear, but otherwise coming to a dinner or something, they were not really interested. So you tried to get these people who perhaps owned a couple of factories or had an import agency or something, but had English wives and therefore were quite approachable and fun and interesting. But the British community were a super bunch. They were all very young, mostly in their thirties, working on aid projects in very basic conditions in the interior. Or they were teachers at the British Council. There was a very good British Council operation there, really excellent.

It was the time of the raid on Tripoli, when the USAF attacked Libya from bases in Britain. The Yemenis protested formally about it, but at a popular level they were pretty cross and one member of the US embassy, a communicator, was ambushed in his car and shot. The shot went through his neck and grazed his jugular vein but did not pierce it. The attackers were traced to the Libyan embassy in Sana'a. One of the Libyans was taken in by the

Yemenis and never emerged. Probably he was murdered by the police, which was a nasty little episode. But it took a long time for that to become clear. I am not sure if it is even clear now.

At that stage we were all very concerned about security. We had to brief our teachers and our aid workers to be careful. It was very interesting because you tried to keep it in a low key and not get them wildly excited, but you realised that while for some people the same form of words would leave them quite phlegmatic, others would go into hysterical over-drive and start keeping clear of their windows and drawing curtains and ensuring they were not overlooked from other buildings. So it was impossible to get it right.

ML – The travel advice was a constant bug bear - how to pitch that at the right level. I think ministers were terrified of the repercussions, like what has happened in Tunisia (massacre of British tourists) if the travel advice was not strong enough. But of course if you made it too strong it annoyed the Yemenis.

DT – In my day I do not think travel advice was computerised on line, so it was far less of a factor. I am sure we had some formula, but it was not particularly oppressive and a number of tour groups came through of about a dozen people and they looked round Sana'a or went camping in the highlands and did not cause any trouble as far as I recall.

I should mention Djibouti. When I was there Djibouti was covered by the ambassador in Yemen. It had not been formally decided, but my predecessor was ambassador to Djibouti and then there was one of the awful famines in Ethiopia and a television programme, which really stoked up the pressure in England and people said we must do something. The only place to do something from was Djibouti where there was a possible airport for RAF planes and so I was told at 24 hours' notice to get over to Djibouti and negotiate rights for the RAF to use the airport, which I did. The Djiboutians were incredibly cooperative. It was quite heart-warming after Sana'a where everything was a problem. Of course the French air force had a base there. By the time you spoke to the French and the Djiboutians, it all fell into place and the RAF could have used that airport. In the end they didn't need to. I can't remember which one they did use. That was my first visit there. It was a fascinating little country really, about the size of Northern Ireland with two quite separate ethnic groups, the Afars, who are vaguely Ethiopian and the Issas who were Somali and spoke Somali and the two official languages were French and Arabic, not either of the languages that real people actually spoke.

I presented my credentials to the President, Hassan Gouled Aptidon, who was a charming old boy and was the father of the country, because it had only been independent for about ten years. I read my little speech in French rather than in Arabic. He replied with a speech in French that was so high flown that I could hardly understand it and then I realised that he had a bright young French graduate in his office somewhere who had produced this eloquent prose. When I went to call on the Prime Minister he rang a bell and in from the adjoining office came the French adviser. They always said the PM was illiterate. I do not know, but he could have been. The President was Somali and the PM was an Afar. It was a fascinating society. In some ways very sophisticated and upper crust, like the town of Djibouti with its lovely French restaurants where you could get good French wine and pork chops and then the interior which was absolutely barren – a few nomadic tribesmen, but almost no agriculture. You were always at one stage removed because you could speak French or Arabic to people, but not their own language. The Somalis were magnificently arrogant. You would meet some nomadic tribesman trekking over the desert with his camels and his wives and a straw hut, they had huts made of woven sheets of straw, and they would treat you with such disdain. You would get out of your Land Rover and try and have a conversation and they were really not interested. I remember the interpreter saying “these are foolish people, we will not talk to them”.

It was a fascinating country. The French and the Americans had embassies there and they were both extremely helpful. Talking to the French there you realised that because they had their armed forces there they had a real intelligence capability and they did know what was going on. They had people who spoke Somali and spoke Afar, which no other embassy did.

An interesting facet of our relationship was the BBC Somali language service. I remember once landing in Djibouti and the honorary consul said, “Oh the President wants to see you.” I thought: my God, I have really got access in this country, he wants to talk to me. When I got there he delivered himself of this enormous tirade against the BBC Somali service which was staffed largely by people from ex-British Somaliland, who did not like the government in Somalia and didn’t like the ruling tribe of Issas in Djibouti. So they were for ever making snide remarks and we were for ever fielding complaints from the Djibouti government, but of course the BBC management had no one who spoke Somali, so the broadcasters had pretty much a free rein as no one could say you are going too far. It was an irritant in our relations, but it was a matter of prestige that everyone listened to it. I remember walking through the souk in Djibouti and you heard the BBC news come on in Somali and then at each successive

stall you heard the same programme. It was a very impressive production, but it did not make our life any easier.

ML – Can you relate it to what was happening in Somaliland, because they had a terrible war with Somalia and the place was bombed by Hussein Habré?

DT – It had not got that far. There was certainly tribal feeling between Somaliland and the rest of Somalia and the Somali government was being repressive. There was probably minor guerrilla warfare and the people from the Somaliland tribes who had drifted into Djibouti, some worked in the British Bank, were pretty anti-Somali. I remember once sitting at a restaurant and a very smart army officer dressed in Somali service dress came in and sat down with a number of other people, I suppose from the Somali embassy to Djibouti. He nodded politely to me and I nodded politely to him and the person I was with who was a Somalilander with the British Bank said: “That’s the man who is killing all my relations in Hargeisa.” I felt a bit put down. I remembered the officer because his name was Morgan, which sounds very Welsh, but I think it was a Somali word. When Somaliland broke away he became a local war-lord/tribal leader and I remember seeing his photo in a paper and he had an Afro haircut. This immaculate soldier had reverted to his tribal robes, he had gone completely bush.

In Djibouti we were very well served by our honorary consul who was the manager of the British Bank of the Middle East – a slightly eccentric character called Christopher Reddington. He did the job very well and used quite a lot of his own money for entertaining. He got a miserable allowance from HMG, but he felt if he did the job it had to be done properly so he entertained well and knew everyone and went round with me on my calls. He was a pillar of strength. Then the British Bank closed down and a very able Belgian business-man became the honorary consul. He was also very helpful, but without quite the panache of Reddington.

We were lucky really and I always felt the honorary consuls got a pretty raw deal. They did not get much money from HMG and they did not get much recognition either and if you tried to get them awards the Office would say, “Oh they have only been in the job for three years. So and so in Europe has been doing it for twenty years, we’ll give him something.” The reason they were only in these jobs for two or three years was that the places were really difficult. No right minded man would want to spend ten years in Djibouti.

