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KCMG 1991 (CMG 1984)

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British Diplomatic Oral History Programme

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR (WILLIAM) ROGER TOMKYS, KCMG, DL

RECORDED BY ANTHONY LAYDEN, MARCH 2015

AML: Good morning, Roger.

RT: Good morning, Anthony.

AML: The first question as always is, why did you join the Diplomatic Service?

RT: By accident. I grew up in Bradford, West Yorkshire. I was educated at Bradford Grammar School, my father was a schoolmaster, a mathematician. I went through the classical side of the school, getting a scholarship to Balliol College, Oxford and going through Oxford with a reasonable degree

AML: A First – come on, you can tell us!

RT: Yes, like Oliver Miles, with a First in Mods and a University Prize. Oliver went on to do Arabic in the second part of his career, but I stayed on and got a first in Greats as well. I had assumed that I would stay in academic life for the rest of my life because what I knew was education, from my father. But I had a summer in the United States, it must have been the summer of '58. It was a wonderful summer in which one went all round America, stayed with Balliol men up and around the country, people who had followed all sorts of different careers, and I looked at this and thought "There's a wider world out here". What's more, I had a look at some of the Classics faculties in the top American universities and thought, "Well, I might finish up here – what do I think of it?" And I also thought, and this is very rational and may indeed have been right, that Classics which was the dominant discipline at the time, was bound to contract: I would be going into a contracting field, and did I have anything so original to contribute that it would be a sensible choice to go into a contracting field? So I decided not, and the comment from my tutor afterwards was "Well, you could have done it, but I don't think you had the fire in your belly to stay in it!" He was dead right!

Next question: well, what next to do? I was, as I say, a scholarship boy, so one looked at things in which you took an examination to get in. I was very interested in languages, there's a story attendant on this, and I was very interested in abroad. I hadn't seen much of abroad, not further than Greece. I was more frightened of the big city of London and all that that implied than I was at the prospect of going all round the world. So I took the Foreign Office exam. I was very interested in overseas and interested in languages, but by accident and without any very great depth of interest in international politics, though being the scholarship boy I was I swotted it up of course in order to achieve my purpose, which I did. When I took the exam I think they were rather perceptive because they gave me better marks for the Home Civil Service which one was also running for than for the Foreign Office. So that's it – accident!

AML: So you duly got in. Were you put in a Department in London for a year initially?

RT: No, we had about six weeks of training, of which I remember very little. I do remember we had sessions in registries being taught what colour of paper one wrote on. I remember that we had a session with a barrister, telling us how to be public speakers: I remember this ineffable man stroking his side whiskers and saying "Well you see I like the sound of my own voice", which I think was probably evident without him saying so. And we went off to Harwell to see the wonders of British science and technology and the nuclear programme. I think it was very good of the Foreign Office to think that we needed training, but I don't think they knew what training was actually needed or what it was for. So we just had these six weeks, and then I went off to Shemlan to learn Arabic.

MECAS, 1960

AML: Who was the Director at the time?

RT: It was Donald Maitland when I got there, John Wilton – now, am I wrong? I know Donald Maitland so well from subsequent times - perhaps it was already John Wilton when I got there – I can't remember.

AML: And did you have a Director of Studies as well?

RT: The term for the British adviser, not Talat Dajani, the Senior Arab Adviser, yes, but I can't remember in which sequence, which is shameful! The one who made the impact for me was Malcolm Lyons who was from Pembroke College Cambridge and Professor of Arabic in

Cambridge and who subsequently was responsible for introducing me to Pembroke College where I was Master on retirement. The other one was John Hopkins. Malcolm stayed a life-long friend; John Hopkins, as I say, I can't remember whether he came before or after Malcolm – I suspect it was after.

AML: What was your assessment of the quality of the Arabic teaching?

RT: Right. Well then, I'll inflict on you the anecdote which I suppressed on the issue of my getting into the Service!

I'm interested in languages and language structure. I'm not a bad linguist, but I'm not an easy parrot and I'm not someone who likes to go out into the street and find someone speaking a different language from the one that I grew up with in order to exercise my fluency. It's the structure and the way things work. In the process of trying to get into the Service I was asked whether I would like to learn a hard language, and I said "yes", and I was questioned about this in the Final Interview Board. The token woman on the Final Interview Board said "You say you want to learn a hard language – why is this?" I went through what I've just said to you, and she said "Oh – not to talk to people?" I expect I blushed, and everybody laughed, and it all passed off perfectly well. But it was in fact true, and that's where I come from, as far as I'm concerned. So you have to take my comments on the MECAS as I knew it in that light. MECAS as I saw it did what it said on the tin pretty well. In a laborious and rather old-fashioned way it got people up to speed so that they were able to read newspapers, understand political discourse, at a pinch and with a bit of practice interpret at a reasonable level on diplomatic business and know a lot of what was going on around them. And it's such a rebarbative and difficult language to pick up – and I think there are a lot of reasons for this including social ones – that this is quite an achievement, and may well have been all that was actually needed. But it was done in a way without any intellectual stimulation and I think that the very clever handful of people that the Foreign Office had as their students could have been given a much more intellectually stimulating approach to the language, including starting with the classical Arabic roots which are from the Koran and Jahiliyya poetry. I think they could have turned us – the handful of us - into very much better Arabists, and probably people with more sympathy for the root culture of the Arab world than was easily acquired by the rote learning of the 3,000–word Word List. I may be wrong; the rote learning had to be done somehow – it might have taken longer – but I think that we sort of mistook an evangelising purpose of training an awful lot of people not

all of whom were ours to a reasonable level for the need to produce the Arabists the Service needed. If we had had that other approach it would have been very difficult to cope with the need to get local teachers who were up to it, because while they were a perfectly agreeable lot of primary school teachers, there wasn't much intellectual stimulus that was going to come from them.

AML: The quality was a bit mixed.

RT: The quality was a bit mixed, and the ones who had some intellectual pretensions – Theodory for example – it was of a rather old-fashioned school Dominie kind, which was not all that amusing. So I was a bit discontented. (You'll find that I was a bit discontented throughout my career, throughout my life!) But I respect what was done – enormous effort had been put into getting it done. We were worked fairly hard – I wouldn't exaggerate it. If it had been smaller, we could perhaps have been housed, lived with Arab families in that context at that time, and I might have learned how to get my hair cut and my shoes shined and so on in Arabic, which I never have done.

AML: Did you go on "language breaks"?

RT: I went on a language break - one, I think only one – went off down to Sidon and stayed with a family who were on the list of families available for the purpose. It was near the refugee camp in Sidon. The man was out of the house throughout the day. I can remember making kibbeh with the lady of the house, bored out of my mind within three days! Then I went off and had a most splendid three weeks or thereabouts in Egypt, going up to Abu Simbel before it was swallowed up by the waters of the lake, staying in Cairo and Alexandria which was absolutely terrific. Linguistically up to a point, but it was a terrific time.

AML: Did you do the Long Course and the Advanced Course, Roger?

RT: Yes.

AML: Anything else to add about MECAS before we move on to Amman?

RT: I don't think so.

AML: Did you get to travel around the region? When I was there we could travel to Syria, though we didn't have relations ...

RT: Yes. We went down at our Christmas break through Amman and down to Petra, and up into Syria and stayed in Damascus with a British archaeologist, and Michael Burton and Bush Lancaster and I stayed with an archaeologist on Jebel Qassioun – enormous fields overlooking Damascus – stayed there and travelled in Syria – that was terrific.

AML: Did you have the practice of British Ambassadors in the region coming to MECAS on their way home and giving you a talk about "their" country?

RT: I can't remember. I remember that there were quite a few lecturers and people coming up the hill from the American University of Beirut (AUB) or whatever, but Ambassadors coming, no. I remember that when I was in Amman I went up to MECAS to deliver a lecture.

Third Secretary, Amman, 1962

AML: My recollection is that you learned quite a lot about the region as well as the language. Let's move on to Amman then. You were there from 1962 to 64. Were you the Third Secretary and general dogsbody?

RT: Yes. With as it were – the nicest bit of the job probably – I got a lot of the responsibility of the Information Officer. Whether I was nominally Information Officer, Press Officer or not I'm not sure, but I shared it with whoever was the Head of Chancery of the day anyway. The press was in Jerusalem, so I had every reason to go across and stay for a couple of nights in Jerusalem every three or four weeks and of course travel around. My first Ambassador was John Henniker-Major and my first Counsellor was Willie Morris, and Alan Goodison was Head of Chancery. Both Willie Morris and Alan Goodison had good successors in John Phillips and Alec Stirling. So it was a very agreeable place to start. Perhaps I was unusually lucky – as I say, as an "accidental" entrant without any background that would naturally make me think that this was where I belonged. But John Henniker had certainly done a great deal in the Service to make sure it was open to people like myself, of an unfamiliar background, and Willie came from a not dissimilar sort of area himself, so it was socially very easy. Amman wasn't socially very taxing either, so it was a pretty easy introduction.

AML: What were the issues in Anglo-Jordanian relations at the time?

RT: Well, John Henniker had got into a lot of trouble trying to dissuade Hussein from taking Muna as his wife; tensions over our responsibility for the Royal Family. It was the period of transition. I suppose until Suez and the aftermath of Suez, Jordan had been our protectorate. The American Ambassador was probably more important for the Jordanians by the time I was there than the British Ambassador. But we were very close to them. We were still giving them development funds, and it was a period in which we were working with them to support the royalists in the Yemen against Nasserite nationalists.

It was very old-fashioned, a funny place. Charles Johnston, John Henniker's predecessor, had compared the Circassian Guard and the frills around the palace in Amman to the court of Byzantium in the days of Anna Komnena which I thought was about as pretentious an absurdity as I'd ever heard. First, I very much doubt that he had read Anna Komnena – I hadn't, and if I hadn't I doubted he had – I may have been unfair to him. But I would have thought that the importance of the court of King Hussein at that time was closer to Birmingham City Council than to Byzantium! It was a close relationship; the Hashemites have done enormously well for themselves; they've done pretty well for the Jordanian people and not too badly for the Palestinian people. And they've done pretty well in serving Western interests - but we've always been deluded to think that their interests were representative of the interests of the Arab world as a whole, and that they somehow have the same high standing in the Arab world that they have in our eyes.

AML: We make the same mistake sometimes with Sultan Qaboos.

RT: And indeed some of the hangers-on of King Hussein got passed down to Sultan Qaboos.

AML: One in particular.

RT: One in particular.

AML: OK, is that everything on Amman, or are there other reflections? A very agreeable country to travel around in…

RT: Very agreeable, but I will tell a destructive story. I'll do two destructive things. First a destructive story.

AML: Please do!

RT: We were very close to the Jordanian security services, who were trained in interrogation techniques at that time by a German who had learned his trade before and during the Second World War. We were informed with embarrassment that a left-wing Circassian schoolmaster had unfortunately died when somebody had made a mistake in these circumstances. We treated this as an aberration – you know, one of our friends had had an unfortunate accident. Then when I was in Syria years later information of a valuable kind was passed to us by the Jordanians with the comment that unfortunately they had had to use rather Syrian methods to extract this information – and we giggled again. The Hashemites had done very well for most of the interests concerned, but we turned a blind eye to their failings, and this had important consequences later, because it meant that in the 70s, when we should have been talking to the Palestinians, we pretended then and continued to pretend until the mid-80s when Hussein gave it up himself, that they could speak legitimately for the Palestinians.

