

BDOHP Interview Index and Biographical Details

Sir Andrew WOOD (Born 2 January 1940)

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This is an interview for the Diplomatic Service Oral History Programme. This is Jimmy Jamieson interviewing Sir Andrew Wood GCMG, Former British Ambassador to Russia and Moldova.

JJ: You have had a prestigious career. You served in two super power capitals, Moscow and Washington – and you are also currently Chairman of the British-Russia Centre.

AW: You could actually say I had a ruinous career since two countries – Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union – collapsed under my tender care.

JJ: You weren't entirely to blame I'm sure. Before all that you went to King's College Cambridge in 1958? What did you study there?

AW: I read History.

JJ: Did you think that prepared you well for a Diplomatic Service career?

AW: Well I'm very prejudiced in favour of history, because it influenced my diplomatic career but anyone who is involved in any way in politics and society and doesn't have a sense of history, at least has got half their equipment missing. So yes.

JJ: But you didn't study history with the intention of going into the Diplomatic Service, or did you?

AW: No, like most people at 20-21 I didn't really have a set idea as to what I wanted to do because I don't think one can know what it is one is going to get into. My father was in the Navy and then the Colonial Service and I had lived abroad, which I suppose pre-disposed me in a typical sort of way to the idea of moving around. Beyond that ...

JJ: It gets into the blood doesn't it? But nevertheless you took your History degree and you did join the Foreign Office almost immediately afterwards, I think?

AW: Immediately afterwards. Again looking back on it there was a mixture of reasons as to why I did that. One was because I needed a job; I'm starting at the most frivolous end first, another reason was I think that like a lot of people being used to taking exams, taking another somehow seemed an end in itself. Also because the idea of living abroad attracted me and without wanting to sound a bit pompous, because the idea of doing something which would be generally useful also was attractive. Plus nobody offered me any other job.

JJ: But perhaps you hadn't applied for many others?

AW: Oh but .. I thought the recruiting system in those days for most companies was pretty abysmal. They would send round people who gave across the subliminal message that you could be just like me in twenty years. Which might not be inspiring and is not likely to be attractive to 20 year olds.

JJ: The trouble with Foreign Office recruiting is that it does take an awful long time for people to know the results. Especially with the security checks which I suppose are even more rigorous these days than they might have been when you first joined? You wouldn't know of course. (laughter).... So you first went into Central Department?

AW: Yes

JJ: What did that cover exactly? Geographically.

AW: That covered essentially Southern Europe. That is Spain, it may or may not have included Austria, I'm not quite sure, but Spain, Italy, Greece Turkey and Cyprus, which was what I dealt with, and Malta. Half of a department which later became West European Department. It was, sort of, an autonomous part of a larger department.

JJ: Yes. You can tell me about Greece, Turkey and Cyprus in a moment, but what was your general feeling about being in the Office and what was it like, working with a lot of people in what is called the “Third Room”, or used to be, how did that impress you, one way or the other?

AW: Well it was very hard. The first year was very hard because I didn’t really have the faintest idea what I was for.

JJ: Nobody really explained it to you?

AW: Not really. They just assumed that you would know. Of course, if there was a particular issue you could go and ask somebody. I enjoyed it perfectly well, but it was difficult to believe this was a serious career for life. But then I was 21 or 22 or something, in which you don’t really take things as seriously as you might do later.

JJ: So you were flung into the deep end.

AW: There was a lot of paper on the Greek bonded debt and the issue of Turkish destroyers, though I can’t actually remember what the issue of Turkish destroyers was. The Greek bonded debt I know was arcane and a multi-faceted subject.

JJ: Which went back into history no doubt?

AW: it went back to the Republic of Crete for example, which not many people know ever existed, but it did. For one year...

JJ: Did you have a lot of drafting to do for your superiors on these arcane subjects?

AW: Some. It was basically writing minutes on jackets in those days. I got rebuked for not writing minutes on jackets when I saw no need. My first year I have to say was not a great success.

JJ: Whose view was that? Your view or theirs.

AW: Theirs certainly. Mine – it didn't really matter. I had an interesting conversation with David Muirhead who was then head of Personnel Department, but although my Assistant Head of Department was a sympathetic man in his way, he and I really didn't understand one another at all. Anyway, the subsequent couple of years there were

JJ: Did you have any formal training at all during your first year in the office?

AW: I studied Russian.

JJ: Where?

AW: At Carlton House Terrace. Then I went to live in Paris for a bit. I lived with a very nice elderly lady..... she was not a Soviet Russian. She was of Jewish extraction. More of an intellectual than someone who had actually fought in the army, if that is what you mean by White Russian.

JJ: Okay, but that...

AW: She wasn't a Red Russian.

JJ: .. suggests that either you or the Office, or both of you had decided that you would want to spend time in the Soviet Union during your career?

AW: Yes, yes. Later the language training, and choice of language, became much more refined than it was then. There were special aptitude tests and so on. When I first joined I had expressed some interest during the interviews in learning Chinese, and they were quite keen for me to learn Chinese. I didn't do that partly because I wasn't actually sure that I wanted to go to China, an impression very much reinforced by meeting someone

whom I'd known very well before who had been a bachelor in Peking and though he'd enjoyed it, it struck me that he'd gone a bit round the bend. He hadn't really, but he seemed very odd. Partly because I specifically wanted to do Russian and because I'd no idea whether I had the linguistic aptitude to do a language like Chinese.

JJ: Quite a different language. Did you do any other training on economics or..?

AW: Later, not then. But then the idea was that one would learn on the job. By no means stupid.

JJ: I think I had very little formal training except on management matters. Three weeks at the London School of Economics, mainly learning on the job and my first year abroad was without any training at all. I remember being told I had to write a speech for the High Commissioner while I was in Lagos. I said, how can I possibly know what he wants to say.

AW: You start at the wrong end. He doesn't know what he wants to say. You have to make it up for him.

JJ: Exactly. I was slow to learn. So Greece, Turkey and Cyprus were in a sense your specialities. Were you dealing with serious problems with Greece and Turkey and conflict in Cyprus and so on? EOKA.

AW: After EOKA. There was a State Visit from Greece at that time which I had to handle and there was a similar sort of visit, not actually a State Visit, I had all the visits from Turkey. And there were the issues to be dealt with in the normal way. But the overwhelming preoccupation towards the end of my two and a half years in the department, was Cyprus because the Makarios Government and the Greek Cypriots had pushed the Turks too hard as it seemed... or the Turks had been too stubborn. The Greek Cypriots saw the idea of ENOSIS as a natural and inevitable aspiration. The communal

fighting started. We put in British troops and then the UN took on the role as peacekeepers in Cyprus, and I was Desk Officer for all that process.

JJ: That must have been very busy indeed. And Makarios eventually had to flee, didn't he?

AW: Yes, he did, but that was later in the story. That was exciting. I knew what I was doing.

JJ: Getting your teeth into some real serious international problems. I suppose that held you in good stead for other places? You didn't have the luck to go out to any of those places did you - for familiarisation...?

AW: No nothing like that.

JJ: Which is a shame in a way when you're dealing with the problems? These days I think people tend to be given one trip to places they're dealing with?

AW: Yes, yes.

JJ: Talking to staff on the ground.

AW: That is a good thing. It's a good thing in terms of team building too. It gives the people at the Embassy or High Commission also the feeling that they actually know who is dealing with the overseas bag in the UK. We had a fair number of visits back from the High Commissioner.

JJ: Who was the High Commissioner then?

AW: Arthur Clark.

JJ: Yes I think he became Head of News Department in the Commonwealth Office when I first arrived there very briefly, and then he died. Yes, I liked him very much.

AW: Yes, yes. He was a kind and decent man.

JJ: Not too kind and decent to the way he was in Nicosia.

AW: I don't know. I have to say *de mortuis* and all that.

JJ: Okay. So you went in 1964 to your first overseas posting to Moscow with your fluent Russian to use as soon as you got there. Who was the Ambassador – Sir Humphrey Trevelyan – that's right, and he had a lot of Middle East experience, I think.

AW: Yes he was in Iraq and he was in Egypt and he served in Peking. And his background was Indian Civil Service and he was a great man.

JJ: Didn't he have to withdraw, yes, from Aden?

AW: After he'd returned. Harold Wilson asked him to go there.

JJ: So you were his Private Secretary?

AW: For a year, yes.

JJ: Was he good to work for?

AW: He was good to his staff and secondly he was extremely kind and generous in that if he was going to a meeting he would always take me along and make sure I went on trips with him and I learned a very great deal from him. One of the things I particularly remember was the importance of honesty in diplomacy, and the importance of telling the truth not only to your own Government but also to the Government to which you were

accredited. And according to him, and I've believed it all my life, you will actually earn much more of their respect as well as hopefully the respect of your own Government, though not necessarily of course, by trying to do that rather than by trying to be clever and just putting across a line. People, assuming they understand that you are reasonably sympathetic in the sense that you are trying to understand what makes them tick, will respect you if you in return do them the normal courtesy of not trying to fool them all the time.

JJ: And there's always the problem that the line will not hold or will change or that you will be found out, for varnishing the truth or whatever.

AW: Yes.

JJ: Lessons for today perhaps. You travelled quite a bit in and around Moscow officially as well as unofficially?

AW: Yes, at that stage, and I think it was a good system, you had one year as Private Secretary to the Ambassador, and then another year dealing with a particular area of the world in Chancery. I travelled I should think nearly, all over the whole of the Soviet Union as it then was, either with the Ambassador or on my own with a couple of mates from the Italian Embassy or the Australian and US Embassy, as travelling companions.

JJ: There was safety in numbers?

AW: It was a rule. You had to travel with at least one other person.

JJ: You could watch each other and not get into trouble in any way?

AW: That's right. To be a witness to any attempts to get you into trouble.

JJ: Yes. Good alibis. How did you find official Russians? Actually dealing with them and to talking to them about issues and so on?

AW: It depended to a degree where you were and what you were doing. In the more provincial parts they weren't so used to foreigners and would either be scared stiff and just give you nothing but reels of figures about how many doctors they were alleged to have and how many people they educated, contrasting that with before the Revolution. Or they would become quite relaxed and talk a bit more generally about how their cities, or whatever, actually ran, which in themselves were not really big secrets and not – though there were differences - not in principle all that different from running a city in the UK.

JJ: And that gave you an insight into what life was like for Russians outside Moscow?

AW: I think so anyway. It felt like that at the time and I think it gave a feeling of sympathy for their dilemmas, not actually a sympathy for their system, because of the deep conservatism and inflexibility of the system that came across in everyday life, rather than specifically the crueller aspects that became highlighted. It was just the power of the small bureaucrat, the person who delights in saying no. The arbitrary instructions that came from central authorities and all those sorts of things. Which are not unknown in other countries. Raised to a higher degree in the Soviet Union.

JJ: and inevitably I suppose, all these local *apparatchiks* were Party members and had to keep the Party line?

AW: Yes, yes. They did. And even if they weren't Party members, which would be unusual, they would follow the Party line, but it is possible to present a Party line and wink at the end of it either metaphorically or even sometimes directly.

JJ: Were they up to entertaining you in Russian fashion? Meeting ordinary, normal people?

AW: Yes. Meeting ordinary people was done best, oddly enough, when you were travelling, because if you were travelling by train, that was a sort of free time in a sense. But it was restricted. You were, as a foreigner, and particularly as a diplomat, an object of suspicion, and all the suppositions that they would have about their own intelligence, or whatever representatives, would be transferred to you. So, particularly when times were tense, you would mostly be someone to be avoided rather than anything else.

JJ: This was an historical attitude rather than something imposed by the more modern Communist Party, I guess?

AW: Definitely historical background but much reinforced by the Soviet system.

JJ: What about in Moscow itself? You presumably managed to develop certain contacts in the Foreign Ministry and perhaps other Ministries as well? Was that more relaxed?

AW: Yes, it could be quite open and relaxed. I can remember some extremely relaxed moments, but it was clearly a duty thing. I'm skipping a bit, but there were two incidents I remember during the discussions about Afghanistan. One was a very spirited discussion I had with the head of the department dealing with us after they had invaded Afghanistan, in which he said that among other things fourteen invitations had come in from the Government of the day, and I said I would just like to see even one of them, because that would be really good. He then got really angry and we had a shouting match, and after that he went outside and having concluded this very spirited, and in many ways entertaining, exchange we went out and he showed me to the lift, which they usually do – probably are required to do for security reasons – it was all – how's your family, will we see you this Sunday - and things like that. It was a clear definition of what was official and what was not official. Dealing with the Foreign Ministry in a country like the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia for most of the time I was there, unless you had a clear question you needed to deal with, it was frankly not very illuminating. It was much better to try to deal with people in business or outside, artistic people, whatever you can get at, if you want to learn about the country.

JJ: I can understand that. You arrived in Moscow the day after Khrushchev's downfall I believe?

AW: Absolutely.

JJ: That must have an auspicious or inauspicious start to your foreign career?

AW: One thing it taught me was that you could spend too much time on pre-posting briefing. But more seriously, ... yes of course it added to the interest in a way. You wanted see how this new regime was going to develop, and whether this represented an opening which would lead to further development or stagnation. So that was interesting in itself.

