BDOHP Biographical Details and Interview Index

(Walter) Kieran PRENDERGAST, KCVO 1991, CMG 1990.

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

Sir Kieran Prendergast KCVO CMG

interviewed at his home in Lincolnshire on Tuesday 10 July 2012

by Malcolm McBain.

Education and decision to join the Diplomatic Service, 1962

MM: Sir Kieran, could you start by telling us briefly about where you went to school and what brought you to a decision to join HM Diplomatic Service?

KP My father was a naval officer, and therefore itinerant. He spent three years on secondment to the Australian Navy and that meant that I did my primary schooling largely in Australia at a school run by the Christian Brothers in Sydney, called St Patrick's Strathfield where I learnt to play tennis. The education was quite patchy. Then we came back to England when I was thirteen. I was too old to take the Eleven Plus so my parents looked around for somewhere to send me as a boarder. I went off to a boarding school run by the Salesian Order at Chertsey in Surrey. I stayed there until I was eighteen and took my A levels there.

MM: And then you went to Oxford?

KP: I went to St Edmund Hall in Oxford. I was very sporty in those days so that was really a most attractive college. It had the highest number of Blues. Indeed it was rather humiliating in my first week; it was Freshers' Week. I went to join the St Edmund Hall soccer club. When I walked through the door, the chap said, ' Honours?' and I said, 'What?' And he said, 'Representative Honours?' And I said, 'I'm not sure what you're talking about.' So he said, 'Have you played for England?' and I said, 'No.' and he said, 'Well, have you played for your region?' and I said, 'No, 'fraid not.' And he said, 'Well, at least you must have played for your county?' and I said, 'No, I haven't.' And he said, 'Well, I'm frightfully sorry but I'm afraid we can't enrol you. We only take people with Representative Honours!'

MM: Now, how about your decision to join the Diplomatic Service?

KP: Well, I think it was because of my peripatetic childhood. You know, before I'd been to Australia, I'd been to more or less a different primary school nearly every year. We'd moved around England, Northern Ireland, Scotland, back to England and off to Australia and I couldn't face the idea of forty years on the 8.42 to Waterloo. So I thought the Foreign Office was rather an attractive way of avoiding that fate.

MM: So you took the exam and came in as a Branch A entrant?

KP: No, my academic record was pretty spotty. I didn't learn to work until I was in my mid-20s. My father didn't really want me to go to university. My father wanted me to go into the navy. I knew very well I didn't want to go in the navy. I didn't like the idea of that sort of formal discipline and Buggins calls the next one up 'Sir' and he calls the next one up 'Sir' and all the rest of it. So I didn't work at Oxford and I joined the Foreign Office through the Branch B competition. And then I took the limited competition and then moved into Branch A.

MM: And what was the first thing that happened to you when you did join?

KP: When I joined I spent the first couple of years in the Finance Department in Journeys Section, which was unglamorous but interesting and part of the system. Then when I was coming up to the age for a posting, you had to fill in a post preference form and it asked 'are you willing to undergo hard language training?' And I put 'yes' and it said 'what sort of language would you like to study?" And I said Japanese or Amharic.

And I was called across by a chap called Norman Hyatt who was Head of Training Section in the Foreign Office and he said, 'Well, I'm frightfully sorry, Prendergast, but we don't have any openings at present in either Japanese or Amharic but we have something in between – Turkish.' So I said yes, I'd like to learn Turkish. The normal system had been that you spent about five months in London under the tutelage of Bernard Lewis, the now famous

Orientalist, but that year he was updating his classic work “The Emergence of Modern Turkey” so I was told I was going to have to start to do my language training in Istanbul.

Appointment as Turkish language student in Ankara, 1964

I arrived in Istanbul and the Consulate General found me a completely incompetent teacher who didn't know his own language. He thought for example, that *vapur* for 'a boat' and *bilet* for 'a ticket' were Turkish etymologically, and if these words existed in French or in English, it must be because the French or the British had stolen them from Turkish.

So I had lessons from him for about four or five days but then I found myself a charming fifty year old divorcée called Güzin Berkmen, who gave lessons for the British Council. For ten months, I had two hours of language lessons every morning from her from ten to twelve noon. I often arrived a bit hung over. She had a seventy-five year old mother who treated me as a grandson and who made me breakfast for about the first hour of the two hours. I would struggle to translate the lead editorial in the leading newspaper of the day and that's how I learnt Turkish.

MM: What year was that?

KP: I went in October 1964.

MM: Right. And when you had acquired your Turkish, what then?

KP: I went up to the Embassy in Ankara to be the Junior Attaché in the Information Section, working for a wonderful man, who's still alive, called Desmond Wilson. His formative years had been spent as a Ghurkha in World War Two, fighting his way up through Italy. He acquired the Military Cross and bar, and the US Silver Star and sundry other decorations for gallantry.

He then joined the Colonial Administrative Service, had a good career in Northern Nigeria ending up as a Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Information and stayed on for a bit after Independence and then joined the Foreign Office as a First Secretary in one of those over age competitions--a wonderful boss, immensely loyal. I might have made a mistake, or done something silly or stupid but that was between him and me and as far as the rest of the Embassy was concerned, including the Ambassador, no mistake whatsoever had been made, and if they thought otherwise they had to get to me through him. He was a rather immoveable object.

MM: Very good!

KP: It was a real lesson in the importance of loyalty and camaraderie and those other virtues.

MM: Yes – a good example of the spirit of the Office at that particular time.

KP: Yes, very strong *esprit de corps.*

MM: Anyway, that was Ankara. Later you returned to the Foreign Office.

Return to Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department of the FCO, 1967

KP: I came back in 1967 and joined Western Organisations and Co-ordination Department under the formidable John Barnes. He had until recently been Head of the Western Organisations and Planning Department until Planning was wrested away from him with great reluctance on his part. He was brilliant intellectually and a formidable person to work for. He had a reputation for being the biggest shit in the Foreign Service, if you'll excuse my French, and for being very hard on his First Secretaries. He drove quite a number of them out of the Department but he was very kind to me because he persuaded himself that I was somehow related to Paddy Prendergast, the Irish racehorse trainer. And he liked racing but only Royal Ascot, of course. I told him I

wasn't that Paddy Prendergast who was about a foot shorter than me. But he was always very kind to me. Basically I learnt how to draft from his example. He was a tremendously good draftsman and enormously quick. I shared a room overlooking 10 Downing Street on the first floor of the Foreign Office, the best floor in the Foreign Office.

I shared a room, which is probably now occupied by some very senior figure, with John Margetson, who was the Secretary of State's speechwriter, a very distinguished figure and extremely kind to me as I was still utterly raw. I didn't really know what a submission was, didn't know how to take a minute, didn't know how the Office worked and I was able to survive thanks to the kindness of John Margetson and John Barnes. I learnt the basics of the trade on the job there.

Appointment to British High Commission, Nicosia, 1969

MM: What was your first substantive posting?

KP: I went in 1969 to Nicosia as a Second Secretary and I had a mixed portfolio. In those days the Chancery was too big. Chanceries in places that mattered a bit to Britain were richly staffed so we had one fast stream First Secretary as Head of Chancery, and, believe it or not, we had another Branch A First Secretary and we had me, a Branch A Second Secretary in the Chancery, so we covered the ground pretty comprehensively. But it was not that long after the breakdown of the 1960 Constitution; inter-communal talks were taking place between Clerides and Denktash. Archbishop Makarios, who was President, was an important figure. We didn't have any huge crises during the two years seven months I spent there but we did have an attempt to kill the Archbishop and the aftermath of that was quite exciting and, of course, we had these active inter-communal talks.

The High Commissioner when I arrived was Peter Ramsbotham who went on to be Ambassador to Iran and then Ambassador to the United States. He was succeeded for the last six months by Robin Edmonds. I thought the Office

was clever. When my Head of Department in the FCO, by then John Waterfield, knew that I was going to Nicosia, and Peter Ramsbotham, as part of his calls before going to Nicosia, came to see him, John brought Ramsbotham into my office to say hello to me because I think my Head of Department wanted Ramsbotham to see that I was housed in some grandeur in a very nice office and therefore to assume that I was not totally insignificant when I arrived in his Chancery as the junior oik!

MM: Right, so in 1969, there was quite a lot going on in Cyprus.

KP: There was.

MM: I mean, it was leading up to the invasion.

KP: That wasn't until 1974 and the term 'invasion' is one which would only be used by Greek Cypriots. Turkish Cypriots would call it an 'intervention' because they claimed it was in accordance with the Treaty of Guarantee which gave Turkey certain rights to restore the constitution, the status quo ante, and I'm not sure that the British Government has ever taken a position there on *invasion* or *intervention*; I think it's probably one of those cases where we try to avoid use of either term: use one term you offend one side, and please the other, and vice versa.

It was a very good posting for me because I did things like sitting on the Scholarship Selection Board of the Cyprus Government for the scholarships that we gave to many, mainly Greek Cypriots, going to Britain, for post-graduate study. At that time, there was no university in Cyprus, rather wisely, because it forced them to be less parochial and to look for their education to the outside world. This Board was chaired by the Minister of Education, who was a formidable woman, Stella Souliotis. I sat on that Board but my main business, being a Turkish speaker, was with the Turkish Cypriot community. I used to give parties that were attended by both sides, dinner parties and receptions. The Turkish Cypriots would come across the 'green line'. This was in 1969 and the ‘events’ were not until 1974 so it was after the breakdown

of the Constitution which was in November 1963 but before the final division of the island into two sectors in 1974.

I had a rather traumatic incident when I was giving a cocktail party with lots of people on both sides and I had a phone call from the Under Secretary to the Vice President of the Republic, Dr Küçük, who was the leading Turkish Cypriot, and the Under Secretary said to me, 'Thank you for inviting me to the party and I gather you invited lots of our community. I'm only ringing you up to tell you that none of us will be attending.'

I said, 'Oh dear, why not?' and he said, 'Well, the Vice President is deeply offended that he hasn't been invited!' 'Come on,' I said, 'I'm a Second Secretary and he's the Vice President of the Republic of Cyprus. He's way above my pay grade." So the Under Secretary said, 'Well, be that as it may, the Vice President has heard about your party and he thinks you're snubbing him. If I were you, I'd send him an invitation.' So I spoke to the High Commissioner and whizzed off an invitation. The Vice President didn't come but the other Turkish Cypriots did! I mention it just to indicate the parochial nature of the island.

MM: And how prickly they all were!

KP: Well, yes. When I first arrived I was quite friendly with the Minister of Labour, Tassos Papadopoulos, and he subsequently became President. He was rather a controversial figure because he'd been one of the three leading members of EOKA, the troika, along with Georgiadjis and Clerides. He said to me rather kindly the first time I went to see him, 'Stop thinking of this as a country, start thinking of it as Leeds Town Council and start thinking of me as a town councillor rather than a government minister'. So it was a small society – one could know everybody. I knew Rauf Denktash quite well, I knew Clerides and I knew many of the ministers, the leading figures and I knew many Greek business men and so on.

MM: That's interesting ... what about the First Secretaries? Were they similarly switched on?

KP: The Head of Chancery when I arrived was called Terry Empson. He was soon replaced by Oliver Miles. Oliver is a brilliant linguist and spoke first class Greek and Turkish already, and Russian and Arabic. He did languages the way other people do crossword puzzles. I don't know if you've interviewed him?

MM: Yes, I have.

KP: Absolutely brilliant linguist … I remember there was a very embarrassing incident when he went on holiday for a couple of weeks to Romania from London and, of course, he picked up Romanian in the course of the holiday and subsequently took the Intermediate Level Romanian language exam at the Foreign Office for the fun of it, which he passed with flying colours. What was embarrassing was that the Head of Chancery with whom he was staying had spent whatever it was, six months, doing full time language training in Romanian and had failed! Oliver did in two weeks what this poor chap had failed to do in six months language training.

The First Secretary when I arrived was Timothy Daunt, subsequently my predecessor-but-one in Ankara, also subsequently Head of Southern European Department, another Turkish speaker, who had served in Ankara as Third Secretary and he tended to do the internal. The Head of Chancery has to deal with the management of the Mission and a bit of everything really but would tend to deal more with the international aspects of Cyprus other than the inter-communal dialogue. We all had plenty to do but we also had plenty of time for leisure. I think the Foreign Service was more leisurely in those days and you had more time for reflection and internal discussion.

MM: More staff, too.

KP: That's part of it and more on the job training. I mentioned to you when we had our informal discussion last night that Peter Ramsbotham had the habit of requiring that everyone in the Chancery have at least one dispatch in draft at any point and, that when the draft reached gestation point, he would then require that it be distributed to pretty well everybody in the High Commission and everybody had the opportunity to comment on it. And then it would be re-drafted and we would have a kind of collective session at which it was finalised. You know, these days the velocity of events is much greater, the number of staff is much less, and the quality of staff on the periphery is more variable because of the gravitational pull of European Union work. I rather doubt whether that sort of practice exists any more.

MM: Yes, I'm sure it's completely changed.

KP: Some people may say what was the point of it. I remember spending quite a long time at the High Commissioner's request, writing a dispatch on the Autocephalous Church of Cyprus. Did anyone read it? I've no idea! The sort of dispatch that we wrote passing judgement on the attempted coup against Makarios when they tried to kill him, followed by the murder of the leading Greek Cypriot who was suspected of involvement in this, probably did require a dispatch. At some stage, some historian will find it in the archives but, you know, the world's moved on and I think there's a lot more communication by e-mail and a lot more of the correspondence is ephemeral.

MM: Of course, the sovereign base areas of Cyprus were extremely important to us then ...