The other comment, which is just a personal one, is that I enjoyed my time in Jordan very much: we got married there and it was all very nice, and agreeable, and very good colleagues. But I didn't feel that I was stretched or that I was necessarily needed at all times or was learning as much as I might have done, and indeed there were embarrassments when one went off to try to fill in gaps in one's experience. Going off and talking to trade unionists in Hebron or whatever, and finding them coming back the next week to see what I was prepared to give them as a sort of follow-up to this most interesting visit, and the mutton-grab that they had provided. And when I said to – John Phillips I think it probably was – yes, it's fine, but I don't really think I've got enough to do, the comment was "Well that's because you do everything so much quicker than the rest of us." There is a problem with the Diplomatic Service – or was – which is that like a peacetime army, you've got to keep people in place, you've got to have people who know an awful lot of people, who've been buzzing around, so that if something happens they have half a dozen telephone numbers or doors to knock on where they can get answers and sympathetic responses to whatever has come up. But how to keep them "down on the farm" until something happens is quite an issue. I think it's rather a good argument for having a Service that's got quite a lot of dilettantes in it – people who like pottering around but don't necessarily want to have their noses to the grindstone all the time. And I say that as one who's got rather more grindstone in his make-up ....

AML: You're a bit of a puritan, Roger!

RT: No, no, I'm not really ... it's temperamental ... people ought to do it, but I need to do it.

AML: Well I must say, throughout my career I was very lucky, I was always in places where things were happening; I always had plenty to do. But I'd have been happy to be on the dilettante side if that hadn't been the case.

2nd Secretary, FCO, 1964

So back from Amman to the grindstone of Economic Relations Department, 1964-66, dealing with oil, energy?

RT: Yes, Economic Relations Department. Archie Lamb was the Assistant. It had a desk which was essentially oil politics. Oliver Miles had had it immediately before me, and he followed me in Amman, so we basically swapped jobs.

I think I pretended to do commodities as a whole, and then we had an energy or oil department which was a self-standing thing. Did Donald Maitland come in as the first head of the Energy Department? I think he did. Or possibly John Fearnley did it. No, John Fearnley before Donald Maitland I think. Anyway both of them were heads of department. It was mostly about Shell and BP's interests in the Middle East, the concessions with the States of the Middle East under which they produced the oil, which were very favourable. We were defending their interests and negotiating – not negotiating over their heads, but giving them support in Iran, Iraq, up and down the Gulf. So the work was relations with the oil companies.

It was also the time when the North Sea was just beginning to be explored and developed. I remember I went out quite early on in a helicopter to one of the first of the oil rigs out in the North Sea – East Anglian coast, really. Shell was the company concerned. And here, by contrast with the induction into the Foreign Office, before one took up one's job, Shell laid on a course for government servants who were going to work on oil issues, and they knew what they were doing. Victor Rothschild was the lead figure at that time in terms of presenting this course. It was a fascinating time. I learned rather a lot about the oil industry, which was very valuable.

Economic Relations Department had been in the main part of the building, albeit cut up into cubicles, in which you'd get sort of quarter of a fireplace visible where the room had been divided up, but at least we were 1st, 2nd or ground floor. When we were in Energy Department we were in a Nissen hut or something similar on the roof and you'd get the oil tycoons and people like the head of Shell and the head of BP clambering up to visit us in this

attic on the roof. It was a very interesting time. One was learning one's job. I had a lot of collaboration with the Treasury and the Department of Energy – however it was called.

We had one fascinating time, which didn't cost me my job but I thought it might at the time, which was a negotiation taking place between Shell, the Kuwait Oil Company and the Kuwait Government over an amendment to their concessionary terms. The monopoly of the oil majors was beginning to be eroded and the whole principle that they owned the oil but paid minimal royalties to the governments concerned, was breaking down because outsiders were coming in and offering them better terms. There was pretty tough negotiation with the Kuwaitis at the time. We got a message from the Kuwaiti Government. It was saying that unless we told Shell to come off it and make the concessions required, the Kuwaiti Government was going to withdraw its Sterling balances on Monday morning; and it was Thursday or Friday – Friday I think. There wasn't anybody about. It must have been August. I got my opposite number in the Treasury and my opposite number in the Department of Energy around, and I said: "Well look: it's our principle, which we enunciate all the time, that we don't interfere in negotiations between the government and the oil companies, and if we give way on this we'd be wound up on it by everybody concerned and it's quite clear that we've got to tell the Kuwaiti Government our usual story and call their bluff." They agreed, and so I drafted the telegram to tell the Ambassador to tell them to go and boil their heads. There wasn't anybody to clear it with, nobody I could find anyway. There may have been some collateral clearance; I may have shown it to whatever Arabian department was called in the day. But there was nobody senior up the chain, so I sent the telegram off myself. And on the Monday morning I was summoned in by the Minister of State responsible, torn off a strip for doing something of such importance without clearing the thing. But because nobody wanted to propose anything else that should have been said it remained a strip torn off in the interests of good governance rather than any attempt to amend it. And it passed off, but it certainly taught me. There were certainly all sorts of people I could have gone to: Permanent Secretaries, Private Secretaries and said "Look, I'm sure this is right, but I'm not sure I can do this on my own authority". It was my first job in the Office and that was how I learned how things were done not by the six weeks we had at the beginning.

AML: On the job training?

RT: Yes, on the job training and it could have been rather expensive had it not worked. I think it was a period in which I certainly had enough to do, a lot of good contacts; but as always I have reservations about how things were done. It was natural at that time that we should see British oil and energy interests in terms of the interests of the major oil companies, but when the North Sea started to be developed, a lot of wider interests came into it. Development, who should do it, competition, value for money – the whole business of energy supply for this country. The closeness of the officials both of the Foreign Office but more particularly of the Department of Energy with Shell and BP was I think too close. There's a very clear example of a very nice and very straight and honourable man called Alan Gregory who went from being the Assistant Secretary in the Department of Energy to become a Director in BP more or less without any interval between. Alan was the straightest and most effective of men when he was in the Department of Energy and I think when he went to BP, but even so there was, I think, a degree of conflict of interest by way of advice that went up. It was quite often cleared with the oil companies before it went up to Ministers. I think even at the time I was not altogether confident that this was always right.

AML: It takes time for differences of interest to emerge and the machinery to adjust. That was very interesting then. Any other comments on that period?

RT: I don't think so.

1st Secretary, Head of Chancery, Benghazi, 1967-1969

AML: Then we're on to Benghazi, 1967.

RT: Yes, '67.

AML: Yes, Six-day War and all that.

RT: Yes, extraordinary, yes. Well the Six-Day War came just about 6 months after we got there.

AML: What was the size of the Post in Benghazi?

RT: Peter Wakefield was the Head of Post as Consul-General and Counsellor in the Embassy, and there was me, and we had a communications staff and a Vice Consul and an Administration officer.

AML: Nobody doing Trade promotion or ...

RT: There was a Commercial Secretary I think – yes.

AML: A UK-based position?

RT: A UK-based position I'm almost certain. Yes.

AML: So it was a fairly traditional Consulate-General?

RT: Yes. But functionally more as the eastern branch of the Embassy, because the Foreign Ministry lived at Beida in the Jebel Akhdar, sort of 200 kilometres or so up the – I can't really remember now, but anyway a few hours' drive from Benghazi. There was also there the Cyrenaican Defence Force, which was a sort of militia, but a pretty heavily-armed militia, a relic of the Senussi paraphernalia, which was much stronger in Cyrenaica than in Tripoli. They were very different places. I was the main, low or medium low level liaison both with the Foreign Ministry and with the Cyrenaica Defence Force. I also inherited from Martin Buckmaster two up-country Information Officers in Derna and in Barce, where films were shown to such Libyans as wished to see films of some Commonwealth festivals in Sierra Leone and so on, which I eventually managed to get rid of. But a small unit, involving a lot of travelling up to Beida. We had a cottage in Cyrene and eventually we got a house in Beida to serve as an Embassy outpost there, particularly when we got heavily involved in negotiations of arms sales of various kinds with the government in Beida. It was a very busy time indeed.

AML: What rank were you by this time?

RT: I was First Secretary and Head of Chancery. Peter Wakefield had Arabic, but it was pretty decayed, and he wasn't going to waste it on anybody very much, and so I was the Post local Arabist as well and if anyone came in through the door and Arabic was needed, that was me. I mean I used it a lot, more probably than I had in Amman. I've never used Arabic on the phone in Amman, but I did here.

AML: Tell me how you used to introduce yourself.

RT: I can't remember … (laughs) ... I can't remember, but it was a funny period. I mean, Libya had just got oil. It was just transitioning from being a really dirt-poor country into an oil-rich state – three million people perhaps. It was said, and I believe it was probably true, that there was only one university graduate in Cyrenaica – a Libyan graduate in Cyrenaica. It was pretty primitive. One Libyan woman came to our house in the two years we were

there. Quite a lot of men came. They tended to get drunk if they possibly could. There was a British training team, but there was also a British garrison in Benghazi when we arrived and liaison between them going round the Jebel with the Commander of the garrison distributing sheep and goodwill at Eid time was part of my responsibility. The RAF were down at El Adem, and it was still sort of post-colonial. King Idris spent more time in Tobruk than anywhere else. So if the Ambassador was going to see him in Tobruk, I probably, once or twice at least, went with Rod Sarell to interpret for him with the King.

AML: Who was the Ambassador?

RT: Rod Sarell. I would also interpret for him if we called on the Prime Minister of the day.

AML: Muntassir?

RT: No. Abdul Qadir Badri was the one I used to interpret for.

I'll break in and give you the anecdote for Abdul Qadir Badri. Our biggest business at that time was trying to sell British Aerospace Rapier and Thunderbird, which was very difficult to sell because the question was, "What were the targets in Libya that the wicked Nasserite regime in Egypt (which was supposed to be the threat) would be attacking?" Because you had to invent targets they would attack which fitted the number of rockets and surface-to-air missiles which could be afforded by the Libyan side. Constructing this so that everybody would be happy was not very easy. So it was quite a difficult negotiation which had to be smoothed with a great deal of inducements of various kinds. The point at which some were left over after the sale had been made, the main fixer came along and offered Peter Wakefield a sort of parure of jewellery for Felicity, saying – you know – they had been so helpful, would he like this because it had been left over spare! But there we were; we were engaged in this when we weren't explaining why Sterling had been devalued and telling them that a pound in their pocket was as valuable as it had been – we were under pressure. But at the same time, while these were our priorities, Abdul Qadir Badri was saying to us "Look, you are the people who are mentors to this country. You have to understand there is going to be revolution unless a stop is put to the corruption which is going on all round us. You have to tell the King he's got to stop this". The point of which is that when he went through this ritual, Rod Sarell, who understood a little bit of Arabic, would say to me "Just the usual thing?" and we would do nothing at all about it. Indeed we had had contingency plans to

ensure that if there was an attempted coup we would alert people to it but we'd taken a policy decision that we weren't going to intervene if we learned about it.

We didn't expect Qadhafi to be the perpetrator of the coup when it came – we expected it to be more senior people, much better known to us. And the Shelhi group were the favourites. There we were. We were very much engaged in the fabric of the society, but at the same time our economy was in a mess, priority for arms and any other sales in a pretty primitive and despised part of the Arab world, but closely associated with it and deriving some benefits as we saw them and from the association. And then along came the June war. And there were mass attacks on our Embassy and on the American Embassy. The British garrison in Benghazi sent down armoured cars to rescue and protect us. Two of the armoured cars got burned out, several soldiers killed, and several desperately burnt and had to come to the Embassy. I'd seen quite a lot of the garrison people in the six months before, and not on the whole been impressed by the junior officers who were swanning around, or by the people who were doing the training. But at that time, with the Embassy more or less under siege, they broke in, they burned my reading room next door. My secretary and I were the only people who saw the film of the World Cup 1966 final. We were going to show it to everybody until it went up in the flames. They broke through into the ground floor of the villa but fortunately we didn't catch fire. We were not very strongly protected, but anyway the Army got to us after the first attack, and when the second attack came they were there with rifles and things, and they were with us inside the Chancery. And they held their fire. I don't know that I would have had the nerve had I been the Sergeant or the Captain in charge, but they held their nerve and the crisis passed. I think if they had used their firearms to repel that second attack, I don't think anybody would have survived. Having seen the peacetime Army as it were, and not thought much of them, having seen them at the business end, I know I thought "they know what they're doing when it is their job to do it". Any way we retired to the D'Aosta barracks and stayed there for three or four days. We went round Benghazi after dark looking to see if there were British subjects around. There had been some killing. Half a dozen Jews had been killed. I can't remember apart from the soldiers but I don't think there were any other civilian losses but it was fairly hairy.