JJ: Was it a totally surprising event, or could one see that Khrushchev was gradually getting out of favour?

AW: I can't answer that directly in a sense because I can't tell you what the Embassy thought before because I don't know. Certainly with any degree of hindsight at all it was not surprising in the least. But it's always surprising in a sense when someone loses control. It's often surprising when it actually happens, but you can often see ways in which they were threatened before, and particularly with hindsight see why Khrushchev's actions threatened the foundations of the regime, because it was so personalised that everybody with an interest in stability and keeping their job felt threatened by him, because it wasn't clear where his policies were going to lead, particularly in foreign affairs. And therefore that would create uncertainty among his peers. So it was quite possibly just a matter of time.

JJ: He did act in a very personal way, didn't he?

AW: He did. The terror apparatus didn't back him up. At least not enough. Brezhnev and his colleagues would have been in real trouble if Khrushchev had caught on to them early enough because he would have presumably tried to organise, but it wasn't the first time he had been under threat.

JJ: You were there long enough to see how this new regime was developing. Brezhnev and Kosygin and Gromyko.

AW: Gromyko was in charge at the Foreign Ministry. Yes. I was there at a time when there were trials of two writers Yuri Daniel and Andrei Sinyavski. We also had the trial of Gerald Brooke who was a British citizen who had brought in some bibles and was sentenced to, I forget how many years, but I think from memory about six in a labour camp. One could I think quite rapidly see that the nature of the regime was consolidatory rather than developmental, although Kosygin did propose some economic reforms which I think probably wouldn't have worked, but nonetheless they would have devolved responsibility a little bit more to the managers of enterprises.

JJ: While you were there Johnson entered the White House in 1965, and I think in his inaugural speech he made a call for *détente* with the Soviet Union. Is this something that surprised Moscow? What was the general reaction of the Soviet Government?

AW: I think their first reaction was one of suspicion, not knowing exactly what was meant, but also wondering if there were opportunities in it for them. Too rigid a stance on both sides has its dangers, and insofar as they were trying to look for a quieter life and consolidate their hold on power, *détente* could be to their advantage. Insofar as it might rouse hopes and ambitions among more liberal-minded people in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union itself, that was a particular danger. The ruling principle must be that there are no free gifts.

JJ: In fact there were one or two what looked possibly like initiatives in that trend. Also in that year the Warsaw Pact as I understand it, accepted some Polish proposals for an

east-west security conference, although at that stage America and Canada were excluded, which made a bit of a nonsense of the proposals. But still that was an interesting development was it not? Possibly opening up some concrete dialogue.

AW: Well there could not have ever been a dialogue on that basis at that time. To do that would have been greatly to Soviet advantages in the short term. It would obviously have split NATO. That was its purpose, at least that was understood to be its real purpose. I mean if we had had conferences which would have been between Europe, East and West, excluding the Russians, that might have been more interesting. Although the Russians would have made sure they weren't actually excluded since they controlled...

JJ: ... controlled everybody else. But the following year the Warsaw Pact again called for something possibly similar - European security arrangements to replace the Warsaw Pact and NATO. Was this another attempt at disarming the enemy or...?

AW: Well plainly. I can't now remember if there was any Berlin connection to that initiative, but in general replacing NATO, replacing the Warsaw Pact, which would be meaningless on the Soviet side unless it meant that there was a real increased measure of freedom to East European countries to make their own policies which some of them, like Romania, were taking at that stage.

JJ: And Tito's Yugoslavia?

AW: I wouldn't consider it East European in that sense. But those countries I suppose could have developed in that way, but there was no obvious or immediate prospect of that really happening. So that replacing the two effectively would mean dissolving NATO. That's what that proposal would really mean. You wouldn't have ceased to have Russian or Soviet officers running the East German military forces, or the Polish for that matter. I think Rokossovsky was still there, allegedly Polish, but actually a Soviet citizen.

JJ: So perhaps it was a very strange initiative at that particular time?

AW: I couldn't see the precise context of it.

JJ: I couldn't see it being widely accepted on either side really, for the reasons you give.

AW: It may be it encouraged some equally idealistic proposal from us. I don't know. Even then it was fundamental to Soviet power that they should maintain their position in Eastern Europe. The two were intimately linked. You could not have had, it was very difficult to see then or now in retrospect, how they could have had a ruling Communist Party sure of itself and in control in the Soviet Union if they had agreed to the undermining which would mean the disappearance of their allied regimes in the rest of Eastern Europe. Not only, but particularly East Germany. That's fundamental.

JJ: What about the British Government? Wilson was Prime Minister at that time, was he not? Was there a different attitude, a different tone coming out of No 10 towards Moscow? Was there some hope that since he was a socialist that this might have some reward in Moscow?

AW: Well there was certainly a readiness to use that sort of language. Which isn't necessarily the same as ... maybe just some language. There were certainly some members of the Labour Party including some reasonably close to authority who did suppose that somehow it would be possible to find an understanding along those lines. I don't think it was ever a great guider of policy. I mean in terms of nuance perhaps it meant that at the beginning they believed that they could handle *détente* and make it go further than the Conservatives could have done. But if so I think that illusion soon disappeared especially with Czechoslovakia in 1968.

JJ: So there were no real pay-offs in terms of socialist camaraderie across the borders?

AW: No, and it was quite often the case that the Soviet Government found the Conservatives easier to deal with for two reasons. One is that at least they knew that in some way the Conservatives were on the other side in a way that Labour was not. The difficulty with being in any sense at all fellow socialists was that social democracy represented a rather intimate threat to communist ideology, because it says it is possible to have a socialist redistributive system which is fair to all but which nonetheless remains a democracy. Whereas the Soviet system was very much top down. So I think many Soviet communists felt that social democrats were more the main enemy than the Conservatives because at least the Conservatives from their perspectives understood and were operating within the parameters of power relationships, rather than any nonsense about social justice.

JJ: Before you left I think de Gaulle visited Moscow. What was that all about?

AW: Yes. Well France has always wanted first of all to be seen to have its own separately defined policy towards Eastern Europe, and particularly towards the Soviet Union, and de Gaulle's phrase about a Europe stretching from the "Atlantic to the Urals" was his, you recall. I think he had a remarkable if perhaps idiosyncratic sense of history and the sweep of history and he could see that Russia, – I don't know how he would have defined Russia – but he would think in terms of Russia rather than the Soviet Union, had a major part, like it or not, to play in Europe, and that therefore there were areas there to be explored as well as having the advantage of showing himself to be independent of the United States or anybody else.

JJ: With his own independent nuclear force.

AW: Yes all those things went into it. I never saw that he got much profit from it, but it made for a warmer relationship in terms of tone with France, between France and Moscow than probably there was between London and Moscow and Washington and Moscow. He was a remarkable man. There were two incidents from de Gaulle's visit. One was I think when he was down somewhere like Astrakhan, there was an enormous

sturgeon caught and laid at his feet, and as it lay flapping, dying he said “Il y a toujours des victimes”. Which was rather nice. The other heroic piece of tactlessness was at Stalingrad or Volgograd as it was by then called. He said there in tones of deep admiration “What a people”. Of course the Russians drew themselves up as they had every reason to do as though he was paying a compliment to them. He said “I really have the Germans in mind for getting so far”. Again in bad taste, but fair enough too. He was a remarkable figure.

When I left Moscow I did it with contradictory feelings. I was very grateful to have served there. It was an enormous country. I had seen things and understood things that I would never have done otherwise. But on the other hand it was fundamentally a spiritually depressing country, because it was a place where the language was not literally dead, but its inner meaning was being lost because so much of it was used to tell lies in terms of propaganda. It was a country where foreigners, particularly diplomatic foreigners were treated with a great deal of suspicion, as I have already mentioned. I thought that for a lot of the staff the Embassy was both a miserable and happy place. It was miserable in the sense that people felt as they were cut off and a bit beleaguered, and it was also happy for the same reason, because people there were happy to get together and you made close friends, and that was great.

JJ: The stockade mental attitude really?

AW: You couldn't help it. You had to, and a lot of people of course didn't speak Russian so they couldn't really travel.

JJ: Very isolated culturally and spiritually.

AW: It was particularly rough on the wives. I didn't have a wife then and there were obvious advantages in being one of the few bachelors around. That was all right for me really. But I thought that it was very difficult for the families and especially for the wives. So I thought when I left there I am going to take steps to make sure I never go

back there again. Because one of these days I would acquire a wife and I couldn't really ask anyone to go through that. And although one could tell in a general way that the Soviet Union wasn't going to last for ever, there was no special reason to think that it was going to collapse and change in good time for me and my putative wife to enjoy a more accessible and therefore ultimately happier Russia.

JJ: So what did you do as a bachelor - a gay bachelor, so to speak?

AW: In fact I wouldn't be allowed to be a gay bachelor in those days even if I was so inclined. Well there were obviously lots of in-house parties and as long as it was basically a Western girl, you could go out with as many girls as you wanted to; the Winter Garden, the theatre, concerts. There were even places you could go eating under what looked like searchlights. There was quite a lot of fun to be had and you could go out ski-ing, things like that.

JJ: The security aspects overlaid so much of one's life?

AW: Oh yes, if you had a family you would be liable to have young children, very small flats, stuck inside in the winter, necessarily always followed around, listened to. You would be aware of the difficulties especially if you didn't speak Russian, everyday contacts with the people you were living among. Okay for the officer who had a professional reason, a professional fascination to be there, but you couldn't reasonably expect that your wife and your children could share that with you. They might, but they might very well not. So that was difficult.

JJ: I was in Helsinki from '81 to '83 and people used to come down, supposedly to get their teeth fixed, or whatever, and perhaps that was case, But they were very relieved to have a rest and recreation for two or three days.

AW: It was a life-line.

JJ: And people I met, visiting from Moscow when I was Consul there, they'd begin to talk after about an hour there, when I told them it was alright to speak in the normal way and say whatever you like because people would not be listening. They would then speak for hours non-stop to get it all out. It had all been bottled up – in their Moscow flat afraid to say anything at the breakfast table or whatever. It must have been very hard.

AW: I think that it was possible to carry fears about that too far, and people sometimes did. But I think it was hard.

JJ: Nevertheless I think you mentioned in an earlier discussion that one of the Ambassadors acquired himself a lady friend. Harrison?

AW: I was fortunately, or unfortunately, not there for that. I was there when he expressed his strong disapproval, which followed somebody else having an affair, a legitimate affair, with a non-Russian. I do remember his attitude being quite harsh on that. So there was some irony there too.

JJ: It had some repercussions in the Embassy as well as in London?

AW: Yes. We're all human and I don't know the ins and outs, and he has a fine wife and a fine family. So I don't know what happened, or why, and we are all human. But nevertheless it was a betrayal of his staff as well as everything else. She was so obvious anyway. She was extremely brightly made up. It was clear what her mission was, but she may have carried it out with great sincerity. Maybe they fell in love, I don't know.

JJ: Well we'll come back to Moscow since you were much later Ambassador there. After Moscow you went to the other extreme in going to Washington.

AW: After six months economics training.

JJ: Was that useful in your actual job?

AW: Certainly, certainly. Increasingly useful. I wouldn't pretend to be an expert at all.

JJ: So what was your actual function there?

AW: I was sent to Washington in the first place because it was felt that our effort in relation to Latin America and the Caribbean needed to be stepped up. That was at the time when some of the Caribbean islands had become Associated States, when Britain was responsible for their foreign policy and defence policy, and they were responsible for everything else. So that was a new area there that needed to be covered. I did that for about six to nine months, I think, then moved over to cover the European scene. I think that was partly because the creation of the post was a classic bit of local empire building, and the need wasn't as great as it appeared to be.

JJ: What title were you given?

AW: Second Secretary Chancery I think.

AW: My biggest achievement there was to spend nearly two months in St Kitts where the opposition was being put on trial by the local government. So I had the pleasure of serving there.

JJ: St Kitts, Nevis and Anguilla were the focus of a lot of...

AW: Yes, and just developing into an interesting subject for ... it was not..

JJ: They declared independence did they not?

AW: Yes, they declared independence later. I was no longer in Washington then, but the government in power in St Kitts were not happy to have people who they found unsympathetic in power in both Nevis and in Anguilla.

JJ: So when you arrived they had joined up in a sense?

AW: Well the government of the three islands together had put the opposition on trial.

JJ: So you were able to go down there as you say and observe?

AW: I was asked to go down and observe.

JJ: As an aside, when the Foreign Office joined with the Commonwealth Office, I had a colleague called Will Carrocher who was only person I knew who had ever been there.

AW: To Anguilla?

JJ: Well all those islands. Yes, Will Carrocher had been in the Commonwealth News Department and previous while in the Colonial Office he'd been the Royal Press Officer for the Royal tour of the West Indies. So he found himself in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office being asked to go to Anguilla and sort it all out, because nobody else knew anything about it. But he was terrified of flying so he absolutely refused! Anyway, moving on: were the Americans trying to set up trade links with this part of the Caribbean?

AW: No the principal American interest was that they should not become local bases for Mafia organisations, and things like that. After all lots of new independent jurisdictions would be vulnerable to that sort of thing. I think that was the main concern - that and drugs.

JJ: And setting up casinos for laundering ...

