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PATEY, Sir William Charters (born 11 July 1953)
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BRITISH DIPLOMATIC ORAL HISTORY PROGRAMME

RECOLLECTIONS OF SIR WILLIAM PATEY KCMG, LLD

RECORDED AND TRANSCRIBED BY CATHERINE MANNING, JUNE-SEPTEMBER 2024

CMM: This is an interview with Sir William Patey for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, covering the first part of his career, Catherine Manning recording.

William, I know that you graduated in 1975 from the University of Dundee, having read History. Would you like to give me a bit more background about your family and how it was that diplomacy turned out to be your career choice?

WP: It was a late choice. I came from a very ordinary working-class family in Edinburgh. My father had left school when he was thirteen; his father had died when he was very young, so he was functionally literate, but not very literate; he didn't have a great education. He'd moved to Edinburgh to marry my mother. They'd met when she was on Army training; she was in some form of Army training, she never talked about it much. He worked variously as a labourer, digging up roads in the Gas Board; then went on to be involved in mending gas pipes. At one stage he was a bus conductor, so a very simple family. I remember – because this was an incident later on in my life which my mother never really forgave me for – they bought a very small flat in Edinburgh which was in Leith, which was where I was born. It was a one-bedroom, one-sitting room flat, very small, with an outside toilet which was eventually condemned, so it was a slum. Then they moved into social housing when I was about eight. When my younger brother was born, this flat was no longer suitable and they qualified for social housing because they had a baby. The house we lived in was eventually knocked down and condemned and we lived in a very nice three-bedroomed house with indoor facilities which were a novelty to this eight-year-old boy who'd been used to less. When I had been appointed as Ambassador to Sudan, I gave an interview to the *Edinburgh Evening News* in which I described my humble origins and referred to where I was born and lived in my early years as a slum. My mum was livid!

Going back a bit, when I was five, we were still living in this area, and I went to a local primary school called Fort Street. I was in with a group of two other boys – there were three of us – who in Scottish terms were keelies; the English equivalent of that would be hooligans, young urchins. One term into this school, the headmaster invited our parents to remove us, James, Frankie and I, from school. I suppose I was technically expelled at five and a half, because we were unmanageable. My mother and father were both working full-time. I was a street urchin, a latch-key kid, basically out of control. My mother took this very seriously, took me out of the school and sent me off to live with my grandfather and grandmother, who lived in a different part of Edinburgh and the local school there was called Broughton, which had a much better reputation than my local school, Fort Street. I lived under the discipline of my grandfather and grandmother. It was a good academic school, and I left that school after three years, when I was eight, we moved to social housing. I went to the local primary again in Drylaw and by then I was more academically inclined and had a sense of discipline and purpose which had been instilled in me by my grandfather. That was a life-changing moment being sent to live with my grandparents for three years, because my mum and dad were working. Much later on in life, when I was just about to go up to university, my mother told me this story about me being expelled at five and a half years old. I was vaguely aware of it, because I asked why am I living with my grandparents. She said, 'You remember Frankie and James?' I said, 'Not really.' She said, 'They were the other two boys who were expelled. They've just been sent to prison, separately. One for armed robbery, one for murder.' There but for the grace of God; or my grandfather at least. That was one of those sliding-door moments. I was quite struck by it, though I was on quite a different path by then. I went to Drylaw and did well academically, got a scholarship to go to the local grammar school, Trinity Academy. I also got a scholarship to go to George Heriot's which is a private school in Edinburgh, one of the very prestigious private schools. Both my mother and my headmaster were very keen for me to go to Heriot's, but again life's choices hinge on small things. I was already wearing long trousers at eleven and in George Heriot's you had to wear shorts until you were five foot five or in the third form, and I pleaded with my mother not to send me to a school where I'd have to go back into shorts. My academic choice – I went to Trinity where I could wear my long trousers. So that was another life choice based on quite ephemeral criteria. I went to Trinity Academy which was a very academic school. I did ok there and got into university and went off to Dundee. In those days you got a full grant if you lived away from home – halcyon days. If you stayed at home, you were deemed to be living with your mum and dad and you got much less. I was feeling the freedoms. I