When it sort of blew over it was clear that we couldn't maintain the garrison there. The political climate had changed. Rotating troops for training under existing agreements in Cyrenaica, rotating them through Benghazi, wasn't really on. We might be able to negotiate continuing training facilities if we kept them down at the Tobruk and El Adem end, and that's

what we did: we negotiated, or re-negotiated that. So that was an interesting process to be involved in, not least interesting being, it was a very early stage, with these primitive Libyans who don't know anything. They said "But what about the 1956 (whatever it was) secret protocol?" We were deeply embarrassed because we knew nothing at all. As far as I can remember the Foreign Office at first blush didn't know about it, nobody knew anything about it. I think we probably said "Well yes, that's a problem, because of course we've burned all our stuff at the Embassy, and we don't have our papers". But there was a secret protocol – I can't remember what it said – but it sort of punctured the little of the balloon of superiority with which we were so copiously supplied. Anyway we negotiated this and continued exercising facilities down at El Adem and Tobruk briefly. But then of course after I'd left came Qadhafi, and all that came to an end.

Meanwhile for me the crazy Cyrenaica Defence Force, they – led by somebody called General Bushah (I think he was illiterate; he was certainly monoglot, a primitive Cyrenaican tribal chap who had a very smart sort of Quartermaster-General who was I think probably Egyptian, Western Desert tribe by origin, but he was very very sharp indeed, both of them totally corrupt) summoned me to Baida: "Would I go up because General Bushah wanted to see me?" And we got up to Baida. I used to go up with a shotgun in the back of my car because there were an awful lot of partridge in the Jebel and if you disturbed a covey of partridge en route you'd stop the car and see if you could get some. Anyway I got up to see General Bushah (the other Quartermaster-General's name I've forgotten), they said "We want to buy some armament."

"Well what do you want to buy?" And we went through them.

"We want some coastal guns."

"What sort?" We were at the level of big, medium or small. And we got to hard hats. "How many?"

"Five thousand" said the General. "Make it ten" said the Quartermaster-General. And so on …

I went back to Benghazi for this. This is it. It looks like – something like – sixty million pounds, which at that time was really worth having. And everybody thought I was going off, out of my mind. But they went along for the ride and so did the teams who came out to negotiate. This order, though never implemented, was still running at the time of the Qadhafi

coup. And, you know, there were still teams coming out, the Cyrenaican training team and so on. So in a ludicrous sort of way, that was fine. But it wasn't much fun for Margaret, and she wasn't all that well, and the children weren't all that well, and it was tough for families there too.

AML: Was there still an Italian contingent in Benghazi?

RT: No. I think there was a barber, and there was a priest. But I don't think there was anything else, it was very different from Tripoli, a different feel. And I went home on leave expecting to come back but I said to Personnel Department "Well, it's a very interesting job but I think if you leave me there not more than another year, because there's nobody in the place who reads a book, irony is lost, I'll be unfitted for anything else. You know, there's good archaeology, good shooting, I mean the job is interesting." They said "You're not going back; we're putting you into Planning Staff" – which was about as different as it could be. "And so get someone to pack". Keith Haskell was sent there in my place, and I must say the Haskells did the best job - you know, we had less things broken than we ever had on our own!

Planning Staff, FCO, 1969

AML You're back in London, and you're going to join the Planning Staff, where all the very brightest people get put.

RT: There are some very bright people there, yes.

AML: I remember telling people when I was in Personnel that we tried to recruit people with above average intelligence and people who were good with other people, but we needed a couple of people every year who were very very intelligent, whether they got on with other people or not, because we needed them to be Head of the Planning Staff ...

RT: (laughs) Yes. Well, the Planning Staff that I went into had Bonar Sykes as Head, and he was not a planner. There are two possible roles for planning staffs. The one is the general speeches for the Foreign Secretary, and the other is to put the grit in the machine and to contest the accepted wisdom. Bonar Sykes could conceivably have done the first, but certainly not the second.

He was followed by Percy Cradock, who was, although a very different political approach from mine, because I'm wet and pinkish and he was very hard Conservative, but he was a

very intellectual, very clever, very accurate user of language: terrific. We had Christopher Everett. I can't now remember exactly what the structure was. I think Charles Powell was there as junior man, me and Christopher Everett. Subsequently we got Leslie Fielding, and John Goulden followed Powell. Anyway, after Libya, gosh, what a contrast! I enjoyed the work in the Planning Staff enormously. I started off doing some useless things: a commission for South West Pacific Department wanting a review of our policy towards Australia and New Zealand. In other words, they wanted something to bolster the importance of Australia and New Zealand compared with other places.

AML: The United States, for example?

RT: Yes. And which would turn a blind eye to the fact that Australia and New Zealand were going to be turning increasingly to the United States. And that was a waste of space. It was at a period when after the RTZ Review, what was the name of the Head of RTZ? ...

AML: The Duncan Report?

RT: Was it? Yes, I think it was. Or possibly to counter it, the Planning Staff had invented an exercise called priorities which was not despicable, probably necessary, attempt to put some sort of quantitative value on our interests and involvement around the world. Very imperfect. We hadn't done it before so it was probably worth doing. Christopher Everett had probably done the first sort of version of it. I inherited it after that. I acquired responsibility for links with the academic world, which I found very agreeable, particularly in a lot of new universities – Lancaster for example – their international relations department, not bad at all, were coming to the fore.

Nobody in the Foreign Office, I think it is fair to say, had any idea that there was a discipline called international relations. I attended a seminar at the LSE which a senior Ambassador possibly Evelyn Shuckburgh came along and spoke on what was supposed to be international relations, and he didn't; he spoke about international politics. What about academic analysis and the theory of international relations? He was unaware of it. So I did a paper on what it was about – maybe not a very good paper, but the sort of ideas which now are commonplace in the street. Game theory, prisoner's dilemma and all the rest of it. No one in the Office had ever heard of this at this stage; and perhaps the paper had some use.

Probably the most interesting papers I did, though not ones that had any impact at all, were on the implications of joining the European Community as it then was. One was on

sovereignty, and I don't think it had any impact on policy. What is striking now is that I had absolutely no idea that one of the most important issues on which our life would be transformed would be on law: how law was derived, and the relationship between our own legal system and the legal system to which we were committing ourselves. Positive law instead of common law. And I hardly touched on that, and nobody criticised it, no one said "but what about ...?" It just didn't even register. So sovereignty was about how we were going to be inhibited in our political dealings with the world.

The more important paper was about external relations with the enlarged European Community and what we should do? Percy Cradock let me go to Brussels to talk with people in the Commission as well as with Michael Palliser's people in our delegation. Much credit to Michael Palliser who must have been entirely hostile to everything that I was trying to scurry around and do because he was, in my view (and I was a convinced European) – my view was that this meant a fundamental change in the way in which we approached the world. The sort of things we should be looking at was whether we could use our membership of the Community to develop an energy policy for the Community which would play to our interests. I came back to this when I was in the Cabinet Office. But whether in our relations with Arabia and the Gulf we could somehow get Europe into a privileged position there which we could play on as the French played on their overseas links to the advantage both of the French colonies and dependencies of various kinds, and also to the benefit of France and so on – all pointing in the direction of accepting the Community was essentially a protectionist group which we were joining, and we'd better see what it was that we wanted to have protected. Well of course by the time I'd written this it was totally unacceptable to John Robinson and the European Community Department, for whom the principle was that you should treat entry into the Community as something which was very good for us economically, but didn't require us to make any adjustments to the way in which we had our relationship with the Americans. It would simply enhance the influence which we would have to continue to be good members of the OECD and good free traders. We would be converting the Europeans, not vice versa. So when I got back it got written, John Robinson killed it within the Planning Committee and it never had any influence, and that I think is probably true of my time in the Planning Staff altogether. I think the work I was doing was worth doing and worth testing, but it was ultimately unsuccessful. I'll probably jump forward now to when I came back and into the European part of the Cabinet Office.

AML: Moving on to 1975?

RT: That's it. Yes, it's as far forward as that. I was landed with doing the first draft of the White Paper on Re-negotiation, and I asked my superiors, did they want an honest document, or did they want a piece of persuasion. They said they wanted an honest document; but when they got it, they didn't want it; and my disillusion with our European policies dates really from there, because what we were doing was a job for Harold Wilson, who wanted us to stay in the Community but without his taking responsibility for persuading his party to do this. That's what we were at, and I think – and I'm fascinated to find that clever, more senior people like Brian Cubbon, for whom I was working at the time, now think so too – I think that that mandarin plot is something that we are paying for now in our attitude to Europe, because the mandarin class took the country into Europe on a false bill of goods, and people now understand that they were sold a pup. There was never an informed decision that we were going to transform ourselves from an outward-facing free-trade mid-Atlantic country into a continental negotiating group in which we would leverage our continental position to whatever advantage we could find. So, end of Planning Staff. Fascinating, but without useful effect.

Head of Chancery Athens, 1972-75

AML: Now we're on to Head of Chancery Athens, 1972-75.

RT: Yes. Athens following the Planning Staff was enormously welcome in personal terms because I read Greats – Classics – at Oxford and liked Greece very much. We'd holidayed there – two short breaks from Benghazi – and I was able to acquire modern Greek relatively easily because of the grounding; and it was perhaps a little bit of a sidestep in that one would be dealing with the Colonels' regime which was frozen out of the civilised race. But in every other respect it was a very attractive place to go. Our children were with us and it was a good environment. We were able to make friends of Greeks of professional classes, which would have been quite unthinkable in Benghazi, and to live a very pleasant life, but with an interesting job. If you're a relatively junior diplomat there's quite a lot to be said for being in a place where you're not on best terms with the government, because the opposition, whether it's the legal opposition or whether it's just people chuntering in the background, they're quite glad to talk to somebody. The Ambassador can't be seen too much to be associating with dissident groups. In professional terms and in personal terms it was an interesting period. And it covered the time of the fall of the Colonels and more or less the return of

democracy. The first elections were just happening. I went covering them towards the end of my time.

AML: What were the forces that brought about the end of the Colonels' regime?

RT: To an extent I think they'd run out of ideas. They'd run out of confidence. Papadopoulos had been replaced by Ioannides who was a much more straightforward sort of character. A degree of internal dissension. I mean, I had friends in the opposition, including someone who comes later in the story – Kostas Zeppos who was a fairly senior Foreign Ministry official – and I spent one long evening with Kostas and his wife trying to find their two teenage girls who were students at the Polytechnion where great riots were taking place, combing the streets looking for these two girls. What would have happened if the very many police who were out there – this is the autumn before the eventual fall – what would have happened if a British diplomat had been picked up in these circumstances I've no idea. Internal dissent, loss of confidence on the part of the Colonels. International pressure? I can't remember that it played a great part. It was a very funny dictatorship. The democratic Greeks – it's almost true I think to say they resented it mostly because the Colonels were socially unacceptable and came from relatively low and provincial backgrounds, and didn't know how one behaved in Athens. The Greeks are quite used to military dictatorships from time to time and it was an unstable polity in which the essentially non-Greek royal family were always on the edge of involvement with more or less right-wing political movements. Not a simple answer. But the last straw was their involvement in the attempted coup in Cyprus which they were certainly implicated, and this was an attempt to achieve Enosis – unity- with Greece. They were tottering already. The tanks had been rolling in the streets before we went on leave in the summer of 1974, but that tipped it over. While I was on leave the Colonels fell, the Turks invaded northern Cyprus and Karamanlis came back from exile. Leader of democracy, everything changed, the Colonels just really collapsed. So the causes were mostly internal dissent, a large amount of loss of confidence, and a final disaster in Cyprus.