KP: Still are. In my day we had two active bases. I think now one of them is pretty well moth-balled but we still hold it and it's a small but important element in a future Cyprus settlement, because it's British sovereign territory and if we were to give up, say Dhekelia, which is the one that has been moth-balled this would amount to, I can't remember whether it's one, or two percent of the territory of the island and it would be an important make-weight in any settlement.

MM: Right.

KP: But in my day, the army used Dhekelia extensively and there was a big hospital there where my wife had an operation, for example, and where our second child was born. That's been completely moth-balled; that hospital doesn't exist any more. We used to go down regularly to both Akrotiri, the RAF base, Akrotiri Episkopi, and also down to Dhekelia.

MM: Good, so, okay. Let's move on from Cyprus. You came back to London and went to the Civil Service College.

Secondment to the Civil Service College, 1972

KP: That's right. That was a twenty eight week holiday, really. The idea was that we should all become numerate. I certainly wasn't numerate. We were given some pre-course reading and one of the books was called "How to Lie with Statistics." Some of the stuff that we did was quite valuable in opening your eyes to the way of real world, the real business world, the way in which, you know, big companies manipulated their figures. They brought profits forward, they moved profits back, all to look better. They made me fairly sceptical about claims of businesses because one discovered how very easily their figures could be manipulated.

We had some extraordinarily good lecturers who came to talk to us about the world outside government. I remember Peter Jay came to talk to us, Nigel Lawson came, also Clive Jenkins, then the head of the Trades Union Congress.

But the reason why I say it was a twenty eight week holiday is because the previous course had ended in disaster. It had been run by a busybody young Foreign Office official who gave all of the young Second Secretaries on the course extensive homework and bombarded them with weekly exams and tests. They had a kind of mutiny so we got a very laid-back Board of Trade

principal running ours. There was no homework, and any exams basically were anonymous and box ticking to see whether we had absorbed things.

A lot of it was fun, for example, again to learn how business worked, the real dynamics of these things, we ran a kind of computer competition on running businesses. We had to set pricing, we had to set volumes, we had to set everything like that on rather primitive computers by today's standards and we had a competition and the computers spewed out results over something like a week.

I was delighted to see that our economics tutors were the first to be eliminated because at every point the weakest team got eliminated from the competition and they were the first out despite their brilliant knowledge of the theoretical! My syndicate didn't win, mainly because we didn't understand the 'lag effect' between changing the variables and getting a result. You had to wait for a bit before the result showed through.

It was an enjoyable experience and we had some stars on the course – John Vereker was on the course, who later became the PUS, at the Department of Overseas Development, later DFiD. Haydon Phillips was on the course. Haydon and I sat in the back row. We were among the more relaxed members of the course. John Vereker sat in the front row and put his hand up a lot, always a very keen officer. It was an interesting experience and also brought me into contact with a lot of young members of the Home Civil Service. I found that they had quite a different perspective even at that early age from mine.

MM: So twenty eight weeks well-spent.

KP: Well-spent and jolly different.

MM: Jolly useful ... and from there you were then returned to the Foreign Office?

Return to the FCO, 1972

KP: Yes, I was the Greek Desk Officer for a year and that was an interesting time because it was the Greece of the Colonels.

MM: Ah, yes.

KP: It was a question of how do you manage the relationship with the Colonels and how does a Labour Government manage the Labour Party, how do you manage domestic opposition with a NATO country? So that was an interesting period. Also how did you manage the Greek application for membership of what was then the European Communities, in the plural?

I drafted a submission, commenting on a dispatch by the Ambassador in Greece, Sir Robin Hooper, in which Sir Robin enumerated the very many ways in which the Greeks would fall short of qualifying for membership; not just corruption, not just lack of development, not just lack of infrastructure, not just lack of bureaucratic capacity and everything else really. At the end of twenty three paragraphs, the twenty fourth paragraph went something like 'I therefore recommend that Her Majesty's Government should give strong support to the Greek application.'

I put up a submission saying that the word 'not' was somehow missing from the key paragraph, but, of course, I was overruled all the way up to the top. One of the nice things was that you could put forward a dissenting submission and it was not suppressed, it was considered and you got a view and a decision. The full range of opinion was not only permitted, but I always felt, particularly when I worked for John Barnes, encouraged.

I vividly recall a submission from John Barnes to the then Foreign Secretary. It was about whether the Spanish Minister of Justice should be invited to some Council of Europe conference that Britain was hosting. In those days, George Brown liked submissions that were laid out stating a summary of the problem, then the recommendation. The submission then broadened out into a

supporting argument and finally described the background. The problem was should we invite the Minister of Justice? The recommendation was, no, we should not, and then followed a long list of everybody who disagreed with John Barnes's recommendation, because you had to consult everybody. Then came the argument. The first sentence of the argument was: "The Spaniards do not know the meaning of the word 'justice'." (Of course, this was still the time of Franco.) His case against it was set out in full. Then, because the system had to be fair, all the arguments of the Western European Department, the Law Officers, the legal advisers, and everybody else, was in with the contrary. John Barnes was overruled; he went down in flames, but he went down with honour. I think that that openness of argument, even if it could be a bit quixotic, has somehow been lost in more recent decades.

MM: Probably overtaken by the need for speed.

KP: Well, also I think, a bit of careerism but we'll get onto that later.

Posting to The Hague, 1973

MM: So after the spell in the FCO you went to The Hague.

KP: I went to The Hague after only one year as Greek desk officer because John Barnes, for some reason, wanted to have me again on his staff.

MM: He went there as Ambassador?

KP: He was Ambassador having been in Tel Aviv. He had endless tussles with the Office because he wanted me to go there as Head of Chancery. But because I only had one year of seniority as a First Secretary, even his titanic efforts to defy the requirements of the bureaucracy did not succeed. I went there as First Secretary Information, which I found boring and unnecessary but then the Labour Government started the process of Renegotiation so I was re-hatted in a new post as First Secretary Economic, I suppose on the strength of my time

at the Civil Service College economics course, but the most important work I did there was Renegotiation.

John Barnes didn't think renegotiation was an honourable policy to pursue so he didn't want to do it himself. He didn't want the Counsellor he had to do it, so it fell to me. It meant that at the age of thirty, I was able to have very high level access to the Dutch Government because the Dutch Government, irritated though they were at the Renegotiation tactic, very much wanted to keep Britain inside the European Community and so we did a lot of co-ordination. They wanted to know what our bottom line was, what did we want and how could they help us to get it but it went right down to matters of tactics, so before a European Community meeting the Dutch would like to co-ordinate with us as to who should speak first, what should the line be? What should the Dutch say in support, or should they speak first and so on - so a very high degree of co-ordination.

MM: Yes.

KP: And we had regular visits from Michael Butler, who was the Assistant Under-Secretary in the FCO in charge of relations with the European Communities. Michael Butler, a great expert on porcelain, Chinese porcelain, always wanted to have an hour to pop down the street of porcelain dealers in The Hague before or after his talks. But I did the day to day work. I suppose these days with the ever closer integration of the EU into the system and the greater frequency of meetings - probably these days it would have been done directly between capitals or done by teleconferencing or whatever. But in those days that wasn't the case.

So we had three very happy years in The Hague: I loved The Hague, I liked the Dutch, we had a nice Dutch bourgeois house. I could bicycle to the office, we had very good Dutch friends most of whom had nothing to do with the Foreign Ministry or the bureaucracy. It was great ... I played a lot of squash. We had another child: it was a great place to be.

Assistant Private Secretary to S of S Anthony Crosland, 1976

MM: I can well imagine – anyway, following that you then became Assistant Private Secretary to Mr Crosland.

KP: That's right. I wasn't looking for it. I wasn't expecting it. I was actually not the right age because the way the system used to work was the number two Private Secretary was someone whose seniority was entering the field of promotion, and expecting to be promoted on leaving the private office, whereas I was thirty four and I was not going to be promoted after my time in the private office. I think it was because they couldn't find anyone else who had the required knowledge of how the EU worked and who was prepared to do it. And even then some people had, you know, life/work considerations in mind.

I would myself rather not have done it because I was very happy in The Hague and my wife was 8 months pregnant. But John Barnes, having touted me as a capable young man would never have forgiven me if I'd said no. I think he took it very much as a vindication of his judgement. So I went across to London and saw Anthony Crosland and he asked me to come and join him. There was a big problem in that I had to start within two weeks and my wife was expecting our fourth child two weeks later so essentially I had to abandon her. Life at the Office can be tough – I had to abandon her to have the child by herself and pack up by herself. She had the baby in Holland – there was only another two weeks to go, you see.

MM: She couldn't travel.

KP: Well, she could have travelled but how would you pack up and have a baby at the same time? So she stayed on and they found an arrangement whereby I was paid the allowance for overseas service. I started in the Private Office as being on 'temporary duty' there which allowed them to pay me subsistence allowance. And the subsistence paid me enough to fly back to Holland every weekend.

I flew back and the baby was induced on the second weekend and we then had the christening two weeks after that and left the same night with a lift van and moved to London but she had to do it with a week old baby, had to do all of the return to London, the moving in of all our effects, the unpacking of all our effects because, of course, I was working enormously long hours for Mr Crosland, and one week in four I was on duty at the weekend. Usually in my case, it coincided with the preparations for the European Community Foreign Affairs Council on the Monday/Tuesday which meant I spent most of the weekend reading the briefs because Mr Crosland would certainly expect me to know everything that was in the briefs for the meeting.

I don't know whether it still is the case, I suppose it must be, but in those days there were no directives limiting the number of hours you could work and it was a very gruelling job.

MM: I'll bet!

KP: And it became more gruelling when David Owen became Foreign Secretary because he was hyper active. Anthony Crosland knew how to delegate but David Owen didn't want to delegate so we used to send him home with several boxes; and at the weekend, four or five boxes. He was the most inconsiderate boss. We used to get into the Office very early in the morning and work on the overnight telegrams; we'd have an intensive round of meetings. If you couldn't get him to agree to someone from the Department being there you'd have to take the notes of all the meetings. You know, the practice in the Private Office was that the business that came in that day was dealt with that day which meant that before you went home you had to disgorge the minutes of any meetings you took a record of so you had to work very hard and in a concentrated way. And if he was going out to lunch, he'd come across to my desk and say, 'While I'm out I'd like you to A/B/C/D' so he always assumed you had no such thing as lunch. My wife used to send me into the office with a little packed lunch otherwise I didn't have time for anything else.

I especially remember one half term. We had a baby. We had two children at primary school, and we had a son who had just started boarding school, and they were all home for half term. One afternoon, David Owen came in at about four o'clock and said 'I'm not just the Foreign Secretary, I'm also a parent, and I'm going home to have tea with my children for once.'
I thought 'super, I'll be able to go home and say goodnight to my son before he goes to bed for once' because half term was really just one weekend as far as he and I were concerned and as he (D.O.) was walking out of the door, he said, 'I'll be back at eight.' !

He went home and he had tea with his children and probably put them to bed and then he came back into the office from eight pm until ten pm. And as you know, when the Foreign Secretary leaves, you have then got to make up the box for him – your work isn't finished – so you have to continue processing the papers that have come in meanwhile. I suppose I got home about midnight!

When we used to go to Brussels he liked to get back to London no matter how late the meeting ended. Which was very good but the RAF, the pilots, used to have to extend their flying hours and sometimes we'd get back at two in the morning but you still had to be in for an early start the same morning. It was physically – and emotionally (because he was rough in his dealings with us) - gruelling.

What I found difficult was taking on more and more subject areas because the bits that he was really interested in were Apartheid, Rhodesia, and Namibia. And then in Latin America, the Falkland Islands and the Latin American countries fell to the number three Private Secretary, Stephen Wall, who was absolutely brilliant and a workaholic.

When I started in the Private Office, I was the EU person and I also had European matters, Defence and Economics and Cabinet papers and Cabinet committees. Then I took on the Middle East because Stephen simply had too much to do. I later took on the Far East; I took on the business of managing

the telegram traffic because Stephen had enough work for three Private Secretaries. First thing in the morning someone had to look at the advance prints of telegrams and decide which ones the Foreign Secretary needed to see, or that he should read. That, of course, meant I had to get in even earlier to go through all those telegrams putting them in sort of order of priority.

So I took on more and more in terms of geographical scope and cover but one felt one was spreading oneself pretty thinly and I envied (I didn't resent but I envied) Stephen because he was dealing with a relatively smaller number of issues, and was able to deal with them in a much deeper way because Namibia or the Falklands or Apartheid or whatever was a single subject that you could look at in some detail. And Stephen became essentially ... because David Owen didn't trust the Office ... he became David Owen's desk officer for Namibia and South Africa, the Falklands and so on. David Owen even sent him out to talk to Julius Nyerere, and the presidents of the Front Line States about Rhodesia.

Have you interviewed Stephen?

MM: No, I haven't.

KP: You should ...

MM: ... but I have got a very good transcript out of him. He's been interviewed, exceptionally, by a PhD. student from the Sorbonne ...

KP: Oh, really?

MM: ... and this student contacted Cambridge University and said would we like to have the transcript, so they sent it to me and it was quite as good as anything I could have expected to get from an interview with me, for example. So I said, 'Yes, please. Let's have it.' So it's there in the Churchill Archives – it's only just been accepted.

KP: Anyway, that was the Private Office ...

MM: But after that gruelling experience, you went to New York.

Posting to the UK Mission to the United Nations, New York, 1979

KP: Well, I went to New York. The Office had wanted me to go to Madrid as Commercial First Secretary and they told me that the Commercial Counsellor would be leaving soon and I could hope to be promoted pretty soon after going there and also that it would give me Spanish which would be a useful thing and open up the whole of Latin America for one's subsequent career and all that sort of stuff. John Kerr, the crafty, cunning John Kerr, was the Private Secretary to the PUS, and he said to me, ' No, no, don't do that. Go to New York because New York and the UN will give you, first of all, direct experience of multilateral work, which is valuable and secondly, whereas Spanish opens one door, but only one door, New York opens many doors. In New York you're dealing with a range of issues. It's a sort of multi-headed missile.'