had a full experience of university, living away. I went to Dundee, did History and that was where I met my wife, Vanessa. I was in my third year by then and she was in her first year – I plucked her out of the crowd, and she never really got a chance. My plan then was to go into teaching with a view of going into politics. I had this interest in politics. At university I held various positions on the student association; I was Deputy President in my last year and was active in the Broad Left grouping at the university which was basically everyone who wasn't a Tory: Labour, Liberals, Communists, Maoists, International Trots, everything, all of them, were in this grouping. I chaired that for a bit which led to an interesting discussion when it came to my vetting. I was heavily involved in student politics at university; I was part of the rent strike committee when the university tried to put our rents up so we went on strike, withholding our rents. I was part of the Chile Solidarity Campaign, protesting against the [Salvador] Allende coup, so pretty active politically. My idea was to go into politics, via teaching. I was all set. I had a place at the educational college for my MEd. I had even persuaded my good friend from school, a guy called David Armstrong, who had graduated from Edinburgh in History, to come and do his MEd at Dundee. We were going to get a flat together and that was all arranged. Then I stood for the Presidency of the Students' Association which was a sabbatical. I was also aware that other people were going down to London for job interviews, being paid, and they were having weekends in London as a result. I thought, hold on a minute! This sounds like a good ploy. I know what I'm going to do, but that doesn't stop me from applying for jobs, does it? I thought I would have a few free weekends in London. I went to the Careers Adviser, Barbara was her name, and we had a proper chat. I said I was interested in politics; I might go off and teach, but equally I'd be interested in exploring other options. She said, 'Have you thought of the Foreign Office?' I said, 'The Foreign Office? No, they don't want lefties like me, working class, state schoolboys.' She said, 'No, that's exactly who they want. They're trying to diversify away from the image of public school/Oxbridge. They want to encourage people like you to apply.' So I applied for the Foreign Office, which sounded interesting, not with any great thought that I would get in. Ironically, I also applied for the International Officer of the National Union of Students, which was a full-time position. I'd applied for both of those jobs, and I had consecutive interviews in London. (I'd passed the exam bit for the Foreign Office, so we were having the interviews.) I had an interview for the International Student Officer for the National Union of Students and that interview panel was the Committee of the National Union of Students. Charles Clarke who later became Home Secretary was President; Sue Slipman who was a Communist who became a Liberal Democrat without

going through any other transitions which I thought was a bit weird. The Executive Committee doing the interview had a fair smattering of communists. Unbeknownst to me, they'd asked for a reference from a local Communist group at the university and they'd given me a very bad reference, saying that I was completely unreliable, didn't toe the lefty line all the time and was far too independent; a terrible reference from them. My interview was all about the coup in Chile. It wasn't, did I approve of the coup, it was assumed I didn't, but they were trying to suss out which of the Chilean factions I was most aligned to. The most bizarre interview for a job I've ever had. I didn't get that job. I went to the Foreign Office interview where I was being asked all sorts of questions about history, how historians could find out the truth. I think Harold Wilson's autobiography had just come out and Barbara Castle's and there were some contradictions. I said, 'History is not a science; it's a social science. You can't be exact. People's recollections differ. You have to weigh it all up. There are facts and there are also other commentators at the time and you have to come to what is a sensible conclusion.' I was emphasizing the fact that I had been school prefect, and I'd played for the First XV Rugby. It seemed a different set of criteria. I didn't play up too much my left-wing politics, though I did mention I'd been Deputy President of the Union. I was rejected by the NUS for being an unreliable lefty, accepted by the Foreign Office, despite my left-wing and working-class credentials, or perhaps because of them, I don't know. That came as a huge surprise to me. I was in the election for the President. At the time I was not so well informed as I am now. I realise I could have delayed my Foreign Office entry for a year, but at the time, I thought, oh, no. If I win the election, I won't be able to join the Foreign Office. The election came around and there were three recounts. It was the closest any lefty had ever come to winning the presidency. I won on one count; lost on another recount; the third recount, I lost by a couple of votes. My opponent assumed that there would be another recount. I said, 'No. Congratulations! Well done.' I remember the chap, Bob Hind, who won the election. He became the President, and I went off and joined the Foreign Office in the summer of 1975. That surprised them all! 'Where are you going? The Foreign Office?' 'Why not?' 'Good luck with the vetting,' they said.