AML: Were they subject to sanctions by other people?

RT: Not of a serious kind. The Americans always thought that the NATO relationship was too important. We took our lead to a certain degree from the Americans, but we were not prepared – we got lots of offers from the Colonels – to set up mostly back-channel links to them, promises we would get commercial advantage and so on. There was only one

Ministerial visit I think during the time I was there. So they were partly ostracised. The sanctions, such as they were, were mostly just not liking them very much.

The Zeppos story is relevant because I was on leave when the Cyprus coup took place. I got enlisted along with Alan Goodison who was then running Southern European Department and John Goulden who was around was a Turkish speaker, and David Beattie. We all went off to a Geneva conference to try to sort this affair out. It's one of my regrets I think. There are two stories – while we were discussing the preliminaries to the first Geneva Conference – the first story is that Jim Callaghan said "Well what are we going to try to achieve here?" And by some process I was landed with doing a very very short paper explaining stuff as best I could and essentially all it said was absolutely predictable. We could go and try to get a ceasefire, or we could go and try to address the political settlement of the Cyprus issue, or we could go and say "Now this won't do. We can't go on like this. We've got to address all the problems which there are between Greece and Turkey: the Aegean islands and all the rest of it. You know, this is the opportunity. If we can do it any time, do it now. Well what should we do? It seems to me that it's obvious that the problem's just too big for us, and just a ceasefire is too small. We'll freeze things and we'll have trouble ever after. So we'll try to get a political settlement while things are still moving." Yes, everyone agreed. And when we got to Geneva I was met on the tarmac by the same Kostas Zeppos who'd been on the edge of being sacked from the Foreign Ministry under the Colonels but who had now re-surfaced as chef de cabinet to George Mavros the Greek Foreign Minister under restored democracy. And Kostas said to me, "Look, the one thing you've got to make certain of is that no one says anything about federal solutions or political solutions which involve any sort of change to the system." And I reported this back. I didn't comment on it, I just reported that this was what I had been told because Kostas said "Do this and it'll be the end of restored democracy. We can't survive if we give up on this."

We got a ceasefire, but we didn't go for anything more; and look where we are now. I could have made that comment. I could have said "This of course is what we agreed we shouldn't do, although this what Kostas has said to me, I think we should disregard it and I think we should go for it." I didn't comment either way. If I had done, would it have made any difference? I don't know, but I regret not doing so. I would have been speaking against advice given by a very good friend, but more than that it was essentially a political decision at that point and unpredictable.

The other anecdote related to it is, before we went to Geneva, Joe Sisco, who was the US Assistant Secretary of State, came back from a visit to Ankara and was sitting with us in Jim Callaghan's office, and he said, did we mind if he called Henry Kissinger. He called Henry with us all there and he said "Henry, I saw them all, and I saw Gunes (and whoever else it was) and I really gave it to them, and I tell you something Henry, the Turks are not going to move. They're not going to go in." And that was the story, we all trooped out. First we all agreed he wasn't saying this to tell Henry Kissinger anything; he was telling it to give us a false assurance that the Turks, to whom the Americans gave full priority because of the Cold War, whatever the Turks were going to do, he wanted the British to keep their hands off and not complicate things; and it seemed to me to exemplify the Kissinger way of doing business with allies. And this was Kissinger's sidekick playing the same game with us that Kissinger would have played himself. I thought that was very revealing.

AML: Yes, a bit demeaning for us, but there you are.

RT: Oh yes, I don't think there was anybody who did not read it in the same way. But we couldn't do anything about it.

AML: No.

RT: So a very interesting time. Nice experience. And one full tour of duty there, three years.

AML: Good. Any other observations on Athens then?

RT: A European issue. One which was, having dealt with the Greeks at that time – there was the Association Agreement, the Athens Agreement, Athens Treaty, of the middle sixties, before the Colonels took over, which committed the European Community in principle to negotiating Athens's application for membership. That seemed to me to be a false position for the European Community as at that time constituted because the sort of Community that I thought we were joining I did not think would fit with the economic and political position of Greece. I think – and I carried this over into my next job in the Cabinet Office – I think I was wrong because what the accession of Greece and Spain and Portugal did do was to nail down a more or less democratic system in all three of those countries, and whatever the economic and political consequences outside that, that's probably more important than anything else. I didn't agree then – and that's probably about it.

Counsellor, Cabinet Office, 1975

AML: Good. And then on to the Cabinet Office. Was it the European Secretariat?

RT: Yes, the Secretariat where, as I said earlier, my first job was to do a complete re-draft – I think it was Stanley Martin who'd preceded me and whoever preceded me had had a bit of a cut at starting on this White Paper, and everybody thought it wasn't getting anywhere. So that was my first job. And that was interesting and as I say disillusioning in many ways. I did this as I thought I'd been told, an honest appraisal which was thoroughly positive in the end, but it was "warts and all". Shock, horror on the part of my seniors, let alone the people in the Foreign Office. So every sentence which could be used out of context by Peter Shore or whatever anti was taken out and/or modified until they finally got stuck because I'd said that the Common Fisheries Policy - which the Community had disgracefully set up just before our entry and totally against our interests – I said that the fisheries policy was one issue on which it was clear that our national interests would be served by being out rather than in. John Fretwell solved that problem re-drafting it to say that while for the inshore fisheries it would clearly be better that we should be fully independent, this was more than offset by the greater negotiating power which membership would give us in third country waters. And you can tell that to people in Peterhead, Fleetwood and Grimsby if you wish. I may be a bit cynical. Britain at that time was in a mess. We were purporting to sit in the centre of Government and manage the economy in ways which were – oh - disgraceful. I remember a discussion of how much subsidy should be given to Hillman Rootes to make bad cars at Linwood and each Ministry coming along - the Foreign Office determined that we shouldn't do anything which would run against EC competition policy, Treasury determined that there shouldn't be any money paid, the Scottish Office determined it should be kept alive at whatever price, Industry more or less likewise. Hardly an economist in the room. Nobody able to calculate what the cost per job was.

Similarly we had a discussion about whether the Joint European Torus should be established – this is energy, experimental - at Culham in Oxfordshire; the Foreign Secretary in the chair – Crosland – and Tony Wedgwood Benn leading the opposition. Tony Wedgwood Benn got hold of the wrong end of the stick, and exaggerated by a factor of ten what the estimates were of the cost of this project, and Tony Crosland refusing to accept notes from the Secretariat saying, you know, please correct this, and the whole discussion going forward on the basis of an estimate which was out by a factor of ten. It didn't matter of course because presumably

whatever the estimate was it may well have been mistaken by a factor of ten. The feeling that it was a government that was interfering, no, was running everything driven by political imperatives without the competence to manage anything was very very strong. Fascinating.

It was fascinating to see the Foreign Office from the outside. Some things very very good. I mean the idea of the Foreign Office operating 24/7 and responding to crises, in a way that home civil servants expecting to go home and come back again the next morning did not - so that was very impressive. On the other hand, seeing from outside the arrogance of some of our colleagues who would pull tricks and assert their abilities - Michael Butler was a clear example of this - which would gain the advantage for the day, while grey people on the other side of the table would mark the score and at a later stage make people pay for whatever had been forced through was ... that also was quite impressive. The attitude to the public role of public servants as well which - much more than now - the cloistered community of the Home Civil Service – I mean nobody appearing in public at all – and the enormous resistance to the identification of any individual with a particular policy; and the readiness of the Foreign Office stars to play, as we do when we're abroad, to play a more public role: that was a very marked difference. It was interesting to see things from the centre. I chaired the sub-committee which was looking at the issue of Greek accession, for example, and I chaired the Euro-Arab Dialogue. I took over from Rodric Braithwaite, and kept that on after I left. Well the Euro-Arab Dialogue, I did that when I was in NENAD and carried on when I was in Rome, but I'd taken an interest in it when I was in the Cabinet Office.

AML: I forgot to ask what your job title was when you were in the Cabinet Office, Roger.

RT: I can't remember! I was an Assistant Secretary; I was a Counsellor equivalent – it was on promotion that I went there.

AML: Yes, I remember Head of Chancery, Athens was a First Secretary job when I was in Personnel Department, we had a list of about 20 people who would like to go there - Head of Chancery, Athens – David Madden was in the job and I had the responsibility to find a successor and a very long queue of people it was, arguing their case with the elegance of Demosthenes.

RT: Robert Culshaw who worked for me – he went and lived in the house that Margaret had found for us.

Head of Near East and North Africa Department, FCO, 1977-80

AML: Right, and after that you were back across the road to NENAD.

RT: Yes.

AML: One of the hottest seats in the Foreign Office ...

RT: Yes, and it was flattering to do it, and flattering that Michael Weir, for whom I had a high regard, had evidently wanted me to do it. Slight reserve that - Planning Staff, Athens, Cabinet Office - I'd probably got as near to becoming de-tribalised at that stage as at any stage, and NENAD was getting me back into the groove again.

AML: "Camel Corps" par excellence ...

RT: Yes, a little, and that was the only reserve I had about it. It's Arab-Israel, and then it's the rest. I had very strong staff, amazing staff at various times. When I got there David Blatherwick was doing the Arab-Israel job, and Charles Powell came in as an Assistant at one stage. After David Blatherwick the Arab-Israel job didn't work out for a while, not ideally, John Holmes had been put in to the Department, and I gave John Holmes the job although he wasn't an Arabist because he was very quick and very intelligent, drafting and response whether oral or written was essentially what he did and he was superb, and of the outsiders I had Peter Torry who wasn't bad either, so it was a very very strong department.

It had the extra dimension of European political co-operation so that as soon as I was in there I was in fact chairing the Expert Group – we were in the Presidency so I did that – and we produced something called the London Declaration which had a shelf-life of about 6 months which was eventually superseded by the Venice Declaration. I've now got a volume of documents published this last year by the Norwegians on Arab-Israel and the basic documents and the negotiating documents – a vast tome; it doesn't even contain the Venice Declaration; that's how far we got and the London Declaration shamefully we produced when the Americans changed their minds and told us that after all they would quite like the Europeans to say something having held off our partners up to the moment at which they told us this.

1977 in particular was a time of transition. Why? - Because President Carter came in and for a brief moment the Americans had what they called the "Brookings Plan" which was meant to be an international effort to resolve the issue, bringing the Russians in as well as

everybody else and was based on a pretty even-handed approach to what the solution might be. This in contrast to the previous Kissinger-led bilateral of don't tell anybody anything, fix up bilateral Israel-individual Arab countries settlements, and manoeuvre everything – well it was a complete contrast to that and it didn't get anywhere. Why didn't it get anywhere? First because Begin and the Likud Party were successful in the Israeli elections and so we had a quite different Israeli context; and secondly because Sadat went to Jerusalem, and whether that was because he thought that the American plan would get nowhere with Begin in power and he could do it another way, or whether he was so disillusioned with the negative response which the Americans had been getting mostly from the Syrians, but also from the PLO, I don't think anybody knows. But having been excluded from the process by Kissinger's manoeuvrings we then found ourselves by-passed by Sadat. After that our contribution, never very glorious, seemed to me to be increasingly disregarded by all concerned. I remember trying with David Owen in response to the question "Well, what *can* we do?" and I said, "Well, here's an idea – if you want an idea, let us decide what we think – it's the opposite of what we have been doing but let's decide what we think the final solution ought to be, and see if we, the Europeans, can agree on this, and just put it out on the table and say "This is where we think you ought to be going." "Oh, what a good idea", he said, and appropriated it to himself, and took it off to Peter Jay's father-in-law, who told him to get back in his box, and that was the end of it. And so I got even more disillusioned.