I thought Reddington did an excellent job under pretty rough conditions and he absolutely saved my bacon when there was civil war in South Yemen in 1985/86. It was basically tribal, but it was put in ideological terms, the extreme Left versus the centre Left. One lot was supported by the Russians, one lot were not. The Politbureau started shooting each other and there was a nasty civil war and we had to evacuate the British community. There was no ship around except the Royal Yacht *Britannia*, which happened to be passing through the Red Sea. So the Royal Yacht was diverted to Aden and took everyone off. It was a tremendous operation and they all came into Djibouti. The honorary consul coped magnificently. It was not just Brits, it was Bangladeshis and Indians and Pakistanis and a whole range of people of vaguely British origin so some had passports and some didn't. The story was that they claimed to be British and as they walked up the gang plank they dropped their passport in the sea and claimed it had been lost. One way and another it was a tremendous drama and the honorary consul coped with it all, helped by the various communities in Djibouti who rallied round. I never got over there while the job was going on.

I had been feeling a bit tired and run down and we had a lovely Irish doctor who said, "David, don't go into work. Take a glass of whisky, relax and sit the afternoon out." I thought this is a great prescription, I'll follow it. Then this thing happened in Aden and we had the only map of Aden in Sana'a. We had a one inch British Ordnance Survey map of British Aden so we handed it over to the Yemenis, Yemeni intelligence, so they could know what was going on. I am not sure we ever got it back. The North Yemenis started to think of moving south but in the end they thought better of it. It would have attracted the wrath of the Russians. However a lot of political refugees on the losing side came up from Aden and sat around chewing qat.

ML – Was Taiz part of the north or south?

DT – Taiz was part of the north. We used to go down to do visits. We had a few aid workers there and one or two British teachers and commercial companies, but not much. And the same in Hodeida which was hot and humid and squalid on the coast. There had been British banks in all three (Sana'a, Taiz and Hodeida) but all were closed down by BBME while I was there, which was rather depressing. The Bank used to send out Sir James Craig, who had been ambassador in Riyadh and became a director of BBME and he had been the foremost Arabist in the Service. I admired him immensely. He had been my head of chancery when I was second secretary in Jeddah. Whenever he came out it was to break the news of another

closure. They had obviously decided it was not economic to have a manager and an assistant manager out from UK on expatriate rates. It was not terribly surprising.

Relations with the South were interesting because on every public occasion there would be an enormous panegyric to Yemeni unity and how we love our southern brothers. The truth was they distrusted them utterly. I remember only once in my three years there noticing a car with a southern number plate. There was almost no traffic across the border. I once went to the border to meet the ambassador from Aden and for an hour nothing passed on the road from Taiz to Aden, which was the main artery. The first British ambassador who came up from Aden was very cooperative and he had long discussions with the Yemeni political people, intelligence and military, and they found it very useful to know what was happening in Aden. When his successor visited and they started prodding him for information, he replied: "I can't possibly discuss the government to which I am accredited in this manner", and more or less stalked out. I felt like saying, "whose side are you on?" He took this terribly correct line that he couldn't possibly comment on his host government.

I think it was a reasonably successful time. The place had not gone to pot. Our trade had increased. We had had a few ministerial visits. People loved coming to Yemen. Our two Ministers of State, Sainsbury and Channon came out and John Stanley, the Minister of State in the MOD as well. But they really did not have much to offer the Yemenis and if you didn't have anything to offer you didn't get to see the President, you saw the Foreign Minister. The Yemenis were quite canny at grading your reception by the amount of money you produced and we were not going to allocate money for anything other than terribly worthy projects which had been determined five years ago. I was relieved to leave in a way, but it had been a very interesting time and it was my wife's favourite post, she really loved the Yemen. But she did not have to deal with the Yemenis in a business sense in the way that I did.

Falkland Islands Department 1987-90

I was not too keen because I did not think it would be a terribly interesting job and I did not have much patience with the Falkland Islands issue and thought it all rather a waste of time. Then I learned that being Head of Falkland Islands Department meant that I was actually responsible for Argentina as well, so it was a slightly more three dimensional job than I had originally expected. When I got there it was a very able department, full of incredibly bright first secretaries and the Under Secretary, Robin Fearn, was a very impressive character, but he had been burnt by the Falkland Islands. He had been the Head of South American

Department before the war and he really bore the brunt of the, “The Foreign Office are trying to get rid of the Falklands” or the “The Foreign Office have done a secret deal with Argentina” or “Why didn’t they see it coming”, accusations. Of course when eventually the Franks report came out it was clear that Robin’s department, the political department, had done their best to get ministers to grasp the problem and ministers always thought it was not that serious and it was not going to happen so they could put it off again, kick it into the long grass, until in 1982 the Argentines actually invaded. So Robin was very neuralgic about the Falklands, as were all the upper reaches of the Office. I think they had had such a pasting from Margaret Thatcher during the war and certainly Sir Geoffrey Howe was very nervous about crossing her on anything to do with the Falklands. And so we lived in what was known at the time as ‘the pre-emptive cringe’ before Margaret Thatcher and certainly on Falklands matters this seemed to be true. We never dared cross her in any way.

So it was an interesting department, very well staffed and we dealt with the Falkland Islands Government Office in London, which was a sort of mini embassy staffed by a couple of Falkland Islanders. They were the first Falkland Islanders I had ever met and of course they were just like us. It was good in that there were funds to get down there and see the place. I went south every year. One year I even managed to get to South Georgia, which is 800 miles away from the Falklands and you travelled by ship, so that was quite a long journey. But you got to know the place and you got to know everyone in it because after all there were only 2,000 people and only a few were politically active. The councillors and senior officials were a couple of dozen. I must say I found myself falling in love with it - I really liked it.

It was quite a positive time. To begin with Anglo – Argentine diplomacy seemed to take place through a series of notes via the Americans because we did not have diplomatic relations. We had an interests section in the Swiss embassy, which was staffed by a very able man called Alan Hunt, who was extremely bright, but he was not allowed to meet Argentine ministers. So the Americans acted as a sort of facilitator for this exchange of notes, but it was very unproductive and very slow and never got anywhere. This was when we had the, supposedly moderate, government of President Alfonsin. Then there were elections and Carlos Menem took over. Carlos Menem was widely considered to be an extremist and very bad news. He had spoken of wading to the Falklands through rivers of blood. When he won the election we thought it was going to be dreadfully tough. In fact he was, I think, convinced by some of his business friends that this was a problem that needed solving, not exacerbating. It did not take long before we restored relations and relations with Argentina

were really not bad. It struck me later that there was a contrast with dealing with the Arabs, where life was one perpetual damage limitation exercise and dealing with the Argentines, who, alright they had their point of view, but they were reasonable people. If you both decided you wanted to restore relations, you did it and worked around the difficulties, so that went well. We re-opened our embassy and I had a real feeling of achievement over that.