It was very interesting, the vetting. I was completely open about my politics. They were not that interested in my politics but were interested in what links I had to extremist groups and individuals. I remember the forms you had to fill in … *Do you know any Communists?* Yes. *Have you ever been a Communist?* No. *Have you ever been a member of an extremist organisation such as the International Socialists?* No. *Do you know any Communists?* Yes.

Do you know any Trots? Yes. *If the answer is 'Yes' to any of these questions, please elaborate.* They give you a little space, so I wrote a rather long essay on the back about my role in the Broad Left Groups, how I routinely came across Trots, Maoists, Communists, was involved sometimes with them in campaigns, but that's not where my sympathies lay. I'm a Social Democrat. I imagine that [Kim] Philby would have answered those questions 'No' had they bothered to ask him. There was quite a bit of checking behind it and they did interview people, so they were interested in that. And there was the usual gambling, sexual proclivities questions and all the employment you'd had. I remember the vetter saying to me when he was asking me lots of questions, 'Yes, we've had a reference from the Post Office here, a very glowing reference. If you ever want another job, they'd be happy to have you back.' I said, 'I hope that doesn't mean I'm being rejected and you're pointing me in the direction of the Post Office.' That went fine and I joined the Foreign Office in August 1975. I remember just being told to turn up at Palace Chambers, as it then was, Personnel Department. 'Here's your pass. This is where you're meant to go. You're going to Aid Policy Department. This is where it is. Find your way there.'

Aid Policy Department, followed by Rhodesia Department (Sanctions Desk), 1975

I go to Aid Policy Department and I'm in the Third Room and I'm taking over from a chap called Hugo Haig-Thomas, who was my caricature of what a Foreign Office person would look like. It was in the summer, and he was wearing a white linen suit and he had a white hat and a cane. I realised he was a complete caricature as most people in the Foreign Office are not like that. I walk in; he introduces himself. 'Here's your desk. I'm off.' And that's the last I saw of him; I had no handover from him. I was in the Third Room with a guy called Peter Rafferty, in Aid Policy Department. At that time, it was the department that shadowed the Overseas Development Administration, which wasn't completely separate. It was an agency. It had its own Head of agency, and it was responsible to an FCO minister, but where aid was directed had to be negotiated with the Foreign Office, so we were the policy department. We handled the negotiations with the ODA about how big the aid budget would be, where that money would be spent. There was another Third Room which dealt with the international institutions, the IMF, the World Bank, IBRD. Included in our responsibilities was FCO disaster and humanitarian relief. It was an interesting department; I was given responsibility for natural disaster relief. There was a fund; obviously the ODA had money for natural disasters, but the Foreign Office wanted to have an immediate response fund which was in my hands, and I was authorised to spend this money. I thought I was terribly

important: just joined the Foreign Office and giving all this money away. It seemed a lot to me, but a hundred thousand pounds didn't go very far.