AML: Had this process included some sketch by you of what the final solution might be?

RT: Oh yes, oh yes.

AML: Why was the Prime Minister against it? Was it the Labour Party's traditional alignment with Israel?

RT: Oh no. It was because the Americans wouldn't like the essence of it – the Americans would certainly stop you doing it if they thought you were thinking of it – it would be appalling – no, it was simply …

AML: The trans-Atlantic dimension?

RT: The trans-Atlantic dimension. The fact is that they were the only ones who could deliver the Israelis – I don't think anyone could actually deliver the Israelis in the end – there won't be a solution unless the Israelis themselves decide that that is the least bad course for them to

take. No the Americans would have loathed it, like the plans for a common energy policy for the European Union – total hostility.

When Tony Parsons came back from Tehran and took over the Middle East, he effectively said we had quite good relations with the Arabs when he was last was involved in this and now we've got awful relations. We need somebody else to run our policy on Palestine and do something effective to ensure that the voice of justice and Palestine is heard. John Moberly had succeeded Michael Weir as Under-Secretary.   John who was far too quiet and probably too sympathetic to the Arabs to be prepared to take anything head on, so it was I who had to tell Tony that it would not run for political reasons, and why we were doing what we were doing. The response to that was that Tony started to manoeuvre to get me removed and replaced by Mig Goulding. The ins and outs of it were slightly complicated, but I started to look for what else I could do – Head of Chancery in New York was one of the things I might have done. But in the end Tony went to New York and got Mig Goulding to be his man in New York, so that job was taken, and then I was offered the Washington thing and then that fell through, so I sculled around in NENAD with Rome and Geneva on offer but in the end stayed on an extra year and got Rome. NENAD was very exciting – this is just Arab-Israel but there was lots of other stuff as well.

AML: Were you at all conscious of there being countries at the other end of your patch like Morocco and Algeria?

RT: Yes, and went to them, but never knew very much about them. They didn't present quite the same sort of problems or issues. Libya did, and I worked quite hard to try to restore the relations which had been so bad after the Qadhafi coup. But then after I'd left NENAD and handed over to Oliver Miles, there was the shooting at the Libyan Embassy in London – the policewoman. The one sort of legacy I thought I might have left in NENAD which might have been very embarrassing were the traces of efforts to improve relations with Libya which would be marked down to me and scored against their appalling behaviour. In the end this didn't eventuate, and Oliver didn't seem to have thought that I'd left a bad legacy. But I put in a fair amount of work on Libya. North-west Africa – the Maghreb – was care-and-maintenance as far as I was concerned.

AML: That's interesting. When I was in Morocco I had really good back-up from the Department, and was grateful for it.

RT: Well I hope that your predecessors didn't feel that they were not backed up, but it didn't take much of my time. Oh I suppose the first year also I was persuaded by Peter Wakefield, Ambassador in Beirut, to re-open MECAS, which we did ...

AML: Briefly!

RT: Briefly. It was a mistake.

AML: But that was the end of an era, when MECAS finally closed.

RT: Yes.

AML: We still teach people Arabic. My daughter, who is a Foreign Office Arabist, spent a year in Cairo, with rather a good little school there.

RT: I don't know what the present plans are.

AML: Possibly Jordan. They go wherever it's safe to ... a diminishing number of countries. Any other observations on NENAD?

RT: That even at that time, that golden era of Foreign Office Arabism as it were, I realized that, setting aside the Maghreb, I probably knew more about each of our countries than did the desk officer or the Assistant in the Department. And I think that the knowledge base has got very much narrower since then.

AML: That's certainly true – partly because of our new mantra that we mustn't offer people a job for life – the value of having a lifetime of experience of a particular area is being lost, or nor regarded as such. Anyway, how did it come about that from NENAD you went off to Rome from '80 to '81?

Counsellor, Rome, 1980-81

RT: Well, all that was on offer when Washington fell through. When that fell through there wasn't any obvious post for me. They said that I could go off to Stanford and do an academic year if I wished but they hadn't any idea of what would follow that. I hadn't got a project that I was absolutely committed to. Margaret said it would be awful if I went off and kicked my heels for a year, worrying about where things were going without having a determined project, so that wasn't on. There was also Geneva, but Rome was much more attractive. It's Head of Chancery again. I thought that Athens was over-staffed, with one too many levels. I

thought I could have been if necessary Deputy to the Ambassador when I was in Athens, and there were three people of Counsellor level above me. In Rome there was a Minister and although it was Alan Goodison, who was such a good friend, that was one level too many. Certainly listening to Ronald Arculus's worries about his security in Red Brigade days was a sad come-down from NENAD. But it was what was on offer. Rome was obviously attractive, we'd had 5 years of penury in London. We liked Rome as a place. It enabled our daughter to do a year of sixth form studies at the International School, which was quite nice, and there was lots to enjoy. But I was very very fed up with the lack of any real responsibility. I had Mark Pellew and Tony Galsworthy working for me, who were grown up and knew the place and knew the job, Alan Goodison deputising for the Ambassador and doing everything that needed to be done including organising the State Visit. I must be the only Head of Chancery who'd been there for a State Visit and not done the organising for it. So I moaned to Personnel Department. David Crawford had died in Bahrain after being there for a few weeks, and they said "Well, would you want to go to Bahrain?"

AML: And you said ...

RT: Margaret said yes – after living in a flat in the centre of Rome which was absolutely ideal and lots of fun – she's not a linguist but she'd acquired enough Italian to manage – a lot of hard work put into very little purpose. But I was fed up ...

AML: And she loyally went with you.

RT: As always.

<u>Ambassador, Bahrain, 1981-84</u>

AML: Off to Bahrain then. And what were the main issues? This was your first job as Ambassador?

RT: Yes.

AML: Quite an important moment. And very pleasant in many ways?

RT: Yes, and I was only 44.

AML: And a good relationship with the Al Khalifah?

RT: Well, a very close relationship with Shaikh Issa, with the Ruler. A relationship which his son, the present King, quite clearly regarded as being unwisely close. We were very fond of him. He was a very very good friend. And although it was possible to make jokes about him – he didn't keep his family in order, he spent money he hadn't got – and he made lots of little jokes – he was nevertheless prepared to stand up to the Saudis when they tried to get him to stop having church services in the church in Manama and when they tried to make the place less liberal. He was a very good friend of Britain and of us, and his personal character, by being open to everybody in Bahrain, he took the edge off what I regard as being a systemic and irreducible difficulty, that it is a small privileged Sunni group that are running the majority Shia population.

It was a small village community in many ways. One went along to mourning meetings to say you're sorry that someone has died. And I used to go along whenever it was appropriate, and would be given effectively the head place next to the host. I'd ask a few questions about how old the dead person was, had he been ill long, how many sons there were or whatever. I would only get bumped off when, as not infrequently happened, I would coincide with the Emir arriving. He would go whether Shia or Sunni or whoever it was and ask the same damnfool questions and show a general interest in everything. It took the edge off what was a pretty deeply resented dominance on the part of the royal family. And we had a State Visit to Britain, to Windsor Castle as part of the entourage and heard cleaning ladies in the corridor in the morning saying to each other "I never knew there were such nice people in that part of the world". It wasn't for once because they were dishing out money to them all, because I'd done a deal with him that he could give whatever he liked into a sort of common purse, but neither he nor his people were to dish out individual money to people. I think he'd observed that, and it was just a genuine comment that they're very very nice people.

It's very agreeable if you're in a place where on the whole if you get instructions from the Foreign Office to go and see them at whatever level you can and see what they think about what you're going to do tomorrow. The chances were I could go today to see the Ruler or the Prime Minister or the Foreign Minister or the Governor of the Bank and be able to report before tomorrow that they'll give us all the support they can in whatever way, it makes life a lot easier.

We had an interesting, large, and on the whole senior British community – it was about 10,000 people, a lot of economic and banking interests. It was just developing as a banking

centre, and the people there were on the whole the head men for their particular organisation in the Gulf region, not just in Bahrain. I learned quite a lot about commercial and financial life.

It's a very small and limited country in which to live, but day to day it's essential to do something every afternoon because otherwise you'll fall asleep. I would swim or play tennis or play golf, play squash every afternoon. It was a pretty easy three years personally and professionally, and very enjoyable.

AML: Good. One deserves those postings from time to time, Roger.

RT: Yes, yes. I mean, people would rightly raise an eyebrow at someone who said he was fed up in Rome but happy in Bahrain!

AML: Of course, you can never tell what's going to happen when you go to a place. You might have found yourself in the middle of a revolution or something.

RT: Yes. John Shepherd did.

AML: But no. I saw online a piece you had written recently about getting the recent difficulties in Bahrain in perspective. I thought you wrote pretty wisely.

RT: Nobody listens, except that in Bahrain, four years ago when the media were excited about this identical Arab Spring that was going to produce wonderful fruit as a result of total change in these despotic regimes throughout the world – the media were excited and Bahrain was one of the places where the vicious torturing despotism was going to be overthrown, and the British Government was not at that time prepared to be heard counselling caution about this. Now four years later, without saying anything about whether their opinions have changed we have a military base agreement there and relations are quietly supposed to have resumed normality. But still almost nothing is said in terms of ...

AML: .. how these people aren't so bad really ...

RT: That's right.

AML: Well, sic vivitur. And on from Bahrain to Syria.

RT: Yes.

Ambassador, Syria, 1984-86

It was totally different. In Bahrain everything was done in air-conditioned and antiseptic five-star hotels and in a friendly government environment in which one was treated with considerable respect. Roger Tomkys's TV show – you know, appearing whenever I called on anybody there would be the TV stuff – to Syria where the political climate was basically hostile in the sense that the Syrians were sceptical and hostile to almost everything that we were doing or they supposed we were doing in terms of Palestine and the Arab world. The refusal front, they led it, it was economically rather unsuccessful, aligned to a degree with the Soviet Union – only to a degree, but that's where they got their arms from, and the Soviet Ambassador had a privileged position, and Eastern Bloc Ambassadors could go down back routes into Lebanon, which we couldn't.

It was very difficult to get access without long notice to anyone above the Head of Western European Department, but if you did get access, chances were that the answer you'd get would be very tough and rather disobliging. The Head of Western European Department, whose name I've now forgotten, was not that bad an interlocutor. And there's a story there. President Asad's wicked brother turned up at London Airport one day – one plane-load coming in from Geneva with his friends, and another load coming in from Morocco with his friends. I've forgotten which plane he was on, but they were all armed to the teeth, and they all had Moroccan passports, although most of them were Syrians. They stopped them at Heathrow, I think fairly politely, and I think they relieved them of most of their handguns, or most of the ones they could find. I got an angry call from London saying "We've had the President's brother here and he's had this gang of lads with him carrying Moroccan documents, and all armed to the teeth. We've remonstrated with them, taken their guns off them, and they're in London. We want you to go and protest to the Syrian Government about this in the strongest possible terms." I went to the Head of Western European Department – maybe I should have gone to Protocol, but that would have been less relevant – but I went to him, and I told him what I've told you now. He said "Thank you. I'll call you back." And he called me back within half an hour and said "I'm instructed to tell you that if Syrian nationals arrive in London appropriately and with the correct documentation we expect you to treat them with full courtesy. In any other circumstances you can do what you wish with them". That could only have come from Hafez al Asad, and it came within about half an hour.