AW: Yes that sort of thing. But I think in practice the fear was greater than the real risk.

JJ: But you did other things as well in Washington?

AW: Yes. For most of my time I was dealing with European affairs. That would be Berlin, Soviet Union, France and whatever. That entailed developing relations in particular with the State Department and trying to make sure that our assessments and their assessments and policies were more or less in line. The business of Washington is very different from that of an Embassy in Moscow, or later Belgrade, in that the Chancery is mostly in some ways an extension of Whitehall. We have as you know plenty of people who are very directly engaged in working with the American bureaucracy and there are American people doing the same thing in the UK.

JJ: Such as trade people, defence....

AW: Intelligence, that sort of relationship was very close and intense, and it's not just the United States, but that's an illustration of that particular sort of Embassy, in that regard. So the input of the people reporting on particular sectors in the Chancery is mostly concerned with trying to find out what's going on in London, what's going on in Washington, and acting as a channel of influence in both directions in regard to that. It is much less than it would be in an Embassy like Moscow or Belgrade, finding out or discovering what makes the country itself tick. There are people who do that in Washington, but it's such a big Embassy it's split up. So you have to try to understand that. In fact I also did things like write the Annual Review and I did produce some dispatches on the way the Supreme Court works and so on. It was very interesting.

JJ: So did you feel that London kept you up to speed on what the thinking was in Westminster and Whitehall?

AW: yes, pretty much. You saw a lot of the telegram traffic, and you could pick bits out if anything struck you as odd or worthy of comment or whatever.

JJ: How did this all fit together at the top of the tree? Did you have weekly meetings with the Ambassador and raised your points?

AW: A daily meeting in the Embassy, usually chaired by the Minister rather than the Ambassador at which points would be raised. Because it was a big meeting of the whole Chancery...

JJ: How many was that?

AW: I would guess about 20 or 30, I don't remember. It was a big selection. I remember it being enlivened by some heated discussions about the Vietnam War and about whether or not the body count statistics were credible. My contribution was relatively modest compared to that.

JJ: How long did those meetings go on for?

AW: That depended partly on the temperament of the person running it. When I was running the same thing twenty years later, sitting in the Minister's chair in Washington, I tried to make sure they didn't last more than half an hour at the most.

JJ: Only the really important points?

AW: You should be able to follow up afterwards, and in any case in the Chancery or most parts of an Embassy like Washington, there are sectoral arrangements, so that you would have a Counsellor looking after, or working with three or four First Secretaries and they ought to be able to find out those things that needed carrying out.

JJ: Quite a factory all the same?

AW: Yes it's a big factory.

JJ: Did you work long hours?

AW: Yes quite long hours. Again that's partly a question of temperament.

JJ: I suppose, unlike in Moscow, doors are opened easily with the State Department or whoever?

AW: Yes, generally speaking, if you are from the British Embassy you will always get a chance to talk to people and you become known eventually as "This is Joe Blow speaking" rather than "somebody from the British Embassy", and by that means you can expect to expand your credibility

JJ: Were they quite open? Did you share information in a pretty free way?

AW: Very much. Very open indeed. After all basically we were working on the same side. There were special signs saying don't tell them this or they had the same thing. Not that you necessarily respected those fully. Sometimes it was just the result of self-importance at the other end.

JJ: What about other departments of State than the State Department itself?

AW: That level of exchange rather less. You would talk to journalists obviously, in Washington.

JJ: British ones or American?

AW: Both, because Washington is a highly journalistic town. You can often find out things and maybe help what you need to know by talking to journalists. Other diplomats to a degree, but not a great deal. Academics. For example I was a member of a thing called the American Association for the Advancement of Slavonic Studies in Washington. So you form links like that which you reckon later will be fruitful.

Although probably at the time you don't think that. I certainly didn't. You just think this is rather interesting I think I'll talk about it or find out more about it. You can be too professional. You shouldn't be single minded about these things.

JJ: So you had a certain amount of freedom as to whom you could talk to?

AW: You were expected to cover your desk adequately. If not your boss would want to know why, normally. I'm a great believer in being in a post for the wider reasons, and not just because you had the need to report, had the need to report on "x" narrowly defined. Why go to the United States and not discover as much as you can about what is a marvellous country. In both senses it's positively good but also it's very different from anything else, also very different from the Soviet Union.

JJ: You couldn't have chosen more contrasting countries to work in could you?

AW: I used to tell American friends - having been in Moscow I had gone so far to the right that I had to come back to Washington for corrective training.

JJ: I suppose it was more of a Democratic country with a big D – than Republican when you were there?

AW: Well, it was, although Nixon came in, but that was at the time when the "Great Society" legislation was being put through, when -

JJ: This was under Johnson?

AW: Yes, opposition and therefore agitated feelings about the Vietnam War coming to the fore, there were race riots, a country in very considerable state of change.

JJ: As you say the Vietnam War was an on-going problem. You were not directly involved in reporting views on that, I suppose.

AW: No, although you could hardly take an interest in the United States without realising something of the impact.

JJ: One of the first interesting things was perhaps Kosygin's visit to America. You were there in post at that time, were you?

AW: That was at the end of Johnson's time, in fact when he had already said he was not going to run again at least I think I'm right about that, and it was clear that what he wanted to do was to provide the best context he could for ending the Vietnam conflict with some sort of acceptable outcome as far as he was concerned. And try to make sure that relations between the Soviet Union and the United States would be at least manageable if not productive. And last but not least to improve the chances of Hubert Humphrey becoming the new President of the United States.

JJ: Which he failed at?

AW: Which he failed in, yes.

JJ: But that was an interesting step forward, I suppose, in East West relations? Kosygin coming to America? I suppose with your, then, Russian expertise, you would have some interesting thoughts on that yourself for the Embassy?

AW: Well at this juncture I can't honestly -

JJ: It was quite a long time ago.

AW: Yes, I think at the time I probably took it a little bit cynically, as I've just described. But I think if viewed in terms of a secular change, it was part of a process where both sides realised that there was not going to be a winner and what both must try to do as far as they possibly could, was to live together. Again it was ...

JJ: That was already an advance of course.

AW: Yes, although Western policy was always containment. Under Khrushchev in particular there was a lot of pressure on Berlin which suggested that Russian policy wasn't strictly containment and that in order to consolidate their grip, they felt that at least Berlin had to be secure.

JJ: And then there was a change of government or a change in the White House, when Nixon beat Humphrey in the election late in 1968. Was that expected?

AW: Not entirely. I know the view in London at the time was that Hubert Humphrey would win which was partly why they decided to send John Freeman who was ex-editor of the New Statesman and a man of the Left rather than the Right, as the next Ambassador - and Hubert Humphrey lost. It wasn't a very sharp win, but ... plus Nixon seemed a retreat, so I think yes, it was to that extent a surprise, but I don't think it was a total surprise, because the Democratic Administration had become so unpopular and the Vietnam virus had bitten so deep and there had been a lot of unrest in the country, which always encumbers an Administration.

JJ: Riots on the campuses and ...

AW: I think there was perhaps a feeling of changes...

JJ: Interesting John Freeman coming in because he had already been High Commissioner in India, so he had a flavour of how diplomacy was run. How did the Embassy take to an "outsider"?

AW: I honestly don't think ... it doesn't make any difference. Of course it always makes a difference and even in a massive machine like Washington it makes a surprising

difference who the Ambassador is, but I don't remember anyone feeling that John Freeman was not one of us, therefore we can't work with him, or anything like that. In fact he became, I speak with bias as he was always very kind to me, which I naturally appreciated. He had a very lovely wife at that time, who was also generous to the staff. I think he settled in very quickly. As I say, I don't recall ... But I do remember thinking at the time there were two good jobs in the Embassy. One was to be young and naturally not to be too concerned about his career, which was me and the other was to be the Minister who, before I became it, enjoyed the delusion that he didn't do very much but got to wear decent suits.

JJ: But in fact he ran the Embassy.

AW: But in my humble position it didn't really seem that clear.

JJ: What were the main issues in America on the international front at that time that took up the Embassy time as well, apart from Vietnam?

AW: Vietnam overshadowed everything. So that was hugely important. Then of course how the new Administration's attitude would develop towards the Soviet Union. Nixon had had a strong anti-Soviet background as everybody knows. Whether or not he would be able to establish a good relationship with the United Kingdom, that sort of question. Perfectly normal questions that arise on a change of Administration. But quite rapidly Vietnam and internal affairs became prominent themes of the Administration. How is he going to change things? To what extent is....

JJ: Of course you had the Black movement developing at that stage? Martin Luther King had been shot, Robert Kennedy as well. I guess that was a major subject in American society?

AW: Well it was. There were popular themes at that stage of whether America was ungovernable, of whether ... relations between the Federal centre and the states could

work ... as they had in the past. Whether the economy was robust and would recover from the stresses put on it by the “Great Society” legislation, that sort of thing.

JJ: And the cost of the Vietnam War. When Nixon came into office he very quickly began to show interest in foreign affairs didn't he? Especially relations with the Soviet Union, and he talked of wanting an era of negotiations with the Russians, in his inaugural speech in January '69. How did that develop – US-USSR relations?

AW: I remember being questioned heavily, this still remains my view, about an assertion in the annual review I wrote that US Soviet relations were thin. What I meant by that was that their actual content as opposed to their general overarching meaning, was thin. When you got down to it, what they talked about most was arms control, and arms control, was essentially a way of avoiding mutual suicide rather than a policy in itself. But a very great deal of the relationship in formal terms was being channelled through that. Plenty of other aspects like what each society thought of the other, how each related to the world at large, where Soviet policy in Asia and Africa would impinge upon American interest, whatever, the actual content of the dialogue was pretty slim. And that also meant that there wasn't much room for movement in Europe, absent either further Soviet pressure on Berlin, which would have been very dangerous, if inflammatory, or the Soviet Union allowing real change to happen in Eastern Europe, which post-Czechoslovakia, even to those who couldn't see the fall, it was pretty obvious it wasn't going to happen in hurry.

JJ: After the debacle of '68 ...

AW: This was plain that this was a frozen area. That did not at all mean that the Brandt *Ost Politik* or the subsequent development of what used to be the CSCE - Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe - was a waste of time. It just meant that this was an era when attitudes, ideas, possibilities, had to change gradually. But when Nixon talked about it and the “era of negotiation”, okay, we'll talk about arms control. Good, a very important subject to talk about so there is mutual balance of reductions, there is SALT

talks, things like that, these were all important, but at least as equally important was a much more gradual process of a changing view of possibilities. But containment still was, and had to be, the Western policy, which was essentially a passive policy of waiting.

JJ: You didn't think the Americans were prepared to stick their necks out with other policies that would open up the dialogue a bit more beyond arms controls and?.....

AW: I don't think that was in their gift. That was the point as I saw it and see it.

JJ: They didn't think there was any point in it do you mean? The Russians wouldn't try to reciprocate?

AW: Putting it very crudely, the position of the Communist Party in the Soviet Union was vulnerable to any liberalisation any where in eastern Europe, because processes of liberalisation in Eastern Europe were obviously for plain reasons were liable to get out of hand, facing the Russians with the unpleasant choice for everybody of suppression using armed force or not. Hungary was the only country within the bloc which gradually transformed itself, partly because I suppose they had had 1956 when they had been horribly flattened by the Russians, but the regime had over time realised that the only way it had any relationship with their own people was to begin a process of change over time which within the context of the Soviet Bloc looked and was very impressive. But running forward a bit, as soon as Poland tried to do the same thing, still less East Germany, all sorts of disruptive forces were let loose which threatened not only the Soviet position in Eastern Europe, but also the position of the Soviet Communist Party in the Soviet Union at home. You can't have liberalisation outside, and suppression inside. So to that extent that automatically narrowed the area down.

JJ: What did the Americans think about Willi Brandt and his *Ost Politik* then?

AW: There was quite a lot of suspicion about that because of the question mark as to where it would leave Germany. It was only natural I suppose partly because it's a major

landmass itself, partly because it was a major countervailing power, for the Americans to have a relatively simplistic view, an accurate view, but it was relatively simplistic, of the Soviet Union and for the Germans, because a third of their people were behind the Iron Curtain because that's an area much closer to them because they knew if there was going to be a war it was going to be in Germany. For all those sorts of reasons you would have a predisposition to hope and to believe that human contacts however and where you can develop them are going to be beneficial. So I think there is a structural, heavily justifiable on both sides difference in attitude. The Americans were also concerned that the energy dependence of Germany and Western Europe as a whole on the Soviet Union which developed over the years, but became increasingly from the '70s onwards

JJ: Oil you mean?

AW: Oil and gas. 80% of Germany's gas came from Soviet gas fields. That also was a source of concern to the Americans because it raised questions as to where things might go. Again I'm not suggesting that the American Administration as far as I know ever suggested that they shouldn't do it, but you know when you see your children going into debt for a big mortgage or whatever, there are questions you ask yourself. That's all I meant.

JJ: I hadn't thought about that at all, but that's a key question, energy, isn't it?

AW: And the seller of the energy is just as dependent in a way. That you must never forget. It's not just a matter of being a buyer.

JJ: And indeed that was one of the factors I suppose in the break up of the Soviet Union? That at some point they ran out of money because the oil price dropped so drastically.