The other feeling of achievement was the Falklands internal scene. When we installed a fisheries zone, about a year before I took over the department, it had absolutely transformed the economy and the Government's income had quintupled in about a year. The more entrepreneurial Islanders went into the fishery and started joint ventures with the Spanish and Japanese companies and the money just poured in. We could build new satellite links and a new secondary school and people started getting reasonable wages and the health care improved. So it was a very nice feeling to have money which you could spend sensibly and which you could put in reserves. We put enormous sums in reserves.

ML – It was some sort of squid wasn't it?

DT – It was a squid which nobody had really known was there. The few who knew it was there were fishing it quietly and taking it away. Then suddenly these squid were discovered and HMG decided to impose a fisheries zone. The last straw I remember for HMG was when the Argentine navy sallied into what we considered our zone and sank a couple of trawlers. I cannot remember whether they were Japanese or Taiwanese or what, but they sank a couple of boats within our 150 mile zone. This was really too much as we had been talking about an international agreement to sort it all out through the FAO and the Argentines really were not interested. When they sank the trawlers, HMG said "That's it; we'll impose this zone of 150 miles". Everyone said "Oh, you'll be boycotted. It's illegal you cannot do it". But the fishing companies queued up to buy the Falklands licences. It was clear we had under-priced them and the price went up the next year. So it was the squid that saved the country and the atmosphere was much easier and the Islanders developed self-confidence. When you have money in your pocket you have a different attitude to the world; when you are no longer relying on the ODA for aid projects on grasslands or veterinary research, but spending the money on what you actually want to buy, it does a lot for your self-esteem. From that point of view it was a good place to deal with and when I was Governor I found it even more so.

It was generally a positive time because the Islands were making good progress and our relations with Argentina were improving. The last push with Argentina was getting Mrs

Thatcher on side and that was done by Crispin Tickell, who was ambassador at the UN at the time, and negotiations with the Argentines had been in New York. The final push for resuming relations was in Madrid; talks at which Crispin was chairing the British side. I did not go because I was about to leave the department, so my deputy went. But Crispin Tickell was prepared to face up to Margaret Thatcher and say, “look, we need to do this now. We can’t go on with the shadow of the war. We have got to restore relations sensibly.” She accepted it from him, whereas the Foreign Office and Howe had always been very loath to cross her on this. It was a successful operation really and I left with an ambassador just going out as I went to my next posting, which was Beirut.

ML – How do you think one could get the population of the Falklands to increase?

DT – It is a problem. Perhaps we might discuss that when we talk about the Falklands, which is one stage away.

Beirut 1990-92

After Falkland Islands Department I was posted to Beirut. Which was flattering in a way, but there was not exactly a queue of people wanting the job. But it did mean promotion, which was nice. There was a long briefing in London on hostages. I think at the time I went out there were four British hostages: Terry Waite, John McCarthy, Jackie Mann and the man from Northern Ireland, Brian Keenan. We solved the man from Northern Ireland by declaring that he was an Irish citizen, so it would be easier for him to get out. That proved to be true, he was first out. But for a long time absolutely nothing happened while I was there. There were endless approaches from people saying, I can fix this or I can fix that. Usually they couldn’t, they were simply people trying to make money out of the situation. In my view what really changed the situation was HMG pinning the responsibility on the Iranians because it was effectively the Iranians, who were controlling the Lebanese groups who were holding the hostages, and for most of the time I was there people thought the hostages were a card in the hand of the Iranians. Douglas Hogg, who was the Minister of State in the Foreign Office, at one stage in Parliament said quite bluntly that the Iranians could solve this problem, that the Iranians were effectively holding the hostages, and when they decided to release them the problem would be solved. I think the Iranians then realised that they were being fingered for this and perhaps it was not a clever thing to do to keep the hostages. And fairly quickly the negotiations through the UN representative, a very bright Italian, took place mostly in Damascus and the hostages were taken to Damascus and released; which was a

very satisfactory outcome. But it was strange for us because we knew the hostages were in Lebanon, but we had no idea where. It was an odd feeling as you drove through the city, they could be in the very houses you were driving past.

ML – So there was never any thought of trying to find them and get them out with a sort of “coup de main?”

DT – No. We simply were not that far ahead, at least from what I knew. Then later it turned out many of the hostages had been held in Beirut. I thought perhaps they were being held in the countryside, in the Bekaa valley, but certainly some of the time they were in Beirut.

The hostage who most impinged on us was Jackie Mann, because his wife Sunnie was still in Beirut and we kept an eye on her and tried to comfort her. She was a splendid lady. The Manns were well into their seventies then. They had been living in Beirut quite happily. He had flown with the RAF in the Battle of Britain. He'd been quite badly burnt. Then he had flown for Middle East Airways. Finally they retired to Beirut. After many of the western hostages were taken some, I think free-lance, Lebanese simply took Jackie hostage for purely commercial reasons, to sell him on. He was held by them and eventually released about the same time as the rest. It was wonderful to see him out. We had never met John McCarthy. We had met his father in Essex: he was a lovely man, a former paratrooper, a captain I think, very tough and very realistic about what could be done and what couldn't be done. He was alive to see him released, which was good. So the Mann family were the ones that most directly concerned us and once Jackie was released they moved on to Cyprus. The High Commission there kept an eye on them and we were invited over for the presentation of a CBE to Jackie Mann, which was a very nice occasion.

The other side I should mention was security because we had a military police body guard. There were about nine Royal Military Police and then we had about a hundred Lebanese guards around, some of whom were very high calibre indeed. They had been trained by the RMP and they were excellent. One always had complete confidence in the RMP, they were very professional and politically very sensitive, in that they could read the situation. I remember them once saying; “We are not going to take the sub machine guns with us on this trip, we'll keep them in the car and just carry side arms as it is not a dangerous time and we do not want to be flashing guns around”. They were much more discreet than the American ambassador's body guards who all had tin hats and drove through the town firing guns in the air. The RMP were also very sensitive personally, they would hang back and not crowd you,

they would give you your space. I had enormous admiration for them, they did a superb job. It must have cost the Office a fortune because I am sure the MOD charged them for that service. We had very good Lebanese guards who provided guards for embassy staff going outside the compound and also guarded embassy staff quarters. We once took a photo of the entire embassy security contingent and there were about 150 people, almost an infantry company. The military police used to take them up to a barren valley somewhere and they would all blast away, so they did actually know how to use their guns. Their instinct was very sensible, if things got rough you got out; you threw your smoke bombs and beat a retreat.

ML – What was happening with the Israelis then?

DT – The Israelis were occupying a large part of South Lebanon. Not a large part by later standards, but a considerable part. The UN had a peace-keeping force covering the same area, so you had these two armies almost on separate planes of existence. They were driving on the same roads, but did not acknowledge each other's existence. We used to go down occasionally and visit the UN forces there and talk to them. I was always surprised by how little authority they had – how little they could do. They could only fire in self-defence. If they found Palestinians going towards the Israeli troops with guns they could stop them. They could remove their guns but they had to return them later on. I was quite surprised at how their hands were tied.