MM: He was right there!

KP: Yes, he was right. So I took John's advice and said no thank you to Madrid – which would have been comfortable – in terms of family and fairly near home, and I went to New York and I didn't regret it.

Ivor Richard was a bit suspicious of me: he was a Labour appointee and his relations with David Owen, and before that, Anthony Crosland, were ambivalent. I think he thought he'd been set up when he was the Special Envoy on Rhodesia, he'd been set up for failure, or at least he hadn't been given the full support and backing which was necessary for him to succeed, and he was a bit suspicious at first that I might be David Owen's “plant” or fifth column in his Chancery. I didn't have that full or interesting a portfolio when I first arrived. I had plenty to do – we would work something like 9am to 8pm – but with a proper lunch. That felt like a rest cure to me and normally

the weekend was going to be clear. It was a very talented Chancery and they were quite collegiate. When Mig Goulding arrived in the summer, Mig increased my portfolio and didn't have any comparable suspicions that I was some kind of 'plant'. In any case, there'd been an election in May and Mrs Thatcher had come to power.

Then Anthony (Tony) Parsons became Ambassador and he was a very good delegator, and gave you, not a free hand exactly, because he kept an eye on what was going on, but he wasn't fussy, and he didn't fiddle with your drafts. He was a very good person to work for: he'd been Counsellor and Head of Chancery himself twenty years before. He knew how the system worked: he was an excellent Ambassador, and Mig was a very good Head of Chancery, very capable, very conscientious and hard-working (again, maybe too hard-working for his own good).

So that was an enjoyable experience. I had three years of that and we had very good relations with the Secretariat. Essentially, anything interesting in the political sphere was run by Brian Urquhart, who'd been the Under Secretary General for a while, and he'd been in the UN Secretariat from the beginning. He'd been present from the creation and was a person of great authority and standing and he had a very good team around him. We were still in the Cold War and the number of things that the UN could do was limited but they were concentrated in the hands of Brian. I developed relations with his inner team. He had an office with half a dozen people in it, all of whom were extremely capable. I enjoyed that a lot, with one interlude, which again made me feel guilty, as a family man, which was the business of the transition from Rhodesia to Zimbabwe after Lancaster House.

Detachment for duty at Government House, Salisbury, S Rhodesia, 1980

What happened was that Nick Fenn was Christopher Soames's spokesman and Nick Fenn developed a problem with his optical nerve and he used to wake up blind and his eyesight wouldn't recover until about eleven o'clock in the morning. I think the whole business of Lancaster House with the television

lights and so on had exacerbated the problem and so it was decided that he should go back to London for a month, which then stretched to six or seven weeks in which he would basically sit in a dark room with a towel round his head and give the optical nerve a rest.

Christopher Soames didn't trust the person who was his deputy and rang up Peter Carrington, Lord Carrington, and said he needed somebody capable. The finger of suspicion pointed at me - first because I was well-known to everyone in the Private Office. George Walden was by then Principal Private Secretary and I'd bedded George in for nine months before I left the Private Office and, of course, Stephen Wall was still there and was a colleague and also my job, my theoretical job, included the spokesman portfolio at the UK Mission to the UN. So I got a phone call from Stephen Wall, saying, 'I hear you're off to Rhodesia.'

I said, 'Well, that's news to me,' and it was pretty unwelcome news because we were just coming up to Christmas and I'd promised my family that I would be with them for the school holidays and so on. I rang up the Desk Officer in the Personnel Department, Jeremy Greenstock. He's always been very smooth and discreet and he said more or less, that there was nothing he could tell me.

So I rang up Stephen again and said, 'You know, you're talking balls.'
He said, “Well, that may be so, but I bumped into Alan Munro on the steps of the Foreign Office at the weekend and said to him, 'What are you doing here, Alan, on a Saturday?' and he said, 'I'm sending Kieran Prendergast to Rhodesia.'

Of course, in the way these things work, I was then told about three days later, and I had to go at pretty short notice. I had nine weeks in Rhodesia; the only thing I was able to extract from the PUS personally, was a promise that they would allow me to leave once the elections were over. Michael Palliser said ‘Don't worry. We are going to go for independence two weeks after the elections, come what may’. I said, 'pull the other one' - you know, because

deadlines have a habit of being missed. In fact we had the elections between 3 and 4 March 1980 and Independence was on 18 April so they did slip.

I went to see Lord Carrington – George took me into Lord Carrington's office – and I didn't know Carrington at all so I think he just wanted to see me and say hello and he came over and he poked me in the chest in a genial way and he said, 'I've only got one piece of advice for you' - and he poked me in the chest again - 'don't cock it up!' with a great roar of laughter, which wasn't intimidating.

MM: It was encouraging, really ...

KP: Yes, it was very encouraging. I think Peter Carrington had a wonderful way with his staff. When he came to Tel Aviv several years later at the very beginning of the Falklands War, that is to say, we knew that the Argentinian fleet had sailed, but we weren't in a position to do anything or say anything about it, he got off the plane and he said, 'Ah, Kieran, are you enjoying it here?' And I said, 'Yes, thank you, Secretary of State.' and again he poked me in the chest and he said, 'Why?' and gave this most enormous laugh.
I think his time in the Guards during the war had taught him certain important lessons about man-management.

I liked Christopher Soames a lot and Christopher, for some reason, took to me, so I saw a lot of him and Mary Soames socially. I mean, if he was bored he would invite me to lunch or dinner. I remember quite a number of occasions when I was lying in my bath, the phone would ring and it would be Government House saying the Governor wants to see you urgently and you'd go round and all he wanted to do was give you supper and have a chat! And also I was not one of the clique who'd been responsible for the Rhodesia settlement and, therefore, he had some slight confidence that I would give him advice on these things that was not borrowed from Robin Renwick and Tony Duff and the others.

On certain key issues I didn't agree with Robin. I never told Robin at the time because I didn't want to be browbeaten into submission. But I did tell Christopher Soames, namely that we had to have a settlement that was accepted internationally as authentic because the game plan had been to move on at Lancaster House and those who wouldn't move on would be dropped and would fall by the wayside of their own volition.

MM: You're talking about the Africans?

KP: Yes, I'm talking about the Africans. I'm talking basically about Mugabe. He didn't reject the settlement partly as a result of pressure from Samora Machel, the President of Mozambique, who told him, we will respect your decision but we have suffered enough in your cause and you can't use our territory as a launching pad or a rear base any more. That left Mugabe with no options.

Essentially, it was very clear to me that the hope was that the Governor and the British Government would either bar Mugabe and his party from the elections or when the election results were known, would disallow whole provinces, or nationally, the votes for Mugabe on the grounds that they had been responsible for intimidation. Well, they *had* been responsible for intimidation but the truth was that everybody was intimidating to the best of their ability. It was just that Mugabe and his boys in the bush were better at it than anybody else. That's not why they won the election: the reason why they won the election was primarily because the population voted along tribal lines so even though Joshua Nkomo had a majority of Shona on his central committee, he was seen by the population as being Ndebele, and Shona voted...

MM: Ndebele?

KP: Ndebele, that's the other major group in Zimbabwe. It was a huge shock and humiliation for Nkomo to find that in Shona areas he was outvoted even by the despised Bishop Muzorewa because Muzorewa was Shona and Shona voted for Shona, and Ndebele voted for Ndebele. I have to say that Nkomo regularly

encouraged the Governor to disallow Mugabe, or ban him, or whatever, but when we said to him - yes, but are you prepared to say so publicly? His answer was always - No, no you do it. I can't say so publicly.

MM: The Governor was Gibbs, wasn't it still?

KP: No, no, the Governor was Christopher Soames who was appointed. He was a great trencherman and he liked his wine. He threatened to come home after a week, from Salisbury as it was then. We used to say Salisbury, the Surrey with the lunatic fringe on top because of some of the Whites who were still around. He threatened to leave on the grounds that his wine cellar was very third rate quality. He rang up Peter Carrington to insist that some decent stuff was sent out.

I was with him once ... he had a major domo called Enos in a very Arab looking outfit of a white frock-coat, white trousers, green tarbush and green sash round his waist. I was delighted to find Enos was still at what was now the Presidential Palace when I returned as High Commissioner ten years later. Enos came in one day when I was having lunch with the Governor, just the two of us, with a bottle of white wine wrapped in a napkin, and poured a glass of it for Soames who sniffed it and tasted it and said, ' Ker-rist, Enos, what's this weasel's piss?' Enos said, 'Weasel's piss, my lord?' Lord Soames said, 'Yes, it smells awful and it tastes worse!' Enos then revealed that it was a bottle of Rhodesia's best white wine from a case which had been presented by a local businessman. Soames said, 'Well, it's f...ing awful! Take it away and bring me something decent.'

I was amused to see that Enos was quite hurt, as a Nationalist, that Rhodesia's best white wine had been dissed!

After about two or three weeks there the Governor asked me to come and see him and said that he was bored stiff; he hadn't been out of State House since his arrival and couldn't I see whether it was possible for him to do something entertaining at the weekend. So I made enquiries and I was told there was a

dinner dance every Saturday night at the Monomatapa Hotel, one of the two main hotels in Salisbury.

With some trepidation, his Security agreed that Lord and Lady Soames, plus me, plus Christopher's long-standing, long-suffering, secretary should go to this dinner dance. When we arrived, we found that there were many, many sullen and resentful Rhodesian whites, who believed they'd been betrayed by Britain, us, the four of us sitting at a table, the dance band playing away, and the tables all around, all occupied by white, plain-clothes security men provided by the former regime, to preserve the life of the Governor. That wasn't a huge success.

But I did take him out on several subsequent occasions to dinner with journalists and I would also bring journalists in, just to provide a little bit of variety, of relief. They liked him – because, well, he liked his wine, and he also liked drinking chilled *poire William eau de vie* and so he would bring a bottle of this *eau de vie* with him to dinner parties. When they came to Government House he would always have *poire William* as a kind of appetiser. I thought it was one of those things that burn a hole straight through the bottom of your stomach; there's no accounting for taste! It's certainly a *digestif*, but it probably digested everything, including the wall of your stomach.

Anyway, he was very very good to work for, particularly after having worked for David Owen. He was the polar opposite because he would delegate pretty well everything.

I remember there was an attempt on Mugabe's life; he was driving somewhere and some whites planted explosives under a culvert, but the timing of the explosives was slightly wrong and they didn't harm Mugabe. I was playing tennis at Government House when I heard about it – it was on Sunday so I went into my office and started ringing up the BBC and Reuters and everybody else - the South African Broadcasting Corporation – saying that the Government was shocked to hear of this dastardly act (I hadn't spoken to

Soames at this point) and that he had given instructions for the perpetrators be ruthlessly hunted down. As far as I knew, he hadn't done either. Anyway, he wandered in after a few minutes of this, listened to me for a second, said, '... and horrified – tell them I'm horrified ...' and walked out again. Which, of course, was exactly the right thing to do. If your spokesman is handling it competently, then don't bother fiddling with the commas and semi-colons. (That was not David Owen's approach. He wanted everything to be cleared textually with him.)

And on the big issue - when we got to it – there was an intense debate within Government House about what to do about the election results, I was whispering in his ear that disallowing Mugabe, who had won by a clear majority, wouldn't solve the problem. The international community wouldn't accept that we had discharged our responsibilities so having come all this way, you know, we had to accept the results. And I must say, that of the Lancaster House team, Henry Steele, who was the legal adviser, was of the same view. I knew he was strongly of the same view. So was his deputy, who either is or has just retired as legal advisor, I can't think of his surname now ...

I think Robin (Robin Renwick) had entered into various side agreements with the whites at Lancaster House, you know, 'you let this go through and I'll make sure things are all right.' Only, of course, he couldn't deliver on those and there was a kind of risk that the whites might just overturn the whole thing and take power again. But General Walls ...

One of the most entertaining things about being there was helping the Rhodesian media to recover a measure of independence. It was rather disquieting. I found right at the beginning it was very difficult to deal with editors. I then understood quite quickly that what they wanted me to do was actually to dictate to them word by word how we wanted it to appear so I started ringing them up and saying things like: 'The spokesman for the Governor declined to comment. However, it's quite clear that Lord Soames's view is that … and you'd just say what it was.

On the other hand, there were occasions where the Ceasefire Commission found that the Rhodesian Armed Forces had been responsible for specific breaches of the ceasefire and I would announce that. I remember on one occasion, the Editor being absolutely thrilled because he rang me up and said, 'General Walls has rung me personally to deny this' and I said, 'Well, you know, General Walls is wrong and the Ceasefire Commission has clearly found that the Rhodesian armed forces were in breach of the ceasefire. Why don't you write that the spokesman for the Governor said this, General Walls denied it, in whatever terms you like, and then say that you consulted the spokesman, and the spokesman says that General Walls has a faulty recollection of the Ceasefire Commission and here's the language from the Ceasefire Commission.'

Of course, they weren't used to that at all, and it takes time. One of the things I learnt in my career was that you can change the system, but changing the mindset is much slower and more difficult.

