BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

CARTER, Andrew, CMG (born 4 December 1943)

Career (with, on right, relevant pages in interview)

Andrew Carter CMG interviewed by Jimmy Jamieson at St George's House, Windsor Castle on 20 October 2006

Education and entry to the Diplomatic Service in 1971

JJ: After your ordinary school, you went to the Royal College of Music and then you won a scholarship to Cambridge University from 1962 to 1965 where you got an MA. You then became an assistant master at Marlborough College at the ripe age of 21, which must be something of a record, and were there for five years until 1970. You had a background in languages - Russian, German, French and so on, but your main activity it seems was music. You qualified as an organist, pianist, and so on. And then suddenly in 1971 you switched and entered the Diplomatic Service. Why did you do that?

AC: Well, I enjoyed my five years at Marlborough very much, but I was never a professional musician. I attended the Royal College of Music while I was a schoolboy, and got a diploma from the RCM before going up to Cambridge. My main hobby and interest and passion in life has always been music, although I've always earned my living by either teaching or otherwise using the languages which I studied at university – German and Russian at Cambridge and these with French, plus a little bit of Chinese as well, at Marlborough College. I felt that I probably didn't want to spend my entire life as a schoolmaster, and I'd always been interested in foreign countries, and had visited Europe as much as I could. The idea of a peripatetic existence greatly appealed. So that's why I did the ordinary Civil Service entrance exam, just before I became too old to do so, and I passed in 1970 when I was 26 years old, just rising 27. So when I joined the Foreign Office in early 1971, I was 27 years old.

Appointment to South East Asia Department

AC: I was a Second Secretary because of age. I was put in South East Asia Department, and was made Desk Officer for Burma, Thailand and briefly for SEATO, the South East Asia Treaty Organisation, which still just about existed at that time.

JJ: It must have been quite a radical change for you from the quiet cloisters of Marlborough College to the buzz and the dashing about and the scribbling of memoranda and all that stuff in the Foreign Office. Did you have a good person to guide you through the ropes, so to speak, for the first six months or so?

AC: Well, no and yes. I joined in January, 1971, because having been accepted in 1970 I had to give notice to my employer at Marlborough, which meant that I had to serve an extra term, and therefore I missed all the induction courses, if any, which were given to new entrants, most of whom had joined in September. I also missed the various language aptitude tests and such things. So as I recall at this distance of thirty five years I don't think I received any formal training at all. I was simply plonked in the Department and told to learn on the job. Of course I got plenty of support and supervision from my colleagues in the third room, and also from the Assistant Head of Department and the Head of Department. I did eventually do a language aptitude test. I had done a bit of Chinese at Marlborough and would have been interested in studying it properly, but the places for Chinese by then were taken. And so I was told that I would eventually do Polish. Despite the fact that I already knew Russian, they thought it would be good for me to learn Polish. And so that was what I was told to expect.

JJ: It's such a different sort of world, how did you deal with it? You didn't have to go on drafting courses I suppose, but ..?

AC: No, I didn't go on any drafting courses. I just began to do the job. There were letters from the post and contact with the Burmese Embassy. I remember attending one or two meetings of the Britain Burma Association where they sang the Britain Burma song. Relations were not very intensive at that time. General Ne Win was Head of State in Burma. Relations were correct but not very substantial. Ne Win would come periodically to spend time at his house in Wimbledon, and indeed one of my first official duties was to get up very early in the morning on Easter Sunday 1971, I remember, and drive to Heathrow to welcome General Ne Win on behalf of the British Government. He came for what was described as medical treatment, but I think it usually involved playing golf. He would arrive in the only Boeing 707 which the Burmese State possessed. It made quite an impression on me at the outset of my

diplomatic career. Another issue I had to deal with was correspondence from British citizens who had previously owned property in Burma and who'd been dispossessed; their property had been expropriated by the military government, and they were demanding that the British government do something about it, or at least arrange compensation. I remember heart-rending letters from one lady about the poverty in which she was now living and how she needed to release the assets that she had previously owned in Burma, and I invited her to come and see me. I went to meet her in King Charles Street and she arrived in a chauffeur driven Rolls Royce and was dripping with jewels, so although we had a cordial interview, I learnt quite a lot on that occasion.

JJ: Without your being told?

AC: Without being told.

JJ: I suppose those negotiations, as elsewhere, went on and on and on, probably without any helpful outcome.

AC: There were negotiations with the Burmese Government about compensation for those who had lost property, but, at least in my time, which was very brief, there was no substantive outcome. We had a very good atmosphere. There were three of us there. Ralph Skilbeck was one. I can't remember the name of the other desk officer. I remember Ralph was dealing with the Philippines and we were all invited to lunch at the Philippine Embassy, where I was given one of the biggest cigars I have ever seen in my life. So this was all a very new, but fascinating world that I'd come into. Actually in the office itself, there were still some very old habits and customs. Once or twice a week someone would come round and give us each a clean towel and a bar of soap and someone else would come round with a bucket of coal to replenish the coal scuttle which was in front of the open fire, which still burnt in the third room. This was only thirty five years ago, but it was in every sense another world.

JJ: So it sounds as if you had a good time and you learnt something about Burma and …

AC: One thing I do remember about it was that almost immediately one was given to feel that one was part of the institution; was accepted. One was a member of the FCO and that was a great encouragement; a great source of confidence, really, because one felt one was part of the "in" team.

JJ: I share your views on that. I found, and I think it's part of the ethos of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office that still remains, doesn't it? People still keep in touch with each other all the time like old schoolboys do? And lots of lunches and so on. I think that's one of the great things about the office. So you were in South East Asia Department until 1972?

Polish language training

AC: Until just about the beginning of 1972. I had already been told that I'd be posted to Warsaw in September. Before that I had six months learning Polish at RAF North Luffenham which was the RAF centre for language training, when airmen were taught all sorts of languages which they then used for their work on intercepting radio signals etc. There we were in the middle of Rutland on a disused Air Force base with tutors teaching everything from Chinese to Russian, and the two Polish tutors were ex-Polish airmen – wartime vintage – and now getting somewhat elderly, but they were charming, although very different. There were three of us learning Polish. I didn't find it difficult because of my Russian, but it did mean that my Russian became much less reliable, because one never knew whether one was thinking in Russian or Polish. The languages are similar, but certainly not identical. There are many differences. But it was an enjoyable time.

Posting to British Embassy Warsaw, 1972-75

AC: I was there for about three years.

JJ: As Second and then First Secretary in Chancery?

AC: Correct.

JJ: That must have been quite a contrast to working on a Desk in London.

AC: It certainly was. I was quite new to diplomatic life abroad.

JJ: Who was the Ambassador?

AC: Firstly it was Frank Brenchley and then Norman Reddaway.

JJ: What was Warsaw like at that time?

AC: It was all new and strange. I went there with imagination working overtime about the horrors of the Cold War and secret police and dirty tricks and so on. In fact it was an ideal place to spend one's first overseas posting, and it was regularly used as a post for new entrants. I had a very comfortable flat to live in. There was of course a sense of being slightly under siege, but the Poles were always reluctant Communists. There were very few fanatics. And so there was a feeling that, although we were certainly spied on, and my flat was searched in my absence, which gave a frisson of excitement, there was no physical danger.

JJ: It was obvious.

AC: They did indeed make it obvious so that we knew, and we were blatantly followed about in the street, similarly in our cars. Nevertheless there was a feeling there were limits beyond which neither side would go, and therefore a form of co-existence existed. Indeed I remember going on a picnic in the countryside with some people from the Military Attaché's department, and we had a Land Rover and the obligatory black Mercedes of the secret police followed us. When we got into the forest the Mercedes got stuck and the Land Rover didn't, and so we simply towed them out. They were grateful. So there was a certain understanding that things had to be done, but we needn't push it too far.

JJ: So you didn't get an atmosphere of oppression, and not being able to hold a conversation with people, and generally closed in and so on? - as people did in Moscow.