ML – Was that an Irish contingent?

DT – Irish, French, Fijian, I think. There were about four or five nationalities. We always used to go and see the Irish and once our Under Secretary, David Gore Booth, came out. His family are very well known in Ireland. It was almost like a royal visit when he came, the Irish were delighted to meet him and chatted away. One of his great aunts had been a famous fighter for Irish freedom and the other had been very Anglo-Irish, very much on the British side. He was a very good man to work for in London. He came out several times.

ML – What was the political set up in Lebanon?

DT – The political set up when we arrived: well underlying everything were the religious sects and that was where a Lebanese's first loyalty lay, to his religious community. But on top of that you had various divisions within the Christian community. You had the remnants of the Lebanese state. There were two Presidents and when we arrived there were actually

three authorities. The official President, Elias Hrawi, lived in a block of flats in South Beirut. I presented him with my credentials. Next there was a former army commander, who had briefly become President, General Michel Aoun. He had a little canton, or rump state of his own, where we lived. Then north of us was a Christian warlord called Samir Geagea. He had another considerable area, about the size of an English county. By the time I got there it was impossible to explain the Lebanese situation in any meaningful terms to any outsider because they always said it was a religious conflict. And you said, "Yes, but the recent fighting has all been between these two Christian war lords and their private armies". General Aoun's, which was the remnants of half of the original Lebanese army and Geagea's, which was bits of the Lebanese army and bits of a militia of his own, supplied with Centurion tanks by the Israelis. Then beyond that you had a Moslem group in the north, who had Syrian backing, you had the Druze, who had their own little statelet with some Syrian involvement and in the South you had the Shia Moslems, who had a political representative in the central government, but also had their own militia, Hezbollah. They were the people doing the kidnapping. Their writ ran from south Beirut down to the border. So you had to be very aware of where you were and what the village you were driving into was. Generally our local staff were very good at that.

The one occasion we got shot at was when we were deep in Christian territory and I had not realised that there were a few Shia villages remaining in this area. We went out picnicking to a magnificent cave, which a waterfall burst out of the hills. It was where the Greek God Adonis was said to have been killed and the waterfall was his blood. We were there and some people came down from a Shia village and more or less said "bugger off"; so we did. And as we were driving away they fired after us. It was a very rugged track and we were in an armoured Land Rover and there were steep hills and the clutch went, as they tended to do. So we had to abandon the Land Rover and walk to the nearest village, which was Christian. They sat us down and gave us a cup of coffee and got out their machine gun and fired at the Shia village across the valley to shut them up. Eventually the embassy sent another car and recovered us. I reported this in a teleletter to London, not a telegram, because I thought a telegram would get a wider distribution and alarm people. I was right to do so because for about a week there was no mention of the incident, then it appeared in one of the English newspapers. I think the Office had mild kittens, but they could at least say I had reported it to them and there had been no follow up and no damage, so all was well.

The big political event when we were there was the destruction of General Aoun. The remaining Lebanese army, the one of the legal President, to whom I had presented credentials, was run by a very able Christian, General Emile Lahoud. He and the Syrians between them arranged a sort of pincer operation and they struck against Aoun early one morning. The Office must have had notice of this somehow, because we were planning to go up to north Lebanon and the night before we got a frantic telegram saying, "For God's sake don't leave! Stay where you are". The next morning a fighter jet came over, which was very unusual, we never saw planes. The airport sometimes operated, but that was about ten miles away. This plane flew over and dropped a few bombs. Then the Syrian artillery started up all round the horizon, firing into our area. The Syrians swept down and overwhelmed Aoun in about a morning. We were in the shelter. I had one call back to London to tell them it had started and that we were all safe in our basement surrounded by sand bags. One rocket struck the building and broke a few windows, but otherwise we were alright. The Syrians invaded. Aoun and his senior commanders leapt into an armoured personnel carrier and disappeared into the French embassy and that was the end of that. The Lebanese government settled down with the Syrians and reintegrated the army. They took Aoun's troops back into the army without much difficulty. A few of the more hard line leaders may have been removed, but that was it.

Beirut had had these barriers across it like an international border. You met one road block and went through it and then round the corner there was another opposing road block. They were never in sight of each other. The border was often demarcated by shipping containers; extraordinary walls two or three high containers high blocking out the area. That border within Beirut disappeared after Aoun's defeat. The others remained. But the scene did not become much safer really. When we were first there you had regular artillery bombardments every afternoon or every evening about six o'clock they started and went on for about an hour or an hour and a half. Then in the morning there was a brief exchange of shells. This was almost the gunners earning their wages and it didn't worry people too much. It was usually along the front lines. Then people would go to work and work all day and come back and do their shopping and then the evening bombardment would start for a couple of hours, then it would stop. Then only occasional shell fire and machine guns went off. So you kept off the streets. I remember almost the first or second night we got there, we went off to a very nice restaurant, which I remembered from my time in MECAS. L'Os it was called, The Bone. The people in the embassy staff there said: "it's fine so long as there are people on the streets."

But if ever you notice the streets are empty, drive into an underground garage or something like that". Two or three people a day got killed I suppose, but no more than would have been killed in ordinary traffic accidents. But when the front lines were removed the bad guys got the freedom of Beirut and you would get alarming intelligence reports that, say a green Fiat had been primed as a car bomb so you would drive nervously along looking for green Fiats. It was more uncertain. When it had been divided into little principalities at least you knew in your own area you were reasonably safe.

The Lebanese political scene was a delight to do business with. They were always keen to meet ambassadors and chat to ambassadors. It was a free country in the sense that the newspapers were free and you got intelligent comment. You could have a dinner party and you could get a couple of ministers and an archbishop or a general. It was what I imagined diplomatic life was like before I went to the Arab world. Although their co-religionists were all busy killing each other, the upper crust all knew each other quite well. They might be busy arranging each other's murders but they were all on social terms. I remember once going on leave to Damascus for R&R and someone talked about a particular hotel as being where all the expats went. I thought it is funny but that is a word we do not use in Beirut. Partly because there were not many expats, but partly because we were really integrated. We didn't need to keep to ourselves. You needed to be careful, but by and large the Lebanese were a pleasure to deal with.

ML – What was our policy? What was the embassy expected to achieve?

DT - I think the embassy was expected to show that there still was a Lebanon. The British government recognised the existence of the Lebanese state and the British ambassador presented his credentials to the Lebanese president. We did not really take sides. My predecessor, Alan Ramsey, who was an impressive man, had quite good relations with General Aoun and he tried to get talks going between Aoun and others. But Aoun was adamant he would not move. The only time I saw Aoun it was like something out of a bad thriller. He was sitting in the ruins of his palace, the presidential palace, a rather vulgar modern building on a hill overlooking Beirut, which had by then been heavily shelled by the Syrians. I think there was an electric light in the room but it was after dark and he was sitting in the shadows and was not giving on anything and being unconstructive. When the Syrians attacked he fled in his armoured personnel carrier to the French embassy and a few months later the French got him down to the shore in a convoy of cars and put him on a ship back to

France. And now he's back in Lebanon and he's the President. So there you are – talk about reverses of fortune, he's apparently become the Iranians' man.