AW: They became very much dependent on ...

JJ: From \$40 to \$10 I think. I've got the figures here somewhere.

AW: It went down to \$10 in '98 yes. But certainly the Brezhnev period of stagnation was kept going for a long period on essentially oil and gas money.

JJ: It was a very sensitive point in Russia-Finland relations as well.

AW: Poor Finland did quite nicely out of that although when the Soviet Union collapsed

JJ: That was the problem. Exactly. Moving on then from Washington you then came back to London and in fact spent nearly six years there, which is longer than normal for a posting in London. Why was that?

AW: Partly because I did three jobs. One was relatively brief. Partly because I got married and my first, and for that matter my present wife, were Americans, I don't know if that made ... Anyway it gave an excuse because they wanted me to go across to Personnel Department. It gave them a perfectly good excuse for me to do a decent stint there.

JJ: Yes, you did two or three years in the Cabinet Office and then there were three years in Personnel Department. What do you want to say about the Cabinet Office?

AW: Well my essential job there was trying to produce assessments which would then be passed through the Joint Intelligence Committee together with various sources of information and get them agreed by the JIC and sent off to Ministers.

JJ: How big an activity was that within the Cabinet Office overall?

AW: There was a relatively small staff doing it. But only the highest quality!

JJ: But of course. Totally reliable.

AW: Yes, as it always has been! Yes intellectually it was interesting and educational. In some areas you could play a pretty critical role in establishing the informational foundation on policy.

JJ: Without getting into too delicate areas, where was the raw information coming from?

AW: Well the raw information would come from something you could get from the press or someone reporting from the post, from intelligence sources of some sort or another. Some from the history book since you wanted to know something about, I don't know, Poland and you needed to know something about its history, whatever.

JJ: It seems to me the Research Department of the Foreign Office played a role in this too?

AW: These things can be also personality dependent. There was a very strong example and there always has been a very strong research effort into the Soviet Union. Many of my best friends did that and they were and remain very knowledgeable and effective. If you tried to produce something on Soviet relations and didn't consult them you would have to be a "Charlie".

JJ: We didn't actually touch on that, but there must have been a team of people in the Embassy in Moscow reading all the press and radio stations and so on, analysing, sending back reports, all that sort of stuff?

AW: Yes, yes.

JJ: Fascinating. Personnel Department which all of us have come across.

AW: And suffered at the hands of ... I did it three times ...

JJ: I don't think I suffered. I never quarrelled with my posting. But what was your function within the Personnel Department at that time?

AW: Well at that time I think there were four Area officers. I was one of the Area Officers, that is I dealt with the postings of people to, from memory, the Americas, Far East, and I think the Middle East. And it operated on a mixture of people saying what they would like to do and you trying to fit it into some sort of career plan and a monthly market where the Area officers would get together under the chairmanship of the Deputy Head of Department and ...

JJ: These were the famous grid meetings?

AW: Yes, the grid meetings.

JJ: I used to go to them when I was in personnel Training Department. Fascinating trying to fit square pegs into square holes and so on. One thing that struck me then, and perhaps it's just as good now, actually people's personal circumstance, particularly if they were difficult ones of one sort or another, were taken into account. It might have been health, it might have been domestic arrangements with their wife or lady friend or financial or whatever – “Look I've done four years, I'm getting into debt deeply with the bank. I must have a posting to get some money”. Even these factors could play....

AW: Everyone understood. They would try to do that and they were actually ... I think it was after five years you had to get a special ruling that you would be allowed to stay in the UK, for the very reason that you needed the balance of home and abroad to be effective as an officer.

JJ: Then there was always the language abilities of the officers, or the need to have some training before going to the post in a language, or economics or whatever it was.

AW: Not ... if you had some Chinese speakers you would generally try to make sure they worked in China from time to time.

JJ: To get your money back for the training costs involved.

AW: Which some people didn't like but ...

JJ: I found it a difficult thing to do and please most of the people most of the time.

AW: This you can't do.

JJ: I thought it worked pretty well myself.

AW: I think in overt terms you can't do. Quite often looking back people will see why what happened to them with or without their enthusiasm, did happen and ... I mean if I had been left to my own devices ... I wouldn't have chosen the posts that I did, but I'm very glad that ...

JJ: You never know. I remember Douglas Hurd when he was Foreign Secretary coming down to talk to the staff and there were lots of questions about postings and he said something like - I know that the Office does try to do its best and get you to Algiers, if you want to go to Algiers, or some other post like it, as though they were all more or less the same. And he'd been a diplomat himself.

AW: I don't know how many people were clamouring to go to Algiers – it depends on the alternatives ...

JJ: I managed to avoid islands because I thought they'd be very confining. I was lucky I think. That kept you in business for three years or so. You were glad to get out ... after making friends and a lot of enemies perhaps?

AW: To me the most mythical time of my life connected with this sort of work was when I was walking up Clive Steps and someone came up to me and said “Andrew, It’s so good to see you. I always wanted to say thank you. I didn’t want to go there and I know you had to make me. I was grateful you did because I had a terrific time”. I don’t know who it was or what the reason was, but that ... No doubt there were people who felt precisely the opposite. I don’t think actually people held it personally.

JJ: I don’t think so.

AW: It is repetitive.

JJ: That’s true. The files keep going round and round, don’t they. There was a problem about that time of wives who had to give up jobs upon which many, especially younger staff survived in London and

AW: That remains a problem

JJ: Because of the finance, especially in living in London now.

AW: There’s the finances of living in London. There’s the question of spouse satisfaction. Not just wives but also husbands in that position.

JJ: And even partners these days.

AW: Well that I don’t know how you define partners... anyway. I haven’t had to...

JJ: That was a bit after your time.

AW: Yes. Anyway it’s very difficult to combine two careers even within the Office, but unless you’re lucky enough to have as your spouse or partner -someone who is the novelist who can as readily write in Morocco as they can in Chelsea - it’s fairly

improbable, but it's possible. They are bound to suffer. Then there's all the separation of children. A lot of it's improved over the years, but it...

JJ: I know that Americans and French who have their own schools abroad in many places find it very hard to understand our habit of putting away our children by the time they are 8 or 9 to boarding schools in the UK; separation of families as well as the cost to the Office and to officers themselves, but that's one of the problems you have to deal with.

AW: Most of our missions are too small to sustain a school themselves. American missions are usually a great deal larger. In fact I remember a Norwegian friend telling me that he'd been stimulated to discover that the staff of the US Embassy in Mexico City was the same size as the entire Norwegian Foreign Service. They had large establishments which means it's easier for them. There are just not enough British children in Morocco to run an effective British School in Morocco. I think most of us are very grateful for International Schools which usually follow the American curriculum in helping to educate our children. But there comes a time when it's very rarely practical to anything except send them to boarding school.

JJ: Your next overseas posting was Head of Chancery in Belgrade 1976 to 79. Tito was still in power - he of the non-aligned movement - keeping some sort of lines open with Moscow nevertheless. Tell me about your time there?

AW: My first wife died when I was there and I remained very grateful for the way my colleagues and the local people, mostly Serbs, supported me and our then baby son. Life in Belgrade was interesting and agreeable because it was quite a lively culture, a new language to get a grip on, and the rather unusual possibility of talking freely about issues with a socialist/communist group in power. It was an interesting comparative study with the life of the Soviet Union and it was interesting on the whole. Britain has had quite a longstanding and reasonably intense relationship with Yugoslavia.

JJ: It is interesting that Tito stayed in office so long under a federated structure which was very complicated to say the least. How did he do that?

AW: Well it was federated and there were changeable and federal elements in it but essentially this was under central control and yes there was a theory of separation between government and party, but in practice the League of Communist of Yugoslavia ran everything and in practice if Tito wanted something done he could do it through the party. There were quite a lot of liberal elements in it, but fundamentally it remained under central control. There were nationalist tensions, and there were certainly perhaps growing economic difficulties, but neither of these factors were of such pressure or reached such a level of threat that they were a danger to the system as it was then. Over the longer term I think that one could well argue that Tito stayed in office too long because his presence there frustrated the potential for development of individual and autonomous institutions which would have had long term structural benefit to the Federation as a whole. And also because he invented, together with his close colleague Kardelj of Slovenia a system of self-management under which at the top of the system, in order to prevent any one nationality within Yugoslavia gaining control, all positions of authority rotated between the Republics on an annual basis. That meant yes, the danger of domination by the Croats, Serbs, whatever it might be, was avoided, but it also meant that there was no-one in the end who could speak for Yugoslavia and whose ambitions would be tied to Yugoslavia as a whole. He would speak for Serbia, Montenegro or Slovenia. The localisation of power allowed the nationalist feelings to come much more to the fore when I was back there ten years later as Ambassador, when the economic pressures also, going from the point of view of maintaining the regime, went the wrong way. That is, as a Marxist would have put it, the forces for production had changed so that the overlying superstructure was actually in the way of further development and it became untenable.

JJ: In what way had it been changed then? Tito was trying to introduce some form of - perhaps privatisation isn't the right word - but local running of local economies, so to speak?

AW: This is more like a localised form of nationalisation. So if you were - most of the Republics, and there were six of them - had a refinery, well the Yugoslav market isn't big enough to sustain that number of refineries. There was a strong tendency to look at patterns of trade between the Republics within Yugoslavia in terms of balance of payments so that Slovenia would feel that it was paying for the benefit of the feckless Kosovars and Kosovars would think that they were being taxed for the benefit of the rich and selfish Slovenes and so on and so forth.

JJ: A very difficult balancing act, politically and economically.

AW: Again we perhaps slip forward to the 80s, but my view was that the only way in which the destructiveness could be held in check was essentially to liberalise the system further and to give the country as a whole the prospect of joining in with the rest of the European Union. That wasn't something you could accomplish straight away, but if you had improving prosperity plus that the country as a whole could share in and could contribute to it , then obviously that is a better position than if everyone regards it as if anyone else's prosperity is a thing that is stolen from you.

JJ: So when you went back to Yugoslavia in 1985 as Ambassador things must have moved on. There must have been certain changes in that ten years. What were they? What was it like then?

AW: Well the first and most obvious change was that Tito had died. Just as important were, as I said little earlier, the fact that the constitutional arrangements he left in place were almost inevitably destructive and the third was that any remaining real belief in the effectiveness of a socialist structure had been so much attenuated that it was very difficult to say that the politicians in charge or the people who were citizens were constructing something new. They were trying to make the legacy work which is a very difficult thing and there were plenty of indications that it was working very much less well than other countries round about, and that the changes that had to take place to make it begin to

work would undermine the aspirations of the socialist regime as it was and would be very difficult to swallow. I think in dealing with Yugoslavia and Russia for that matter it's as well to remember how long it took the United Kingdom to begin to tackle its own structural problems which were very, very much less severe, but nonetheless existed in the shape of various branches of industry or firms that were no longer viable, in the shape of ideas patched into realitiesall sorts of factors. Perhaps there's not time here to... but there are reasons why I think we in the UK should have a degree of sympathy with other countries who have been through difficulties of transition. The sort of scale of transition required in Yugoslavia was way beyond what we would find in Britain and the disparity of interests between, for example, people living in Kosovo whose income per head was one sixth of those in Slovenia, made the whole thing much more difficult, so that you got bogged down in terms of discussions about what was fair to my region .. stealing my property and so on. So all these things were differences from Tito's time, but their increasing severity was also a logical development from Tito's time.

JJ: And there was very little that we or other Western governments that were broadly sympathetic to Yugoslavia could actually do about this situation except observe and report.

AW: Well I'm not sure. I did think at the time there were things we could do that would at any rate have made a difference to the atmosphere. In the first place we could I think have been very explicit about our belief that a liberal and economic liberal political approach were the only ways to solve this. When it came to Milosevic and the Serb leadership, who from the beginning demonstrated a will to override the interest of any other groups and an inability to keep their word on any point whatsoever when they decided their interests weren't suited to that, we could I think have spoken out a bit more in terms of agreements freely arrived at in terms of where the country might go. So I believe that that might have had some effect. Above all we could have made a greater effort to - this is European wide, this is not just about ... and it applies as much to the press as to the diplomatic effort - we could I think have done more to try to understand what was going on and what might happen in the country. The difficulty of doing so was

the effort involved in facing up to insular complexities. Everybody's name sounded to those outside it, much the same. They all ended in "ich". By the time everyone understood where Kosovo was they'd forgotten what the issue really was. Not just particularly Kosovo; that was the first name that came into my head.

JJ: So was there any consultation between member states of the EU on this problem or was that just too difficult given the sort of problems that were arising in the country at that time?

AW: Well, I left in October 1989. Up to that point there had been some pro forma discussion between European states, but I would say not really. It was, I think, rather too firmly in the "too difficult" tray that I think I indicated not entirely rightly, but nonetheless, that was the attitude, and also there was much more attention going on then, in some ways quite rightly, to the relatively hopeful developments elsewhere in the region, particularly in Hungary and Poland, and for that matter in the Soviet Union. So there was very little attention given to Yugoslavia until it was suddenly discovered, by which time I think that a lot of the necessary intellectual preparatory work was skipped.

JJ: And so Milosevic really became unstoppable? He just overrode everybody else?