So, that was a sort of interlude ... I had to remind Christopher of the promise that I could leave once the election results were known and he said that he didn't want me to go but a promise was a promise, which was very nice, and Joan and I remained friends, after he died, with Mary Soames and, indeed, she became chairman or president of a charity focused on Zimbabwe so she came and stayed with us several times when I was High Commissioner in Harare. (We are jumping a bit ahead of ourselves here.) She also came out for the funeral of Sally Mugabe when Mrs Mugabe died. Mugabe was always grateful to Soames for the advice he gave him immediately after the election results were known about the importance of reconciliation. He wrote him a hand-written letter – Soames wrote Mugabe a hand-written letter pointing out that he would still need the Whites, and on the importance of reconciliation. And Mugabe acted on that. I know that many Whites had their cars packed ready to go to South Africa and they stopped when they heard Mugabe's broadcast. Christopher Soames died when I was in Harare and the Mugabes flew to Britain for his funeral. That was before the Great Breach ...

MM: Incidentally, I can't resist mentioning that Mary Soames was one of the biggest donators of funds to this British Diplomatic Oral History Programme.

KP: Oh, really? She's a wonderful woman, great fun. I have a copy of her biography of her grandmother and it is inscribed to me 'from the Governess'! She ran, when the elections were coming up, not a lottery, but she asked each of us to write down on a piece of paper and sign it, how many votes we thought the parties would get.

You see, there were meant to be eighty elected seats – and the question was what was the critical mass beyond which it would be very difficult, or not credible, to have a coalition that excluded ZANU-PF, Mugabe's party. Again, the game plan was even if he wasn't excluded, there would be a coalition of all the talents except Mugabe and ZANU-PF. I think the calculation was, was it thirty-five? Was it thirty-six? Beyond a certain number of seats, really you couldn't credibly have a coalition above that number. Of course, I think he got sixty something, fifty something, well over a majority of the black seats. There were twenty reserved for whites so it became rather moot.

I think I gave Lady Soames's lottery the highest number. I thought Mugabe might get thirty-five; I don't think any of us thought he might actually win a national majority, because, in addition, to the factors that I mentioned earlier, namely, the black population knew that it had been Mugabe and his boys that had fought the struggle and had brought Rhodesia to this point and the ethnic factor, you know, Shona voting for Shona, eighty percent Shona and only twenty percent Ndebele, so the Shona are always going to win. There was a third factor which was really very important, and that was that ordinary black Zimbabweans knew intuitively that if he didn't win, the war wasn't going to end and they were very fed up with being the jam in the sandwich, between the whites and the guerillas and they wanted the war to end. The only way for the war to end for them would be for Mugabe to move from the bush into Government House.

That was a short period in my career but it was one of the most intense and particularly because one knew that if one said the wrong thing, you could make a real mess of things, not so much locally, but in New York. The New York Times had a very active correspondent, John F Burns. He was very difficult when I first arrived and very sceptical. He wrote many unhelpful articles. I heard that Mr Abe Rosenthal, who was the Managing Director of The New York Times, was passing through so I went to see the Governor and said, 'It would be a very good idea to invite him and Mr Burns to lunch, because every delegate in New York reads the New York Times first thing in the morning,' and, in fact, we did have debates in the Security Council, the only time, to my knowledge, that Britain has ever non-participated in a Security Council. The vote was over Rhodesia. We couldn't veto it. That would have been pouring oil on the flames. We certainly couldn't vote for it, and abstention was pretty difficult too. So, uniquely, Britain didn't take part in the vote.

Anyway, Soames thought it was a good idea, sat this very well-known journalist down, with Mr Burns sitting next to him at the lunch table and said something like, 'Tell me, Mr Rosenthal, why is The New York Times trying to sabotage my efforts to bring peace to this country?' or words to that effect. Then, of course, Mr Rosenthal was pretty taken aback. Soames explained that every word was read by the third world delegates and other delegates in New York and that, therefore, Mr Burns, who was not in the habit of ringing us up and checking on the stories, would do well to bear in mind his wider responsibilities and also to check things out. I found Mr Burns an impeccable colleague thereafter.

The other person I had difficulty with was the Reuter's correspondent, Alan Cowell ...

MM: Really?

KP: I found him quite insulting. In fact, Robin Renwick claims that, after one briefing I tried to hit him (but I was restrained by other well-wishing

journalists) after he said to me something like, 'So, Ron Ziegler is alive and well and living in Salisbury?'

I don't know whether you remember but Ron Ziegler was the hapless spokesman of President Nixon who was well-known for his inability to answer questions ...

MM: I see ...

KP: ... and his rather incompetent efforts to deflect them. For me, that was the last straw. Occasionally, my Irish blood does assert itself! A kind of red mist arose in front of my eyes and I lurched towards this gentleman. Anyway, we then found that we'd been at the same college at Oxford, at Teddy Hall - and we became tennis partners.

It's not that often that you are in a job where you feel that you really make a difference for better or worse and if you do make a serious mistake, it could cost lives for example.

MM: Chilling thought.

KP: Yes, well, fortunately not that often.

MM: Okay, let's move on to Tel Aviv ...

Appointment as Counsellor at British Embassy, Tel Aviv, 1982

KP: Yes, Tel Aviv was quite different...

MM: Another rest camp?

KP: Another rest camp – well, I was Number Two in Tel Aviv for four years, my longest posting until I became an international civil servant. I wanted to go there. I'd been there with David Owen and it struck me as a very lively and

interesting place with shall we say something happening all the time. The Office didn't want to send me to Tel Aviv. The Office wanted me to go back to Ankara, which I wasn't very keen on because the place wasn't in very good shape and I didn't think it was anywhere near as interesting as Arab Israel. Indeed, I was offered to the then Ambassador, a slightly stuffy character called Sir Peter Laurence, who turned his nose up at the idea of having a Number Two coming to him on promotion. I would have been fine as Commercial Counsellor, he said, but he did not want me as Counsellor and Head of Chancery.

So I went to Tel Aviv as Counsellor, and Head of Chancery, and Consul General, and Commercial Counsellor and everything else. That was a lively posting for several reasons, not all of which I expected. First of all, the Falklands War broke out within about two months to the day of my arrival, and we knew from impeccable sources that the Israelis were trying to sell fighter jets and also drop tanks to the Argentinians so that they could reach the Falklands with their fighters and secondly, we had at pretty well exactly the same time, the Lebanon War. So we were annoyed with them over the Falklands and they were very annoyed with us over Lebanon, and if that wasn't enough, by way of ingredients in the mix, I found that my Second Secretary, who was a curvaceous young lady called Rhona Ritchie, was not only having an affair with an Egyptian diplomat, but that the Israelis were aware of this. The Israelis were accusing her of espionage, of giving secrets to the Egyptians. So she was removed at rather high speed. She pleaded guilty to an offence under the Official Secrets Act, though not key sections of the Act.

I sent my technical man round who found evidence that the Israelis had replaced some window frames in Rhona's flat with frames with microphones in them, and that was for listening to her amorous discussions with the Egyptian. Talk about conforming to stereotype. It didn't altogether surprise me that an Egyptian diplomat should be following this form of diplomacy with some success. She was incredibly naïve. She told me that he had told her that

unless they were completely open with one another, how could he trust her, and so on.

But she was knowing enough. She'd been a law lecturer at Glasgow University and she was knowing enough not to give him any original or photocopies of documents, but to write out the texts in her own hand. So she couldn't be prosecuted successfully for handing him documents – it was the texts she had given him not the actual documents.

Anyway, that was the end of her career. The trouble was that she was my only support in Chancery. I looked around and it was going to take over a year to train up and supply somebody else. She was a Hebrew speaker as well in the mix. So I found a chap in the Commercial Section, a bit older than me, I think, who'd learnt some Hebrew and was quite presentable, and brought him into the Chancery.

But it meant essentially that for the next eighteen months I had to do pretty well all the reporting myself and my Ambassador, Patrick Moberly, was away during the key portions of the Lebanon War on leave, and that was, you know, very interesting and absorbing. I was getting most of my information from my opposite number in the American Embassy, who was very helpful in telling me what was going on. What was a bit disappointing about the Israeli posting was that I found one was not an actor in events. Britain didn't really count for that much politically. The Americans were everything, and there were certain others, the Egyptians obviously very, very important. Our rôle in the Embassy was that of observer of events and all I was was a commentator on events but not an actor in events. In my career, I always preferred it when I was active.

MM: Well, we'd handed everything over in 1948.

KP: Yes. They were pretty ambivalent about Britain. There was a large Jewish community in Britain who were active in Israel. They were active a fair amount on the commercial side particularly when we used to have regular visits by Trade Missions from Britain. The Marks & Spencer's people were

very active in relation to Israel, so it wasn't a waste of time at all. You know, to be an American diplomat in Israel was more rewarding than to be a British diplomat in Israel. I did chafe at that but then I was in charge quite a lot and it was the first time I found that putting your own name on the bottom of the telegram caused you to read it and think about it a bit harder than if you had an ambassador above you who was going to check on the contents and the judgements, particularly! Maybe it made one a bit more prudent about making swingeing judgements on things.

So I had four years of that. It was very good for the family; also one of the things I liked about Israel - and it's changed since then – was that on about 1 April, one got an official note from the Foreign Ministry, saying that from 15 April to 15 October, the official dress at the Foreign Ministry at Receptions and so on, was short sleeved shirt and no tie, you know, open-necked shirt. I spent six months of the year never wearing a tie and in short-sleeved shirts, including dinner parties, Receptions and calls to the Ministry! The Ministry asked for reciprocity on this because they said if you guys are going to be wearing jackets and ties, we'll have to do likewise and we don't want to.

That was a nice feature of life in Israel but you did feel that you were in a confined space. For the first twenty months, I didn't leave at all. The other thing you couldn't help but notice was that the Israeli elite were always going abroad. It was like living in a pressure cooker. When they were annoyed with us over Lebanon, for example, I'd be driving home and I stopped at the traffic lights and your nationality was identifiable from your number plate, and, of course, you drove with the windows down and so on, and people in the car next to you would start shouting things at you about British policy on Lebanon.

We had very good friends. Again we didn't do the standard diplomatic thing of having lots and lots of friends who were fellow diplomats. Nearly all our friends were Israelis, many of them of British origin. Nevertheless, they were Israelis. I remember one weekend being invited to go to the beach by a very nice commercial family of Israeli Israelis and they were going to have other

friends there and I said, 'Yes, fine, let's go,' but standing in the surf watching our children, while he lectured to me about how there's only one Israel and lots of Arab countries.

So the next time they invited us to dinner - the standard dinner would be after dinner outside on the terrace with me on a chair surrounded by a semi-circle of about half a dozen chairs with Israelis, all of whom were criticising British policy or explaining how 'it's us or them and we'd rather it was us', and I said to my host, a very nice chap called Dan Propper who ran a very big, well-run foodstuffs company, I rang him up and I said, 'Dan, you know, dinner tonight, do you think we could for once have an evening without this turning into an interrogation of British policy?'

He said, 'Fair enough,' And, indeed, we did have an evening like that, but it was very much the exception. Life there was really quite intense, quite intense.

MM: I can well believe it. So in a way it was quite a relief to get back to the FCO and to become Head of Southern Africa Department.

Return to the FCO as Head of Southern Africa Department, 1986-89

KP: Yes, that was one of the most interesting jobs I did, where one felt that one was making a difference. I was a bit nervous about doing it because I wasn't sure that British policy on Apartheid was reputable.

MM: Meaning?

KP: I wasn't sure that we were on the right side of the argument over Apartheid particularly given Mrs Thatcher's views on sanctions. I actually gave a lecture. The planning staff under David Gore-Booth used to have lunchtime lectures and I was asked if I would do one on Britain's South African policy. I called it when it was circularised in the Office ' Is British Policy on South Africa Reputable?' Actually, no, I think I called it 'disreputable ' and my

theme was not that it was not disreputable, but that it was mistaken. It was mistaken basically because we had signed up to various sanctions but we wouldn't call them sanctions. We called them 'restrictive measures' as Mrs T wouldn't allow the word 'sanctions' to be used. But this was the equivalent of being dragged through the hedge backwards. Also it meant that we failed the basic test, which was to show that we were opposed to Apartheid and gave the impression we were soft on Apartheid, which we weren't.

Anyway, I arrived pretty well at the peak of sanctions pressure and waves of pressure in the Commonwealth, in the European Community, and also in the United States. There was a tremendous amount of work. I didn't think that we were equipped to deal with it in terms of the quality and numbers in the Department. There was a very interesting illustration of how these things work. I was working really intensively – don't forget, it was before the days of word processors, so when you changed drafts or you changed anything, you had to read the whole damned thing through again for typing errors and sense errors and all the rest of it, rather than just looking at the changes you'd made or incorporated. So that was very time-consuming. You had to have a really, really good PA and a really good Assistant Head of Department and you had to have very good Desk Officers.

And I had some of excellent quality and others who weren't so I asked the Personnel Department for help and they didn't take much notice because I think they decided they thought they knew what were the priorities. Then the Foreign Secretary asked that a minute be written on his behalf to the Administration asking that we be reinforced and that had very, very little effect and then I was in conversation with the Permanent Under-Secretary, Anthony Acland, who could see that we were buckling a bit, and I told him about the volume of work, the intensity of the work, and I think, after the Foreign Secretary expressed concern we were given another First Secretary. But he was someone for whom they couldn't find another job ...

MM: Oh dear ...

KP: Well, I found Anthony Acland sitting rather uncharacteristically - because he was very smooth and dapper and a County gentleman - sitting with his leg over one of the arms of the chair in his office; anyway we only had a conversation for about five minutes and a very crisp minute went from the Permanent Under Secretary to the Chief Clerk or the Head of Personnel or whatever and pretty well the next day I got Simon Fraser, who is now the PUS, a top class officer, and some other reinforcements. We never had such difficulties again.

I ought to say because I've noticed in this oral history that some people mention colleagues and others don't - that I had a wonderful assistant for about two years of the time I was in the Southern African Department and that was Charles Humfrey.