We did have some disasters, and it led to an incident that "but for the grace of God" I would not have been in the Foreign Office very long. There was a disaster, an earthquake in the southern Philippines. We got notification of it and I thought, right, this is it. What do they need? There was a call for tents and blankets. I said, 'Where are the nearest tents and blankets?' The RAF are in Hong Kong, so I got in touch with Hong Kong and said, 'Can you take a planeload of tents and blankets down to Mindanao for this earthquake relief?' They said, 'Sure. Who's paying?' I said, 'The Foreign Office; my budget.' The plane lands and it gets brilliant headlines, because it gets there before any other relief, even before the Philippine air force has got there. I think, job well done, marvellous publicity. This is exactly what the Foreign Office wants. I was basking in the glory when I got a phone call from the Private Office of the Minister of Defence. He said, 'Are you the chap who authorised an RAF plane to go down to Mindanao with blankets and tents?' and I said, 'Yes, isn't it brilliant?' He said, 'When you divert an RAF plane you're required to get the Secretary of State for Defence's approval.' Everyone had just assumed that because it was the Foreign Office that was ringing them and telling them that I had done all the necessary legwork back here. But it was all news to me that I had to get anyone's approval to do this. Luckily, the plane landed, dropped its supplies safely; there was no mishap. I thought, imagine if there had been a mishap; if it had all gone wrong, I was the one responsible. That was my first lesson in Whitehall co-ordination.

The normal pattern was that you did two one-year jobs, so I spent a year doing that, great fun. It was my introduction to the fact that I might have a strong accent, because in those days you had secretaries, and you would dictate to them – no computers – and they would bring your minutes back with the original plus five carbon copies. Woe betides if you wanted to correct anything because the secretary had to retype it again. You'd get a very vicious stare from them; it had to be a big mistake. The first thing that came back was gibberish; I couldn't understand it. I said to the young woman, 'What's this?' She said, 'But that's what you said.' I said, 'But I was speaking English.' It was clear that I was speaking too fast and with my accent she was all confused. I had to learn to moderate my accent a bit and speak more slowly. That was quite interesting as an early lesson. My mother used to complain when I went back to Edinburgh, 'Son, you've lost your accent.' I said, 'I don't think so. Everyone knows I'm Scottish.' Scottish was the one regional accent that the Foreign Office couldn't

cope with. I didn't come across many regional accents in those days: it was estuarine English, except for the Scots. I suspect the Foreign Office couldn't place us. They didn't know whether we were posh or not. We all sounded the same to them. I used to say to my fellow Scots, 'Why do you want independence? We're doing very well running the whole country.'

Then I went to Rhodesia Department for a year, and I was on the Sanctions Desk; my job was to try to ensure that sanctions against Rhodesia were being enforced. Again, I thought I was terribly important as Third Secretary. Later I realised that the reason it had been given to a Third Secretary is that no one cared very much about it. I had to track boats that were calling into ports in Mozambique such as Beira, tracking them from South Africa through analysis of where they all had been, working out that they were sanctions-busting. Then I would name them in notes to the UN. The idea was that the countries would be shamed into doing something about it, but most countries were shameless. I spent a whole lot of time naming and shaming these people, but the impact that it had on Ian Smith's regime was limited. Rhodesia had its own department because the British Government was trying to bring pressure on Ian Smith's regime to allow majority rule, which eventually happened. In 1979 Rhodesia became Zimbabwe and that whole department was wrapped up. That was my introduction to conflict and sanctions and in some sense the limitations of diplomacy in the face of obduracy. It wasn't completely useless; they were beginning to feel the international pressure, but it did seem quite frustrating at times. I was very gung-ho to begin with before reality set in.

Another part of the job was answering letters from members of the public, the Rhodesian public. We used to have a sweepstake – because lots of members of the Department had to get stuck into answering these letters – on how soon after joining the Department your name appeared on the front page of [the] *Rhodesia Herald.* For a while I had the record because four weeks after I joined the department, I answered a letter which had been sent to HM The Queen. "*Thank you for your letter to HM The Queen, which she has read with interest. She has asked me to reply on her behalf. Your comments about how pleased the Africans are with white rule and how the young piccaninnies…"*– because I got this letter about the young piccaninnies with a big smile on their faces, they really were just like children and without white rule the place would go to the dogs. I answered in measured tones that we still believed that the best solution was for all people to be treated equally and for them all to have a vote and that was what we were aiming for. The headline in the *Rhodesia Herald*:

'*Communist Writing Letters on Behalf of Her Majesty,'* quoting my standard reply, accusing the Foreign Office of being full of Communists. *'This outrageous letter by William Patey on behalf of Her Majesty…'* That used to happen quite a lot, the Rhodesians would get into high dudgeon about our Foreign Office replies. It was quite fun. You did get some weird letters. I got one from a lady, I guess she must have been in her sixties, a white Rhodesian, who wrote a letter that wasn't political at all, asking for advice. She had a boyfriend who was in a wheelchair, how could they get to Britain? I gave her practical advice; she wrote back thanking me for me letter. Her letters got more and more personal; *'I am really having trouble. I don't know whether to leave him or not.'* I was becoming an agony uncle; a twenty-three-year-old answering these letters. Then she sent me a Christmas card and I sent her one back, a Foreign Office Christmas card. She said, 'Oh, if I live to be a hundred and get a telegram from The Queen, I've never had such a nice card.' Even after I left Rhodesia department, I still got a Christmas card from her; it was the human side of being in the Foreign Office.

I had my year there and then the Foreign Office encouraged you to do the MLAT test, the hard language test. I didn't really think about a language, just took the test, as you did and then they came back and invited me to study a hard language; Chinese, Japanese – I wasn't interested in going to China or Japan. Russian and Arabic were offered, and I thought, If I'm going to learn a hard language, it had better be in a country where I can use it more than once. I don't want to keep going to the same country. I had already been to the Middle East; Vanessa and I had travelled to Egypt on holiday in 1974, so I was interested in Middle East politics at that point. So I thought, yes, the Arab world, twenty-three countries, why not? The other incentive – the things that shape your life – was if you did Chinese or Russian or Japanese or Thai, you spent another year in London, then a year abroad; Arabic you went straight to Lebanon. I was finding life in London a little bit expensive; my life style had deteriorated from being a student when we had subsidised drink, subsidised accommodation, a decent grant, wear a pair of jeans and a T shirt, a woolly jumper and that was it. I was now paying rent; London transport costs; suits; I was finding life a bit tough in London. I thought if I can get abroad, I'll be living rent-free, I'll get allowances and that was the clincher.

MECAS, Lebanon, 1977-8

So I went straight to Lebanon in 1977. The Arabic school which had been closed because of the civil war reopened in 1977 and we were the first year going back. I was on the ten-month

course, because I joined on the Executive Stream, not the Administrative Stream, so I was a Grade 9 in those days. There was a little bit of discrimination in the Foreign Office: those going to Admin jobs got eighteen months of Arabic and the Executive Stream jobs, they got ten months of Arabic. I didn't even know what job I'd be going to do when I went to do Arabic and while I was on the course the job came up: I was going as Commercial Attaché to Abu Dhabi. The course starts the same and the ten-month course takes you to operational level. I came out with operational Arabic. I wasn't fluent; even Higher doesn't get you to fluency. The idea was that operational got you to what they called lift-off, so you were functional in it. You could read the newspapers, you could write Arabic, you could understand Arabic, and you could speak in Arabic, but you were expected then to go on from there to improve, to use it and to take the Higher exam eventually. It's probably equivalent to four months of French, as opposed to a year. A year of full-time French you'd probably get to fluency, but four months, you'd be all right, but you'd still have to work on it. I think that would be the equivalent.

CMM: Just looking forward to the rest of your career, when you later become Ambassador in Saudi Arabia, at what point did your Arabic become fluent?