When I had presented credentials to Shaikh Issa in Bahrain I presented them in Arabic because I thought it was a courtesy, and that it would report well in the morning's press. With Hafez, I thought, I'm hardly going to get any time to have a crack at this man, I want this to be absolutely right, and I want it to count. So I said my say - Palestine and everything else – in English and he listened, and then he said "All British Ambassadors speak Arabic, come over here". We sat on the settee, Abdul Halim Khaddam and the rest of the gang facing us, and he grilled me for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes in Arabic – then he said to me, "In your address you said three things. The answers are X, Y and Z. Thank you very much. Enjoy your time in Syria." I never again had a chance of speaking to him face to face, whereas with Shaikh Issa of course I could go and chat to him more or less at any time.

It was pretty difficult for the Foreign Office as well, because John Coles was in Jordan at the time and he would be reporting King Hussein's latest wheeze for solving the Palestinian problem, and it fell to me and Bill Squire in Tel Aviv, similarly to say "Well, what the Syrians or Israelis will say and do is as follows." And Hafez's line when I listened to him was "Yes of course - an international conference is the right way to solve the Arab-Israel conflict. However if I were in Begin's shoes (or was it Shamir at that time?) if I were Prime Minister of Israel – backed by the unqualified support of a major superpower, I would not go to an international conference in order to solve this problem. I wouldn't give away an inch of the territory that I hold; if I did go to an international conference I wouldn't give it away, I would only go to that conference if I knew it was going to give me things which I cannot get by any other means. And that's what I expect to be the policy of Israel." Of course you report that back to the Foreign Office and it's not very welcome, and the messenger tends not to be very well regarded. It was made worse by the fact that if necessary the Syrians would put bombs under Arabs who thought otherwise.

When we left Syria it was because we broke relations over the affair of Hindawi, who was a terrorist who tried – instigated by the Syrians – to put his Irish pregnant girlfriend, on to an El Al flight. This had been six months back in London when the Syrians had been engaged in a charm offensive. I'd come back with the Foreign Minister and then this thing blew up, and I spent six months waiting for the upshot. It was my view and it remains my view that although the Syrians were certainly involved – they had tampered with my Visa Section to get visas for Hindawi on two occasions before the attempt; he'd been closely linked to the Syrian Embassy in London, but I could not believe and still can't believe that Asad would

have authorized so stupid an attempt at a time when they were engaged in a charm offensive; when if it had been successful the Israelis would certainly have destroyed Syrian Arab Airlines on the ground, probably a great deal more than that; that having never as far as I know indulged in that sort of terrorism before they would have chosen to use as their agent a Palestinian whose terrorist credentials were known to the Jordanian Special Branch and therefore known to the Israeli Special Branch; and which was detected at the airport by an El Al security officer who knew enough to try the radio which he was proposing that the girl should take on board and discover by trying it that it was in fact a detonating mechanism. I think the thing was contaminated and I argued that they should sack the Syrian Ambassador who was certainly aware of what was going on; and I would have been sacked, and we wouldn't have lost the underlying link. But it was a tough way to go. 10,000 British subjects in Bahrain, maybe 200 in Syria, mostly married to Syrians. Virtually no commercial work of any significance. Very odd, fascinating country it was.

AML: Were you able to travel around?

RT: Oh yes. One would be put into the rooms in the hotels which were more effectively bugged than others, and you know the Mukhabarat – the secret police – would be around if one travelled. We went on holiday again after retirement – Margaret and our daughter – travelled around, went to Deir az Zor etc – and we had Mukhabarat following us around then. I think that they were more concerned then – we were near the Iraqi border – this is in the - 2006-ish sort of time – Deir az Zor is a bit close – and I think they were more concerned for our safety than that they were going to interfere with what we were doing. No, we could travel around as much as we liked. We had to shop in Lebanon. We met David Miers by arrangement in Shtoura when we were both shopping there in the Beqaa. David came in a sort of cortege of three armoured vehicles and an escort – I just drove across in my own car.

AML: It's often the way. When I was in Libya I had a protected vehicle, but there wasn't really any threat.

RT: Well I was bloody-minded in Syria. The FCO tried to make me have an armoured Rover, or possibly a Range Rover. I said look, if the Syrian Government want me dead, I need an armoured division; if they want me alive, nobody's going to interfere with me at all. They just backed off – thought it too much of a nuisance to argue the toss.

AML: Was it a country where you could speak freely to people you met, or were you worried that the regime would be listening?

RT: No, I spoke perfectly freely. A lot of people would speak quite freely, with limitations – on the whole they wouldn't speak against Hafez al Asad, but they speak against, grumble about the Government, grumble about the Mukhabarat. My joke used to be, I knew from visiting Iraq that Iraq was a bloody tyranny because nobody would drive a British visitor anywhere within two blocks of the Embassy and so on – they wouldn't do anything which might bring them to the notice of the secret police; in Syria it's a bloody tyranny because every shopkeeper in the souq in Hamadiya would pull you in and told you how awful life was under the Party. But they wouldn't say anything about Hafez. Life was OK as long as you didn't do or say anything which suggested any sort of threat to the regime. If you did there were no civil or human rights at all, and a deserved reputation.

AML: We were all shocked at television pictures of them dealing with demonstrators; pretty brutal and horrible.

Assistant Under Secretary and Principal Finance Officer, FCO 1987-89

AML: So we're now back to London, Roger, and its 1986. You've gone back to be Chief Inspector, a much grander and more responsible role than it sounds.

RT: Well, I didn't go back to be Chief Inspector. The experience of having broken diplomatic relations with Syria was a very uncomfortable one in many ways but it was a bad career move because it means you are back in London without a job and without being in anybody's plan. I fairly quickly realised that I was probably not flavour of the month because of the inconvenience of being spare. I had been away for quite a little time, two postings, five years, and I knew if I was going to get anywhere I had to get nearer to the centre and to Ministers.

They had nothing for me to do immediately so I did things like being on the Civil Service Commission, interviewing boards and so on. I chaired one for three months and did one or two other little things which I forget. I said that I wanted an Under Secretary's job in London and that I would take anything. To begin with I had inflated ideas because I'd had two European Community postings and had been in the European Secretariat in the Cabinet Office and thought perhaps that I could do the European Under Secretary job. The blank look of astonishment I received was evidence to me that people like John Kerr and Stephen

Wall, who were a good deal younger than I was, were way ahead of me in that sort of queue. I was out of that channel. I said I would even do Principal Finance Officer, so that's what I got.

It wasn't Chief Inspector to begin with; it didn't become Chief Inspector until later. There were two Under Secretaries who work on the administration side under the Chief Clerk. Christopher Long did the personnel side of it which at that time included the Chief Inspector role. I had the estate and did I have Personnel Services Department? I can't remember, but I had a mix of things plus the main job of being Principal Finance Officer of which I knew relatively little but didn't find it uncongenial.

I narrowly escaped disaster because six months after leaving Syria and going back to work in the Office we had to present the bid to the Chief Secretary, then John Major, for the Foreign Office's budget and I had no break in the summer. This meeting was put off and put off and I did go off for a week to Italy with Margaret with the meeting with John Major scheduled the day I got back. The papers hadn't been ready when I went away and when I got back they were absolutely terrible. I won't go into who prepared them but they were over complicated and designed to show off the cleverness of the writer. Geoffrey Howe was livid; he said he'd never seen such an awful brief. I couldn't say that I hadn't been there when it had been done because that clearly would have been no good so I just had to do the best I could. Geoffrey Howe was very kind because he didn't sack me.

I did that job in the form that it was until Christopher Long got a posting, at which time I said that the job of Finance Officer was also responsible for coping with the next steps of the Government's efforts to modernise the management of the Civil Service and ensure we got value for money and so on, and delegate everything to agencies that could be delegated. I thought that should be brigaded into the Chief Inspector's job and I should take that clutch of things. I can't remember which bit I gave up but I think that the best thing I did was to change that structure particularly because there was a Treasury component in the Chief Inspectorate and it was important that it should be seen as a way of controlling the way in which we spent our funds. I think it was well worthwhile and I rather enjoyed the couple of years I was doing that administrative clutch although as usual I was far from satisfied that we did everything in the right way. Whether things could have been better done I don't know, but my chief criticism of the traditional way of the Service's administration was first the general rule, which must be true of the whole of the Civil Service, that administration and the

finance of administration was seen as a responsibility of getting as much money as you could out of the Treasury, and then ensuring that the stamps were not stolen and it was properly accounted for. There was no sense in which the administration was in the business of delivering an acceptable service to the country at the least cost available. We were there to maximise our budget not to minimise it. The Treasury knew this and I think that the confrontation result was that we didn't get any more money and we spent it less well than we would have done in a less confrontational system.

My second objection is that we were so enormously driven by Personnel Operations Department, by a huge margin the most prestigious department in the administration, because to run the Service well, priority was given to bringing forward the right, good people so that they would be able to fill the top jobs in 15-20 years' time, identifying them early and putting them through Ministerial offices and so on. That's fine. But it sometimes overshadowed the need to assess whether a particular job would be best done left in somebody's hands rather longer than the standard time rather than moving someone else into it. There is one of our colleagues who I won't name who rose through the Service without ever having done any job particularly well. So I railed a bit about that.

Then there was confronting a reforming government who wanted us to smarten up our practices. We did smarten some of them up. There was a very good man who came in as our Purchasing Manager. We never had a Purchasing Manager before. He was a Pembroke man and came from Shell where he had been a middle piece executive and he saved us millions because he knew how you wrote contracts and how you got discounts. We had never known that before. An esteemed colleague of ours was put in charge of the great IT Folios programme because he needed a job, was very able and surely could do it. That was a disaster. I don't think it was very good for him but was done out of collegial kindness on the theory that someone who was good and clever and interested would be able to do a very strange job. I knew nothing at all about computers but I told the Chief Clerk that in my view it was a disaster because we were trying to introduce a huge, complicated, top secret, all seeing, all dancing, very expensive innovation where nobody in the Service knew how to use computers.

AML: Who was Chief Clerk?

RT: It was Mark Russell the nicest most humane of men and very sensible. I didn't have to answer for Folios collapse, but my successor David Blatherwick did and that proved tough. I think he was probably better at it that I would have been.

The Government's other reforming initiatives were sometimes very stupid. There was a man called Peter Kemp who was running a thing called the Next Steps, who was pressing all departments to hive off activities. He was trying to persuade us that such things as for example, passport, visa services, and commercial services and if possible to make them commercial and charge for them. I would try to explain that we were already embarked on a modernisation programme, which went rather against the grain in the Office, of trying to devolve responsibility for budgets to posts and that it made no sense to have vertical transfer of responsibility and at the same time to have horizontal transfer of responsibility so that people at posts to whom we were transferring responsibility for a budget only had a fraction of the total of the budget for their post. You would finish up with a Russian Salad of diced vegetables. But that didn't satisfy a Government set on reform and indeed one could see that politicians confronted with a monolithic Office found this rather difficult.

I also thought, and this has now come forward, that there ought to be much more by way of competition for posts and jobs and there should be a greater element of the Ambassador saying who he wanted and whether he wanted locally engaged or home based, and have people bidding for jobs. That has come about, but not through any effort of mine.

I had two years, learned quite a lot. When the Chief Inspectorate job was added, that was a very worthwhile experience. The Inspectorate was responsible but not very imaginative in some respects. But it served quite a useful control purpose. As I say my ideas were for changing about the ways in which the Service managed itself and if they had gone ahead at that time then the Inspectorate might have had a bigger role to play in evaluating it.