AC: Not at all. I mean sometimes you would meet people who would be visibly reluctant to talk to members of a foreign embassy on anything which had political overtones, but for the most part the Poles were only too willing to talk about anything at all. It was not difficult to make contacts. It was evident that there were some people, particularly in the journalistic sphere, who were licensed jesters, and were prepared to criticise the government knowing that what they said would be avidly reported. But you quickly got to know who they were and to make the necessary allowances for what they said. We were encouraged by the Foreign Ministry to join the Journalists' Club, which was not far from the Embassy, which was an excellent restaurant, but also clearly a hot bed of surveillance and espionage. So there were some constraints, but for example there weren't any serious limitations on our freedom to travel, anywhere. Obviously there were clearly defined military areas that were off limits, but we could travel all over the country, and indeed I did so. I had a close friend in the Swiss Embassy and he, being from a neutral country, was allowed to have a Polish girlfriend, and indeed had a most attractive girlfriend, who had actually worked previously for Orbis, the official tourist agency – as a guide, and had all the various credentials and identification cards and so on. And she admitted frankly to us that she would have to write reports about her meetings with us, but we could rest assured that she wouldn't say anything of interest. In fact in later years she married this Swiss chap, and he is now an extremely wealthy businessman in Poland and, as far as I know, they are extremely happy together with a family. With those two I travelled all over Poland and had wonderful times visiting beautiful and historic places from Cracow to Gdansk. I even gave some organ recitals and visited many instruments. A very enjoyable time.

JJ: In the early days when I joined there wasn't enough money for people to go out to travel very much outside the capital city, or you were far too busy to go out. When I went on my first post to Lagos the Head of Information Department said – "Go away for three weeks. Travel all over Nigeria and then come back and tell us everything you saw" and so on, because they recognised a need, but these days the Office is too stretched to have much of that. What were political relations like at that time between the UK and Poland?

AC: It was a quiet time. I think relations were fairly good within limits.

JJ: Who was the Polish Prime Minister at that time?

AC: The Party Chief was Edward Gierek, an ex-miner, who had lived and worked in France. He was, again within certain limitations, an acceptable and certainly not a dictatorial Party boss. I think he was genuinely trying to do the best for his country within the constraints that were imposed upon him. Yes it was a relatively quiet time because there had been some political unrest in the late 1960s and of course there were the consequences of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and obviously conditions were very bad in that country. And in Poland they were anxious to make the best of a bad job, it seemed. They were particularly trying to revitalise the economy and they had a policy of taking very substantial credits and loans from western countries and buying factories, often as turnkey projects, completely off the shelf. They would perhaps erect a factory shed and then they would purchase all the contents to go in it. And so there were opportunities for western firms, including British firms. One of the major projects was to build a tractor plant, which Massey Ferguson were doing, and so the Commercial Department was extremely busy at the time. The policy was not entirely successful because the Poles couldn't get their act together, and so one would get consignments of expensive machinery delivered and they would stand in the field and go rusty while the factory in which they were to be located was built. So we saw that some of it was going to end in tears. But nevertheless while it lasted it was a good time. Commercial relations were strong, and political relations were correct, even if not very substantial. My job was to report on the political situation in Poland and as part of those duties I had to read the Polish press. We had an arrangement with the American Embassy whereby my opposite number there, and I, would get up early in the morning, read as many papers as we could, mark articles for translation, and pass them to Polish translators who would then put them into English, type them up and we would publish by about 9.30 every morning a bulletin in translation of the Polish press of the day, which we then sold to other embassies who didn't have Polish speakers. Then I would get to the morning meeting in the British Embassy and brief the staff on what was in the papers.

JJ: Did you send copies of these daily press reports back to London?

AC: Oh yes.

JJ: Just going back to the commercial aspects you mentioned. Where did the Poles get the money from, or were they borrowing internationally or what?

AC: They were taking very substantial international loans. And when some of these investments did not generate the income that people hoped, then by the end of the 1970s the economy was in difficulties again, and that of course was the time when the Polish Pope was elected, and Solidarity came into being and the countdown to the collapse of Communism began.

JJ: During this time what Soviet involvement was there in Polish affairs? Presumably they had an enormous embassy?

AC: They had an enormous embassy and I remember when Julian Amery, one of our junior ministers came on a visit to Warsaw, and we were driving past the Soviet Embassy, a massive building, he commented: "I know a colonial capital when I see one." And that just about summed it up. Russians kept a fairly low profile. They were aware, so it seemed, that there was no love lost between Russians and Poles. They didn't want to cause any trouble. I'm sure that behind the scenes they kept a very close eye on what the Polish Government was doing, but to the extent that the Polish Government, by generating prosperity, was going to reinforce social stability, they were happy to let them get on with it. It was the time of stagnation under Brezhnev - I remember Brezhnev paid a visit to Warsaw on one occasion and drove past the Embassy in a motorcade waving at Poles lining the streets who were absolutely silent. That was quite a moment which spoke volumes.

JJ: Interesting. So was the Soviet Communist Party visible at all? Were they lurking in the background?

AC: I'm sure they were lurking in the background. There were of course close links across the board between the Polish Communists and the Soviet Communist Party, but it was evident that there were some leading Polish Communists – they didn't call

themselves Communists, they called themselves the Polish United Workers Party – who were totally subservient to Moscow. Western embassies discussed among themselves who were the ones most closely identified with the Soviet position, and indeed the conclusion was that most of them were not. They were working within an imposed system to do the best they could for Poland. But there certainly were some people - I'm trying to remember the name of one in particular, he had been Foreign Minister, who was thought of as Moscow's man in Warsaw.

JJ: Did we have a British Council presence in Warsaw?

AC: Yes, we did have a British Council presence with a library. After I got married in 1973, my new wife and I took part in a performance of "Oliver" at the British Council. They had a big library which was intensively used, and scholarships were also awarded. I remember one of the young British students who came over was a musician called John Casken, who is now a distinguished composer, and professor, I think, at Birmingham University. He and his wife were living in Warsaw and studying with Lutoslawski, the composer.

JJ: So your general life in Warsaw sounds as if it was quite enjoyable, in fact. You were able to get around, mingle with the local population, travel and so on?

AC: Yes it was enjoyable. It was easy to make contacts. One had to take some with a pinch of salt. It was not a time of great political upheaval. There was relative peace and quiet. Travel as I say was possible and enjoyable. Cultural life was extremely active. There was wonderful opera and splendid concerts. And of course as diplomats we had access to special shops, but even in the ordinary shops there were adequate supplies.

JJ: You didn't have to queue for hours for a loaf of bread?

AC: No. Life was certainly bearable, not only for us but for the Poles as well. There was an Embassy shop where we could buy duty free things, such as drink and tobacco, but also British commodities that weren't available in Poland, and this shop was used by the Commonwealth Embassies, and there was a slight, well, a major

problem. Most services were paid for not in cash but in cartons of Benson and Hedges cigarettes.

JJ: Outside the Embassy?

AC: Yes, we all paid our daily helps with cartons of cigarettes. There was an Embassy country club – that's a rather ambitious name for what was a small house on the outskirts of Warsaw – which enabled people to get out of Warsaw and relax, and it was run by a very charming Polish gentleman who under a capitalist economy would have been a millionaire. He was an extraordinary wheeler-dealer, trader and had access to all sorts of amazing supplies. One could telephone the country club at 4 o'clock in the afternoon and say "we are coming to dinner with three guests at 7.30 and we would like smoked salmon, fillet steak and strawberries", and it would be available. It was well known that he had access through the back door to the Central Committee's special stores. So that was extremely nice. But then, because the other Commonwealth Embassies were using our shop so assiduously, the Head of Chancery, Chris Howells, was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, and the Head of Protocol said: "Mr Howells, we are men of the world. We know what goes on. But the goods in the British Embassy shop are imported, strictly speaking, by the Ambassador for his personal use, and we notice that His Excellency is importing several million cigarettes a year and perhaps he might like to think of his health." And as a result of that the decision was taken – and I'm not sure it was a wise one – to suspend all use of cigarettes for these purposes and to go over to paying cash, which would be obtained at the official exchange rate. So all our allowances went up by several thousand per cent. The staff concerned didn't want the money. They preferred to have the cigarettes which were more easily tradable, and a mini-crisis ensued, certainly in our relations with our local employees. But that was the way it was.