The embassy staff were very good and the embassy local staff were brilliant. They were very plucky and just soldiered on and I had enormous admiration for the Lebanese, the way they put up with this violence and mayhem. The one time that the bombardment started in the early afternoon and we got most of the staff down to our basement, which was probably the safest place in the compound, they were really upset because their children were at school and they were not at home. They felt they could cope with the bombardment if they were in their own house. They knew the safe corners, they could go down to the basement, their children were with them. But when they were caught out away from home with no immediate prospect of getting home, some of them were very upset. But by and large they were very robust and gave very good advice on the local scene.

One afternoon I went back to MECAS to see what was left of it. It was a shell. The school itself, which was a large modern building, had been completely looted, even the window frames had been torn out and it was derelict. Our house was still there. The furniture was still recognisable, but it was a mess. A group of very wild Palestinian Fedayeen had occupied the village and they had lived there for a while.

The other thing that happened while I was in Beirut was the invasion of Kuwait. I remember going to the Iraqi national day reception and having a very jovial conversation with the Iraqi Ambassador and I think it was about ten days later they invaded Kuwait and they became enemies. And their friends in Lebanon, who had been reasonably well disposed to us suddenly became hostile, or potentially hostile. Areas that had been absolutely safe, like the little town of Byblos, suddenly became potentially hostile. That was unsettling and we were more or less confined to the compound for a long time, a fortnight during the immediate crisis and during the war itself we were kept there. That was 1991 and the invasion was in August and the liberation was not until about November / December. The Lebanese were saying we were not going to win - the Iraqis had an enormous army and were battle hardened against Iran. Of course we went through them like a knife through butter - the Lebanese responded: "Oh we knew that was going to happen. We knew they didn't stand a chance against you". We left at the beginning of 1992.

Falkland Islands / South Georgia 1992-95

DT – We have got to the stage in 1992 where I was appointed Governor of the Falkland Islands and also Commissioner for South Georgia. This was a post which I had been angling for in a way because I had been Head of Falkland Islands Department and I had seen the Falklands and had some idea of the role of Governor. I found the idea appealing so I did the usual briefings in London and then flew down with my wife in June 1992. I enjoyed it enormously as a posting. It was largely domestic, largely governing the country where you had this sort of figurehead position. You chaired the Executive Council and the Legislative Council. LEGCO was eight councillors and they chose three of themselves to sit on EXCO, which was effectively the cabinet. As long as you got on well with the councillors it was a very smooth ride. I took trouble to understand their points of view and to remember that it was their country and the budget was their money, not London's money.

We were very fortunate in that the fishery regime had been introduced in 1986 and had absolutely transformed the economy of the Islands because their income had been quintupled in a couple of years. The Falkland Islands government with the support of HMG had imposed a fishery regime around the Islands for 150 miles and although the Argentines and lots of other people huffed and puffed, they could do little to prevent it and all the foreign fishing companies, Spanish, Polish, Taiwanese, Japanese queued up to buy licences. So the income from licences became about three quarters of the national budget. The country imposed a very enlightened fisheries regime, it was generally considered to be one of the best in the world, assisted by Imperial College in London. Professor John Beddington (now Sir John FRS) designed this regime and it was implemented. Foreign fisheries companies used to appear and say "Who do we have to pay what to?" and we said, "No, you do not have to bribe anyone to get a licence. You simply have to pay the fees that are requested".

ML – This was the famous squid wasn't it? What was it used for?

DT – It was Ilex squid. It was a very high value product in Japan and in the Far East generally. They dried the squid and you ended up with something rather the consistency of potato crisps. People bought it in little packets and took it to the pictures or had it as a snack before meals. There were two kinds of squid: one was exported to the Far East and the other went to Spain and was sold around the Mediterranean as Calamari. That was even higher value, but there was less of it so it was about a quarter of the total revenue.

MT – Did it have any impact on whatever predator lived on the squid?

DT - No. There was a lot of talk. You had to be quite careful because the squid's entire life cycle took place over one year, from spawning to full adulthood to spawning again and then it died. If you wiped out the squid through over fishing there was a real danger that with normal predation there would be nothing left for the following year. So there had to be a degree of "escapement". A certain amount had to escape fishing to breed next year.

That was a success story and with that the Islanders were able to build a new secondary school and install new satellite dishes. So they had a really first class communications system. And they all paid themselves a little more, which was fair enough because it meant that wages caught up with British levels. The cost of living went up a little, but their wages more than kept up, so it became a very prosperous little community. What was encouraging was that the children went to secondary school and if they passed their GCSE they then went on to Peter Simmons College in Winchester for their 'A' levels; then to university and all these expenses were paid for by the Falkland Islands Government. When they graduated most of them came straight home. They might do a bit of work in the UK, but the loyalty to the Islands was very strong so there wasn't a brain drain. Those people, 25 years later are all taking jobs in government service and providing the leadership for the next generation. So from that point of view the internal scene was very encouraging and very prosperous.

HMG was responsible for defence and foreign relations. Defence was not really a problem. We had a succession of very capable and friendly commanders who rotated between the three armed services. My predecessor had had uneasy relations with one of the commanders, but when I was there we got on well and it was fun. We used to go for rides in Hercules or drop in on destroyers by helicopter, which I must say I enjoyed.

Relations with Argentina had been transformed at the time I was in Falkland Islands Department because we had ended up resuming diplomatic relations. When I was Governor the Argentine Foreign Minister was a man called Guido di Tella and he had been a political exile during the generals' time and had studied in Oxford. He had done some post graduate work there and he was full of good will. He could not change policy, but he was interested in the Islanders and wanted to know what they thought and would ring them up and try to draw them into conversation. Of course everyone was very suspicious of him. He used to give them all a video cassette every Christmas; usually of "Pingu the Penguin". Everyone was

terribly suspicious, but after his departure they really missed him as he was so much more reasonable than subsequent Argentine governments this century.

The air link with Chile had just started and we had weekly flights to Punta Arenas in a Twin Otter.

ML – It's a long haul in a little thing like a Twin Otter.

DT – It's a long haul and what's more, they had removed the plane's lavatory in order to put in additional fuel tanks, so I was always distinctly nervous on that flight. It did 120 mph, which was fine if you had the wind behind you, but if you were flying into a 60 mph headwind it was pretty slow. I remember coming back once via Chile and we stopped at Punta Arenas where we had a splendid Honorary Consul called John Rees. He took me round and I interviewed the Deputy Prefect and various people at the Navy and University. I was waiting to catch the plane to Stanley when I was approached by a man in a mackintosh who said he was the Argentine Consul which I am sure he was and he informed me that the Argentine government were going to accept Falkland Islands passports as valid for flying through Argentina. Pre-war, Islanders had been told their passports were not acceptable and they needed to have what was called a white card, which was just that, a white card with a photograph. This had caused enormous resentment with Islanders who felt deprived of their nationality. It was interesting that the Argentines had chosen this rather odd method for telling me that they were not going back to the white card: if they wanted to see people they were going to have to accept their pukka passports. That was Di Tella I think, being reasonable.