He's a Japanese speaker and a very low-key officer. We had been together in UKMIS only for about four or five months some years before. In fact, he told me when I did his first report - when I did reports – they'd say well, it's also your chance to report on me. He said he hadn't been sure before he joined the Southern African Department that he wanted to work with me from our time together in New York but that he thought morale was very good in the Department because, he noticed, although I dished it out, I dished it out harder, much harder to those above me than to people below me and what people didn't like was when it was the other way round and that people in the Department felt that they were part of an elite.

Charles was extremely meticulous and he was absolutely wonderful at things like Parliamentary Questions when the FCO was top for questions. You know it's extremely important when you're a Minister that when you open your book, you have the answer to the question on one page with supplementaries below it but also that you have the answers to all of the supplementaries in easy to read form.

I'd learnt some lessons from the Private Office about maintaining morale and maintaining some kind of collective *esprit* so one thing I did was to have a

weekly meeting and I used to make sure that the juniors, especially the clerks and the secretaries were able to attend if they wanted to. If they couldn't all attend when they wanted to, they only had to ask and then when there were more wanting to attend than there was room for we'd go on a rotating basis. It kind of demystified the meeting. If you're not in a meeting, then you think all kinds of fascinating things must be going on.

I also used to have a lunch every month, or two months, for the Assistant Head of Department and the Heads of Section in my room, and I would supply wine and my wife would make sandwiches. The idea was to have some sort of lateral interchange of ideas. I also thought it was really important to be sure that everyone, including me and the Section Heads, paid attention to the junior staff and tried to involve them in the work. Very often, many of them were over-qualified. Just about everyone in the Foreign Office in that era was over-qualified for the work that they did. Some cross-fertilisation was important so that Section Heads knew what the other Sections were up to and had some opportunity to talk about one another's areas of work. I also got a pay bonus several times when I was in the Southern Africa Department. I was aware that the subject of bonuses was contentious so rather demonstrably I used to spend mine on wine, and had a wine and cheese party for the Department so that they felt that the Department was benefiting and, of course, if we'd been through some major trauma involving a lot of work for the Department, I would also bring wine and cheese and we'd have a party. So, for example, when we had a Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting that involved a huge amount of preparation and work, I'd have a Departmental party. I thought it was money well-spent. The whole idea was to give the people in the Department the sense a) that they were valued and b) that they were part of a kind of elite corps. When I was there, you see, we had a survey done by the Office about the loss of Grade Ten, you know the Clerk grade, because quite a lot of them were leaving and what the survey revealed was that more than half were leaving, not because of money, not because of lack of promotion prospects, but because they felt they weren't valued for what they were doing. All the people who came into the Executive Branch, pretty well a hundred per cent of them had degrees, some of them had very good degrees; some of the clerks,

who were only supposed to have O levels or GCSEs, most had A levels and could have come in at a higher level. These weren't robots that you're dealing with. I paid quite a lot of attention in those days, especially if you're working hard it makes it more important that you pay attention to morale in the Department that you're responsible for.

Also, twice a week, there was a Departmental Tea and the idea was that we would share that with the other African Departments so again there was a bit of cross-fertilisation and contact and people would know what was happening in the other African Departments and I think that sort of thing - I wonder whether it still happens when people are so busy and resources are under such strain - but I thought it was a worthwhile investment.

MM: Indeed. I am sure that that's right. That is extremely important, I feel sure, and that served as your prelude to going back to Zimbabwe?

KP: Yes, it did. Of course, the Office didn't want me to go to Zimbabwe.

MM: They didn't?

Appointment as High Commissioner to Zimbabwe, 1989-92

KP: Oh no, they didn't. That was in the era of salary points. Instead of having grades 1, 2 and 3, there was a period when they divided those three grades up and multiplied them into five so you had something called 'SP', salary points, five, four, three, two, one. Five and four were the old three; in other words, the more senior three and a more junior three, and then three and two were the old Grade Two, again the same thing, with very few salary point twos, and then the old Grade One was the new Grade One. And Harare was a salary point four post, so basically, they wanted to give the job to somebody who was coming up to his last job.

I was 46 at the time and they wanted to give it to someone who was, say, ten years older than me and who was already a High Commissioner or

Ambassador in Africa somewhere. And, indeed, they even told me who the two competitors were. I'd better not mention names – I don't know whether they're still alive or not. I think that the Head of the Personnel Department, I'm not sure that he ever quite said that it would be over his dead body but he certainly said it would be over his body, his objections, but Robin Renwick was the AUS in charge of the European Community; no, sorry, it was John Kerr; Robin Renwick was by then Ambassador to South Africa. John Kerr, the cunning, the Machiavelli of the Office, was the AUS in charge of the European Community and between them they stuffed the ballot, basically they rigged the ballot – they arranged for a revolt by the members of the No.1 Board against the recommendations of the Administration, and I went to Harare. And, of course, I went to Harare as a salary point five which was a tiny bit of revenge! They gave the floating salary point four to somebody else who deserved it, was heading towards retirement and wasn't going to make it to the old DUS level.

I had three interesting years in Harare. I told the locals that I must be the only Head of Mission who was the holder of the Zimbabwe Independence medal and also holder of the Rhodesia medal. I loved it. I mean it's still, in a way, my favourite posting. It is a beautiful country. I like the people – the issues were fascinating.

When I was there there were two big issues. One was *Do you have a one party state or a multi-party system?* Mugabe made it clear that he wanted a one party state. He told me, 'I'd really like to have more whites in parliament but no black Zimbabwean will vote for a white, and therefore the only way to bring more of them in, is to have us all under one roof in the same party.' You could never have envisaged the present situation where there are several white Members of Parliament in Zimbabwe who were quite clearly elected by black voters over black candidates in his party.

The second big issue was that Mugabe wanted the economy to be organised along Marxist-Leninist lines. He used to call for it, he used to advocate it and speak about it publicly, but he never did anything about it. I asked a close

black Zimbabwean friend of mine, who was his Chief of Protocol, 'Why doesn't he do anything about it?' And he said, 'Well, you have to understand that our society is based on consensus. The President knows that and knows there's no consensus and is trying to generate a consensus but until and unless there is one, he won't implement a one party state or a Marxist-Leninist economy and he knows that even if he ordered us to do so, we wouldn't do it,' which I thought was a very interesting comment on society there. I think in a way, it's still relevant.

People speculate about who's going to be his successor but unless there's a military coup, it might well be someone that you don't know and because the criterion is different from in the West. I mean, here we're looking for charismatic politicians and leadership qualities and all the rest of it. I think that in Zimbabwe anyway, they're looking for someone who can unify the community so it may be somebody who's much lower key. Taking a stand-out position, being a contrarian defying people, someone like Margaret Thatcher, who was divisive but charismatic, dynamic, decisive but divisive, is not regarded as a plus in a society like Zimbabwe.

Dealing with Mugabe was very interesting but I thought I was going to be the shortest serving Head of Mission anywhere, because after about a week I was invited to come to State House to present my credentials and I was told you have twenty minutes with the President afterwards. You'll have a cup of tea and that'll be it. And my staff told me that because the bureaucracy kept you away from the President possibly this would be one of only two or three occasions in the whole three years to have a substantive exchange with him.

So I prepared myself quite intensively for it. I'd been briefed in London and one of the main issues that people were worried about was land. I had instructions from the Office and from Chris Patten, who was the Minister for Overseas Development, to make clear that if they tried to go near any funny business on land this would affect British aid and so on but that we were willing to give more money for land reform on the basis of willing seller/willing buyer so I got into a conversation with him about this and the

twenty minutes stretched into about one hour forty minutes! A lot of it was about land; some of it was about some white air force officers who were under arrest and I asked for them to be, subject to the rule of law and so on. A lot of it was about land and I talked to him about how land might be a sacred commodity for black Africans in Zimbabwe, but for foreign investors, it was a commodity and if you can nationalise a commodity without compensation, you could nationalise anything. Zimbabwe was going to need investment and so on.

I also deployed the argument that we were all looking to abolish Apartheid and we wouldn't want to give an argument to people who wanted to maintain the status quo in South Africa, so that they could say, 'Look what happened – you have majority vote and they'll take your land.' Anyway, it was a very even-tempered discussion and he was clearly enjoying it and the Chief of Protocol kept coming to the window and the Permanent Under Secretary at the Foreign Ministry kept waving him away so we went on for the hour and forty minutes …

Anyway, I was sitting at home and we were having quite a quiet evening and Ian Mills, the BBC correspondent rang up about half past nine in the evening and said,' What on earth were you talking to Mugabe about this morning?' and I said, 'What do you mean?' and he said, 'Well, the President opened some grain silos this afternoon and he had a speech but he didn't use it at all; he talked, entirely, mostly in Shona, entirely about his conversation with the British High Commissioner this morning.'

So I said ... I gave Mills an expurgated version of what was discussed and then I turned on the TV for the ten pm news and there was Mugabe speaking very slowly in Shona, saying British High Commissioner this, and British High Commissioner that, and he switched into English, something about South Africa, put his hand down in a gesture of disdain and said in English, 'What nonsense,' and then he goes back into Shona again and I thought. 'Crikey, you know, that doesn't sound very good,' and had a rather sleepless night and the next night, more touring round the countryside, more stuff about the British

High Commissioner, I'm not sure he said 'what nonsense' again but I thought they're going to PNG me before I've even got my feet under the table.

Anyway, they didn't but one or two white farmers were quite annoyed with me for raising the issue in those terms but I was never denied access to him, I saw him quite a lot and because I'm a Catholic and was known to be a Catholic, a lot of missionaries used to invite me to functions where he was presiding.

MM: Was he a Catholic?

KP: Yes, he was lapsed because of the very distressing experience of having his only child die of malaria in Ghana and not being allowed to go to see him. He was incarcerated at the time, without trial, under detention. He said to the regime that he wanted to go to his son's funeral in Ghana and he promised that if they let him out, he would come back and go back to detention and I'm sure he meant to but they wouldn't let him go and so there was a certain bitterness. But he used to go to a lot of functions right out in what the people in Zimbabwe called the *bundu,* the bush – remember the very famous pop group called 'the Bundu Boys', all of whom died of AIDS, poor chaps. There was a huge incidence of HIV when I was there. The Minister of Health told me he reckoned it was about thirty percent of the working population.

Anyway, when I used to go to these functions I often found I was the only diplomat there and secondly, when tea was offered afterwards people were terrified to go up and talk to the President. So I would go straight up to the President and have a substantive discussion with him – much easier than trying to do it through the Foreign Ministry. I saw a fair amount of him and I never saw any sign of resentment - indeed, I remember him asking to see me to sell me the virtues of the one party state.

MM: He probably wanted to discuss it to find out what the opposing arguments were.

KP: He was a very interesting person. He was one of those chaps – I think his head ruled his mouth; sorry, his heart ruled his mouth, but his head ruled his decisions in those days. He was an auto-didact; when he'd been in detention, he'd taken degrees by correspondence, and was still taking degrees by correspondence. We tried to look for ways of influencing him. I suggested we find out who his tutor was and get him to send a good choice of books that might change his mind on some of these issues. He didn't go out to parties in the evening: he had no interest in that and didn't understand why anybody would want to go out to parties but what he did do in those days (it was only nine years after the end of the Rhodesian war) was he was giving adult education lessons in literacy – O levels and things – to ex-veterans. They were coming to State House and being taught to read and write by him personally, and also they were being taught and prepared for their O levels, which I thought was really worthy of him. Of course, if you got him the wrong way, he could be violent in his language, but I was always in those days quite reassured by the fact that, as I say, his head ruled his decisions whatever his heart told his mouth to say. When I was there, he told the Canadian High Commissioner in public, he could go to hell, over something or other!

Relations with whites were very interesting and, of course, I used to go to a lot of meetings with farmers to talk to them; they always wanted a sort of lecture and they always wanted to know about land and the most difficult thing to get them to understand was that on issues like land they were either Zimbabwean or they were British and if they were British, I was very happy to make representations on their behalf but if they wanted to keep substantial quantities of land their interests lay in being Zimbabwean, born there, parents born there, grandparents born there and so on and therefore with the same rights as any other Zimbabwean. What I couldn't be, if that was the case, was their High Commissioner to their own government. A lot of them found that difficult. I mean, I made very strenuous representations over the entire period on the issue of land because I thought, first of all, it was not going to solve the problem of unemployment, and secondly, if they didn't handle it right they were going to be in a real mess over attracting foreign investment. Foreign investment was needed both for the growth of the economy and for the growth of employment.

And then we had the Queen coming, which was a very big event of reconciliation and that involved an enormous amount of detailed preparation.

I saw Mugabe several times on this and he actually took me round State House where the Queen was going to stay. He didn't live in State House himself, he used it for ceremonial occasions. He lived in the old Prime Minister's House. State House was the old Governor's House and he took me into the bedrooms - 'Were they all right?' There was no shower – would the Queen like it? Should they have a shower constructed?

As far as he was concerned, it was the Queen who was coming for the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting and a whole bunch of also-rans. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs were astonished and dismayed because, by agreement with the Palace, I insisted that the Queen's itinerary for the next day be published in the daily newspapers so that people, if they wanted to see the Queen, would know exactly where she was going to be. The President's itinerary was a great secret for security reasons. He used to hurtle round in his Mercedes, accompanied by a huge convoy going at about sixty or seventy miles an hour and her wish was to go to each engagement at around fifteen miles an hour and with no more than two outriders and could the outriders please not be next to the car therefore obscuring her from the people who had taken the trouble to come and see her.

When she arrived, I remember the High Commission staff were lined up at the airport to be presented; there was a lot of pushing and shoving with Zimbabwean dignitaries and a very large black lady said to my wife who was trying to explain who these High Commission people were, 'Yes,' she said, 'but you know they think she's their Queen. She's ours, too,' which I thought was very interesting. That was a huge success.