AW: Milosevic was never able to keep any promise he ever made and never saw the necessity to do it. If he saw a weakness, that was something he found very difficult not to go for. I'm not saying that Milosevic made the break-up of Yugoslavia inevitable. Maybe it would have broken up without him, but I am absolutely sure he gave a tremendous impulse to the process, and it would not have happened in the same way, and quite so quickly, without him. The key was not so much Slovenia breaking away, which I do not think it would have done, or not in the same way, if the country had gone down a liberal path. The key to tragedy was the fact that Bosnia is, or at least was, I can't speak for the way it is now, inherently unstable. You've got three mutually fearful groups there who have only been kept in a state of some security from each other by outside powers. By that I don't mean that they all wish to kill each other, but they all did fear that any two

of the others would get the third, so that the way of achieving a balance was either having it in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia or as at present with NATO or some other countries firmly in charge of security. Yes, I do think that Milosevic bears a lot of the blame. I think there are things we would have tried to do which might have given him pause at least.

JJ: Did you make any concrete suggestions to London?

AW: Yes but the biggest mistake I made in Yugoslavia was to lose my audience. It's difficult when you are reporting something from abroad, to do it in the abstract. It's not an abstract. You've got a dialogue going, and if you feel the other half of the dialogue doesn't understand or goes silent, then one mistaken human reaction is to say more and to get crosser and crosser. That is the mistake I made towards the end in Yugoslavia. So I think probably by the end the Department at least thought – "He's on again".

JJ: So perhaps it was the typical reaction - a far away country of which we know little, or nothing?

AW: No question about it. It was. At one stage the Office explicitly gave the opinion that even if there was serious armed conflict, this would not be a great threat to British interests. That in some ways is quite true, but that is viewing British interests in a narrow fashion, and ignoring the fact that we're part of a larger whole anyway.

JJ: A sad end to your Ambassadorship in Yugoslavia?

AW: No I thought I failed in that regard very much, and that was the most important part I had. So that was

JJ: So after Belgrade you went as Head of Chancery, but to Moscow again, a very important role?

AW: Yes, we have elided both halves in fact of Belgrade. I was in Belgrade in '79.

JJ: So you were in Moscow again from 1979 to 1982 and Andropov was then in charge? But Brezhnev was still there when you arrived.

AW: I had the distinction of being there at the beginning and end of Brezhnev. There was a famous and possibly mythical interview with an American who when asked if he had noticed any changes from the beginning of Brezhnev's reign to the end of it, his reply was said to have been - "Well I have. Quite a lot. I think, I really, really think the trees have grown".

JJ: You had a different role. What is the role of a Head of Chancery in Moscow in particular?

AW: Well the Head of Chancery was there to provide the essential co-ordination of especially the political section, but not only. Questions relating to security or staff morale or general co-ordination of the work of the Embassy would flow to the Head of Chancery.

JJ: A senior manager's role in a sense?

AW: Political as well as a senior manager. Then of course you wouldn't attempt to do the work of the Management Counsellor or the Cultural Attaché or something, but you would make sure that you knew what they were doing so that it wouldn't clash with other things. If there was a clash then you must resolve it as best you can, if necessary by instruction.

JJ: In the following year the Soviet Union went into Afghanistan to support a new government. 50,000 troops. What was it like in Moscow at that time? Was this a popular move or was it an irrelevance to Russians but much more relevant to the British Embassy?

AW: I don't think it was a popular policy to Russians. They were more resigned to it. They were surprised by the strength of the Western reaction to the invasion. A proportion of them, including I think senior members among those who actually took the decision believed that they were doing in a general way the right thing because after all they were civilised, they had a formal civilisation. Here was a country in trouble obviously going down the wrong path. They knew what the right thing was and therefore it was their duty to impose it. Which may sound slightly reminiscent of things that have happened elsewhere more recently. But I think that there was an element of that in there. It was not simply a power play and they feared instability there. So there were positive reasons, but there were also straightforward imperialistic reasons. The effect on the position between East and West was pretty catastrophic. It meant that dialogue for a substantial part of the time simply ceased. It meant that suspicion of Soviet intentions and suspicion in the West of what the Russians might do, were heightened very considerably. Shortly after that we had the election of President Reagan and his famous "evil empire" speech which again reinforced a tense atmosphere between the official West and the official Soviet Union. Whether it had quite the same effect on personal relationships I'm not quite so convinced, but anyway it did put a very considerable damper on things. You may remember at that time the Olympic Games were scheduled to take place in Moscow which

JJ: Did we withdraw our team?

AW: The Americans withdrew, we withdrew. So yes that was unpleasant, but at the same time, I have to say, that personal relations were probably easier then than they had been earlier, because the internal decay of the regime meant that, yes, Russians had to be wary of their own KGB and the possible effects of talking too much to foreigners, but also they had far less inherent respect for their authorities because they were so obviously not able to produce a country which was able to continue to develop, to move forward, and because the place was ruled not only by age, but obviously an aging group of people who had no further ideas to offer. So that you could probably have - it seemed to me that

you could have easier personal relationships. Sometimes you used to hear things said, comments heard, that you would not have heard a few years before.

JJ: Even among senior officials or..?

AW: Yes, yes, not of course their being senior officials, but off the record. One of the things that stuck in my mind was the wife of someone with very strong regime connections by descent, rather than... he did have an office, but his connections were essentially because of his family - she used to drink too much and one day we were standing chatting together and her husband was the other side of the room where you couldn't hear, and she looked across and said "I really love that man. He's so naive. Because he was brought up in the Kremlin". In a way that was a perfectly true statement. If you lived in the Kremlin you didn't know what was going on really. Nobody expected you to. So that was a.....

JJ: But why did the Soviet government feel it really necessary to go in such a way in Afghanistan? Was it so important that they should have virtual control over the government there? I simply don't understand the I mean, it's such an awfully long way away from Moscow?

AW: But it's not that far away from the borders of the Soviet Union.

JJ: I realise that sure .. but...

AW: If you sincerely believe that there is such a thing as socialist choice, then the defeat of the government which had strong ties to the Soviet Union was itself seen as a defeat. There was also a joke that went round Moscow at the time - Soviet foreign policy was very like the attitude of the Soviet consumer - if you went into the supermarket and something was on the shelf you better take it because it wouldn't be there tomorrow. So it was a targeted opportunity. It was a foolish error, but I think it had reasonable explanations if you happened to be the person sitting in the Kremlin at the time.

JJ: A Soviet view of the domino theory? If that would go then the next state...

AW: Yes, they didn't really fully have it, but they nearly had it. Besides they probably, at the top, and I mentioned naivety in the Kremlin, believed their system would fix it, and their system was more civilised than the incipient chaos in Afghanistan, and I think one can sympathise with that. I think it was wrong, mistaken; it was morally wrong, but nonetheless one can to a degree understand that. In reverse, because I should perhaps mention, the other major factor during my time there, was the rise of Solidarity in Poland, and there they did not militarily intervene, although there were times when it seemed they might. Nonetheless they were able to make their will prevail. General Jaruzelski imposed a strict control in his presentation, again quite probably likely, to pre-empt it, and to make a sure a Soviet invasion was not necessary. As the ferment in Poland grew, so one could see the nervousness in Moscow about the spill-over effects of this in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union also increase, and I remember spending ten days in Warsaw to try to get the feel of the place with a Moscow perspective, and I had no doubt at all if I was KGB officer I would regard it as absolutely essential to get this thing under control. Otherwise the dangers were just too considerable.

JJ: Was there a risk at that time that they would enter militarily?

AW: There was a risk. Jaruzelski did it for them, and again, if you're looking historically, he did everybody a service because he pulled it off and made panicky Soviet reaction unnecessary. But if that had not happened, then it's really easy to see that a collapse of Soviet rule in Poland would have had a very rapid effect elsewhere, notably on East Germany, and I don't think that the then Kremlin leadership would have had the wisdom or whatever is the right word, to see that such a collapse was inevitable and that they should live with it as best we could, for which we have to thank the

JJ: Having done it in Afghanistan...

AW: It would have been illogical not to..

JJ: Exactly, exactly, much closer, much more dangerous as you say with Germany right next door. After Moscow you returned to London again in 1982 as Head of Western European Department, which was a Department which covered quite a lot of territory literally in Europe, with all the organisations within Europe as well - OECD, NATO, EFTA etc. A very important Department to manage and quite a lot of problems coming across your desk and those of your colleagues. What were the ones you had to deal with? You were only there for a year weren't you?

AW: The difficulty for that Department in a way was defining itself because you could look at it one way then the business of European Integration Department, the business of how to manage the EU and so on, can be held to override the business of how to manage the bilateral issues, but anyway there was obviously an inner tension between the two. It was obviously essential to try to agree and liaise closely with the European Integration Departments which had their own agenda and their own purposes driven by a very powerful Whitehall machine. So that was one area that had to be managed. But at the same time there is such a thing as the bilateral relationship. There is a particular relationship between Britain and France which is, yes, part of the European-wide relationship but is also has its own logic, its own internal dynamic. Essentially that is where you have to balance yourself between the two areas. Then there were the various particular international organisations like the Council of Europe and OECD, WEU, about which I was personally extremely sceptical, but which

JJ: (Interruption)

AW: The WEU I was thinking about. Anyway it enjoyed a revival later. For me it was a very good Department to head because these were interesting countries. Bureaucratically as I said it needed definition, it needed fitting in.

JJ: Were there any turf wars between you and EID?

AW: Of course, but that was all right. I don't think you should be Head of Department and be frightened of turf wars. At the same time there's no point in trying to expand an empire. You just have to manage as best you can and on the whole there wasn't really any significant

JJ: So having managed a mixed bag of bilateral relations and the problems that they throw up with different countries, you moved again to familiar territory in Personnel Department, and indeed Head of Personnel Department in 1983, for a couple of years. Obviously a very important Department, because without the personnel the whole thing collapses and modern pressures of finding, retaining personnel were obviously foremost in your mind. Tell me a bit more about that and your perspective with regard to personnel matters at that time?

AW: The system had not radically changed from when I was working as one of the Area Officers in the sense that it remained an overtly centralised system. Obviously like any other such department, one should try to convey to the Service what you were trying to do, trying to convey the notion that there were swings and roundabouts, if you're going to a difficult post this time you'd better have some hope for something that was a little more comfortable later. That yes, okay, you hadn't got the promotion you'd hoped for this time, but there were good reasons for that and didn't mean you'd been forgotten and abandoned. All those sorts of normal things, if you like, pastoral care. Perhaps the disadvantage of such a centralised system in terms of people's attitudes is that it is too clear who you have to blame if things don't go as they are very likely not to go to your liking. You know it's the fault of POD and somebody's got the inside track that you didn't find and that sort of thing. So I don't think that anyone at that stage would have been naive enough to suppose that you were going to be popular as Head of POD or indeed working within it. Nevertheless, I absolutely believed then and still believe that people actually tried to operate the system and did it as fairly as they could and that in the end there are decisions that someone has to make. Later on when I became Chief Clerk that system had become much more linked to the new structure of boards, multiple

candidacies which actually was designed to make the process more transparent, but hasn't been entirely successful in that, nor can it be entirely successful in that, because people have to have somewhere to place their resentment, fears and doubts, which typically, I think about 90 per cent of people, attribute to outside forces. 10 per cent attribute their amazing good fortune to outside forces. They remain surprised by the success, but by and large it balances towards seeking to place disappointment elsewhere than on your own shoulders.

JJ: Were you trying to restructure the way people were selected for promotion or moves from one place to another?

AW: Yes. One tried to make sure that the... there was a board system which reviewed, which obviously tried to be as fair as possible. You tried to make sure that the critical decisions like who was going to get faster promotion, what the balance of postings should be, how career planning was done and so on, weren't made at the whim of an individual, but were made following a proper process of discussion, so that no one person in the department was acting as dictator, and there was a structure which would review how postings were going. I also tried to make sure that people realised that they could and they ought to come and see the Head of Department, but at the same time I think we were all clear where responsibility in the end rested, and that was with POD, and where there were mistakes, well I remain and feel sorry for them. But someone had to take some decisions and that's where they were located.

JJ: How much were the geographical departments involved in the system of selection and moving people from one place to another?

AW: Not so much as the Commands are now. Partly because, obviously if you had a particularly energetic or pushy, or whatever word you want to use, Under-Secretary or Head of Department, they would try to influence things to get who they wanted. And equally obviously there are structures within the Office - like I'm a Russian speaker - in principle Moscow wants all the Russian speakers it can get its hands on and will know

who they are and will try to influence things in the right direction from the point of view of Moscow. So obviously there were things like that. And some of the areas are more desirable than others. It was not at all uncommon for people who had learned a difficult language, but one which subsequently took them to places they didn't really like to discover a very strong, European usually, vocation and therefore a reason why they should never move anywhere beyond Paris, Brussels, maybe on a very bad day to Vienna.

JJ: I should tell you perhaps that in 1993 the Ambassador and I in Strasbourg, which was effectively a three man post, both were told within a week or so that we should move that summer, thus leaving one fairly inexperienced Third Secretary to cover the work of the whole delegation.