ML – We never considered doing what the French did with places like St Pierre et Michelon, simply making them provinces of France with their own MPs ?

DT – No, and I think we were right not to do so. At that stage in the Falklands there were less than 3,000 people and you could not have them electing an MP because they could only elect one twentieth of an MP. It's the same with Gibraltar I think. And also if there is going to be any solution at all it is going to be in building the country up enough to allow it to become independent. And having an adequate income gave people a lot more self-confidence and a belief that they could do things on their own and buy what they wanted. They did not need ODA any more. There was an enormous sigh of relief when the last ODA project wound up because of the incessant nannying that seemed to go with it. So although

nobody was talking about independence it was becoming increasingly there, at the back of people's minds, if the population continues to increase. If you could guarantee the country's security, the bigger the population the more secure it will be and the more stable it will be.

There was also South Georgia, which is 800 miles away from the Islands and only accessible by boat. I went over once every year. In those days we still had a British army garrison. There was a platoon there. One of the most remarkable evenings of my career was when I had gone over with Val on a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship and when we landed we stayed in the hospital, which was just another building with a bit of medical equipment in it. We were invited up to a mess night by the Ghurkha garrison and we had curried reindeer brought in by a piper. It was really magical.

South Georgia had fairly minor problems. We declared a fishing zone around it because people were simply poaching the fish. The Russians in the 1970s had exterminated one or two stocks. They had been fishing round the place and nobody even knew they were there. So we imposed a 150 mile limit and then brought it up to 200, which was the maximum you were allowed. That was very successful in the longer term. It took a bit of time to get established but there were a couple of fish stocks there that were very valuable, Patagonian Ice Fish and the Tooth Fish, (because it had the most horrible teeth). A certain amount of krill was also fished there. Otherwise there were just problems like the church, which was a Norwegian pre-fabricated building put up in 1914 and it kept rotting and we kept getting people to mend it and then the new work blew off in the next gale. South Georgia did not have much income before the fishery regime started working. I remember our total reserves in the bank were less than one million pounds. Actually the Norwegian government were very good and gave us some money to work on the church and there was a very successful museum just starting up, which my predecessor William Fullerton had inaugurated. That was visited by all the cruise ships so that gave us an additional income to the colony.

ML – Isn't there a huge problem with rats?

DT – Well there was. When we were there it was a problem, we had all these rats and they ate the little birds. A successor, Howard Pearce, had the imagination to see that this could possibly be cured and he recruited a very prosperous Scandinavian whom he had met down on a cruise. He persuaded him to finance a rat eradication scheme and this seems to have worked. Various people said if you leave ten rats you may as well not do the thing at all as they will just breed again. But various helicopters were hired and poison was sprinkled over

the land and the rats disappeared. Now you can apparently hear the pipits calling happily and all is well. I am afraid that I did not even consider it a possibility when I was there as I could not see where we were going to get this sort of money from, but my successor had more imagination.

The other problem we had in South Georgia was asbestos because a lot of dangerous asbestos had been used by the Norwegian whalers to insulate the buildings in their settlements. The buildings were starting to decay and the asbestos was blowing around the town. The settlements were all deserted, but there was a danger to tourists and a possibility of litigation, so a programme was worked out to remove the asbestos and that was quite expensive, but again that happened really after my time. South Georgia now is a very flourishing enterprise. Its fishery is producing a good income. They have taken measures to stop snaring albatrosses on their hooks, the asbestos is under control, the tourists are coming and the rats are all dead. The reindeer have either all been slaughtered or evacuated. A lot were taken to the Falklands to produce reindeer meat. They were considered to be non-native and therefore they had to go. There was a slight danger of over grazing and depleting the vegetation on the Island, but it was largely for the same reason that the huskies were removed from Antarctica: a sort of environmental purism that no outside species must be allowed there, except of course man.

I enjoyed the Falklands very much. It was my favourite post. London really let you get on with it. When I was there we started on the oil prospection. That's to say we started to draw up legislation to determine who could prospect for oil and how. Our experts were our Attorney General with the British Geological Survey acting as consultants. They started going to the various oil fairs around the world, mainly in Texas and when I left they were actually prospecting, doing sonar geophysical investigations. So that got off to a good start. Some Islanders were very nervous about it and thought it would mean the death of all livestock and so on, but the younger and more venturesome souls saw that it had to be the way ahead. Apart from anything else it would ensure that HMG would never abandon the Islands and that they would always be of economic value. Although the income from oil would go to the Falkland Islands' Government, not to HMG, nonetheless it would make an enormous difference. When I was there we negotiated a letter from Falkland Islands Councillors to HMG saying if we ever get an income from oil, be assured that we will take over more of the expenses of the defence of the Islands. That I sort of negotiated and it was one of the few bits of real negotiation I have done in my career. It produced this letter – the Battle Day Letter - which people were happy about and while the income is still about three

or four years away, when it starts to flow Islanders will try and make some serious contribution to the cost of defence.

ML – I suppose the trouble with that is that it all depends on the oil price.

DT – That is exactly what has happened. With the slump in the oil price people have ceased preparing to drill. The plans are all there but they have not taken them forward. They say it is going to need an oil price of US\$55 a barrel before it becomes economic. It has just about reached that now, but it still oscillating a bit and they need to see a little more improvement. But everything is there, it can be done without reliance on the mainland or any danger of Argentina interfering. It will provide an extraordinary income when it starts coming in. I do not know what they will do with it.

ML – Are they going to drill in the sheltered sounds, or in the horrendous seas?

DT – The weather is bad, but from the point of view of drilling it is no worse than west of the Shetlands. Because what you don't have in the South Atlantic, you have dreadful winds and so on, but you do not have 'reach', so you do not have these waves building up over thousands of miles across the Atlantic and reaching enormous size by the time they hit the Shetlands. You are only, as people are forever reminding us, about three or four hundred miles from the mainland, which is effectively sheltering the Islands from westerly swells. So it is not a big problem.

Colombo, Sri Lanka 1996-99

After that I was told there were three postings coming up. Two of them were in North Africa, Morocco and Tunis, and one was Sri Lanka and that was the one I was selected for. I was sorry in a way not to finish off my career in an Arab post, but I think Colombo was a much more interesting and active post.