One evening was very difficult. I had a reception for the Queen, then dinner for the Queen at our Residence and then had to make it out to the airport in time to meet Prime Minister John Major, as his plane landed. We had nine days of the Queen.

MM: Excellent. And that was your forerunner to Kenya?

KP: Yes.

Appointment as High Commissioner to Kenya, 1992-95

MM: Another similar sort of place?

KP: In some ways more difficult. I arrived on the eve of the transition from one party rule to the multi-party system. The parties had been through a very tumultuous time over this question. But the multi-party system had been agreed by the time I arrived in the October and the first multi-party elections were due at the end of December, a timing chosen deliberately by the ruling party because a lot of the tribes who supported the opposition would be at home for the holidays and therefore their votes, would be wasted because it would just be a bigger majority for the Opposition candidates. They wouldn't be in places where the ruling party hoped to win, because they were migrant workers in the hotel industries and so on. I said to you earlier that it's easier to change a system than it is to change a mentality. As I found in Zimbabwe when they liberalised the economy, the leading bureaucrats thought that you could liberalise while maintaining control; they didn't see that as an oxymoron.

And in Kenya, I found that there was a one party mentality both on the Government side and on the Opposition. There was a huge amount of intolerance particularly to do with possible defections. The concept of a loyal opposition like that which we've had in Britain for hundreds of years was a very difficult concept to inculcate. You just can't do it with a stroke of the pen or a click of the fingers, and so it was a very tense period. And my predecessors had not had contact with the Opposition. The juniors in the High Commission had done it - the First and Second Secretary - but the High Commissioner hadn't.

The system was that the High Commissioner would see the president probably about once a month for a *tête-à-tête*. I found, especially during periods of tension, particularly in the run up to the election, that I was sometimes seeing him three, four, five times a week, just to try and help keep things on an even keel. The first time I saw him, I said to him that I was going to – once I'd seen him privately – I was going to see the Heads of all the Opposition parties and that I was going to maintain regular contact with them and that I thought that he would need, Kenya would need, something of this kind done in order to help maintain a degree of calm.

I started off with Odinga and there were about thirty thousand people there when I went to see Odinga. The Second Secretary, a very nice young woman, Diana Gwynn, Diana and Robin Gwynn, were both in the Chancery, he was Second Secretary, she was a Second or Third Secretary, looking a little bit nervous as we in the armoured Jaguar drove extremely slowly though this enormous crowd, a lot of whom were chanting. It sounded a little threatening but my driver, who was a Luo, knew they were all Luos. The driver didn't seem at all worried about it so I said, 'What are they shouting?' and he said, 'Simba, simba.' ('Lion')

MM: Who was that to?

KP: Odinga.

MM: Which Odinga was it? The old man? The father?

KP: Oginga Odinga not Raila - not the current Prime Minister. 'Double O', I think people called him - when the British weren't very keen on him, they said he should be called 'Double Cross' not 'Double O'.

Anyway, when we got there, he tottered out of the building in which his party, FORD Kenya (Forum for the Restoration of Democracy in Kenya) was housed. He was about eighty, wearing a porkpie hat and a sort of check jacket and a different check shirt and carrying an ornate walking stick. The cheers

redoubled when Mzee Odinga appeared and then he responded to the cheers by lifting his walking stick up to the sky and there was a tremendous roar of approval.

I got out and went up and said hello to him, and went up in the lift to his offices and we were offered African tea. This reminded me of when I was a child of eight or nine on naval airbases and I would go and have tea with the ratings. We were given tremendously sweet tea with brown sugar in it and evaporated milk. The tea that was produced for us by Odinga was very similar. I think it was made with tea and milk rather than tea and water, but anyway he said he was very glad I was here because my predecessors hadn't had contact with the Opposition and he said, 'We are going to need you during the period ahead because our system here is that we can't talk to State house direct so we are going to have to go through you and ask you to help'. And indeed we did.

You have to understand that things were not, you know, the same as in this country. We here have had many hundreds of years to establish democracy. The Opposition did some things to try deliberately to provoke Moi and the Government. For example, it's a very tribal society still though they wouldn't admit it. Sometimes they wouldn't tell you what tribe they were but all you had to do was ask, 'Where's your home area?' and you knew. There was a lot of resentment of Kikuyus because people of other tribes felt that during the initial years under President Kenyatta, the Kikuyus had established political, administrative, economic and commercial dominance. I believe that under Kenyatta, forty percent of District Officers and District Commissioners were Kikuyus, and they were about twenty five to thirty percent of the population.

They'd also bought up a lot of land at the coast from people who didn't know it was of any value. They were very smart. If you go round Kenya, you will find these little *dukas* all run by Kikuyus. Very enterprising Kikuyu small businessmen are making a living. Kikuyu women are buying and selling used clothes .... The Bishop said to me,' If you lend a Kikuyu woman five hundred Kenyan shillings she'll buy clothes, she'll sell them and she'll end up with

seven hundred. She'll give you your five hundred back next day and she'll have made two hundred shillings. They're worker bees.'

MM: Which bishop was this?

KP: The Anglican Bishop of Nakuru. He was a Kikuyu himself.

But the feeling of other Kenyan communities was that the Kikuyus had burst out of their Central Province and they had shops and businesses and had also been given white land in the White Highlands which were basically Kalenjin areas but that if you tried to do it in the other direction – if a Kalenjin or Luo tried to establish a *duka* in a Kikuyu area, nobody would do business with them. So there was resentment of the Kikuyu, partly economic and political dominance but also a feeling that it was one-way traffic, a one-way filter; you couldn't do it back the other way. This was very much resented and when the Kikuyu parties, or the Kikuyu dominated parties, tried to register Kikuyus as candidates in Kalenjin constituencies, including Moi's own constituency, this was vigorously resisted as a provocation. And I'm sure it was – but, on the other hand, in a democracy, in our own democracy, if you want to run (say) a Scotsman in Cornwall, so what? But we live in a different system. The election period was a very tense and exciting episode.

I spent a lot of time with Moi, keeping him calm and telling him he was the Father of the Nation, so he shouldn't descend to the same tactics as other people, then people would see that he was behaving in a statesmanlike way and other people weren't.

We had similar episodes later on. For example, when Odinga died, Moi went to his funeral in his home area down by Lake Victoria. I went to his funeral and I was sitting directly behind Moi. So I saw his reaction when youths started running around in front of the stage, yelling insults at him and also some of the party leaders started demonstrating, including the present President of Kenya, Mwai Kibaki. Kibaki stood up and said, 'You're not our president; we don't accept you as president; we don't regard you as legitimate'. This was

completely gratuitous at the funeral of somebody else. Moi then stood up and made a very good speech praising Odinga as one of the founding Fathers of the Nation, and mentioning his record and so on, but I could see Moi was furious, I could see his hands gripping the chair. His face was very controlled but his hands gave away his anger and the tension. He asked to see me the next day.

I used to see him at 7.30 in the morning, so as to be his first visitor of the day. Thus I was not kept hanging about all day. He said he was going to do this and he was going to do that and so on, and said they can't get away with that. I said, 'All that is true but when people look at what happened yesterday, you're the one who comes out well from it. They are the ones who come very badly out of it. You're the Father of the Nation. You mustn't descend to their level and you're not going to react against them or they'll bring you down to their level'. I had to go and see him for about three days in a row because he was still simmering.

Yes, it was a very interesting time because I had a fairly intimate relationship with him so I was always seeing him. He was quite wise. When I first saw him he said, 'I will always see you one on one because one on one you can say to me things that wouldn't be appropriate if there were witnesses and I can say things to you which wouldn't be appropriate if there were witnesses'.

In fact, I went to see him after a few months later about his Vice-President - who is still a minister, Saitoti. [He has since been killed in a helicopter accident.] Saitoti was supposed to be a Maasai but actually he was Kikuyu. He didn't speak any Kimaasai. He was a good constituency MP but his reputation was of someone who was extremely corrupt. The Governor of the Central Bank, a Kalenjin from Moi's tribe, was also regarded as very corrupt. There had been an incident where dodgy banks had allegedly been making loans to politicians then not recovering the loans. In fact, in the run up to those elections, the money supply in Kenya expanded by something like fifty-six percent in the last three months before the elections. There were people worried about losing the election, very anxious to feather their nests to the maximum degree possible.

Anyway, one of these banks was being shut down in Britain by the Bank of England, and they gave the Governor overnight warning. Overnight huge quantities of money were removed from the branch of the bank in London and repatriated. So I got a message from the Bank of England saying that they wouldn't deal with the Governor anymore. In banking, confidence is extremely important and it had been breached so I asked to go and see Moi and I told him about the Governor. I called him 'the invisible governor' because he had never agreed to see me. I told Moi, 'It's up to you but he's damaging the Kenyan economy; he's certainly ended relations with the Bank of England. He can't do you any more service, and if I were you I would dismiss him.' I said, 'I also want to talk to you about the Vice-President. I haven't any evidence against the Vice-President that would be usable, but you must be aware of the very widespread rumours that the Vice-President is also very corrupt, and certainly it is my judgement that he is in no position to do you any further service, so you might want to think about replacing him.' Moi, who was a very controlled man, said, 'Thank you for your advice.' and that was about it.

The Central Bank Governor got ejected forthwith but the Vice-President stayed on. The new Central Bank Governor was another Kalenjin, quite a well-respected young accountant from Unilever, I think.

I'll tell you why I said to you earlier that I liked to be in positions where you could do things. The British High Commissioner in Kenya was the number one foreign presence. Moi didn't like the American, so he didn't like the Americans. They'd been too publicly critical of him, so they couldn't have the same relationship. They never saw him tête-à-tête. Everyone looked to Britain to do things. There was an affair called 'the Goldenberg Scandal.' Kenya had a rebate scheme for people who exported goods that brought foreign exchange into the country. We discovered – no, we didn't discover - the press discovered that this firm called Goldenberg, which was run by Kenyan Asians who were closely associated with the members of the ruling establishment, were claiming very large sums of money. I think a hundred million dollars was mentioned for export rebates for goods which Kenya didn't produce - gold and diamonds, for

instance. So there was a big scandal about it and the Kenya Parliament established a commission of enquiry chaired by the Head of the Public Accounts Committee, who was the leader of the Opposition.

Anyway, I was having breakfast one morning when the Governor of the Central Bank asked to see me very urgently. He came round to my house and told me that the Public Accounts Committee was going to wind up its enquiry that day and what a disaster that would be and I must tell the leader of the Opposition not to do it. This guy was quite straight that it was really important that Parliament get to the bottom of it, so I rang up the Leader of the Opposition and went round to the Parliament and he came out and I briefed him. This caused a great to-do with Intelligence officers asking what I was doing asking for an urgent meeting with the head of the Public Accounts Committee. I didn't say that Cheserem, the Governor of the Central Bank, had asked me to inform the Head of the PAC but did say that I had been informed about the problem and told it was really important for the reputation of Parliament and his reputation that this enquiry be continued and pursued vigorously, which it was. So there were things that we could do that other people couldn't.

And earlier than that after the elections, the three main opposition parties announced that they were going to boycott Parliament unless Moi met certain conditions. I asked to see the American Ambassador, Smith Hempstone, a former journalist who fancied himself as a reincarnation of Ernest Hemingway, had the same sort of beard and drinking habits and love of wildlife and all the rest of it, and he'd been a very vigorous and open critic of the government. I went round to him and I said to him, 'Look here, Smith, do you think the Opposition lost it because of rigging?' And he said, 'No, I think there's been some rigging but no, they lost because they were divided.' And I said, 'Well, honestly, you have to say so. You're the guy who has influence with the Opposition and if that's your view, you owe it to Kenya to say so. If the Opposition won't go to Parliament, you don't have a basis for a parliamentary system. The move to multi-party-ism is negated.' So anyway, he drank some more of his bull shot and he did issue a statement and I went to see the three party leaders and I said to them, 'Why do you want to give President Moi a veto

over whether you go to Parliament?' And they all said, 'We are not giving President Moi a veto whether we go to Parliament...' And I said, 'Well, yes you are actually, because you're saying you won't go unless he does a/b/c/d ... There are eighty eight of you out of two hundred members of Parliament, so it's a very strong opposition. You know that in the multi-party system you will have the chairmanship of the PAC, that will uncover all sorts of wrong-doings. If I was President Moi, faced with a strong opposition, faced with giving the Leader of the Opposition the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee, I would say, 'I will certainly not meet your conditions,' and that way you will be prevented by your own pre-conditions from going to Parliament.' And they said they hadn't thought about that, and they went to Parliament. What they did was when Moi made his State of the Union opening address, they walked out but they participated thereafter which was pretty obviously the right thing to do.

It was quite exciting being High Commissioner! Then about one o'clock in the morning one night I woke up, and I could hear the phone ringing downstairs in the kitchen and it rang, and rang and my wife woke up as well, and it carried on and on for about ten minutes, and eventually, I put on a dressing gown and went downstairs. Of course, I had to come out of the Keep because we locked ourselves in at night and it was our gate-guard saying that Mr Matiba and about twenty people were there ...

MM: Ken Matiba?

KP: Kenneth Matiba was the leader of the other large Opposition party, called FORD (Asili). FORD had split into two parties and Ken Matiba had been - well, you knew him when you were there – a very powerful civil servant, a very good administrator, but he'd been imprisoned by the government when the multi-party movement started and he'd become very ill. He'd had a serious stroke because he'd been denied the medicine for high blood pressure and had to be flown to the London Clinic for treatment. I had a friend in Kenya, a Kikuyu psychiatrist, who was his doctor, and he said that in the brain we have a mechanism which inhibits behaviour so I might be annoyed at you but I've got a mechanism which tells me I mustn't show it or to control it, or if I'm very

happy, I don't get over exuberant and so on and that mechanism seemed to have been destroyed in Matiba's brain.