JJ: If we can move on now. You left Warsaw in 1975 and rather than going back home you went down to Geneva and you joined the UK Delegation to the CSCE.

Appointment to Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe 1975

AC: I did. I was posted to Bonn, but before this I was temporarily to reinforce the Delegation to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Conference was believed to be reaching the endgame, and they needed some extra pairs of hands, and so I had to go there. Once again I had to learn on the job. On my second day there I was in a Committee representing the UK and being reminded by my French colleague that the Russian was looking at me and expecting an answer on a topic about which I knew absolutely nothing. So briefing and preparation were not a great feature of life in the Foreign Office in those days, but you learned very quickly on the job. I was there for some six or eight months.

JJ: How many were in the British team there?

AC: I can't remember. There must have been about twenty of us altogether.

JJ: Twenty? Including secretaries?

AC: Yes. I can't remember the exact numbers, but there were several negotiating fora, called baskets. I was in the basket dealing with confidence building measures in the military sphere. We all lived in a little world, with our own particular problems. We did of course have coordination meetings with the Head of Delegation, Sir David Hildyard. There was a considerable air of improvisation. I remember a message coming from Jim Callaghan, who was Foreign Secretary at the time, saying: "We must wrap this up. Go for constructive ambiguity." Which is a phrase which served me very well in much of my diplomatic career. There were some interesting personal relationships between the British and the Soviet Delegation, and the Russians did respect the British as being among the more serious and principled, but at the same time subtle and flexible opponents. And there was a particularly fruitful relationship between Patrick Laver – I can't remember his exact position but he was my boss, my line manager – and one of the Russians, Mendelevich. Patrick was a devout Catholic and Mendelevich was one of the most senior Jews in the Soviet hierarchy, although not, I think, a practising one. But he had a great interest in religion, and he and Patrick would have regular lunches at one of the superb restaurants in Geneva,

dispatch their business about confidence building measures and other aspects of the emerging Conference document, and then discuss religion and philosophy. This respectful and intellectual relationship was quite famous and did both of them enormous credit. Another interesting event there was at Easter time – it must have been 1975. The question arose of the recess for the Easter holiday. The Russians and the Americans both wanted a very brief holiday because they saw the prospect of concluding the Conference. Other communist countries wanted to spin things out because their diplomats enjoyed living in Geneva rather than in their rather Spartan capitals: but they didn't dare to admit it. It was brought to a head by the Permanent Representative of Liechtenstein, Prince Henri of Liechtenstein, who said: "You Americans and Russians have plenty of people in your Delegation and therefore you can work for long periods. I however have to cover nearly the whole waterfront, and I want a holiday. I'm going to withhold consensus unless we have ten days". This led to a crisis. There was a technique of over-extended coffee breaks. This was a way of stopping the clock. If a meeting was not making progress you would have a 'coffee break' and negotiate a way forward in private. Some 'coffee breaks' lasted two or three days. So it was with the Easter recess. But eventually the compromise was more in favour of Prince Henri than it was of either the Russians or Americans, so that's a good example of how in a Conference where consensus is required, even the smallest country can make its presence felt.

JJ: For the least important matters. How interesting. So were you there when it did wind up?

The Helsinki Final Act

AC: Until nearly the end. The final document (the 'Final Act') was signed in Helsinki, and as we all know now this was an extraordinarily important document. The Russians accepted that the question of human rights was not exclusively an internal affair into which other countries could not interfere. That was in many ways the beginning of the end of the communist system, because as later became apparent, other countries at successive review conferences could criticise, and demand improvements in, the human rights situation in the Communist countries. I think the Russians felt that by getting some sort of acknowledgement of the existing frontiers in

Europe, in other words of their political and territorial gains as a result of World War Two, it was worth making some commitments on human rights. In fact they seriously miscalculated, because the balance of advantage was very much in favour of the West, and, of course, the rest is history.

JJ: And they constantly fought against our requirements, or our wanting to change how human rights were dealt with in the different countries.

AC: But they were not able to do so because of their signature on the piece of paper. I remember also that there were enormous arguments between Laver and Mendelevich in the final stages about the language on the changing of borders.

JJ: By language you mean special wording?

AC: In English – of course there was always the question of comparing the same text in various languages – there was a passage to the effect that the states agree that the borders between them may be changed in accordance with international law by peaceful means and by agreement. And there was a question of whether or not there should be a comma saying that borders may be changed "comma" in accordance with international law "comma" by peaceful means and by agreement. That would imply that anything that was done by peaceful means and by agreement was *ipso facto* in accordance with international law. If you didn't have the commas it meant that there would be three criteria, not two; international law, peaceful means and agreement, and the implications that were extrapolated from that, the absence or presence of the commas, was considerable.

JJ: Yes, it sounds like drafting a text when we were trying to join the then EEC in the 1970s – the same sort of problems. That's fascinating. But you weren't there much longer after it had really wound up its business, apart from the signatures?

Transfer to British Embassy, Bonn, 1975

AC: No, I left just before it ended. In the autumn of 1975 I moved directly to Bonn.

JJ: Well, why don't we do the same? We will move you directly to Bonn for this discussion. And so again another foreign posting. What was it that you were required for down there?

AC: I joined the so-called Bonn Group. The Bonn Group were representatives of four powers – the UK, the US, France and Germany – and handled everything concerned with inner-German relations, and particularly the status of Berlin and the presence of the allied garrisons in West Berlin. So we met at least once a week, and sometimes more frequently to discuss absolutely everything to do with Berlin. Access to it, the status of it, the activities of the Russians and the East Germans, how to preserve the legal status, how to avoid submitting to provocations, resisting provocations while at the same time not unnecessarily committing any ourselves, because we were interested in stability rather than anything else. The document that ruled our lives, that we had in front of us at all times, was the so-called Quadripartite Agreement which had been negotiated in the early 1970s.

JJ: Between the four powers?

AC: The QA, as it was called, was between the four victorious powers, not the Germans - that is America, the Soviet Union, France and Britain - and set out agreements to manage the relationship while protecting the radically different interpretations of what it meant. This was another example of Jim Callaghan's constructive ambiguity – you had a text which could be interpreted differently by different sides, which was satisfactory as a diplomatic device provided neither side chose to press their point to the moment of rupture. So if you had a piece of prose which the Russians said meant one thing, and we said meant another, that was fine as long as neither side tried to force the other to accept their interpretation. And it was on that basis that stability reigned in Berlin in the latter years of the occupation regime, whereas in earlier years there had been extremely dangerous confrontations on a number of occasions. And so the purpose of this agreement was to avoid the repetition of that, and it was entirely successful. Of course, all the arcane and recondite knowledge that we acquired was swept away and became irrelevant after 1989.

JJ: But still the game plan was stability and don't block any access roads.