In Colombo the British High Commissioner had a sort of status - more than any other country I think, except of course India. The Indians were the major power in the land, but we still had very good relations with all the elite in Sri Lankan society. You could talk about an elite there because there were people who had been educated in Sri Lankan public schools and gone to universities in Sri Lanka and sometimes in England as well. They spoke English better than they spoke Sinhalese or Tamil and they were very well disposed by and large. But they were people in their 50s or 60s or older. The younger generation's English was

much shakier and they had much more of a chip on their shoulder about British rule because they had not experienced it. The older generation had rather enjoyed the latter days of colonial rule when they had effectively internal self-government and a lot of freedom and before the ethnic problem had really reared its head. So the British representative had a degree of access there to the President and the Foreign Minister, which I had never seen in any post except perhaps in Muscat. The Foreign Minister had been at Oxford when I was there and I vaguely remembered this dark featured President of the Oxford Union whose name was very long. There were two prominent Sri Lankans in the Union at that time, one was Tamil, one was Singhalese, (not a difference we appreciated at Oxford), but they both had long polysyllabic names, which I never remembered. When I got to Sri Lanka one of them was Foreign Minister and the other, a presidential candidate, had been blown up by a Tamil suicide bomber a couple of years before. The Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar was a very able operator and a good friend and neighbour. Quite often I would wander across the road and he would drink a whisky and I would drink a beer and we would sit on his veranda and chew the fat. He was killed about ten years later by an assassin who got into a building overlooking his swimming pool and shot him. That was a real tragedy.

ML – It has been a terrible story really, Sri Lanka. Did you have a big immigration problem?

DT – It has. Yes there was. Many Tamils had fled Sri Lanka after the riots in 1983. There had been rioting in Colombo and a lot of Tamils had been murdered by their neighbours, so many of the rest took off for England and settled in communities in places like Tooting. This gave them very considerable electoral power in this country because it meant that the whole community, five or ten thousand votes, could be swung one way or the other on the determination of their political leaders. They were all heavily committed to the Tamil Tigers and they paid large sums of money to support them. Was this voluntary or intimidation? I think it was a bit of both. But it did mean that British politicians tended to be pro-Tamil and to chase us up with complaints about human rights. The major problem in Sri Lanka was the civil war. There were large areas of the north of the country that were under rebel control. There was a front line of trenches and stockades across the country and the army sat behind that and the Tigers sat on their side and occasionally they sent patrols out or shelled each other. But it was a serious war.

ML - Who was supplying the Tigers' logistical support?

DT – Most of it came from India. Not officially. But the government of Tamil Nadu province in the south, opposite Sri Lanka certainly facilitated the purchase of arms and they tended to be smuggled across from India. Money? I won't say it was never a problem, but they levied taxes on their expatriate communities all over the world, so they seemed to be able to afford quite effective arms. And they are as a race incredibly assiduous, hard-working people and their commander, a man called Velupillai Prabhakaran was an absolute fascist in many ways, a militarist, but he was a very effective guerrilla commander. I remember one summer when an army base, a brigade, was simply wiped out. It was extraordinary. They were in a big coastal defended area and the Tigers began by destroying all their communications and shelling all their radios and they simply lost touch. The government desperately tried to get reinforcements to them, but they were effectively wiped out. A few people emerged from wells and down palm trees when the government re-asserted control. It was a grim business.

We had a couple of very good defence attachés, well in with the military. Just before I got out there London tried to close down the defence attaché post. I thought this is really absurd in the middle of a war, when the host government really wanted our assistance and our views. In the end the Prime Minister of Sri Lanka had to write to John Major. The Prime Minister was old Mrs Bandaranaike, who was about seventy five or eighty and did not do very much. But she was wheeled out to write this letter and induce the Ministry of Defence to reconsider their decision. Eventually they sent another defence attaché.

The President of Sri Lanka was Mrs Bandaranaike's daughter, Chandrika Kumaratunga, who was a very impressive woman. I dare say she was about my age and she was very affable and would talk very frankly and was a good influence. She did her best to damp down racial tensions, which ironically had been fostered by her father, Prime Minister Bandaranaike, back in the 1950s when he made Sinhalese the national language, which was fine, but it excluded all the Tamils. That was really what set the Tamil insurgency off.

ML – Were the Tamils a British Empire import?

DT – No. Some of them were, but the basic Tamils had been there for about two thousand years. They did probably come from India. What was a British Empire import were the hill Tamil community. They were the Tamils who had been imported from South India to work on the tea plantations, because the Sinhalese did not enjoy that sort of work, neither did the Sri Lankan Tamils. The Tamils were interesting because they had quite a strong caste

system. But the LTTE were the deprived caste. They were fishermen and people like that. I remember one lawyer saying to me, “You have to remember that the LTTE, the Tamil Tigers, are the disenfranchised minority of a disenfranchised minority.” The Tamils felt they were excluded from political power, but within that the lowest caste felt that they had had a raw deal and they were going to get their own back.

The man who said that to me was blown up after I left. He was a very enlightened Tamil lawyer who was totally devoted to human rights and all the right things in life and he was killed by a twelve year old boy with a suicide vest who jumped on his car driving through Colombo. It was so depressing that the best Tamils I met were killed by their own people, the LTTE.

ML – Anyone who tried to find compromise and saw that was the only outcome. And then in the end they were completely defeated weren't they?

DT – They were and I must admit I was astonished by this. I did not foresee it because it seemed to me that man to man the Tamils would out fight the army. But I think the army got a lot of fresh equipment from China and really battered their way through. And the Tigers themselves split. There was a leadership split and part of them in one of the provinces hived off from the majority and I think that must have weakened them considerably. The army fairly brutally destroyed the Tigers and the question is open as to how many civilians they killed at the same time, but obviously quite a few. On the other hand the Tigers were using them as human shields and what could you do? But it caused a great stir.

ML – Do you follow it subsequently? Is there hope that things will settle down?

DT – I don't know. I think that things have settled down in that the Tigers have been removed from the scene, but there are still a lot of extreme Buddhist Singhalese with a racist attitude towards the Tamils and the Tamil communities abroad are still very hard line (rather like the Irish Americans) and see their only justification in continuing the struggle. So it could all go bad again. I hope not, but some of the Sri Lankan governments, the Singhalese, have not been terribly open minded and have been pursuing the feud. The Tamils need to be given a degree of internal self- government. At the time I was there that was what President Chandrika Kumaratunga was working towards. They were all supposed to have some degree of provincial decentralisation but it never really got anywhere.

They were very nice, very affable people the Singhalese. Very pleasant to be with and it is a very beautiful country. So we were there in the midst of this sort of low level terrorism, but every so often there would be a horrific bomb and a hundred people would be killed and in the north you just had this war going on. Occasionally we used to fly up to the north and go to Jaffna, which was occupied by the government, but was a totally Tamil city. We had the odd aid project there and we helped re-establish the public library which was a well-known institution. When I left the Tigers had been pushed back a bit but they then reclaimed territory and I could see no end to the war. But it did end and with a government victory, much to my surprise.