So anyway, there he was at whatever it was, one o'clock in the morning, and I went out in my dressing gown to meet him and greet him, and invite him in, gave him a cup of tea and my wife came downstairs to provide coca cola for some and make tea for others and he told me, 'I've been summoned by the District Security Committee in the constituency for holding a rally without permission.' He said, 'I'm not having this. I'm not going back to prison. I'm going to lead all my supporters on a march on the District Security Offices at half past six tomorrow.' So, I said to him, 'Well, have you consulted a lawyer?' He said, 'No, why should I consult a lawyer?' So I said, 'Well, have you established whether the District Security Committee have got the right to summon you, and if they do have the right, do you have to appear in person? Have you established whether they have the right to determine when you have to appear, if you have to appear? Have you established whether your lawyer could represent you? Have you established any of these things?'

These suggestions obviously came completely out of the blue; he certainly wouldn't have thought about them in his agitated state. I said, 'Look, we both want to establish the rule of law, don't we?' And he said yes; 'we both want to have the sort of civil society in which we behave according to the requirements of law,' and he said, yes, and I said, 'Well, I suggest to you very strongly the first thing you need to do is find out what are the requirements of the law. I think it's very likely that the District Security Commission Committee in your Kikuyu constituency, whatever the constituency was, don't have the right to require you to appear in person, in which case, you don't have to go but you do need the advice of a lawyer as to what the legal rights and wrongs of the matter are.' And he said, 'Thank you very much,' finished his tea and went off into the night!

And I never heard any more about it and I think probably the lawyer told him to tell the District Security Committee to get lost. But, it's typical of his state

of mind that his first thought was to lead a demonstration, and his second, to come round and talk to the British High Commissioner about it.

MM: Thank goodness he did!

KP: Yes, well, indeed. So, you know, it was a very interesting posting. We had ethnic cleansing, trying to make arrangements for people who'd been 'ethnically cleansed' to return to their homes, trying to get community-based arrangements for reconciliation between communities, getting churches involved, getting the elders involved, asking can you forgive one another? Can you live with one another? A lot of the problems that arose stemmed from fears by people who'd been running the country for quite a long time that they would lose everything. And, of course, it shows the problems that arise when the State controls too much.

Honestly, in Britain, does it make all that much difference whether it's a Tory government that controls the country, or a Labour government, or a coalition government? It makes some difference, but it's not a matter of life and death. But in a system where much of the investment was controlled by para-statal bodies, the government was large and powerful, where many appointments are made by the president, it can matter a huge amount.

And the other complicating factor was sheer greed. In the ethnic cleansing that was done in the former White Highlands, basically, local politicians were pushing people out because they thought they'd buy up their assets, buy their farms cheap: many people who lived up there, who'd lived up there for thirty years, told me they'd been approached by local businessmen who offered to take the farms off their hands. You know 'you're not going to be able to live there so I'll do you a favour and buy it from you' at 10 or 20 per cent of its value. There was a vile side to it, as well, of taking advantage of others; just human nature, I suppose. The final factor, of course, is land hunger. You have to remember that in Kenya only twenty-five percent of the land is arable and also that the population has increased by more than three hundred per cent since Independence.

MM: More than that surely?

KP: It was about ten million before Independence.

MM: No, no, it was less than that, much less than that, about seven, maximum.

KP: Well, it was about thirty when I was there.

MM: It's over forty now, according to the latest figures I have seen.

KP: Anyway, I very much admired the Kikuyus in many ways, and had many Kikuyu friends, but when you drove up through Central Province, I was astonished to find that the verges of the main roads were cultivated and, indeed, outside my residence, my High Commission Residence, I'd walk round the block and when you got round to the far side of our Residence, the people had planted maize and so on on our verge, because there was this terrible land hunger. It's a contributor to ethnic clashes in many ways particularly between Kikuyus and Maasai because the Maasai as you know are pastoralists and have summer grazing and winter grazing. They'd come up for their summer grazing, dry season grazing, and find that the Kikuyus had moved onto their land and were cultivating it. So they'd beat them up and drive them off.

MM: Well, it was a tradition – Maasai versus Kikuyu; keep the numbers down, kill off the young men, let them go to war together.

KP: It was also agrarian versus pastoralists, planting versus roaming.

MM: One of the first things we did, the British High Commission did, after Independence was to try to persuade Jomo Kenyatta, to let the International Planned Parenthood Federation operate in Kenya. He absolutely refused to let them come in because he wanted his Kikuyu to outnumber the Maasai.

KP: Moi did no better; I mean, Moi was opposed to family planning but the tragedy of Kenya, as far as I was concerned anyway, was that population growth was neck and neck with income growth, GDP growth, so the country never got any richer and you had this tremendous competition for land. It's a similar problem in some ways, to the problem in Darfur, you know, when you find clashes over land hunger, water, the other thing that people clash over, and similar phenomena in Burundi and Rwanda.

Anyway, that was Kenya: we liked it a lot.

I did a lot of shooting. I used to shoot thirty or forty days a year – there was unlimited shooting and billions of duck and geese. I belonged to about four different syndicates and we used to go down to the Maasai low country near Amboseli and we had the shooting rights over a Maasai group ranch about thirty miles by thirty miles. You could only have eight guns so there were millions of game birds - guinea fowl, and different sorts of partridges and we would pay about a pound a day for the shooting rights and 50p a day for the wood. We used to camp on the edge of the wood with a nomadic lion in the wood, and every morning we'd find his pug marks in the sand and, of course, as you know, the Maasai don't eat game birds and don't hunt antelope or anything like that. 'Why do you want to kill God's creatures?' they used to ask us. 'Because they're bloody good to eat, that's why!'

MM: Why do you cut their throats? Oh dear ... Anyway, on to Ankara.

Appointment as HM Ambassador to Ankara, Turkey, 1995-97

KP: Ankara, I suppose in status was promotion. It was the same grade as Nairobi, but I found it was a step down in terms of personal influence and things to do in those days. I went from being, if you like, by some way, the number one Foreign Ambassador, to being about number five – or six, or seven – because again, a bit like Israel, the number one Ambassador by far, was the American, followed by the German Ambassador who mattered a lot more than the British

because there were a couple of million of Germans of Turkish origin and the descendants of guest workers; the Russian Ambassador matters hugely; as you know, Russia is the Big Brother lurking; France also had closer relations with Turkey than Britain did so you know, you're ...

Also the Turks like to have a good look at you before they decide whether they want to deal with you or whether to trust you or not. I was, of those ambassadors, the only one who spoke Turkish! It was a big advantage because one of the things that astonished me was that almost every governor or deputy governor I met in Turkey, had been sent by the Turkish Government on a six month course to Britain to learn English and thereafter been supplied with English newspapers. But my conclusion was, that wherever they lived they must have lived in the middle of the Turkish community, because none of them seemed to speak any English and certainly weren't comfortable speaking it, so my conversations with them were conducted entirely in Turkish, very often with local TV news crews filming which was a bit of an ordeal really. You know, you would be having a thirty or forty minute conversation entirely in Turkish with the TV camera rolling and I was going to be on the evening news. I was just beginning to enjoy it when the call came to go to New York to work with Kofi Annan.

During that two years in Ankara we went to Istanbul a lot; spent probably the best part of a week in Istanbul, a month, and because it's the commercial centre, and cultural centre, the media centre, in many ways, increasingly the political centre, the Turks are holding more and more conferences in Istanbul rather than in Ankara which is a fantastic setting. We had a very nice *pied-à-terre* based in the old Embassy, now the Consulate General. Of course, in Ankara, we never called it the Consulate General because the Consuls General tended to think it was theirs so we called it Pera House which was its proper name. There was a kind of tension between all of the ambassadors in Ankara and the Consuls General in Istanbul. They were a kind of tight-knit group of their own and I got the impression that they resented the ambassadors coming down and trespassing on their turf.

MM: Coming down from an inferior town.

KP: Exactly. And in many ways, the Consul General in Istanbul is a dream job, an absolute dream job. I recall poor Roger Short, who would have liked to have been Ambassador in Ankara, who spoke very good Turkish. He'd been a language student in Ankara twenty five years before – but was very happy to be Consul General in Istanbul, in many ways a better job than Ambassador in Ankara. But we also travelled very widely in Turkey. We went to the east, and the south-east, we went to Mardin which is right on the border with Syria because there's an Assyrian-Christian community there which was under some pressure. We went and spent a night in an Assyrian Christian monastery the origins of which went right back to about the second century, one of the oldest Christian communities in the world. Of course, having a foreign Ambassador there to stay with the Patriarch was a kind of assurance for them and also reminded the local Turkish authorities that we were paying attention to their well-being. We went and looked across the border at Armenia from Ani, a very old Armenian town on what used to be the heavily-defended border between Turkey and the Soviet Union on the ancient Silk Route. We travelled very widely. I don't know why – I had a sort of instinct that I might not stay all that long.

Then one day, the Permanent Under Secretary, Sir John Coles, made a visit to Ankara, supposedly a pastoral visit, and he asked to have tea with me. He told me that Marrack Goulding would be leaving New York in a few months time and they would like to run me as his successor, on the assumption that the Secretary General wanted another Brit. I was more dismayed than thrilled because after eighteen months I was establishing myself in Turkey, getting my face known, and building up my own network of contacts, and Turkey is not exactly without interest you know. There was an Iraqi issue, a Balkan issue, a Cypriot issue, a NATO issue, the economic issue itself. It was strategically really central. There was an EU issue. So there was a lot of interesting substance to the job. So I said to him: 'Have you got any other candidates?' And I mentioned a couple. David Gore-Booth was one of them but he'd only just recently gone to Delhi so he had to accept that that ruled him out for this

and I mentioned one or two other people and then I said, 'Nice town, shame about the job,' because I've got a rather jaundiced view about international secretariats, multi-lateral secretariats, and he did a very sort of suave pressure move. What he said to me was, you know the way the Foreign Office twists your arm without appearing too crudely to twist it, he said, 'You've been Head of Mission in three important posts and the Number One Board might think that if you turn down running for this job to which we attach enormous importance perhaps you would be being a bit greedy by looking for another Head of Mission job.'

Well, I may be slow, but I'm not that slow so I said all right! And when Kofi Annan was elected Secretary General he asked for a choice, so they put up another very good candidate with some UN experience and I went across and I was interviewed by Kofi and his *Chef de Cabinet* and his closest personal colleague and I was offered the job. But I was then told I had to start at the beginning of the following month so I went back to Ankara for about a week in order to leave and I had a week in London. Then we went to New York.

Appointment as Under Secretary General for Political Affairs, UN New York, 1997-2005

KP: The first thing my secretary asked me when I went in on the first morning, was, 'Have you brought your boarding cards?' and I said, 'Why would I bring my boarding cards?' She said, 'Well, it's a requirement that you produce your boarding cards.' I said, 'Well, I'm here – does it matter if I rowed the Atlantic? Or walked it?' She said, 'No, but you know, you had business class tickets and the administration wants to know if you travelled business class or cashed them in for something cheaper.'

MM: Oh, I see ...

KP: I then realised the culture of the UN Secretariat was one of intense distrust of one another, a lot of bureaucracy and so on. I used to say to my staff that when I spent eight and a half years in New York, that it was a combination of

fascination and frustration. They should think of it like cholesterol. There's good cholesterol and bad cholesterol and as long as the good cholesterol is in sufficiently high proportion, it was okay. When the proportions started to change, you should think about changing jobs.

Even before I went I'd had a prolonged negotiation with the administration about terms. To begin with, they had wanted me to go on secondment terms.

MM: The FCO?

KP: Yes, the FCO ... and to find my own apartment, and I said, 'I don't want to do that, because apartments are very expensive in New York and it would swallow the whole of my UN salary and they said, 'Well, we can't do what we did for Mig Goulding which was to give him an apartment, because the Foreign Secretary has said he's not going to continue that kind of arrangement.' He didn't want a surreptitious arrangement of that kind any more. I said, 'That's absolutely fine by me – find someone else!'

Only then did they consult the guy in the British Mission who was on the Administrative & Budgetary Committee of the UN, the famous ACABQ, who pointed out that there was a provision in the UN regulations for someone to receive a benefit of that kind as long as he declared it. Then there was some percentage formula, twenty-five per cent or something of your gross emoluments was deducted, in accordance with a formula set by the International Civil Service Commission.

I said, 'Okay,' and I also said, 'You know, I think I'd rather you compulsorily retired me' because the other thing I worried about was being seen as completely impartial and independent. So they agreed that if I asked for compulsory early retirement, they would give me compulsory early retirement. That paid for the reduction in salary. So when I got the job offer from Kofi Annan, I wrote on the bottom of it that, in accepting it, I wished to make clear that I was benefiting from a British flat, in accordance with the applicable rules, and indeed, the UN made the reduction in my salary for the time I was

there. But I was the only person in the UN Secretariat with that arrangement. I was aware of other colleagues who were receiving similar benefits and denying it but I was the only one who was declaring it. And that was fine, because when people asked me, I said, 'Yes, too right I've got a flat supplied by the British government but I have declared it in accordance with the rules and they're making the approved deduction from my salary.'