AC: Don't block any roads, but don't concede any points of principle, and so there were many fascinating aspects to life. Anyone who was a representative of the four powers had the right of free access to, and free circulation within, Greater Berlin. Despite the construction of the Berlin Wall, members of the allied garrisons of the West and of course officials such as myself, still had, and were granted by the Russians, the right of free movement. So even after they'd built the Wall, the Russians were not going to risk a confrontation by crossing the red line of principle as laid down by the Western powers. And so all sorts of extraordinary behaviour grew up. Military patrols circulated freely. The Russians came to the West; we went to the East. When we, as civilians, went to the East we drove up to Checkpoint Charlie where there were usually no Russians – who were the only people whose authority we recognised – but there were East German police and guards whom we did not acknowledge. But of course unless we had some dealings with them they wouldn't let us in, and then we would have an international crisis. So what we would do was to put our identification against the window but avoid eye contact with the East German guard – avoid eye contact – that was the most important thing, and the East German would raise the barrier, and we would go through, and so honour was satisfied on both sides. In many, many ways and many contexts, that sort of face-saving compromise was applied in order to ensure that things never got out of hand. One thing that we had to do in Bonn was to give political rulings on questions posed by the British Military Government. The question came one day – "We have an elite cavalry regiment in the garrison at the moment and some of the young officers wish to exercise their right of free movement in Greater Berlin in full dress uniform on horseback. Can they do it?" And after careful reflection we said "no" because this risked making a mockery of what was a very delicate but effective working compromise. But one could have argued the other way.

JJ: And others would want to do the same sort of thing. Even if it was only on bicycles. What were senior West Germans, politicians/government, doing while you were not rocking the boat amongst the quadripartite team?

AC: What was the West German Government doing in respect of Berlin?

JJ: I mean what were they doing all the time that you were, in a sense, controlling West Berlin?

AC: Well it was still the 1970s – I mean the Cold War was at its height – they were extremely grateful to have the allies, and of course, first and foremost the Americans, there. There was however an increasing consciousness that they were really an equal partner in preserving the status of Berlin, particularly since they paid for everything. They paid occupation costs and every year these had to be negotiated, and I found in my time that the Germans became more and more meticulous in looking at the details of the costs of the occupying forces or the 'protecting forces,' as they called them. The Federal Republic had long emerged from the condition of an occupied country. They were very much an equal partner, and of course, they were an extremely successful economic power; far more successful than Britain at that time.

JJ: Helmut Schmidt was Chancellor?

AC: Helmut Schmidt was the Chancellor. I remember there was some discussion just after I arrived about the fact that the Germans were insisting that they would no longer pay for taxis to take the wives of sergeants to do their shopping. We agreed that this was fair enough, and this privilege was abolished; but there was some discussion about the extent to which we could, on grounds of principle, permit the Germans to call the shots in matters relating to the occupation regime. But overall the co-operation was extremely warm and friendly. And everybody realised that the maintenance of the status of Berlin was in the interest of those who lived there, and in the interests of stability in Europe. I remember going up and down to Berlin frequently on the military train. I learned the fascinating detail that apparently the menu served on the train had been the same ever since the end of the War, and the German stewards serving in the dining car had more or less lived on that train for the previous thirty years. And so when you left Berlin in the early morning, you had a breakfast composed of doorsteps of white bread, tea, coffee and jam, boiled eggs, and then half way there you had lunch which was chicken or hamburger with vegetables, and slices of cheese with chopped onions and more doorsteps of bread, and then on the way back from Braunschweig tea was as breakfast, and dinner was as lunch, and it

never changed. But I think that probably did change later. There were these curious little traditions that were observed, and apparently the British military train was much preferred to the American train because the food was better, but the French train had the best cooking.

JJ: What was the relationship between Helmut Schmidt and Honecker who was running East Berlin, was he not?

AC: The relationship really became much more intense, not so much under Helmut Schmidt, but under Willy Brandt.

JJ: Willy Brandt was before Schmidt.

AC: Yes before, and Willy Brandt had gone to Warsaw and knelt at the ghetto memorial, which had won him enormous respect, but also much condemnation from certain sectors of German society. And he had instituted so-called *Ostpolitik* which was to bring about change through *rapprochement* – 'Wandel durch Annäherung' – and he believed that by negotiating with the East German regime he would eventually enable contacts to be re-established between the two parts of divided Germany. He was concerned that if the present situation lasted for two or three generations, then effectively the nation would be divided into two; two completely new nations as it were would emerge, and he wanted to prevent that, and so he believed that it was worth making what some critics saw as concessions, in order to maintain contacts. For example, paying money to bring about permission for certain people to emigrate from the GDR. But this policy was controversial. It was continued under Helmut Schmidt, but with rather less intensity.

JJ: Apparently they helped to finance a Hamburg-Berlin autobahn at that time, according to something I read. One of the parts of their financial aid.

AC: Yes indeed. Because the West German economy was doing so well money was available and they believed that it was right to spend it in order to preserve the idea of one single German nation and not to be provoked into reinforcing division by the unacceptable antics of the Communist regime.

JJ: How long did you stay in Bonn?

AC: I was in Bonn for three years.

JJ: So you saw West Germany, presumably, gradually developing its own way for doing things and ..?

AC: I very much enjoyed it and once again was able to travel a great deal. It was interesting to note that even then, despite the enormous success that they had, and the fact that they were far more successful as an economy than we were, there was still in some respects a wilful amnesia about the War and the past, but on other occasions a sort of touching insecurity. I remember talking to a fairly senior lady from the Foreign Ministry, an experienced and cosmopolitan lady, and I just happened to say how much I enjoyed living in Germany, and how much I found to admire, and how I loved German culture and history, and all that, having studied it at university. And she actually had tears in her eyes and she said that it was the first time any foreigner had ever confessed a genuine love for Germany to her. I found that quite remarkable.

JJ: So all the allies were pretty tight-lipped about the whole business.

AC: There were still people in the British military in particular, but also among civilians, and indeed among businessmen, who had very much what I call an occupation mentality, which I found inappropriate, given our relative weakness and the extent to which the situation depended on Germany and on the Germans continuing to accept, if you like, an inferior status. I felt that this was not going to last for ever, and that we should be cultivating our friendships to ensure that this emerging economic superpower remained genuinely friendly towards us.

JJ: I mean, it was thirty years after the War and the West Germans must have been getting restless at that time? Really wanting proper freedom to run totally their own affairs.

AC: They certainly wanted freedom to run their own affairs. As I described, they were not as willing as in the past to accept the impositions that were placed upon them as the occupation costs. They were conscious of their very considerable economic power, but there was still a reluctance on the part of many, to face up to German responsibility for what had happened. Though since then of course they've more than compensated for that, and are analysing the Nazi period with extraordinary frankness and in great detail.

JJ: Of course, at this time the EEC was continuing to develop, and with Giscard d'Estaing, the President of France, cultivating good relations with Helmut Schmidt, I suppose this would have strengthened the Germans' desire to play a leading role?

AC: I am a great lover and admirer of France as well, but I have to say without naming names, that the behaviour of quite a few of my French colleagues towards the Germans and indeed towards the Americans, was arrogant and unforgivable. They behaved as if they were culturally superior, and they were domineering. They did not behave well. I mean it's not, I'm sure, typical of the French, of all the French political class, but certainly there were some egregious examples of humiliating behaviour by the French towards the Germans and Americans. There was one Frenchman who spoke perfect English, but in a meeting would not speak anything but French because he knew that the American representative spoke no French. That was crude and unforgivable.

JJ: But that survives today in the Council of Europe. French Ambassadors are tempted to do that as well.

AC: Not where there are no grounds. This was an informal group; maximum of eight people sitting round the table transacting business informally. It was not a formal meeting with simultaneous interpretation and so on. It was a matter where you had to work and communicate as best you could. He did it simply to embarrass the American.

JJ: Yes, that's not what diplomats are supposed to be doing, is it?

AC: The person concerned is still in an extremely senior position in the French Civil Service.

JJ: So what else before we move on.

AC: I would simply say that I was there at the time of the Queen's 25th Anniversary and there was a big military parade at Sennelager and we had to prepare for all that, because in the second part of my time in Bonn I left the Bonn Group and became First Secretary, Defence, so I was dealing with the Armed Forces and the headquarters at Rheindahlen and so on. We were very conscious of how we were trying to stretch increasingly scarce resources to maintain a status which really, frankly, we could not afford. And the contrast between our pretensions and the real wealth of Germany, and the extent to which we depended on their good will to protect our *amour propre*, was really quite dreadful.