What else about Sri Lanka? You talked about immigration. The visa section was a constant drama. It was very sad really. People selling their family farms to pay enormous bribes to people smugglers who would fix their documents and they'd be sent round to the High Commission to try and get their visas. Some would get them and some wouldn't. Our visa staff had to be constantly on the lookout. And we had to be constantly on the lookout that our local visa staff were not being suborned. I do not think there were any awful incidents when I was there. It was a constant low level friction.

The Maldives

I was also accredited to the Maldives, which really is the most extraordinary country because they are a mass of coral islands and their total land area is about the size of Hyde Park. I think it is really very small, but they are a series of coral atolls stretching about 800 miles in one direction and about 150 miles across. The capital was on a fairly substantial island about a quarter of a mile by half a mile. They were these strange people. I think they had originally been ethnically Sri Lankans. Their language was certainly a variant of Singhalese, but they had all been converted to Islam and Islam was their identity. It was a difficult country to understand because they had no surnames. Somebody just had the name "Son of so and so". You had no idea who was related to whom. There was a fairly firm, mildly dictatorial government, which had been there for a long time. They had all been educated in Cairo, so I spoke Arabic to them, but of course they spoke beautiful English so it was not a problem. Their main worry was fundamentalism. That and global warming, because the whole country was just these coral atolls. The story was that the British Minister of State, Mr Hanley, a Conservative MP, went over there and asked them, "What is the highest point on this island?" He was about six foot so they replied, "You are Minister!"

The whole place was literally not more than a yard above sea level and it lived on the tourist industry. We would stay in a hotel about half an hour's boat ride from the capital and every morning you would emerge with your briefcase and your light weight suit past all the bikini clad tourists lounging round the pool.

ML – Do they have any plans what to do? With it all being so low lying you would think the sea would just wash over if they had a bad hurricane?

DT – Well, the great Tsunami, the one that did for Sri Lanka was not too destructive. It is all to do with the shelving of the beach and although the sea came up a bit it was not ferocious, because the coral atolls broke the force of it. So although it may have come up a bit it went down reasonably soon. It was a country I never really understood. The population was scattered over these atolls. The men went fishing. The women stayed at home and picked coconuts. Funnily enough the women had quite an independent role because there was a very high divorce rate. If the women got fed up with their husbands they simply left them and found someone else. I had no idea what was going on in the political life of the country. There were people who said the whole place was controlled by a rich Maldivian living in Singapore, who pulled all the strings. But since I left there has been a democratic upsurge and a change of government and the old gang was moved out, I think quite bloodlessly. Then I think they came back so it is not a beacon of light any more.

My last visit to the Maldives was to accompany John Prescott, the Deputy PM. Prescott was a great SCUBA diver, which I didn't realise. He had got word that the reefs on the Maldives were suffering from global warming, which I must admit I had no idea of. He appeared with a delegation of about half a dozen plus the BBC environmental correspondent, Roger Harrabin. I suppose it was probably Roger who had alerted him to this situation. So I went out with him and he swam around the reefs and pronounced that they were indeed all bleached and got himself photographed, which I suppose was partly the object of the exercise. He spoke to a few ministers, but the Maldivians were not at all keen on talking up the fact that their reefs were bleaching because it would put off the tourists. I think that is probably why I had never heard of it. Anyway John Prescott came and spoke briefly to the Sri Lankan ministers and flew on to the Maldives and then flew off home.

That was about my last contact with a minister from London. We had Rifkind out there, who was very impressive as always. And we had Liam Fox, who came out when he was a junior Foreign Office minister. Liam Fox at that stage nobody had ever heard of. When he arrived

in Sri Lanka I think he thought he could help to solve the civil war by calling the sides together and talking to them and that quickly fell through. But he then produced a much more manageable scheme, in that he got both the main parties (one was vaguely Left the other vaguely Right) to agree that they would not criticise any settlement which the other might reach with the Tigers. Which actually was an extremely positive thing, because otherwise they had this awful tendency to be spiteful with each other and to criticise whatever the other had done. So it did mean there was a chance of negotiating something sensible with the Tigers. And Fox did that really with the force of his own personality. He had nothing to offer them. He paid about three visits and as a result his name was far better known in Sri Lanka than it was in England, because, as I say, I do not think he was even a Minister of State. I think he was just a Parliamentary Under Secretary. He did achieve this, but it then rather got lost as the war lingered on. Eventually they did not need a political settlement, because they won a military victory. But it was an interesting exercise.

We had Prince Charles out for the 50th anniversary of independence, which was memorable. It was all terribly affable, but it was a bit of a worry beforehand because of the security situation. I was impressed because his security detachment came out and said it was OK; they could do it. The Sri Lankans were very good on security. They had to be because their lives were on the line. They did it right and he got on very well with the President and had a very nice trip to the country and visited Sri Lanka's leading architect, whose style was very much in Prince Charles's mode, very authentic, almost native architecture – the vernacular.

ML – There was the famous Sci-Fi man who lived on Sri Lanka. Did you meet him?

DT - Yes we did. Arthur C. Clark. I used to visit him and he was a fascinating person to talk to. He had all these contacts with the astronauts and world scientists and he knew a completely different sphere of people, of intellectuals really.

Sri Lanka was my last posting. I left and wrote my valedictory dispatch, which I can remember nothing about. I do not think it was quite as disgruntled as most of the valedictory despatches at that stage. In the end they stopped valedictory despatches.

ML – I don't know if you have any reflections on the whole diplomatic career that you would like recorded?

DT – Let me add a few reflections. One is that I have enjoyed it. I have enjoyed almost all my jobs except for a couple I suppose. I think it has been a worthwhile career. But I do find

the Middle East now so depressing. It has got steadily worse and worse. Every time you think it has reached a new low, something fresh and more horrific occurs. There must be reasons for that in the structure of Muslim society I suppose or Arab society. While I have enjoyed working in the Middle East, so many of the states there may not be failed states but they certainly produced a pretty inadequate living for their people – inadequate education, inadequate economic opportunity and so on.

The other great regret of course last June was Brexit and the feeling that all we had been working for, for the past thirty years, has really gone down the sink. Maybe it has, maybe it hasn't but I found it very depressing. I suddenly found the country I thought I was representing perhaps didn't really exist. A rather darker side of England emerged.

Otherwise the Office itself... I was quite glad to leave when I did. I thought it was becoming less sympathetic and it goes back in a way to the valedictory reports. A lot of people obviously felt that the system was not really working. And the Office's reaction, by simply forbidding people to write valedictory reports I thought was shameful. If a lot of senior people at the end of their career felt there was something which needed saying then surely the administration should have found someone to go round and look at the various problems that had been identified. Should we be doing something differently?

The Iraq war was a prime example of that, when all the experts said "Don't do it, it will all end badly." The politicians and their advisers said "Grasp the nettle" and of course it did all turn out for the worst.

Otherwise I would only say what everyone says in their valedictory despatches, an incredible tribute to my wife, who shared all my postings with me, some of them quite difficult. I know she was very grateful for the support we all received from the Office and the many wonderful experiences we had.

ML – Well thank you.