WP: I went down a few notches to begin with, and I never became fluent in Arabic. You can be ambassador in a lot of Arab countries without being fluent in Arabic. I always struggling in Arabic, mainly because when I left MECAS, I went to Abu Dhabi where there are very few Arabs and many of the Arabs you meet have mostly been educated in the UK or US. They spoke English fluently. The opportunity to speak Arabic on a daily basis in the UAE was virtually non-existent. As one of the Commercial Attachés my portfolio, was oil, gas, water and electricity. I remember going to visit the Under Secretary in the Water and Electricity Department, and speaking to him. He had been at Cardiff University; he spoke fluent English. Most of my business was done in English, both with the visiting businessmen and with the Emirati businessmen; the lingua franca in the UAE was English. My Arabic deteriorated. It was probably quite high at the beginning because I was thrown in at the deep end when HM The Queen came on a Gulf tour on the Royal Yacht in 1979 and they pulled in Embassy Arabists to act as interpreters when Her Majesty was entertaining on the Royal Yacht in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. It was decided that for the dinners on board the yacht that Foreign Office interpreters would be used, so anyone who spoke Arabic was enlisted to go on board the Royal Yacht. I was absolutely terrified, because interpreter standard I was not. It was one of those moments when you think you're going to get found out here. You learn a

lot of tricks and you have two simultaneous conversations going and they are not always related. They may be on the same subject, but they're not always related. It was quite stressful. It got even more stressful because after no disasters occurred in Abu Dhabi, the Royal Yacht was putting in at Dubai and it was decided that the same would happen there. So having survived Abu Dhabi, we were shipped up to Dubai to be on the yacht. I remember I was assigned to Frank Judd, the Labour minister – it was the Labour government - and he was the accompanying Middle-East Minister with the royal party. I was attached to him for the cocktail party. A lot of people speak English, but the higher up you go to the sheikhs, the fewer of them speak English. On the royal yacht you had all the rulers of the seven Emirates. I'm attached to Frank Judd and whenever he comes across somebody who doesn't speak English, his conversational gambit was to introduce me and say, 'He's one of the Camel Corps, Foreign Office Arabists,' and he tells a long story about how they are more Arab than the Arabs and how the Camel Corps in the Foreign Office is a tight group with its own views! This was a little bit of a loosener-up. He told this story about four or five times, which I had now translated to various interlocutors. We get seated for lunch. There was The Queen with Sheikh Rashid who's the ruler of Dubai to her right as guest of honour with Sheikh Rashid's interpreter doing The Queen and Rashid. I'm doing Judd. At the moment when The Queen turns and stops speaking to Sheikh Rashid and starts speaking to somebody else, Rashid is then speaking to Frank Judd. Frank Judd begins this story of the Camel Corps to Sheikh Rashid and he realises that I have heard this story five times and he says, 'Just tell him the Camel Corps story.' That's all he says to me, 'Tell him the Camel Corps story.' So I tell Sheikh Rashid this story. Sheikh Rashid turns to me after a little while and says, 'All that Arabic for that little bit of English.' I said, 'No, I have heard this story five times. He just told me to tell you the Camel Corps story.' Rashid lets out this almighty laugh; he's absolutely tickled by this and the whole table stops. The Queen looks round; David Roberts, the Ambassador, is looking at me. 'What have you done?' He was staring at me. I'm looking terribly innocent. Rashid turns again. I survived that one.

On a previous occasion I found myself sitting behind Prince Philip and the ruler of Umm al Quwain. The ruler of Umm al Quwain is not well known for conversation, so Prince Philip is struggling to engage him. The fish course arrives, salmon, and Prince Philip begins to tell him of the life cycle of the salmon, based on his experience up in Balmoral. How the salmon, when it's fully grown, struggles back up the river, spawns its young and the whole life cycle of the salmon. Trying to explain this life to the Ruler of Umm al Quwain, who I can see is

not very familiar with salmon – not many rivers in Umm al Quwain. He lets out this sort of guttural roar at the end of it, 'Arrrhh!' The direct translation would have been, 'Boring!' I paused and Prince Philip said, 'What did he say?' I said, 'Aren't the ways of Allah truly wonderful.' Prince Philip was listening because on one occasion I used the word 'king' instead of translating it and he nudged me and said, 'malik' so he knew the word for king, and he was listening. As you can see it was one of the more stressful moments of my diplomatic career. But my Arabic went downhill from there.