JJ: And embarrassing for us. The 1970s were a bad time for the United Kingdom, as I remember it. So after Germany you finally, after seven years away, returned to London. It's unusual to have such a long spell abroad after just really a very short time initially in the FCO?

Return to Western European Department of the Foreign Office in 1978

AC: I think it was usual after such a short induction period to have two foreign postings and then back to London, and that's what I did. The time in Geneva was an added interlude really. And I came back to London and I worked first of all in Western European Department, as Desk Officer for Germany.

JJ: That was very sensible and useful for the Office.

AC: Dealing with Austria and the GDR as well, as they were in the German room, and of course I was also particularly Berlin Desk Officer. So Berlin remained my preoccupation.

JJ: Was British policy towards the set up in Germany just continued? Was the Government happy for it to continue?

AC: Very shortly afterwards there was the election in 1979 and we were all expecting a new departure under the Conservatives and Mrs Thatcher. I looked out of the window of our office and saw her on the steps of Downing Street saying: "Where there is hatred may we sow love". I actually saw that take place.

JJ: This is the Prime Minister who eventually dreaded German unification.

Moves within FCO Departments then on loan to the Ministry of Defence, 1981

AC: Then after about a year I moved to Eastern European and Soviet Department as Assistant Head of Department. At this time I did an interchange with the Military of Defence for a year or so and was in DS12, the NATO Department. It was just before the Falklands War. Then as Assistant Head of the East European Department I was able to visit all the East European countries – Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and Czechoslovakia as it was then, which I did not know as well as Poland.

JJ: Did Ministers pay visits?

AC: Ministers paid visits. Of course our political relations were thin with those countries. It was fascinating to see them, particularly how even then Hungary was beginning to pull ahead by having a rather more liberal economic set-up. Romania was in a terrible condition. Bulgaria also doing quite well, at least relative to Romania, and Czechoslovakia, materially not too bad, but spiritually and politically totally frustrated. So it was fascinating to see all those. Then I had a year's sabbatical at Chatham House.

JJ: But in EESD what were the main problems you had to deal with including no doubt briefing Ministers?

AC: Well, briefing Ministers about the situation in those countries and preparing them for visits there. For obvious reasons there was very little substance in our

relationship, although it was always interesting to try to interpret whether there were any different nuances of interest or approach between Ministers in Prague or in, say, Sofia.

JJ: We weren't trying to be proactive in the sense of trying to wean them away from relations with the Soviet Union dominance and so on?

AC: We were always looking for ways to encourage a more assertive attitude on the part of those countries, although as the Hungarian events in 1956 had shown, we were not going to push it to the point of risking peace in Europe. Of course, we did now have the Helsinki Final Act as an alibi, if you like, for taking a more interested attitude in human rights and other freedoms in these countries. Also encouraging particularly the Romanians, to continue to distance themselves from Moscow, because it wasn't clear then what a monster Ceausescu actually was. He was just seen as someone who was prepared to stand up to Moscow and therefore needed to be encouraged. Indeed he even paid a State Visit to London. I can't remember when that was – not in my time – but later. That was a great mistake. Of course the Hungarians were seen as more pragmatic, and we wanted to encourage the growth of goulash communism because we thought that that would ultimately weaken the political hold of the Communist Party in Hungary. So there were differences between them. The saddest case was still Czechoslovakia. I remember I went with Malcolm Rifkind on a visit to Prague and we sat in the magnificent palace that was the Foreign Ministry and had a political discussion that was abject, and that was it …

JJ: Were CSCE meetings still taking place in this period?

AC: Every two years or so there were follow-up meetings though I was never involved directly in them. There was a meeting in Belgrade. They happened about every two years until it was decided to create a permanent organisation, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, which still exists in parallel with the Council of Europe.

JJ: You found London just as interesting in a way because you were seeing the other side of what you'd seen on the ground in some of these countries in Europe?

Appointment as Head of Chancery UKDEL NATO 1986

AC: Indeed, I thought there was some consistency developing in my career now. I seemed to be evolving as a sort of defence and East-West specialist and so I spent a year at Chatham House studying that aspect, and wrote some short papers, before going off on promotion to UKDEL NATO in Brussels. As Head of Chancery – the Political Counsellor – I sat on the NATO Political Committee, and also had responsibilities for administering the Delegation – personnel matters and such things. The Ambassador, Sir John Graham, left almost immediately after I arrived and Sir Michael Alexander then came as Ambassador. Also for part of the time I had to be a sort of Clerk of Works because Michael decided he wanted to refurbish the Delegation completely, and I had to do all the administration of that, but the political work was the most interesting side of the job. I was working alongside David Omand, who was the Defence Counsellor on secondment from the MoD. On the political side our job was to study the political situation as it evolved in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Did we see what was coming in 1989? No we did not. I'm afraid I have to plead guilty on that. But on the other hand, neither did anybody else. It was the speed at which Communism collapsed that was the extraordinary surprise for everybody. Gorbachev was studied in great detail, but the conclusion was – and I think it was probably the right conclusion – that he was a convinced Communist who wanted the system to work better rather than to abolish it. But then, towards the end, events crowded in on him and he very fortunately decided to let things take their course. History will always owe him an enormous debt for not having used force.

JJ: He is still now quite an elder statesman isn't he for the Soviet Union? And came to the Council of Europe while still in office and talked about the common European home. Wanting to be part of the European home.

AC: He did give warnings. He went to an anniversary celebration in Berlin a short time before the Wall came down, in which he made a speech saying that – I can't remember the precise words – life punishes those who are unable to change. That was the substance of what he said, and I remember television pictures of Honecker

standing there looking furious as Gorbachev said that, because major demonstrations were already going on in Leipzig at that time. We obviously followed the events in Prague and in Budapest with concern, when so many East Germans invaded the West German Embassy in Prague and also were demanding to be permitted to cross into Austria from Hungary. The Hungarians actually initiated the collapse of the system by opening the border. Once they opened the border then one thing followed another, and you couldn't stop it unless you declared war. That was an option of course. But Gorbachev, to his credit, decided not to go there.

JJ: Coming back briefly to your job in Brussels, in UKDEL NATO, how did you and the military side of it deal with each other? Did you have joint meetings?

AC: Yes we had a UK military representative – UKMILREP – and his staff, and he took part in numerous meetings. I think it was the defence side of the delegation, the MoD staffed side, that had more to do with the military in terms of detailed planning.

JJ: Were these military officers?

AC: Very senior officers. UKMILREP was always an Air Marshal or equivalent, and the detailed interchange with the military side and of course with the NATO military staff was for the MoD colleagues. We on the political side were studying the political situation in the countries of the Warsaw Pact.

JJ: So the soldiers and airmen doing their own thing looking at what the other side were doing, I suppose?

AC: They were endlessly refining their plans and monitoring the intelligence reports, but most of the military activity took place at Mons, at Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. The military presence at Brussels NATO headquarters, the political headquarters, were advisory and for liaison with the senior political authorities of the Alliance. The French were present on the political side, but not of course on the military side at least officially, but I think there were very considerable unofficial contacts between the French military and the NATO military. And the French would always say: "Don't worry, when you need us we'll be there".

JJ: So after NATO, what did you do then?

AC: As my time at NATO was coming to an end - I was there until 1990 - we witnessed the events of 1989. In early 1990 after the Berlin Wall came down, it became obvious that the two Germanies were going to be unified. We were told that we could visit the GDR. So I dropped everything and jumped in a car and went and toured the GDR. It was absolutely fascinating, particularly talking to people who really didn't understand what had happened to them. The currency union had already taken place – they had received their Deutsch marks – but the political union had not yet happened, so they were still, strictly speaking, a separate country. But to drive up to the inner German border, and see all the fortifications that were there, and a hole knocked through them and an old pre-war road joined up with a few hundred yards of tarmac. Just to drive through was an extraordinary experience. And to go to some of the little towns in the Hartz Mountains and to talk to people and to hear their stories – they were charming people, but totally confused. They said that televisions now cost a quarter of what they used to, but bread and coffee cost ten times as much and they couldn't come terms with this – and many, many other things. It was amazing.