AW: I could answer that comment. I wasn't there, therefore..... Of course these things do happen. Any organisation is going to be subject to accidents that way. It usually happens either because that's the way postings in that area are worked out or because there isn't flexibility elsewhere in the system. One of the pieces has been taken out because someone has resigned, or whatever, and it just causes a chain reaction. People were always very unhappy that they were never told sufficiently far in advance, when they were coming back to London, exactly what it was they were going to do, a problem which exists. That's because it's in London where the flexibility had to be.

JJ: I understand that of course. It gave me the opportunity to serve three Ambassadors as opposed to two in the space of '89 to '94.

AW: It would mean you controlled at least two of them?

JJ: Yes. What about broad matters of trying to recruit staff and keep them, and the amount of money available for opening posts where at that time, no doubt as at others, there were recognised needs? Were there problems with the Treasury on that score?

AW: It did always surprise me, and it still does surprise me, that recruitment and retention has not been more of a problem than it has. The difficulties of foreign service life are quite considerable. There are, as I think we've already discussed, issues about spouses working and therefore maintaining proper income in a society which is increasingly accustomed to joint incomes, difficulty with children and so on. Actually our retention rate, I can't speak for it now because I don't know what it is, but during my time with the Diplomatic Service it was always amazingly good. The reasons for that are partly because we had a very strong spirit of solidarity, *esprit de corps* which is a terrific asset. People like working, on the whole, they like working together doing a worthwhile job. That was the most tremendous asset which we touched at our peril. That was part of the rationale of having, not literally a career for life, but on the whole a career where people would expect to serve and move at a pace they could understand and measure, up the ranks where sudden stops and starts were the exception rather than the norm. People welcomed it personally if they had a sudden accelerated rise through the structures and they regarded that as well deserved. But for every such rise there is a penalty for those who don't get it and logically to weight the balance for someone to plummet downwards rather rapidly, which can be a very poor reward for a life of good service and maybe drudgery in other places. I don't think that is something we needed or need to apologise for.

JJ: Were Foreign Office Ministers very supportive of the need, or the perceived need, for sufficient funds to staff posts properly with the appropriate amount of space, for leave, for placements, for training and so on? The training margin was always at risk as I remember it, because there wasn't sufficient money for people to go off on training before they were posted from one place to another. And the Treasury was always...

AW:: Well to be fair to the Treasury, they take a lot of flak for lots of things. Well in principle yes, but in practice no. In principle if you say to Ministers and anybody else, we need to support staff, they're going to say, yes, of course. I've no doubt at all they mean it. If you say however, the question is "I'm sorry there are not quite enough people

just now to provide you with a Private Secretary just now. Can you wait a couple of weeks?" They say "What the Hell do you think you're playing at?"

JJ: But what about opening posts? Or expanding them because of a local change in circumstances?

AW: This was more when I was Chief Clerk than when I was in Personnel. I think we were not sufficiently rigorous about opening posts. We tend to have the view that because Britain has always been a worldwide power in principle we ought to be represented everywhere without necessarily actually thinking what does "X" will do when he gets up in the morning. Is it going to provide a reasonable day's activity for him? Does it really matter? This is slippery ground because it's very subjective, any judgment you do make. But we do have posts we've opened in places where I personally certainly would not have done it.

JJ: Would you like to name any of them?

AW: I won't name names.

JJ: What about after the fall of the Berlin Wall where obviously we were going to have to need some sort of representation in these new countries, if you like? Ex-Soviet Union countries. Where we were able to read about a lone officer living and working in a basement with his dog and so on and so on, while the Germans poured in... maybe this is all apocryphal, but?

AW: It isn't necessarily apocryphal. Anybody making a case for opening a post would be certain to report that the Germans, the Italians, the French were piling in, whereas if you look at the facts, we have probably as good a network in terms of where we actually are. Perhaps not in the case of numbers. The Germans had a strong interest in a lot of former Soviet Union countries (a) because they are nearer and (b) they had a very large

programme of repatriating people who had German ancestry. So a lot of those people were there for that.

JJ: But near or further away is not a very strong argument.

AW: For what?

JJ: The fact that the country is a bit nearer to London or a bit further away isn't an argument? British interests? Trade interests?

AW: That is quite obviously linked to distance. I don't know how much trade we actually do with some of these countries. Not much I think.

JJ: Yes, but which is first? The chicken or the egg? Is it because we're not there promoting trade or there isn't any trade to be done?

AW: An interesting statistic to evaluate. The correlation between the opening of missions and the development of trade; that's another argument which is always put forward. All I'm saying is that think we should treat a lot of these arguments as what they are, which is highly subjective. I told you mine was a minority point of view.

JJ: The Treasury was pretty insistent, unless I'm wrong, in that if you opened one post you had to close another one somewhere else, which might not be a bad system.

AW: They sort of tried that. They usually try holding on to it by monetary means rather than anything else. There is no logical connection to my mind, between opening somewhere and closing elsewhere.

JJ: I'm not saying that they chose the posts.

AW: These sorts of methods of control are extremely broad brush and not usually tremendously effective. And also what they can mean by opening and closing a post. I don't think they ever said literally "If you open in Düsseldorf, you must close in Jamaica".

JJ: I'm not saying that they quoted post

AW: What you had to do was you couldn't go above a certain personnel ceiling. So you were spreading thinner and thinner. Again I think you had to have a care for not just the number of people you could send out to staff a post initially, especially a small one, but how you are going to maintain that. You might well find someone who was extremely enthusiastic to go to Ashgabat in Turkmenistan and then find it more difficult to find someone who could speak a relevant language to go another time, and also preserve that person's marriage, sanity and other desirable things. So I think this is an area where we have to have a clear balance between proper measurement of our interests and how sustainable it is, not just in terms of financing it but in terms of effort and real interest.

JJ: There is also I suppose the aspect of, well, we've got so many senior officers, under secretaries of ambassadorial rank, who we cannot retire because they are too young, but you have to find somewhere useful for them to do a job?

AW: That is always alleged and may be, I can't answer it as of now, but that was not the case before. An absolute safeguard and one which if we have abandoned I think we've made a mistake, is to link promotion to available posts. You could not give someone promotion in the abstract. If they'd been promoted to become First Secretary it had to be to go to some job to be done in that grade. That meant you could measure the number of posts that needed First Secretaries or Grade 7s or whatever it might be, or ambassadors of whatever grade. They'd choose the grade and appoint people accordingly. You could work out building in expectations for how many premature retirements there might be, how many people might become ill, or die, or resign, or anything like that, and come to a reasonable projection of how many people you could promote and therefore have some

idea of when you might promote them. Which of course people take as a promise, not a maybe.

JJ: In any case the job had a lot of balancing acts to carry out?

AW: Yes it's a managerial job and it's one where I think you have to be as clear as you can. You have to be prepared to take people's happiness, which is easy, disappointment which is wearing and their hopes. By and large in Personnel Department you are dealing with your contemporaries, and you also know that sooner or later you're going to be sitting on the other side of the desk.

JJ: Yes, you're the one who's waiting to be posted? Therefore the importance still of these confidential reports and what is put in them by the person writing them - I always thought it was a mistake that the most interesting part of the confidential report which people in London would read to find out what this chap was really like, or this girl is really like, was the pen portrait which was dropped for what I would call today, politically correct reasons, of not making judgments on people's personalities.

AW: Indeed, so that is now just ticking the boxes?

JJ: What the hell is the point of the report if you can't make judgments.

AW: Is that right?

JJ: Well that's what always happened. That's what happens now. The pen portrait was dropped ten, fifteen years ago largely, and strangely, I always thought, because of staff or trade union pressure - that it was somehow unfair. My view was always that over a period of ten years or longer, somebody looking through a person's file can see all the pen portraits and find a commonality of view about a person; strength, weaknesses, personality, so on and so on. Therefore it's a shame to drop it.

AW: This is true. Well the pen portrait says at least as much about the person writing it as about the person about whom it is written; at least as much. Secondly, there is a high consistency between various reports of people and thirdly, if there's one thing that - let's say that someone is criticised for talking too much, or being aggressive, something like that, they will almost always, virtually the first words when they come in confirm the criticism. "I'm not aggressive" or "I'm practically silent" and then proceed to talk for half an hour. Yes you used to get some prejudiced judgments.

JJ: You had Personnel matters to deal with when you became Chief Clerk in 1992, but perhaps there are certainly aspects of being Chief Clerk that you haven't covered on the personnel discussion side?

AW: there were two things. I inherited a changed personnel system following the Coopers Lybrand report.

JJ: What did that recommend?

AW: It recommended a very elaborate series of boarding structures and openness and so on. It was all fine, but taken too literally, I inherited a rather too literal interpretation of every one of its requirements which needed to be, in my view, rebalanced and more user friendly. So that was one issue.

JJ: Was it drafted on what one might call business lines as opposed to the business that we were in?

AW: Well working even more closely now with business than I did before, I don't recognise anything really that follows the description of business as assumed by Ministers and Civil Service, so yes, I think it was not well aligned to the business that we were in, and I think that it had a quite a lot of theoretical responses to the complaints that were made by the system it was supposed to correct, and it was obvious it was going to throw up difficulties like disappointment of multiple turnings down by boards,

uncertainties, long uncertainties and so on. But anyway that was one issue that needed addressing. Another was how to manage the internal structure of the Service to make sure that management of money and of areas was co-located with management of the policies, which we addressed. There was a major review. We addressed that by establishing the current system of commands whereby the Assistant Secretary, or whatever he's now called, had a defined amount of money to use and he knew how much it was and he could shift around resources within that.

JJ: More flexibility?

AW: More flexibility, but at the same time more responsibility, which is an inevitable trade off. We looked at the research cadre and again aligned that more closely I think and hope with the geographical commands. There was a major attempt to adjust and rationalise the communications systems. There was an attempt, because we had to produce a new computer system for management and finance, to again put that on a more accountable and clearer line, again to work within the command structure. The inherited communications system had to continue going over to a more computerised communications system so that everybody had a terminal at their desk as they do now, and so on and so forth. There was the normal diet of personnel management, security issues, visa issues, consular issues. There was a new structure which meant that the Deputy Under Secretaries as a whole took forward the management board, discussed management issues of use to the service. That was before decisions were taken, so it was a pretty full plate.

JJ: But when you say consular issues or visa issues, for example?

AW: That is because the Chief Clerk is the Deputy Under Secretary in charge of Consular Department.

JJ: As well as all the other broader management ..oh really. That in itself is quite a major problem area.

AW: Yes, he has Protocol Department and things like that. It's on the whole unlikely that the Chief Clerk would get involved directly in a consular case. What he had to do was to make sure that either the Assistant Under Secretary who was immediately answerable would keep in touch with that. Make sure he went round to see these Departments from time to time, and they could talk to him, and he was sure that they had the right money and the right access if they needed it.

JJ: How did you at the top of this tree liaise with all your Assistant Under Secretaries and Heads of Department and the PUS, of course?

AW: Well the PUS was David Gillmore, with whom I had a very close relationship, and with the AUSs. You would see them at regular morning meetings and so on. I would meet one on one regularly to talk about issues that I wanted to talk about or he wanted to talk about, plus the regular diet of the No 1 and Management Boards. And we had meetings from time to time with all the AUSs.

JJ: Was there still while you were Chief Clerk, discussion about how for example Embassies might merge? Having EU embassies as opposed to bilateral embassies and EU Consular Services?

AW: Yes. We did something in that regard in terms of co-location.

JJ: Sharing one building?

AW: Yes. When you'd have shared services, but still have a British Ambassador, German Ambassador whatever it might be. I think the French and Germans at one stage had a common Embassy in Ulan Bator, but it didn't work. I don't know what the issues were in Ulan Bator, but in most places there would be for example commercial issues where obviously if you are the British Ambassador, even if you're representing France, Germany, Italy and everybody else, if Shell and Total Fina Elf come up, even if you are

absolutely impartial between them, you will be supposed not to be. So I think there is a real difficulty there. Integration hasn't gone far enough to change that.

JJ: One can see, for example, that on the issue of visas within the EU common travel area, ie posts where they have an applicant for a visa to go to a Schengen or EU country, that any of the EU embassies might issue that particular visa, because as a certain national he would have to go

AW: It wouldn't work for the UK because we don't ..

JJ: We're not in the Schengen Agreement.

AW: Yes you could, but there would be those that would suppose that the Belgian Embassy - which I mention straight out of the top of my head - might be easier than say the Greek embassy, or possibly the other way round. So there would be questions as to how rigorous the procedures were. It's not insuperable, it's just ..

JJ: I can understand the hesitation.

AW: Getting to the stage of actually having a common service.....

JJ: It might come in time.

AW: I think it probably will come in time.

JJ: The more and more integration we have.

AW: There is certainly a logic to it. In Benelux they do have it.

JJ: That's certainly true.

AW: And we represent various other countries presumably for the issue of visas

JJ: Some Commonwealth countries. Once there is a unified or EU immigration policy, which might take some years to come to fruition, that might become easier. So did you have contact with Ministers as well directly or just through the PUS on?

AW: Douglas Hurd used to take a considerable interest. He was the Minister of State and he used to sit on the No 1 Board as the Minister of State does still. I would go along and brief him and talk to him and get his input, plus you would not forget financial issues in which Ministers would have an interest in which you would have to explain your actions, or explain the possible limits.