The Government thought that management was the most important aspect of saving money and therefore we were under instructions not to put people up for honours who were no good at management. But then nobody could accuse a number of my most able contemporary colleagues who rose and quite rightly were knighted of having taken the least interest in management at any stage and Ministers, nevertheless, properly preferred to have the people who were best at our proper job which was advising them rather than those who were good at managing a budget in the most important posts. But it sometimes filtered down and I found myself being very unpopular in explaining why I thought one recommendation for a

knighthood to an ambassador, very well known for being able to put on a splendid show when Ministers came into view, but for doing absolutely nothing between his appearances on the stage, I said that this was completely contrary to what Ministers said they wanted. But they don't always want what they say, so there are all sorts conflicts like that. But it was fun and I think that apart from the bidding process in the first year I did the job perfectly well and it was probably better when I left it.

AML: Did you conduct any overseas inspections yourself, Roger?

RT: Yes, I did only one. I went out as a sort of John the Baptist once or twice. I went to Washington before the inspection to talk over what the ground would be to cover. But I did one inspection which was East Berlin, nine months before the Wall came down. It was absolutely fascinating. I am not a German speaker so not in any way an expert but it was wonderful to see a quite junior man in Chancery, not a member of the fast stream, who had been charged with links with the Lutheran churches and he knew more about what was going on and how things were developing as the Communist system unravelled than anybody else in the diplomatic community, not just our Embassy. He was doing a wonderful job at a very modest Third Secretary level.

It was a good post. I thought Nigel Broomfield was driving his staff rather too hard, the earlier point about keeping the army occupied when it is not actually at war. At this time war hadn't broken out and I wasn't sure there would be enough flexibility if war did break out. I don't know, but it was an interesting experience.

AML: When I was in Personnel Department I once had the job of going to Paris to tell Reg Hibbert to stop bullying someone!

RT: Someone in particular? I thought he bullied everybody!

AML: Any other comments on the big issues of how we manage our affairs?

RT: I think that's it on this section, except for a sort of coda. My path and Charles Powell's path crossed at various levels at various times. I also told you that seeing the Service from outside casts a rather different light on it. Charles of course viewed with contempt any submissions on paper that came across which smelt of compromise, caution and of covering the back. I know why. It's partly temperamental and partly because Charles can draft faster and better than almost all of us. I think there was a lot of the product of the administration of

the Service to which Charles could reasonably have taken objection on those grounds. It was very self-protective and very slow to change, almost by choice.

AML: I worked with Charles a couple of times, he never did me harm.

RT: He did me harm once, but fairly legitimately. When we were breaking relations with Syria he got hold of a submission from an inter-Ministerial meeting which was discussing whether we should break relations. The Foreign Office had managed to get this inter-Ministerial gang to endorse my wish that we should sack the Ambassador and not break relations. Charles put up a minute to the Prime Minister and within hours and before anyone could reach him or her to say there were those in the Foreign Office who thought it was judicious and those who thought it was, I don't know, some word that would enrage her, he ensured that the decision was overturned.

The opposite experience was over Iraq when we come to it when he played the friend to me and when we were handling the first weeks after Saddam Hussein's invasion whenever Frank Berman and I would go over to see Margaret Thatcher which we did two or three times a week, Charles would tell us what was in her mind and what her concerns were and ensure that we had a chance to know exactly what the state of affairs was. I think it was the only major crisis in her time in which, at least the period when I was there, that there was no conflict between Number 10 and the Foreign Office and apart from her bullying of Geoffrey Howe, there was no unnecessary friction. Charles should have been doing that with all the issues which arose and whether he did it out of friendship for me or whether he thought I knew my business I don't know, but one way or another he played it absolutely straight and there was no conflict which was not always how others reported their experience.

Deputy Under Secretary, FCO, 1989-90

AML: And so this takes us sideways to Africa and the Middle East …

RT: Happily not sideways, it was a promotion, the last promotion that I got. Alan Munro was posted to Saudi Arabia. I'd followed Alan a couple of times, a bit like interlocking careers with Oliver Miles, anyway I followed Alan as Deputy Under Secretary. We are very different people and do things in a different way. In so far as I have skills, they are not the skills Alan has and vice versa.

I had about two years as a DUS of which all but the last three months were times of relative normality. The last two to three months was the Iraq crisis of Saddam Hussein. During the normal period I formed, not for the first time, the conviction that there was one layer of authority too many in the Office. That is to say that if you had very competent and better than competent departments which were the operational focus of the Office run by grown up people who knew what they were doing supervised by Under Secretaries, I had David Gore Booth doing the Middle East and I had Patrick Fairweather doing Africa, both of whom were very good and very different, then the degree to which the Deputy Secretary above them should be dealing with day to day issues was very moot. I think Alan always wanted to do it himself and there were lots of stories of Alan walking the streets of Paris waiting for meetings in the mornings and being hyper busy. My instinct was on the whole to interfere as little as possible and the result was that one of the big rows that went on was over arms to Iraq, Churchill, the big gun and all the rest of it, when there was a Parliamentary enquiry into this I realised that I had hardly ever participated in this at all. There was one occasion when I put an oar in and made it better or worse. But there was something quite big going on and I'd left it to Rob Young and to David to deal with William Waldegrave and I very rarely got in the way.

So what day to day is the Deputy Secretary there for? Well in the modern world in which the Chief Clerk has become the Director of Corporate Affairs (Donald Tebbit used to say that he didn't have affairs and he wasn't a corporation), membership of the Board of Directors is the sense which envisaged the PUS's morning meeting in some ways setting the strategic lines, and there must be a reason why one reads - now it would be emails but then it was four inches deep of telegrams - before each morning meeting. So you would be in the Office at 7 or 7.30 to start speed reading to determine what should be done and then report to it. But that's not a totally fulfilling life, and again my instinct for reform was to think that although you could make justification for the two levels, it was probably wrong that there should be two levels.

What there was was a periodic, useful and very enjoyable role as being substitute Minister. So, for example, when Nelson Mandela was just let out into the world, and Ministers were very anxious that we did everything we could for him and show how wonderfully we regarded him, if he passed through Gatwick Airport for three hours and a Minister couldn't go down and sit with him and Winnie and ensure there was a conversation, then the Deputy Secretary would go down. Troubles in Sudan, East Africa and the Horn, Somalia in a

complete mess and so on, I went out looking partly on Chris Patten's instructions to see if there was any way in which we could contribute to a settlement. We discussed this with Mubarak and Boutros Ghali at the airport as they passed through. Mubarak and our Foreign Secretary agreed that it would be a good thing for me to go out and stay in touch with Boutros-Ghali who was then the Egyptian Foreign Minister. Of course as soon as Boutros Ghali got back to Cairo James Adams, who was the Ambassador, was invited to come in and hear at least a dozen reasons why the Egyptians didn't want the British in Khartoum, they really wanted us to keep out. It was fun, it may have been useful.

I also went out and talked with the Japanese at a pretty high level about all and sundry and European political cooperation. But hard work, long hours and uncertainty about whether day-to-day it was adding value. You either get stuck in and make yourself a nuisance to the department or else you could stand back and ask yourself whether all this hard work was leading to anything.

There were a lot of contacts of course with the Ambassadors around London, the Israeli representative who had been their Minister when I was in NENAD, nice man called Yoav Biran, turned up as Ambassador. If a top level Mossad or Lebanese expert came in we would have a very nice chat together and it was very good to feel that one got a bit of access higher up in almost everything one did.

Then Saddam Hussein invaded Kuwait and that was absolutely fascinating. I'd been out in Israel and Jordan shortly before and the Israelis had been full of the threat from Iraq in a way in which they hadn't been before. When I went across to Amman the King wasn't there and I was taken to see Prince Hassan who said to me "Can you tell me what my brother King Hussein is doing?" I still don't know who knew what or why but this must have been only a very short time before the invasion. On the eve of the invasion I got a telephone call from Percy Cradock who was at that time in his political foreign policy adviser to Margaret Thatcher role, he'd ceased to be Chairman of the JIC, but he was an eminence grise, not I think as influential as Charles, not omni-purpose but he was much respected. He asked what was happening and that they heard all this stuff but asked if there was going to be conflict in Kuwait. I went through what we had got which was that he had moved his forces so that he was in a position to invade, that the Americans had been told very forcefully by the Egyptians and the Saudis that in recent talks it had been quite clear that the dispute was a financial and economic one over oil and that it could be resolved and would the Americans

please keep out because this was under control. I said to Percy "We have no means of testing this, but we have no means of challenging it either and no access to anything that would make it possible for us to dissent in a practical way".

That was the night before the invasion. Rob Young rang me at about four o'clock in the morning to say it had happened. I was in the Office by 6am and then we all set off. But this was wonderful for me. Like Robert Peston's great career move of the banking collapse of 2008! It was wonderful. Patrick Wright had just gone on leave and David Gore Booth wasn't there. Nigel Broomfield, who was the Pol Mil Deputy Secretary, and normally did all the Chief of Staff meetings, wasn't there. Ministerially I think Douglas Hurd was Foreign Secretary and was on leave as well. Margaret Thatcher and Charles were in Aspen Colorado but that didn't stop them playing an active part with the Saudi King. The same day I had to go and see Shaikh Khalifah the Prime Minister of Bahrain, who was in London, in his hotel. He said they would give us all the facilities we wanted but we must stop this, or it would be the end of all the Gulf States.

We just went on from there. Rob Young ran the emergency operations crisis room and I called the meetings with the Bank and the Treasury and so forth. Two days later there was a meeting of Political Directors in Rome and our Political Director was on leave so I went as Political Director. It was a fascinating time because my City and financial meeting had led to our blocking all Kuwait funds held in London so the Iraqis couldn't raid them and I went to Rome intending to try to persuade the Political Directors and the European Union to do the same. When I got there I found to my embarrassment that not only were they already doing it but they wanted to block all the Iraqi funds and they wanted us to block Iraqi funds too. For the Bank of England to take such a decision was an immense step, not to be done lightly. I had to say that I would have to get London's authority; it was well above my pay grade. I rang Douglas Hurd and he said "Yes, tell them we'll do it" and we did it so that when, a month later when we were talking to Margaret Thatcher about her great statement in the House, I think in September, I'd done a first draft of a speech, at least I hacked at it. It had got something about the EU and she said "I won't have that, they don't do anything". I told her this story. She accepted the point and the reference stayed. So that was fun and it went well.

There were lots of jokes. Margaret Thatcher came across and inspected Rob's crisis room and was enormously impressed. Charles told me she was very concerned about a British Airways flight that got trapped on the tarmac at Kuwait. How to get the passengers off. There was a lot of interesting stuff whilst that was going on. I talked, on instructions from William Waldegrave, I talked not only to BA about whether they could get these people out but in the interests of privatisation I also talked to Richard Branson. I talked very near the top of BA but Richard Branson said "Yes, of course we will help, and give me a call at any time and I'll have a plane in there". The BA passenger list included children and one 18 month old and Charles told me Margaret Thatcher was worried about this. So before we went across to Number 10 I enquired about this. When we talked she said to me "What's happening to that baby?" I said something like he was taking his bottle well, I don't know, and this became Mr Tomkys's baby and was referred to in Cabinet "Does anyone know what has become of Mr Tomkys's baby?"

The upshot of all this was that in a very fast moving situation where there was none of the usual need either to submit upward, or downward, I happened to be surrounded by really quite close friends - Rob had worked for me, Percy Cradock I'd worked for, Charles and I knew each other very well, the Legal Adviser was absent on leave, and so Frank Berman who was a very close friend and I would go across together, he would go and see the Attorney General. Margaret Thatcher for whatever reason thought that we were alright, and if her Principal Private Secretary, Andrew Turnbull (who later became Cabinet Secretary) came in with something else she would humiliate him in front of us just to show how good she thought we were. Everybody came back in September and we'd had about five weeks by then. I was already posted to Nairobi, and due to go in September. Margaret Thatcher said that I didn't have to go to Nairobi but should stay in London but she didn't say for how long.