I might also mention one other event at NATO. We had periodic summits, Mrs Thatcher and President Reagan and some other Heads of Government, and the great disputes about the location of Cruise and Pershing missiles in Europe to counter the SS20s. On one occasion I heard Mrs Thatcher's voice raised fairly high in the Ambassador's allegedly soundproof office as she was being advised by Geoffrey Howe to compromise. She was refusing to compromise.

JJ: What do you think led her to take such a tough stand about the reunification of Germany at that time, when it was on the cards?

AC: I shall never understand why she publicly opposed it.

JJ: Did she think she could turn the tide back?

AC: I'm not here to justify her ideas. It was far better to do what the Americans did, which was to welcome reunification and to derive benefit from it and the credit that comes from having supported something that Helmut Kohl was determined to bring about.

JJ: It must have cost the Americans millions to keep it all going? Still, all's well that ends well on that part of Europe anyway. So then you went off to Gibraltar.

Appointment as Deputy Governor of Gibraltar, 1990

AC: I was told by Personnel Department, as I was coming to end of my time in Brussels, that I had to go to the Third World to get my knees brown and do commercial work, because it would be good for my career, and it was more or less agreed that I would go to Islamabad as Commercial Counsellor. Then they rang up and said: "Would you mind going to Gibraltar as Deputy Governor, because we need someone at short notice to go there." So I said: "So what about the Third World and commercial work and good for my career?" And they said: "Your career will not suffer. We'll see you right". This is the only complaint I have about the way I was treated by Personnel Department. They made that promise and years later, when I was in Strasbourg, I said that I would like to run a bilateral embassy to complete my career, and they said: "Terribly sorry but you haven't done commercial work". I do feel resentment against them for that. I might add that I have seen Michael Jay as Permanent Under Secretary on three separate occasions since I retired, and on each of those occasions he said: "We didn't do justice to you at the end of your career". Now why he remembered that among so many other people, I don't know, but I just note that. That's my only complaint about the way I was treated by Personnel.

Anyway I had a very happy time in Gibraltar. It was difficult because it was my job to be the senior official representing the British Government in Gibraltar. The Governor to some extent had a different responsibility. The Governor was a retired military officer and it was his responsibility to represent the interests of Gibraltar. But I was there as the acknowledged Foreign Office representative. My job was to interpret London to Gibraltar and vice versa, and that did call for a certain amount of diplomatic skill, I suppose. Others before me had not always managed to do that, and

to keep some measure of confidence from both sides. But the Gibraltarians were charming people, although very subtle and rather devious at times, and I remember the Chief Minister at the time, Joe Bossano, calling me in on my first day. He looked at me very sternly and said: "You have to realise that because you represent the Foreign Office, we Gibraltarians neither like you nor trust you. Now that I've said that, would you like a drink?" And that was how it was. There was a great deal of trust to be earned on both sides, but it was an interesting challenge, and I was lucky to work with two excellent Governors, Sir Derek Reffell and Sir John Chapple. The circumstances of life were very good. I had a wonderful historic house to live in, and so it turned out to be a very rewarding posting.

JJ: And did you get across officially into Spain at all?

AC: Not officially. But despite periodic delays, hold-ups, problems at the border which were part of the problem, it was possible to get into Spain frequently, and we did, and enjoyed it and came to have an enormous affection for Spain as well. But I can't say that I haven't liked any of the countries I've served in. I've liked them all without exception.

JJ: But were there not the constant difficulties for people living on both sides of the border, not just Gibraltarians.

AC: There were difficulties, and one reason was that Gibraltar was part of the EU. It joined with us in 1973, but had elected to stay out of the Common Customs Area. Therefore, although the Spaniards could not impede the free movement of people on foot, they could apply customs controls, and when they wished to, for reasons of harassment, they applied them in spades and a car could take twenty minutes to be processed. Queues of four to five hours were not unusual.

JJ: Why did the Gibraltarians choose to stay out of it?

AC: Because the basis of the economy in Gibraltar is its status as a free port, a duty free shopping centre, and I have to say that successive British Governments, while loudly paying lip service to their support for Gibraltar had not put in train an

economic plan to restructure the economy after the withdrawal of the military presence. The military presence was decreasing rapidly in my time, and had decreased before I arrived, and continued to decrease afterwards. But ever since Gibraltar became British, the military base had been the prop and stay of the economy, and it seemed to me that Governments had not adequately devised an economic strategy to keep the place going once the military had largely departed. So they did take to smuggling cigarettes to which a blind eye could perhaps be turned, but not when it turned to smuggling drugs. So it was part of my job to try and urge London to understand the plight of the Gibraltarians, whilst also urging the Gibraltarians to stand on their own two feet and earn an honest living as opposed to a dishonest one. But it required a certain amount of subtlety and flexibility of mind to accommodate both points of view. The Gibraltarians set up an off shore finance centre and London demanded that that should be regulated, quite rightly, to a standard close to the standard in the City of London. And many Gibraltarians said: "This is meant to kill it stone dead, because we are competing not with the City of London, but with Madeira, Cyprus, Malta and other finance centres where regulation is not so tight". There was no compromise on that, and now after ten years or more, the finance centre of Gibraltar is doing well and is tightly regulated. This was the sort of point one had to try to get across. To be honest, and seen to be honest, was the best way to build a secure economic future. When it came to subsidies and investments the British Government did not have a very admirable record.

JJ: What I could never understand was why the Spanish thought harassment would work in their favour, as opposed to courting the Gibraltarians and being nice to them?

AC: Well exactly. Which seems to be happening now, and that's very sensible. In our contacts with Spain we were always urging that, while of course quite rightly continuing to stand up for our commitments to the Gibraltarians. But we were unable to deploy the same arguments in the defence of Gibraltar as we did for example for the Falkland Islands, where we said the inhabitants had the right of self-determination. We could not use that argument in Gibraltar because we were bound by the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, which stipulated that if Britain did not want Gibraltar then Spain would have first refusal. The people did not have any say. But even that circle seems

to have been squared in the latest negotiations that ended just last month, and that's a good thing.

JJ: How long were you there?

AC: I was there for four and a half years. My son was born there and we settled in and had a very enjoyable time.

JJ: I spent just enough time there to get married. I couldn't get married in Algiers because there is no reciprocal arrangement with the Algerians. Gibraltar is a very nice place for a short time. I would have found it difficult to stay for four years in a place as small as that. But I suppose you travelled around?

AC: Oh yes. We travelled a great deal in Spain.

Appointment to Moscow as Minister in the British Embassy 1995

JJ: Your penultimate post after that was Moscow, Minister to Moscow. Number Two in other words, bringing you almost, in a sense, back full circle, but a very interesting job at a very interesting time?

AC: I did go at an interesting time. There was a vigorous, if somewhat rudimentary, and not always effective, democracy and an even more chaotic wild capitalistic sort of economy, where many of today's oligarchs acquired the assets from which they have now become phenomenally wealthy. Not a happy time for Russia. Living standards for the vast majority had collapsed with much of the social security of the Communist period gone, enormous hardship for the majority of the population borne with tremendous stoicism. I had great admiration for the Russians, both in their ingenuity in getting through and finding alternative ways of making a living, but also in their ability to suffer a great deal. This is of course a common theme in literature, but when you actually see it happening it makes a great impression.

JJ: How was it that this capitalist movement, if you like, behaving like West Europeans, came about?

AC: Well they weren't behaving like West Europeans. They didn't construct a structure of law and a means of enforcing that law so as to ensure that the transition to capitalism took place in a rational way.

JJ: That's what I was wondering. How was it allowed to happen?