JJ: You mentioned briefly IT and communications, I can imagine that communications because of IT have expanded a great deal in the office. Perhaps almost to an unmanageable degree. The sheer volume of texts that you have to get through. The “spam” effect. This is a serious problem certainly in business now and beginning to think of ways to take action to cut it all down.

AW: It’s inherent in the medium actually. The advantage and trouble of e-mail is that you can do it very quickly, and your message goes straight through and that’s it and it can be only to one person. Where communications are instant so is oblivion usually. If your message can very quickly get to the bottom of the tray it will be forgotten. That is one thing. The other thing is that people can too easily fire off something, which they haven’t really thought through.

JJ: No reflection. No consultation with others. Just you have a thought so...

AW: It still happens. I know that the systems include a means to get back to previous correspondence, but I doubt even if the system worked better than I’m sure it does, which I’m sure is now close to perfection, which it was not at the time, people don’t do it. They will not. So if you wish your messages to get through, you have to genuinely try to be

sparing, but regular, so that if someone sees something in Banjul that they know is going to be a sensible message, as opposed to something which is sometimes sensible and sometimes not, they will read it.

JJ: At least until the Ambassador changes! What has the effect of e-mail been on the number and length of telegrams that are sent? When I was still in the Service - I retired in 94 - there was a post limit on how many telegrams you could send in the year. I remember my American colleagues thought this was totally laughable. How could you limit the number of things that you needed to say to headquarters?

AW: I think it wasn't a bad discipline at all. There are quite a large number of people in the world who will always want to be seen to be saying something, and that's both wrong and right, because if you don't say anything, people will assume that you're not doing your job. That would be a process of tail-wagging to show people you are still around. There have been various attempts to make sure that people differentiate between what is important and what's personal. What's of interest to the Department and so forth. That is actually quite important to bring about properly. The comfort is that people used to complain about the mass of paper. I simply don't know enough to know if it's worse now than it was before. I do know if you see something on the screen you forget it much more quickly than you do if it's written on a piece of paper, and then you take a pencil to it and make remarks in the margin. Those sorts of little habits that technically you could do on the screen, you would not do - they help to fix things in the mind sometimes. I regret the fact that e-mails also have the result that people, once they have even been discouraged to do so, are much less liable to produce a thought-through piece of reporting, like despatches used to be or were supposed to be anyway. Because that was very good for the producer as well as, sometimes at least for the person receiving it. This was supposed to be a formal statement of a view on a general broad topic usually which was supposed to be valuable in six months time as opposed to just the next five minutes. I think that was a valid thing to have to do.

JJ: There was a certain discipline there that perhaps has faded away. So your next post was in 1989 when you went back to Washington as Minister this time, No 2 in other words. George Bush Senior was in the White House, James Baker in the State Department, Douglas Hurd as Foreign Secretary. What were the main bilateral issues you had to deal with during your first year? What was on the boil?

AW: The main issues were reunification of Germany and the invasion of Kuwait. German reunification is something which the US Administration very quickly saw as (a) inevitable and (b) as welcome, which we feared would result in the early emergence of an over-mighty Germany, and in any case perhaps it would be better for everyone if it remained two Germanys. That may be a slight caricature, but still.

JJ: Well was it? Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister expressed her views about the risks of German reunification and Nicholas Ridley had to resign as a result, am I right? The Spectator article.

AW: There were genuine fears about what it meant.

JJ: I'm sure they were genuine.

AW: One of the things that was clear to me anyway, and certainly to the Americans, which was far more important, was that once you removed the Communist Party from power in Eastern Germany there was going to be reunification. So you didn't really have a choice, and all the rest is just faffing about.

JJ: That's perhaps one of the few topics where Mrs Thatcher and the French President agreed.

AW: It was, and that was certainly something that, a repeated message that, not only me, but largely me, found myself sending from Washington that (a) this is inevitable and (b) that the Americans welcomed it. It was not all welcomed in certain quarters in London,

but I think that it was important that they heard it and it was true. It turned out to be actually something in our interests anyway.

JJ: What was Douglas Hurd's view then? He had to argue his corner with the Prime Minister?

AW: No, I think that Douglas Hurd understood it perfectly. I think that Margaret Thatcher understood it in a general way. She just didn't like it.

JJ: She just didn't like it. She had to accept it in the general way, especially if the Americans were right?

AW: Well the Americans couldn't have stopped it either. They couldn't have stopped it and remained true to themselves, even if they were prepared to be critical ... So that was certainly an important subject. Within the same general optic of trying to get good understanding and where the Americans saw the Soviet Union going, where they saw Eastern Europe as a whole going, that was closely related and a substantial body of work.

JJ: At this time Gorbachev was making his mark? He came to Strasbourg and made his speech about the "common European home" and so on and generally was wanting lines opened for the Soviet Union as it still then was, to play a more positive role in Europe once he saw the way Germany had gone and so on, without necessarily wanting to give up the Soviet Union which in the end

AW: That was the risk.

JJ: How did the Americans take Gorbachev and his overtures and announcements?

AW: Well the American public and the Administration too had an essentially a welcoming attitude to Gorbachev. He was doing something which was very much in the common interest, that is in trying to deal flexibly with a situation which otherwise would

have been very dangerous indeed. I think there was and still is abiding gratitude in the way he managed that. But that said, his grip on the internal processes within the Soviet Union was uncertain. The American Administration certainly wished him very well. They had quite a lot of suspicions about Boris Yeltsin as being unpredictable, unfamiliar and so on, but again they adjusted to his making the best of the good or bad job or whatever it was that they had to deal with whatever it was who was there. I think that American policy towards what could have been an extremely dangerous situation, as I said before, in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has been highly pragmatic, sensible and well managed. There are those who say we should give them a tremendous amount of Marshall aid. I don't accept that at all, but essentially it turned out very well.

JJ: Why not?

AW: Because it would have been a complete waste of money, because you have to have a structure in which you can use the money you give, or ability I suppose to impose one yourself ...

JJ: That was the real problem, I suppose, because it did work pretty well in the first Marshall Aid plan?

AW: yes but you were dealing with established countries and all the states were actually under your control.

JJ: With stable democracies, effectively.

AW: Yes, nothing recognisable like that in most of the former Soviet Union

JJ: And then there was Iraq of course.

AW: Then there was Iraq. That was ...

JJ: It all seemed much simpler the first time round?

AW: Yes, but I don't know what George Bush would have done had Margaret Thatcher not been there. I suspect probably what he ended up doing anyway, but there was a "Don't go wobbling on me George" phrase, which epitomised at any rate the unity and clarity of view. From the point of view of the Embassy in Washington that was obviously a very busy time....

JJ: There was some reluctance obviously. They didn't want to get drawn into further overseas military intervention.

AW: I think it was clear to them that they had to get rid of the Iraqis from Kuwait and I think actually that they made up their minds to do that as quickly as we made up our minds in effect that they should do. We couldn't have done that on our own I suppose. So I don't think there was any serious disagreement. We tend to like to think of ourselves as being stronger minded than the Americans but it is they who had to bear the main responsibility then.

JJ: As we see it.

AW: As we see it. On the whole it's a strong dose of self-flattery.

JJ: Why did they not go right into Baghdad in search of Saddam Hussein, or try to?

AW: Very logical at that time for good kosher reasons. One is the reason that ought to be absolutely clear to everybody now is that you have to do something with Iraq afterwards.

JJ: They had that thought at that time?

AW: Without question, I think that that was the primary reason why they did not. The other is that their policy objective at the time was not to actually to get rid of Saddam Hussein, but to see he quit Kuwait. What followed was like a containment strategy. Going into Baghdad only really arose because of the speed of the collapse of the Iraqi resistance. I think that you could as easily argue what was at stake having defeated Hussein, to maintain the sanctions regime for as long as we did. Instead of imposing sanctions... ceasefire and then to flood the country with aid or killing with kindness, something like that. This is purely theoretical. Sanctions acquired their own logic and changed the situation.

JJ: With hindsight it didn't do an awful lot of good?

AW: You're not speaking to an expert with hindsight. No. The difficulty with sanctions and the difficulty with invasion is stopping.

JJ: Turning back to Europe then, NATO and all that. There was a lot of discussion about what was going on in Europe and the role of NATO in the new Europe, if you like. Were the Americans looking to keep the status quo as it was with its traditional role, or?

AW: No. I think within the new Europe there were contradictory desires. One was to maintain by frequent repetition NATO's viability and relevance. A bit like people trying to take strength from their marriage at a time it is failing. So there was a certain amount of that because you couldn't quite decide what to do next, and because NATO does contain an essential relevance as the framework for the transatlantic relationship.

JJ: There's militarily such a vacuum there.

AW: Well there's also the political structure there. Militarily I don't know what Western Europe would have done if NATO had simply disappeared.

JJ: That is what I was coming to. Presumably even then the Americans were thinking if only the Europeans could get their military act together.

AW: This is a very old song.

JJ: Of course it is. It's still being sung, even today.

AW: I remember my first Ambassador in Belgrade in his farewell dispatch said he was very grateful for thirty years happy employment addressing the question after Tito what? Which he never had to answer.

JJ: What about the transatlantic relationship between the UK and the USA? To what extent did official America have regard to what we still like to call our special relationship? Was this just lip service to this country? Lost an Empire and possibly found a role or not quite sure?

AW: I suppose America's found an empire and not quite a role. No, it's not entirely lip service. I think the habit that we had of easy consultation was quite a significant factor for a degree of integration.

JJ: But the special relationship, as you see it at the moment, and because of your own American experience, there's an awful lot of criticism that we are Bush's poodle in a political sense.

AW: Perhaps we should be Chirac's poodle instead. I see it as basically not true.

JJ: From a British point of view Mrs Thatcher said it after the Kuwait invasion that we should never again take any serious decision involving our American friends without getting them on our side, or our being on their side. This seems to be the conclusion at the moment, coming out of the Iraq business?

AW: This was supposedly our conclusion after Suez. Well, what other decision could we have taken concerning Iraq? The only other decision would have been not to support them (the Americans).

JJ: Yes indeed.

AW: I have no doubt that our fears about Iraq were very real even if hindsight suggests they were not well founded.

JJ: To what extent - to put it another way - would British interests have been damaged if we had not gone along and not joined in militarily in the Iraq intervention? If we'd taken the Chirac view?

AW: I think if we'd taken the Chirac view that would have made things far worse.

JJ: After Washington then. Your last posting, Andrew, as Ambassador to Russia and Moldova in 1995. You must have seen an awful lot of changes in what was then Russia as opposed to the Soviet Union since your previous posting in 1979 to 1982?

AW: It was quite literally a new country.

JJ: Yeltsin as the first President of a Russian Republic, since 1991, and his promotion of some forms of market reforms, privatisation of 80% of the State enterprises and so on, serious economic problems at the same time.

AW: I think the first thing to realise is the depth of change that had been taking place in Russia. The second thing is the essential nature of that change. Russia emerged from a Soviet Union which had quite literally collapsed. Which had spent its resources and begun a process of out-farming to people of the regime under no control whatsoever. It needed to reinvent property relationships, begin the establishment of a viable political structure, and finally to extirpate the power of the Communist Party and the myth that

power in Russia should flow from a single centre extending to all regions. I think the biggest plague of Russian history has been the idea that a strong man is necessary to rule the country. It's not good to have a weak ruler of course. But it's a question of building up institutions hopefully managed by decent people, but institutions primarily or whether you are going to rely on an all-powerful czar. Yeltsin's great contribution during my time was twofold. One was to complete the destruction of the Communist stranglehold. He did not as it were expel the Communist Party. It was still part of the system but it was a different Communist Party and it has no immediate prospect of restoring anything like a centrally run economy. That work of destruction was essential. Parallel with that was the beginnings of the construction of a system whereby presidents and people in authority were chosen by elections, whereby property relations were acknowledged and in a number of hands, whereby the press had a role in criticising, clarifying; the liberation of a society. Lots of things went wrong. The relationship between the President and the Duma - the Parliament - under Yeltsin remained oppositional throughout his time, which meant that getting reforms through to simplify matters was almost impossible. There was obviously far too much reliance on revenues brought in by the oil and gas. The process of privatisation was rough, and the structure of justice remained inchoate. There was all this stuff written about him having too much to drink and having been in ill health, which was perfectly true, and had its relevance, but was not actually the defining moment.

The defining moment I think was the beginnings of a process of transformation which depended actually if people would be forced to take responsibility for their actions, good or bad, and more often bad than good, and that's where their responsibility lay on the individual shoulders, and the beginnings of the construction of a system of viable institutions. Corruption, criminality, failed enterprises, and other things were major problems. They had their roots in the past and were not just the fault of Yeltsin. No reform was completed, but a very important secular change began which I strongly believe will be historically recognised to be a major achievement. Some of it by inadvertence, but nonetheless an achievement occurred during his time.