I reported back to Patrick Wright to discuss whether I was now of such good standing that I had different expectations of the Service. I pointed out that it didn't change the fact that there wasn't any top job for which I was particularly qualified. To quite a large extent the magic went out of it when everybody came back. I couldn't go to the Chiefs of Staff meetings any more, Nigel had quite rightly taken this over and it got a bit more orderly. I was in quite a dilemma - to go back on a decision to go to Nairobi meant going back on something which my wife Margaret and I had decided upon. I had by this time been approached by Pembroke, I hadn't got the job, but I had been approached as to whether I would be prepared to put my

hat in the ring for the position of Master, which I certainly was. I might have had to withdraw if I had stayed on. I had sort of committed myself to leaving the Service and it was because of that I decided that Nairobi was a good exit route. I had said twice that I was prepared to go to Nairobi, it was my choice, but it wasn't an ambitious choice. The fact that it wasn't going to be as exciting in London now everybody was back at their desks was perhaps another reason, but more important was that I'm not that sure of my political instincts and I had the sensation of going on very thin ice, not in the sense that I would get anything significantly wrong and certainly not in the sense that I would have to say things that the Prime Minister wouldn't like. I had already said things she didn't like and she had developed some respect for me, but nevertheless there was an element of false assumptions in that I had been admitted, perhaps temporarily as "one of us" and at some stage she might find out that I was not "one of us". I met her at an Arab dinner party in Eaton Square about four or five years later and when she, with some help, got her focus and got me fixed as to who I was she said "Well if you and I had stayed Saddam Hussein wouldn't be here now, would he?" My view of the success of the operation had been, because we went step by step through the proper procedures, we got the United Nations onside, we were not into regime change, we didn't commit the alliance to any purpose beyond the UN sanctioned action and in my view that was the right thing to do. What she said five years later illustrated the thinness of the ice we were on. I suppose that was the most exciting part of my career in a sense, it was certainly the most spectacular. It was a total contrast with the peacetime Deputy Secretary role.

AML: What did happen to the passengers on the plane?

RT: Oh they were fetched out by BA. They all got home safe, including the baby.

AML: There was a long saga of the Ambassador and his number two carrying on there for a long time?

RT: Yes that was very funny. We had conferences, they weren't email conferences but there were people at either end. Michael Weston was a real pain at the beginning of this because he kept moaning about how awful things were, this was in the first two or three weeks. "You can't leave us here" and so forth. He got quite obstinate. In the later stages he was absolutely adamant that he would not to do anything which would give any comfort to the

Iraqis in any way at all. In the end we went from asking him to stick it out to asking him not to take so many risks, and quieten him down. He did very well in that role in the end. Hooky (Sir Harold Walker) was marvellous when he went back to Baghdad and gave comfort to the British Community there and wise solid advice.

AML: Michael Weston was the chap in Paris that Reg Hibbert bullied.

RT: Well Reg would bully everybody. Although Reg didn't bully me when I was in NENAD, it might of been for a number of reasons, he didn't know about the Middle East, he might have had some respect for me, but I think it was because he didn't want to take on Michael Weir, and knew if he tried to bully me he would have had Michael Weir to cope with and he wasn't prepared to waste his ammunition.

AML: The number two in Kuwait was a nice man called Larry Banks who was at MECAS with me

RT: I just remember him, only just.

British High Commissioner, Kenya 1990-92

AML: And so off to Nairobi?

RT: As I've said I had got to this level at a satisfactory time but without a satisfactory way, from my point of view, of how to improve the condition for the remainder of my time in the Service. The streak of dissatisfaction continued with myself and everything else and I wondered if perhaps it wasn't better to do something else if I could. I'd just started to poke around in the academic world. Even before Iraq the DUS role had very long hours and we were pretty poor and it would in many ways be easier to look from an overseas post.

I'd visited Nairobi and I knew it was a nice house. I'd been in a pretty heavily loaded Grade 2 job at home and Nairobi was certainly not heavily loaded. It didn't make structural sense but made some sense in terms of my individual preferences. It was an interesting place to be and the Pembroke thing was bumbling along satisfactorily.

In the event it was two very agreeable personal years but unsatisfactory professional years. Quite a lot of our relationship with Kenya was about aid and that post-colonial relationship. As long as Margaret Thatcher was there, Moi was regarded as sound on Communism and didn't give her any lip about apartheid and so he was a good thing and we used our aid to butter him up. As soon as she went we were deeply ashamed of this not least because of Stephen Wall who had been Private Secretary to David Owen whose business partner was Ken Matiba was one of the leading opposition figures. And so Number 10 got Kenya through the opposition. Whereas Moi had been our stalwart friend he became the biggest blood-covered tyrant in Africa. It was at the time of the Washington consensus, open up your economy, free your exchange rate, privatise everything in sight, have multi-party democracy and you will have a fast developing economy in no time at all. Moi was pushed very hard to introduce multi-party democracy. I think Kenya got quite close to serious civil war as a result of doing this a bit too quick. Anyway we went from one extreme to the other and I had the responsibility of telling Moi that this wasn't because we had changed but because something had changed that he was doing, which was codswallop. Lynda Chalker used to come out and see the President, leave me to tell him what was wrong and then go back and tell her colleagues that she had laid it on the line. To say the least that was not frightfully comfortable and the Office wanted me to explain why we had any interest in Kenya at all. I was briefing David Steel who was a Privy Counsellor when he visited and I gave him a copy of my response which was promptly published in the local press. I'm not sure whether David Steel leaked it or whether it was his staff but it was the copy that I'd given him. I became seen in London as an apologist for the Moi regime and that would have been alright, but it was wrong. I was also fed up because aid was such a substantial part of our policy there and DFID's predecessor had its regional office in Nairobi physically located in my High Commission. Whereas Robin Renwick who had the same arrangement had, as High Commissioner in South Africa, oversight over the regional aid programme, I did not have any oversight over the regional aid programme and that made me realise that in stepping down, which effectively I'd done by going to Nairobi, that it was my fault, I had relinquished the sort of clout which I'd enjoyed in London. I didn't like that.

Professionally it was OK. Whether I was a good leader in the High Commission I'm not absolutely sure. I didn't think it was a very happy ship and I asked the Office to take a look. I think it was thought to be partly my fault although it wasn't said in those terms.

I had another responsibility there in that I was Permanent Representative to UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme). I didn't do anything but I had a good, competent First Secretary. UNEP had a conference and the largest of any foreign delegation was from London and they were very competent. Apart from providing their gin and tonics I was not really required to play a role but I rode on the coat tails of that in my last summer when I resigned and went to a conference preparing for the Rio world conference. You can gauge my psychological condition at the time by the fact that the Foreign Office and Treasury representatives talked with glee about how they had got a series of devices by which to get through Rio without any financial cost to the Treasury and without any damage internationally to Britain's reputation. I actually made a little speech saying there was just a chance that the environment was the most important issue to be faced by diplomacy in our era, and it wasn't good enough to sit and giggle that we could get away with a conference on the grounds that we won't have any damage financial or moral from it. There was silence for a moment and then they moved on.

HM the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh passed through and stayed in the house which was very nice. We had quite a lot of visitors. I had followed John Johnson who had spent his life in Africa and whose instincts were those of a District Commissioner or senior, inspecting the drains, etc. I thought that was wrong and I think people were rather surprised when I said, and meant it, that as far as I was concerned I didn't feel any guilt or any particular responsibility for the effects of Empire thirty years before and treated Kenya as a friendly independent state. But what I did think we ought to do was ensure that we had the best possible control over the way our own aid money was spent, and that if there was corruption then that impacted on our aid commitments. I had a wonderful meeting with Bob Horton who was Head of BP and who came out to call on Moi. It was an object lesson really. Bob Horton said to Moi that as a consortium of oil companies they were prepared to modernise, at enormous expense, the export refinery at Mombasa so that it was the refinery for eastern Africa, but would only do it if they would clean up their internal energy market and we were able to compete on normal terms and they ceased the corrupt fixing which goes on. Moi took note very clearly. He was afterwards got at by the Minister of Energy, who was the most frightening of Moi's Ministers and a real thug, and nothing happened. But there was no doubt that was the way to get things done.

We have a lot of good memories of Kenya. I don't think I made anything worse. I hope I mitigated a bit the rate at which we would have otherwise been forcing Moi. It's a very funny relationship.

When the Queen came, before she left the house, I thought the whole visit in the circumstances was a bit vulnerable to criticism because Moi was such a bad hat. What was she doing going staying in Kenya? But I'd had a call from London to say could she break her journey to Southern Africa en route and have a night's sleep. I said Yes and she would have to call on Moi, but I reckoned I could get her to the house to sleep pretty well on arrival and without any abuse of the visit. The visit illustrated to me what a terrific influence the Queen has in Commonwealth affairs and that it matters to them all. It's also, I think, relevant to compare it to the idea that the Foreign Office had that I should propose to Moi that we set up a joint British Kenyan Committee to enquire into corruption in Kenya, which was an idea the Under Secretary came up with, which seemed to me to betray a complete lack of understanding of how Kenya worked. It might work in Uganda where they were adroit at saying "Yes, good idea" and then mission boy style, having got more aid as a result, go out and massacre a few more people. Kenya had its points. Those who did not think it was the right place for me to go probably, if we disregard my personal inclinations, were right. It wasn't a natural habitat.

That's it, I left in the middle of September 1992 and was admitted here *(Pembroke College)* two weeks later.

AML: Did you prepare a valedictory despatch?

RT: Yes, not I think of any distinction. I asked David Gilmore, who was the PUS, whether he would mind if I wrote the despatch which I wanted to write, which said "here I am in a middle piece post and not in the centre of HMG's concern, and yet our policy is determined largely from Number 10 on the basis of very limited information. They didn't read the stuff from here. And if this is a pattern repeated anywhere else then we ought either to staff Number 10 so that it can run foreign policy on the basis of an adequate information base or alternatively we ought to go back to the old system when foreign policy, excepting the relationship with Washington, is essentially our business and Number 10 does not attempt to run it". David said "Please don't". I think that the result, and which has probably happened,

is that Number 10 is staffed at least so that it can be informed on the political impact of whatever it is in foreign countries. But it was thought an error to raise this.

AML: Have you any other bits of general au revoir?

RT: No, other than that having been here (*Pembroke College*) with quite a lot of young people and seeing how they wonder about what they can do with their lives, not a few have come and said they were interested in going into the Diplomatic Service and asked my advice. I've given them really a Government Health Warning to say essentially that compared with 1960 when I went in, the financial returns are in starker contrast with the financial returns to be had from comparable City jobs and the prospect of managing two careers, which was not frequent in my generation, is not as easy as if you were at home. I believe that the relationship between civil servants in whatever branch and Ministers has much deteriorated and we are in a less deferential society in which some of the benefits which compensated for lack of high financial rewards are less available than they used to be. Boarding school used to be seen as desirable location for children and it was a privilege that you might be able to send your children to boarding school, but that is rarer now. So bear these things in mind. It was an enormously good club to belong to and I think it remains so. Looking at yourself in the mirror in the morning, unless you were very unlucky, I don't think that I have cause to be ashamed of what I was doing it for. It's stimulating for those interested in the world and outside the box. It's a rewarding career in that sense but I would not advise you to go in like me by accident, but only if you are genuinely committed to it. It isn't a first choice for many of the highest flyers now, it doesn't have to be a first choice for many of them but it has to be first choice for a sufficient number of them to get the business done. I think it ought to be the ones who are pretty committed to the choice from the outset. I don't think it will be sustained otherwise.

AML: Wise advice Roger. Thank you very much.