AC: Well I think it's a very interesting development. As soon as the Soviet Union collapsed, the Russian leadership, Yeltsin in particular, invited advisers from abroad, especially the United States, to advise on the transition to a capitalist economy. The conventional wisdom seems to have been: "You won't be able to have an efficient economy without democracy". That's the American mantra, and so they went almost overnight to what was notionally a democracy, but in fact was a system for which the country was not prepared. There was a multiplicity of political parties combined with a lack of the firm political and legal structures on which a democratic polity could be built. And the economy likewise was freed up. People continued to argue that you must have democratic freedom to build an efficient economy even though the evidence was even then emerging, and is much more visible now, that China had perhaps done it better by keeping control with a firm political hand. Nobody would suggest that there is democracy in China, but the Chinese have liberalised the economy, and at least by some standards, China is now doing very well. I think opinions can vary as to how long it is going to last and if it is going to be as successful as some people anticipate, but the Chinese undoubtedly have done very well in the last fifteen years. They have managed to build a capitalist economy without giving up the political control exercised by the Communist Party. Perhaps it would have been better to keep a tighter political grip on a country of the size and diversity of Russia, liberalising the economy in a more structured and carefully controlled way, building a comprehensive and coherent structure of law, because there was enormous hardship, not a really effective democracy, and an extremely unfair society emerged.

But despite the confusion that was apparent in both the Government and the economy, it was an exciting time to be there. Access was possible at any level at almost any time. You could ring up a Deputy Minister and go and call on him, almost immediately. There was enormous openness and a variety of opinions being

expressed. And there was an absolutely free press, much more than there is today. It was equally very easy to get to know Russian businessmen. The way in which the country would develop was not clear, but it was justifiable to be very optimistic about Russia, and I was. I am less optimistic now, but I do have enormous affection for the Russians, and particularly for the sort of young people, with no memory of Communism, who are awarded Chevening scholarships every year. I had the opportunity to interview many of the candidates for scholarships. These were obviously the cream of the cream. They were extraordinarily impressive young people who at the age of 21 or 22 would have one, if not two, degrees from Russian universities and would speak three or four languages. The languages would not, as for example in my case, be their speciality. They would just be a tool of life. And they would be applying to go to the UK to study a whole range of subjects, mostly connected with business administration, economics or finance or banking. They had very clear ideas about what they wanted both for themselves and for their country and I believed then that when that generation achieved positions of real power, Russia would really take off. When you see what's happened in the five or eight years since then it's not possible to be so optimistic.

JJ: I expect that when Yeltsin came in they had never faced this situation in their history, so they really didn't know where to start and how to deal with it.

AC: I came away – I hope this is not a naïve observation – thinking that human contact is the way to solve international problems. The MoD ran a scheme for retraining army officers who were being made redundant by the Red Army and it was my job to go and present certificates to these people when they'd finished courses lasting a few weeks or months giving them basic skills in accountancy, how to run a small business, or in office management, or some similar skill to help them earn their living after they left the army. Talking to these people I heard some of the prejudices that they'd imbibed, but noted also the speed and readiness with which they were ready to give them up. I came away feeling that if one could only bus thousands of Russians, or thousands of Brits in either direction and just let people talk to each other, then we would make enormous strides in promoting stability and understanding in Europe. The Russians are remarkably warm, friendly and charitable people, and the more people experience that the better.

JJ: How was the Russian Parliament organised once they'd got their freedom as Russians? It was just Russia now and not the Soviet Union?

AC: It was fairly chaotic, but the Duma did have quite a lot of power in those days to pass legislation and the Kremlin did have to negotiate with them. I think now under Putin the Duma has been muzzled or at least the organisation of political parties has been managed in such a way that no really significant opposition to the Kremlin's policies can be expected in the Duma now. You can argue that Putin is perhaps restoring the sort of order and control which we referred to earlier on, and which might have been a better way to effect the transition to an efficient economy before preparing the legal and educational groundwork for a transition to a functioning, effective and responsibly exercised democracy. Now, if one could believe that Putin does actually have democratic ambitions, then that would be a policy that one could respect, but I just don't know whether one can assume that that is ultimately Putin's policy or his aim.

JJ: It doesn't seem to be certain which way he will go, does it?

AC: I saw an analysis the other day which suggested that most of the elements of what we call fascism are now present in Russia. It was a very convincing argument. It would be very sad if it were true, because the Russians deserve better.

JJ: But one reads from time to time comments to the effect that Russians like a very powerful leader. They've always had powerful leaders in their history; their Czars, and therefore they don't find it extraordinary that Putin should want to hold all the reins.

AC: Yes and there are an awful lot of Russian people who say they'd much prefer to have a strong leader provided he can give them the security and material standard of living that is acceptable. There is no doubt about that. And of course Russia is a gigantic country; very difficult to administer and it is very difficult to operate an effective democratic system in a country that stretches pretty well half way round the world.

JJ: One of your predecessors in Strasbourg said to me when he arrived in Strasbourg, having been Minister in Moscow, that he couldn't imagine Russia adopting the Council of Europe's forms of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, at least not much further than just outside Moscow, for the next thirty or fifty years. Do you think that's the case?

AC: Well I think Russia is extremely difficult to understand, and you certainly can't generalise about it, but I did take part in some seminars at the Moscow School of Political Studies which was run by a very dynamic and distinguished couple, and they brought young opinion formers, future leaders from various walks of life, mainly politics and administration, for these very Russian, chaotic, but lively and stimulating seminars which would have titles such as Politics, Economics, Human Rights, Culture and the future of Society, and that would mean that you could talk about absolutely anything. And they got distinguished speakers, largely from the UK – Shirley Williams and Bernard Ingham and other people would go and give talks, and then they would discuss among themselves in an unstructured, but extremely vigorous, committed and chaotic manner, all these ideas that relate to the governance of an open, free, and democratic society. And then they would take the ideas that they had generated or learned back to the remotest parts of Russia from which they came, and the multiplier effect must be very considerable. I think there is a hope for these ideas being accepted, but of course the situation on the ground in the remoter parts of Russia is so desperate that democracy must still be seen as a luxury, where survival is the much more urgent need. I think it is conceivable that Russia could evolve towards a functioning democracy, but there are certainly going to be some very, very unsteady periods along the way, and indeed now the liberal democratic constituency in Moscow is certainly in retreat, faced with the Kremlin machine.

JJ: What exactly though, now, in 2006, is the conflict between human rights, justice and so on, with what the Russians need to do to get the country properly on its feet?

AC: Well the conflict is that if you have these things applied without the necessary underpinning structure, which first and foremost is a judiciary that is not corrupt and has a coherent body of law to interpret and enforce. Unless you have that, then all

these other things – you can create a parliament, you can create a stock exchange, - but unless you have that cement that comes from a coherent body of law and a judiciary to enforce it, then there will be various forms of chaos, or at least the scope for enormous corruption and abuse of arbitrary power, and that does seem sadly a bit of what's happening. I remember in Moscow there was the question of whether Russia should be admitted to the Council of Europe and we were writing saying it must be admitted because this would strengthen the good guys, and help Russia to reform more quickly, and I knew that the leader of the opposition to that in Strasbourg was the leader of the British Delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly. And equally …

JJ: Who was that?

AC: I can't remember. He's died since. At the same time, there was a suggestion that some ex-Warsaw Pact countries could join NATO – Poland, Hungary and Czechoslovakia, the Czech Republic. And we were writing advice from Moscow saying that that would not be a good thing because that would weaken the good guys who wanted Russia to be a part of democratic Europe and strengthen all the old paranoid fears about conspiracy against Russia by the West, and we argued that yes, to have the three new members of NATO would certainly strengthen the security of those countries in a certain sense, but it would risk lessening the opportunities to co-opt Russia into the democratic project for a united Europe, and that to get Russia on the right lines, to get Russia developing in a way compatible to the standards of Europe, would be a far greater contribution to security and stability in the future than simply reinforcing NATO. That argument did not win the day then, and did not win the day either when the Baltic States joined NATO. But I think we may be paying a price now in that we are seeing Russia going its own way, because I think that there can be no stability and security in Europe unless Russia is embedded in Europe and its cultural affinities with the rest of Europe are emphasised and developed. There is great debate about whether Russia is Asiatic or European. I think Russia is European in its vocation and that we should work to consolidate that: perhaps the damage wasn't quite as bad as was feared at the time, but certainly it has strengthened those in Russia who argue that Russia will always be different and must always stand apart. We found that in the Council of Europe where Russia with its very questionable

human rights record is actually at the moment exercising the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

JJ: Overall I draw from what you say that in the longer term it has been a good thing for Russia to be in the Council of Europe and to have gradually absorbed something useful through their pores, if you like? It's a long run thing.