This is a strong statement, because it is too easy to begin with the negative. People often say, why couldn't Russia have done what China did and has done so far, which is to maintain a political system and follow the process of economic change within it. There are reasons for that. We were talking earlier about Eastern Europe, that's one of them. Another is that the agriculture sector in Russia was not as important as it was in China - Russia is much more urbanised than China is - so there is no way that you could begin an agricultural revolution for that reason. And because the degradation of the agricultural sector in Russia is much greater than it has been in China. But I also think severe political problems are building up in China. They have at least as much corruption as Russia. The scale of their failed enterprises is at the very least as alarming as those in Russia, and their political structure is such as to be extremely ill-equipped to deal with the problems. So we will see. I wasn't Ambassador under Putin so that's another matter. Yeltsin left a mess in some ways, but I think it's a mess that possibly had to lead to constructive development. A lot of the reforms and changes that have been introduced, and legislation under Putin, were first thought of and attempted under Yeltsin, but he couldn't do it because of the Duma. And also because he was unable for reasons of health and other reasons, to keep plugging away at it and really be consistent about it. But I think that a period of maturation was very necessary.

JJ: Do you think that Western governments and organisations like the World Bank and IMF had the right approach in trying to help forward these reforms towards a market economy or were we pushing the Russians too fast beyond their capabilities...?

AW: It is the duty of the outside world to point where they should be going and encourage them to be brave rather than anything else. In the abstract it wasn't that they had too much shock therapy. In the abstract, I'm not saying this was possible - in the abstract they didn't have enough shock therapy. They should for example have privatised and made transparent Gazprom instead of leaving it as a piece of the Soviet Union which is still in place and far too close to the State. They should have done far more to cut links between business and the State than they have done, because that's a cancer for both sides. There are other things which ideally they should have done, but for very

understandable reasons they didn't. The IMF, as I understood their policy, was saying do what you have to do against inflation. We will lend you money if you make reforms. It's a difficult balance. That's a negotiating point not easy to manage. But the object of the exercise in the end was to help Russia face up to its choices. I don't believe at all that we would have been well advised to give more money.

I wasn't there in 1992. Brian Fall was Ambassador then, but what I understood from reading about it and talking to people who were there at that time, the reasons why Gaidar fell and gave way to Chernomyrdin, who was much more conservative, wasn't really lack of money. It was because they described themselves as a *kamikaze* administration and so they were. Gaidar had no choice actually than to liberalise the price structure and let the market find its own level in terms of prices but it's not popular. He had no choice but to begin the process of privatisation, but again it wasn't particularly popular. I doubt whether a huge injection, a further injection of Western money would have made that any easier. I also doubt whether that money would have been wisely spent. I suspect a lot of that money would have disappeared into the wrong pockets. One of the things about the Soviet Union and about a system of personal rule is that it means that everybody else is automatically irresponsible. It's not just that people are afraid to take decisions. It's because they know that their decisions and actions in a sense have no consequences. Therefore pocketing money is not stealing from anybody. It's just grabbing it as it goes past or somebody else will take it.

JJ: How did the Russians feel about having lost an empire without all that much visible or immediate economic improvement, or improvements only for some? Did they feel that overall they had gained from these very radical changes?

AW: No. Two reflections really. One is that like the United States, Russia is a huge country. It's bigger than the United States geographically. It is also a very local one. So if you're living in Ohio you tend to think about Ohio and not even about Washington, let alone abroad. In a similar way if you are living in Tomsk, yes in a general way you feel the Ukraine should be part of your country, but actually you don't really care about it,

because you care about trying to survive and do whatever you can about life in Tomsk. There was a political élite in Moscow. Substantial proportions of that definitely regretted the passing of the empire and felt it was an injustice that should ideally be rectified and that certainly Russia should be treated as the equivalent super power to the United States. That's a feeling which has lessened over time. I did not, and do not, think that the Russians were, generally speaking, either that much interested in foreign policy or particularly imperialistic in their feelings about it. Certainly as compared to the Serbs whose every other conversation by the time I left there was becoming about how the world had treated them wrongly, and about how they should not be deprived of their due rights as a nation and so on. There was no reflection of that in conversations in Russia. Conversations were about how do we get out of this mess? How do we arrange our own country? What is our own future supposed to be? Not about how are we going to recover the Ukraine, let alone the Caucasus. You can see where that leads in relation to Chechnya, which is a terrible situation and a terrible thing.

JJ: They are taking a terribly strong line.

AW: Well, strong in some ways. It's a horrible situation Chechnya now. That was I think Yeltsin's biggest mistake.

JJ: Doing what?

AW: Trying to suppress the Chechen government of Dudayev at that time, by force. He thought he could do it easily and it didn't work and therefore he got into a war and so on. That made things worse. They agreed on peace in Chechnya in 1996, but the Chechens could not govern themselves. It was a case of anarchy in which British as well as, of course, far greater numbers of Russian hostages were taken. You will recall we had four people whose heads were cut off and we managed to get another couple out, which was one of the happiest days of my life when I saw those people. We got them out eventually, but it was a very dangerous place in a very unstable part of the Caucasus and

that has to threaten everybody all round it. But at the same time what Russia has been doing, is trying to do now, seems extraordinarily unlikely to work.

JJ: The Russian Vietnam, possibly? They eventually have to let go?

AW: I'm not sure what they would be letting go, because the place is such chaos, it is so destroyed, it is hard to know.

JJ: Do you think there are these wild Islamic elements?

AW: Without question. Whether there would be wild Islamic elements had things not developed earlier to produce the situation we have today, that's a different question. I don't think you have to argue with the implication of that. The fact is that such elements now exist. I don't think it's because of Chechnya - it exists the way it does. There is also the brutality and incompetence of the Russian campaign. The vicious response and vicious actions, not just response, of the Chechens themselves. Horrible.... a truly dreadful situation.

JJ: Do you think that while you were there, there were visible signs of favourable developments as far as democracy, human rights and rule of law were concerned, which were the things which Russia signed up for when it joined the Council of Europe in the mid 1990s?

AW: Yes I do. I think it's bound to be a slow process.

JJ: Of course.

AW: I think it's a pity since then that press freedom has been eroded.

JJ: This is under Putin?

AW: Yes. The discipline and organisation of the Federation in some ways has been improved, but the amount of real responsibility carried by either the local administration or the federal units has been diminished. The courts have been used - there has been improvements in the performance of the courts - but they have also been used for blatantly political purposes. Those are very regrettable.

JJ: Steps forward, but one or two steps back since Putin's time?

AW: Yes.

JJ: What about Putin's relations with the Duma? Have they changed?

AW: It's radically different, he's got his own party there. It isn't billed as such, but there is a party which controls, which is able to control the Duma for all practical purposes, whose purpose is to support the Kremlin.

JJ: So there is a dropping off of the democratic power in that sense?

AW: Well yes and no. The Duma under Yeltsin, and it remains the case under Putin, has no direct executive responsibility. It doesn't choose the government or the Prime Minister. That is actually the President's choice but a choice which he quite frequently refuses to take responsibility for. So he in a sense is irresponsible as well.

JJ: What does the Duma do then?

AW: The Duma passes laws and enacts legislation. It does not choose the government of the day. The government of the day does not reflect the Duma. The Duma has to accept the appointment of the Prime Minister. It has three goes and if it refuses three times then usually the Duma has to be dissolved then. So you then have to hold fresh elections. But the government answers to the Kremlin which pretends that it doesn't have day to day responsibility and therefore criticises the government whenever it feels like it.

The government doesn't reflect the balance of forces within the Duma. If it did then Yeltsin would have had Communist or close to Communist Prime Ministers.

JJ: Presumably the Duma will consider laws which Putin and the government wishes to pass? They may or may not?

AW: Generally speaking if Putin has got a law to pass it will pass.

JJ: Not least because he's got his party there now?

AW: He's got a party that was elected on the understanding that they would support him. It's not actually his party. Until the government belongs to the Duma the Duma will not be responsible for the government.

JJ: Yes. I understand.

AW: But as soon as that happens of course it's not under the control of the Kremlin.

JJ: So how do you view Russia's future over the next ten years, say.

AW: The only Russian Government which has actually been answerable to the Duma and not the Kremlin was the Primakov Government. After 1998 and the financial collapse, Primakov came in with a government of left orientation and found itself to its surprise maintaining a very strongly liberal, market-orientated framework which actually stood Russia in very good stead. That's the only situation where in reality the government was answerable to the Duma and relied on the Duma's support and not on being the nominee of the President...

JJ: Over the next ten years?

AW: A great deal depends on what Putin does in his next term of office. Whether he will continue the process of

JJ: He is the only candidate presumably?

AW: He is not the only candidate.

JJ: But the only one with any prospects.

AW: The agenda for the next term is potentially heavy. They need a banking system, they need a properly market-orientated energy sector, they need military reform. They need to make their judicial system truly independent. They need to reform their bureaucracy which is huge and frankly inept, but ever present. They need to make sure that the very large sector of the economy which consists of bankrupt firms, which in the end depend upon successful ones, disappears. They need to ensure that the big oligarchs allow medium sized and smaller enterprises to grow. That's just a few of the things they need to do. It's not a hopeless agenda. It is an agenda you won't accomplish in one term.

JJ: It's a strong wish list, isn't it?

AW: Yes. The best thing about Russia is that the habit of independent association, independent thought has grown and is on the increase rather than the reverse, that the economic pressures are pushing essentially in a liberal direction. The cost of inaction is very high. In my Annual Review for 1998, after the crash, I wrote that despair was a sin and I think it is a sin. I do not at all despair of their ability to achieve what they need to do over time. It's a country of extraordinary talent which I am very happy to continue to believe will make it and can do so. It could be frustrated by foolishness and return to the idea of the strong man but I don't think it will, at any rate over the longer term. So in ten years I would expect it to have made some progress along some of these lines, but of course one cannot rule out the possibility of it instead becoming a spectacular mess.

JJ: Could you just say a brief word about your other country, Moldova?

AW: I went there four or five times, but it was taken over by the Ambassador in Romania, from memory in 1998.

JJ: It was in the news today, according the Financial Times that the OSCE is requesting EU troops to be in Transdnistr by the end of the year.

AW: Who was suggesting it?

JJ: The OSCE was asking the EU to consider sending troops there.

AW: Jolly good luck to them. That is part of the country which is essentially turned into a sort of a Mafioso Republic by small exiled groups of Russian soldiers.

JJ: Really?

AW: That was the part of the country which had the most Russian population as opposed to Moldovan-Romanian speaking peoples. The successive governments in Moldova have missed a number of chances in admittedly very difficult situations.

JJ: An unhappy relationship with Russia?

AW: No, not particularly. There, for example, British American Tobacco was going to make big investments essentially to rescue its tobacco industry, which I suppose might or might not prove to become a major part of the Moldovan economy. They could never make up their minds to do that and eventually they fell between that and other stools. Their agriculture potential has been considered in a similar indecisive fashion. It's in a very difficult situation.

JJ: Well I think our interview is drawing to a close. I have put a few questions about your views in retrospect. I don't know whether you feel inclined to answer any of them. For example, about British diplomacy since you joined and what changes you might like to introduce if you had your time again? Its practice or its range?

AW: If I had my time again I'd have wished to have Mrs Thatcher as Prime Minister much earlier.

JJ: Really?

AW: Most of my career was with Britain in decline, because Britain was unable to face up to some of its inherent structural problems. She got the nearest to dealing with this during her time. James Callaghan himself certainly deserves credit for commencing the process of facing up to reality. This was a significantly difficult and bruising period but much was done to restore us as a significant force in the world. I suppose it would have been better if we had faced up to those things a little earlier.

JJ: When I was in Africa, even in other countries, my experience was that her reputation was such that one could "walk tall" as a Brit. Everyone said if only we had Mrs Thatcher in our government what a difference it would make, and so on. She had very clear views and set of beliefs about what she wanted done.

AW: If we had had her before whether she would have been more captive to imperialist nostalgia than people were at the time, that's another possibility. It's a rather useless analysis. I suppose all I meant was I think we had a set of problems we had difficulty in facing up to, which is understandable. Once we did so it became much easier than having to say so often 'you have to understand that British industry means well, but it can't deliver on time'; that's not a strong line.

JJ: She became very much anti-Europe despite having signed Madrid, Maastricht and so on. That wasn't helpful for Britain's future, was it?

AW: Probably not, but I didn't serve in those countries. I had to attend lots of EU meetings, but that's not quite the same. In the countries in which I served, two were going through the process of trying to face up to their own difficulties, which had their analogies, but they very much admired what she represented and achieved in this country. The other country, the United States, had different problems, and capable leaders too.

JJ: It certainly makes British diplomacy easier when you have a Prime Minister like that.

AW: Well apologising is just not policy. Spending too much time explaining why you can't get it right is a bit debilitating.

JJ: Anything else? Would you still choose to become a diplomat, in retrospect?

AW: I'm very happy to have done it but would I recommend to my children to join the Diplomatic Service? No.

JJ: Why not?

AW: There's an immediate personal reason in that I think there are at any rate risks in doing what your father did, especially if it is easily measurable in terms of relative achievement. I have seen people who have joined the Service, their fathers having been in it, who spend far too much of their lives measuring if they've done as well as he has. It's sad. The others are family reasons. I think it has its inherent difficulties so I wouldn't advise anyone. If they did it I would be perfectly proud and happy, but that would be their choice, not mine.

JJ: Well, Andrew thank you very much indeed, for the time you've taken in providing full and very interesting replies.

Typed by Evie Jamieson

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