So it was good to be there in the beginning on a sound basis and, of course, the range of things we were dealing with was extremely interesting - something in every continent. In Latin America we had Guatemala, with which I was quite involved. It was a wonderful country to visit, with very, very interesting issues. We had negotiated the end to a civil war lasting thirty-six years, with hundreds of thousands of dead, mainly Mayan villagers. The agreements that we had negotiated were incredibly ambitious – basically involved the transformation of the whole society: land, justice, language, economic participation, political participation, everything. And that is the job; that's a task that's going to take generations, but we had four years so we ended up doubling it but we didn't do the job. There was intense resistance from the haves. The western hemisphere has a much lower tax burden than the eastern hemisphere and Guatemala is the country in the western hemisphere with the lowest tax burden (and it was overall eight per cent) and the accords that provided for that to increase over four years to twelve per cent and you wouldn't believe the complaints from businessmen and landowners. You would think we were trying to do what President Hollande is threatening to do and put the tax rate up to seventy-five per cent. They were saying things like, 'We don't need better roads. We don't use roads so why should we pay more tax for roads?' They all had helicopters. They were helicoptered to their *fincas* at the weekends so they didn't give a damn whether the roads were any good. There were whole areas of the country where there were no police stations, no schools, no nothing ...

That was very interesting and we also had Colombia. There were problems on every continent. On my watch we brought independence to East Timor which is now the subject of many an academic work. It was deemed almost

impossible but it was done. I think the UN felt rightly proud of that and we nearly had a Cyprus settlement, but we didn't basically because one of the parties didn't want it. The Middle East of course. We were very active in Africa and the Congo, Ethiopia and Eritrea. All sorts of issues emerged. So what I did was to survey the scene and tried to delegate quite a lot, but I looked to see two or three ones that were my pet projects and I tried to look at ones being a bit neglected, but were important like for example, Burundi where you'd had a couple of genocides.

MM: You missed the big one.

KP: Which one was that? 1980?

MM: Rwanda. Oh, that was 1994 before your appointment.

KP: I went with Kofi Annan to Rwanda and a very traumatic visit it was. But we didn't have a political mission there during my time. I lived with the legacy of the 1994 genocide but Burundi next door was ongoing for much of my time in New York. We had to get the Tutsis to accept that they were 10-15 per cent of the population and to make arrangements that made them able to live securely among the majority community. The difference between Burundi and Rwanda is that in Burundi everyone accepts there is ethnicity whereas Paul Kagame in Rwanda, in my opinion, has tried to solve the problem of being a small minority by abolishing ethnicity. And it is a serious criminal offence in Rwanda to say that you are either a Tutsi or a Hutu. Everybody knows who is who; it is called Divisionism. It is a very serious problem if you have been subjected to a horrendous genocide of the kind Rwanda has but my worry is that they are laying the foundation in the long term for another cataclysm of that kind.

But anyway, that was one of many issues to deal with. There was a lot to do with Israel and Palestine, the Quartet and all the rest of it. Perhaps we haven't got the time to go through each individual problem area but it was eight and a half very interesting years. I enjoyed working with Kofi Annan. It came to a

bad end, if you like, which is well set out in a book by James Traub called "The Best of Intentions", but in the end I was pushed out by the Americans and the British.

I do not suppose the British would admit it, but they did, and I heard it on good authority that Jack Straw had said in terms of my succession that it would be better to have a nice Scandinavian in my post because he would be less trouble than a Brit. This, of course, was all to do with Iraq, the aftermath of Iraq, where as far as I could see, the Coalition kept making terrible mistakes. We thought the need was to try to get ahead of the curve, or at least catch up with the curve, and every step of the way they made mistake after mistake, starting with the disbandment of the army and the banning of anyone who had been a member of the Ba'ath party from holding any kind of office or official position which is in contradiction to our own system of individual accountability. It was like a collective punishment. Even in Germany after the war, we started by trying to ban everyone who had been a member of the Nazi party but denazification then turned out to be done on an individual basis, didn't it?

MM: Yes.

KP: People's individual records were looked at. There was some recognition of reality. And it was the same in Iraq. You could not get anywhere, you could not be a doctor or an official unless you were a member of the Ba'ath party. Not all members of the party were evil people.

MM: But anyway this decision was mostly taken by the Americans wasn't it, not by us?

KP: I think it was an embarrassment because ...

MM: We had gone along with it of course …

KP: We had gone along with it but the embarrassment was that in the Secretariat I was asking questions and also pointing out errors as they were made, and, you see, the whole business of forming a new government meant that my preoccupation was with the need to broaden the base of support for a political transition. They started off with a very narrow base for support. They started off by Lebanonising the whole issue, which was a serious mistake. The governing council which ran the country under the authority of the Coalition consisted of twenty five people. The first mistake was to Lebanonise. Out of that twenty five the coalition felt there had to be a majority of thirteen Shi'a, then you had to have five Kurdish members, five Sunni members, one Nestorian Christian, one Yazidi and one Zoroastrian. So you immediately turned Iraq from what had been really quite a sophisticated political society into a 'Lebanon,' from one in which people's identities were not based purely on their religious affiliation into a Lebanon where the President has to be a Maronite Christian, the Prime Minister has to be a Sunni, the Speaker in Parliament has to be a Shi'a and so on. Once you have done that it is incredibly hard to undo it. It also meant that the parties were similarly confessionally based.

And then the Sunnis boycotted the first election. We were trying all the time to push the Coalition into bringing in more Sunnis, being more inclusive, also allowing more time to draft a new constitution by saying this was a constitution that was going to determine events in the country for a long time to come and if you rush it you will end up with a bad constitution. You will not be able to change it for decades. However, the response was that we needed to get on with this. The result was that the base got narrower and narrower rather than broader and broader. The other thing we did was to establish contact fairly early on with representatives of the mainstream Sunni Arab insurgency. We established what it was they were after and we tried to get a dialogue going with the Americans.

MM: By 'we' you mean ..?

KP: The Secretariat, the key people in the Secretariat. I used a Moroccan guy who happened to be a British citizen, because he was a political prisoner in Morocco for eight or nine years and very gifted, a lone wolf, strongly disliked by the Americans. I tried to put him into Baghdad as the Deputy Special Representative, but they vetoed that on the basis they always knew best and Britain went along with that as little Sir Echo. That is why I became a bit of an embarrassment to the British Government. We also caused enormous resentment because the Coalition legitimised their actions by a series of Security Council Resolutions and they also tried to give the UN responsibilities without the corresponding authority to deliver on those responsibilities, which we resisted.

MM: 'We' resisted?

KP: We resisted - Kofi Annan and I and the Secretariat. I remember a particularly disastrous Security Council lunch where the Brits and the Americans were trying to run a new Security Council resolution that had features that we did not like at all and my deputy, who is now the President of Slovenia, Danilo Turk, an international lawyer, Professor of international law, had drafted a rather killer line which Kofi used at the lunch, which was 'bad resolutions cost lives.' And this was like a torpedo through the side of the draft resolution which sank, to the enormous irritation of the British permanent representative and also, of course, of the American ambassador.

I did not like that period because the American ambassador was very good, very reliable but very Republican and also very 'Bushy'. It was always the British Ambassador acting as 'little Sir Echo' who spoke first, basically by prior agreement and representing an American line. I did not think that was very worthy. It reminded me of when I was a young diplomat when the Czech Ambassador, Czechoslovakia having been invaded by Russia, was taking the Russian line in the Security Council. As a permanent member of the Council I thought Britain should have defined things in its own interests. Anyway, for one reason or another, Kofi made one mistake. Under a lot of pressure from a BBC interviewer, who pressed him to say that the invasion of Iraq had been

illegal, Kofi said in the end 'if you like, it was illegal'. Interviewer: 'Are you saying this was illegal? Are you saying this was illegal?'

What Kofi really said before, which the Americans could live with, was that it had not been in accordance with the provisions of the Charter. Then they ran a kind of persecution campaign against him over oil for food and other things and the activities of his own son and so on. I think he ran out of courage in the end. He was strongly advised to get rid of a small number of trouble makers in the Secretariat, including your humble servant. I think Kofi fought long and hard but I have always felt that courage is a finite commodity. He decided in the end he was going to do whatever was necessary to remain, to see out his term of office as Secretary General.

His chef de cabinet was dropped. Iqbal Riza had been with him for a long time and was incredibly loyal. He was dropped at about an hour and a half's notice. Do you remember Paul Volcker, who was doing an inquiry into oil for food and the Secretariat's behaviour was investigated. He came up with some criticism of Iqbal Riza for having weeded the float copy of documents and submissions and so on. Well the float copy is not the authoritative copy. Lots of us kept our own float copies. They were not the file copy and so it was a mistaken criticism. It came out at about 9am and I think Iqbal was told at about 10.30am that his resignation was going to be announced at 12 noon.

MM: Whether he gave it or not?

KP: He is a very loyal fellow so never said anything about it, but I think he must have found it incredibly hurtful; no farewell party for him; no real thank you for his services. Mark Malloch Brown was brought in from UNDP as chef de cabinet. He now has established a reputation as a tremendous critic of the Iraq War but he was actually brought in as a friend of the Neocons and an accommodator of US interests. He came to see me after about three weeks and said I must have realised that there were too many Brits at the top of the UN so I would have to go. I was a bit irritated because although I did not want to be there for the lame duck period of Kofi's stewardship and my wife

and I had discussed what would be a decent point at which to go I did not want to be pushed out under a cloud. Also Kofi had only recently insisted on extending my contract. I had wanted only a six month extension to include a period of mid-tour leave, which was due to me. Kofi had insisted on an extension of my contract to cover the period up to February 2007 after he would have left the UN. I objected to that pointing out that the UN was not some kind of oriental court where one serves the whim of the ruler. I had therefore told Malloch Brown that I had a contract and I wanted the contract to be honoured. I would go, but I would go in my own time. I required the UN to allow me to take all my leave due and to send me to Harvard for a sabbatical. I took some more leave and I ended up finishing as an international civil servant on 28 February 2006, which I should think was six or seven months after I would have left if they had left me alone.

The other consideration in my mind was that the oil for food question was still bubbling away. I had never had anything to do with oil for food. I had excused myself on the grounds there might appear to be a conflict of interests. I was concerned that if I was pushed out in a precipitate way it might look as if I had misbehaved in some way over oil for food. So it left a rather sour taste.

MM: It was a terrible pity really.

KP: These things happen. What was irksome to me was that I had no support from the British Government, not a word of support. If this had happened to a French Under-Secretary General, Chirac would have been on the blower to Kofi, and Kofi would have backed down. And to remove this from the personal, the fact of my departure was a big contributory factor to the fact that when I left, the British lost the post at the UN to which they attached maximum importance: the Under-Secretary General for Political Affairs. They are not going to get it back, at least not for a good long while. The Americans have now taken it. This to my mind is not a good idea because I found there were enough subjects on which my independence and impartiality were doubted, or questioned, not by me, but by people who said 'Well, he is a former British diplomat'. You can imagine how many more would question

or doubt an American. The one who has just been appointed, Jeffrey Feldman, is a former ambassador to Lebanon, former Assistant Secretary to the Middle East, so how can he accepted as playing any kind of impartial role on issues to do with the Middle East? All the Arabs will see him as an American, not as a UN official.

Anyway, let's just say we have to live with the consequences of our actions and it is a shame that Britain has lost that job. We kept it because we were regarded as having a very good Foreign Service and being quick, hard working and loyal. I am not talking about me. I am talking about the reputation of the British Foreign Service.

MM: That is a very sad note to end on …

KP: I'm very happy that we were in New York. We have a very bright but not very academic son who went to university there which would not have been possible otherwise. It allowed me to work to the age of 63 as the Office would have undoubtedly thrown me out into an unforgiving world at the age of 60. So my memories of the New York are good, and in the end, I ended up with six months longer as an international civil servant than if this business hadn't started at all.

MM: I think, if I may say so, you can be proud of an extremely distinguished career. I am most grateful to you for describing it.

KP: Not at all. I have enjoyed it. The only thing I really regret is, when I was in the Private Office, for example, I regarded the Deputy Under Secretaries as titans of integrity and courage because very often when David Owen wanted to do things they didn't think were wise, regardless of the effect on their careers, people like Johnny Graham and Tony Duff insisted on taking the Secretary of State through the implications of what he wanted to do and made him look at the other possibilities. Of course, they entirely accepted the responsibility of the Secretary of State to make the decision. People did pay a price; for example, Johnny Graham was sent off to Tehran when he really

wanted to go to Cairo, but I greatly admired his sense of integrity. In recent years, first of all, the distinction between the politician and the civil servant has become blurred. Even when I was in the Secretariat I never called Jack Straw 'Jack'. I insisted on calling him Secretary of State.

MM: Quite right.

KP: But some of his officials were calling him 'Jack' yet we sit on opposite sides of the table. It is an important distinction. It is not a question of deference or anything else but you must not blur the distinction.

MM: We are paid servants of the government.

KP: Exactly. And we are paid to speak truth to power. I am not sure that some of the issues we have had, in particular Iraq, officials have spoken truth to power. I asked Edward Chaplin, who was Director of the Middle East, whether there had ever been a discussion in the run-up to the Iraq war based on what are the options for British interests as opposed to 'do we go with the Americans or do we not go with the Americans?' As far as I could establish, there had never been a conversation of that kind, and I think that is an illustration of a decline and the politicisation of the Foreign Service. I do not mean in a party political sense. I mean they have become more like American political appointees. People have been catapulted to great heights as a result of being 'can-do' kind of people and that is a shame. It started with Mrs Thatcher 'Is he one of us?' which was not party political, but it was a mind-set and it intensified under Tony Blair. I think we need to get back to the idea of impartial civil servants. I remember reading that a former Head of SIS came to see Jim Callaghan about something when he was Prime Minister. Callaghan said to Maurice Oldfield, 'Maurice, you are being very difficult'. Oldfield replied: 'Yes, Prime Minister. That is my job'.

MM: Quite right!

KP: That is my last word. Thank you very much, Malcolm.

Transcribed by Mrs Liz Barnard, January 2013