UK Permanent Representative to Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1997-2003

AC: Moving on to my time at the Council of Europe. I'm a great supporter of the Council of Europe. I think it does an excellent job, albeit incrementally, by osmosis, in stages, and imperfectly. People tend to criticise the Council of Europe and say it's irrelevant because it doesn't lead immediately to 100 per cent success in the application of democracy and the rule of law and these things, in the member states. But I do feel that if we hadn't admitted Russia – this is of course what I was saying from Moscow at the time – then it would have weakened those that ultimately could bring about a democratic transition. I think the ability of the Council of Europe to exert gentle, but inexorable pressure on a recalcitrant regime has been seen to work. It seemed to work in the Ukraine to some extent, certainly in the Balkans, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. There have been setbacks, but I think the overall balance is positive, and I do feel that if it were possible to strengthen it, particularly its Parliamentary Assembly, to create a genuine all-European parliament, this would do a tremendous amount to consolidate stability in Europe at a time when those who are not candidates, or not immediate candidates, for membership of the EU, are tempted to feel they are being relegated to second class status. I think we have no option but to get Russia into European structures on an equal basis as part of Europe, and to work at Russia to ensure that Western European values are predominant there. The Council of Europe seems to be an excellent channel through which to do that.

JJ: What do you think about Turkey in this context, because Turkey has been a longstanding member of the Council of Europe and perhaps the Council of Europe hasn't managed to introduce all its requirements to Turkey, even today.

AC: The Council of Europe is not perfect. Having Turkey as a member almost from its foundation, the Council of Europe has not managed to reform Turkey as much as it should have done. The prospect of joining the EU has made Turkey reform much more quickly and effectively than years and years of pressure from the Council of Europe. But that is because Turkey sees direct political and, even more so, economic advantage. Perhaps the weakness of the Council of Europe is that it hasn't had these particular political and, especially, economic rewards in its gift, but I think that does not in any sense invalidate the value of the work that the Council does do incrementally by relentless political pressure, advice and argument to create better societies in Europe. I think the EU will find as it continues to expand – if it continues to expand – that there comes a point when it may become too unwieldy precisely for economic reasons: but I still think at the moment the only genuinely pan-European organisation is the Council of Europe. If therefore we wish to reassure and stabilise countries by making them feel they are genuinely part of the European family, with equal rights, but with equivalent obligations, then the Council of Europe is the mechanism through which we should do it.

JJ: What mechanism does the Council of Europe actually have to check on the continuing development of its criteria?

AC: It has very extensive mechanisms to do that through fact finding and monitoring missions, through the Parliamentary Assembly backed up by the Secretariat who produce reports which are then debated and eventually published. Also the Committee of Ministers has its own mechanisms which are perhaps more effective because they come directly from governments, but less effective in that they are usually confidential. Therefore this is less a means of bringing public pressure to bear. The debates of the Parliamentary Assembly on compliance with obligations, because of their public nature, are perhaps the more effective. But the two-pronged approach by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly can, I think, be very effective. It has worked. Obviously with the really big and powerful countries like Russia, and to some extent Turkey, the pressure has to be more sustained and more urgent to be as effective, but it is certainly not negligible.

JJ: That was my impression when I was there, before you were there. But I still worry about the effectiveness of the Committee which makes overnight visits to look at prisons, including British prisons, and every time they go – at least when I was there – produced reports about the terrible state of our prisons and how we treat, or don't treat, our prisoners. Of course the British Inspectorate of Prisons also produces reports on our prisons, with little improvements as a result.

AC: Well reform doesn't happen overnight.

JJ: But this has been going for the UK a long time.

AC: Yes, yes. But nobody is suggesting that the Council of Europe should become some sort of supranational government with power to order countries around, but it can, I think, insist on compliance with commitments voluntarily undertaken, create an atmosphere, and certainly give ammunition to domestic pressure groups who press for improvements. I do have a lot of respect for the Parliamentary Assembly which, like every human organisation, depends on the quality of its members. I have two ladies particularly in mind – one from Liechtenstein– who were appointed as *rapporteurs* for Ukraine and went and produced very critical reports about various aspects of life in Ukraine. It became evident that Ukrainians, and I fear macho sexism probably played a role in this, started off not taking these ladies seriously, but then they slowly realised that the thoughts that these ladies were submitting when debated and approved, were acquiring a tremendous political force, and were reported in the media and so on, and they gave interviews on TV and all these things, and to cut a long story short, it came from the character of these two feisty ladies, as much as anything else, but it showed that the mechanisms can work. And in the case of Ukraine they did, to some extent. Now I'm not pretending that the Council of Europe is always successful, that it's always particularly efficient, but I do feel, as the only current existing pan-European organisation it is an asset that we should not neglect. We should reinforce it, and we should build it up, because it can deliver a political reward in a sense of stability that countries like Russia and Ukraine can feel as members on an equal basis, which no other organisation at the moment can offer.

JJ: I agree with that having spent four or five years there myself. But I did also feel that COE spreads its activities across such a wide spectrum that they could more successfully, I think, have focussed on the really serious urgent matters, perhaps more on the political and legal side. When I went there, there were enormous numbers of side-shows in the cultural, educational and sporting fields – all this sort of stuff which was very nice if you could afford it. I think that's one of the reasons the British Government insisted when I was there that we go for zero real growth budgets every year. I don't know whether that still exists?

AC: That was always the case in my time and I was the nasty guy who had to do it, but I found nevertheless that there was enormous respect for the UK and this is not something personal to me, but for British officials generally, and it's not only the language advantage that we have, but there was tremendous pressure – not only on me personally, but for my colleagues and for British officials generally - to chair and administer groups. Again and again, people would say in a wider European context, if the British would get involved more, we would be happy for them to give a lead, and some of the people who said that most convincingly were Frenchmen. And they said: "We the French – our culture is Cartesian – we tend to be logical, but sometimes logic in politics and administration is not the right way forward". Germans said; "We're all trained lawyers, and what we value is British pragmatism, and a sense of compromise and the application of common sense. The British have qualities that are much needed in Europe. Not only in the Council of Europe context, but in the EU too, but I'm getting near to making a political rant so I'd better stop. I found in my experience that a competent British official is a) much in demand and b) can do a lot of good if he just gets hold of the controlling reins and does give a lead.

JJ: That was certainly my impression both in the EEC, when I was participating in the negotiations to join and then in Strasbourg later on, that all the other delegations were stuffed full of lawyers and ours were not, and the pragmatism and the bit of common sense was, and still is, highly appreciated. Any final thoughts for your audience on the Foreign Office in the modern world?

Some concluding reflections on the diplomatic career

AC: I'm very grateful. I had a very rewarding career except for that one disappointment which I mentioned earlier on. I think the FCO treated me very well. I made some excellent friends and had some wonderful colleagues. The great thing about the Foreign Office is you very rarely meet someone who is evil. I mean you meet people who are irritating, you may meet people who are vainglorious, but basically there is a gentlemanliness and a courtesy in life in the Foreign Office which I don't think you find in every career or in every walk of life, and I think myself very privileged to have had a career there.

JJ: I second that. Andrew Carter, thank you very much.

Transcribed by Evie Jamieson on 14 January 2007
Word count 15,201