When I was Deputy Ambassador in Saudi Arabia I had to relearn Arabic. After three years in Abu Dhabi – two and a half years in Abu Dhabi, because in Abu Dhabi I took the internal bridging exam and bridged to the Admin Stream. Once I had done that, the FCO couldn't have me in this Executive Stream job, so I was transferred to Libya as Second Secretary Political and Commercial, an Admin Stream job, '81 I think I went to Libya. After Libya I hadn't been in the Arab world for ten years and before I went back as Deputy-Ambassador to Saudi Arabia I had to do a refresher course, which lifted me back to where I was before. Language training in those days wasn't that brilliant, I have to say.

MECAS was beautifully sited at Shemlan, up in the hills of Lebanon, in the lovely Christian Maronite village of Shemlan. It was one of these marvellous Foreign Office institutions which made money. It trained Foreign Office Arabists and we had Arabists from everywhere else. We had Arabists from other foreign ministries; commercial companies used to send employees to learn Arabic there, so we had people from the BBME (the British Bank of the Middle East), British American Tobacco, the Japanese sent people from Mitsubishi. The private students paid for the whole thing. The Arab world wasn't all that good at formal training at that time. Shemlan produced its own teaching material designed for foreigners learning Arabic because no one else was doing it. We had incredibly loyal teachers who'd been with us for a long time. Lebanon was a great place to be, even with a civil war going on. There was an Arab peace-keeping force, mainly made up of Syrian troops, but there were some Saudis in a sleepy little village near us. The war was on hold, with the Syrians keeping the peace. There was a green line and the Christians didn't cross to one side of it and the Muslims didn't go on the other. The road to Damascus was still open; we could still go skiing on Mount Lebanon; we could still visit the Bekaa Valley; we could still go to the wineries. It was still a fabulous place to learn Arabic. We were free to travel, so we went to Syria. We went on a language break and I drove down to Jordan by car. My language break was meant to be two weeks with the Howeitat, which is a Jordanian Bedouin tribe, better

known to Brits because they feature in the film *Lawrence of Arabia*. I spent one week with the Howeitat near Maan in Southern Jordan. They are not great conversationalists, the Bedu. We sat around the fire with coffee; they would go out and tend their flocks and I'd wander around a bit. Every so often there would be, '*Alhamdulillah, kayf haluk*,' How are you? We'd repeat all that. Trying to get the conversation on to politics or something I'd actually been learning was actually quite tricky. I made the mistake of introducing, since I knew the background of the Howeitat, T. E. Lawrence and 'The Seven Pillars of Wisdom.' They all knew about T. E. Lawrence, of course, but the conversation went in a funny direction. They got quite agitated about Lawrence and the depiction of the Howeitat. I realised that I was talking about the book and they were talking about the David Lean film, in which their leader is played by Anthony Quinn and he's not a very sympathetic character. So they're irate because of this portrayal and because my Arabic is not very good at this point we're talking at cross-purposes. Eventually, I discover that it's Anthony Quinn they're objecting to, not T. E. Lawrence, so it was quite funny. But it wasn't a brilliant place for intensive language training, so I bailed after a week and spent the other week in Aqaba in South Jordan, talking to as many Arabs as I could. It was all quite difficult. I felt envious of the people who had gone off to stay with a Syrian professor and his family in Damascus and spent two weeks talking to him and his children about everything under the sun. They came back much better equipped than me.

Commercial Attache, Abu Dhabi, 1978-81

In Abu Dhabi there were two Commercial Attachés, an older guy, Don Cairns and myself, with a First Secretary, Bill Hodgkinson, who died soon after that posting. We were the Commercial Section there, a busy commercial section. Abu Dhabi was a boom town with oil. My portfolio was oil and gas, water and electricity, quite big, shadowing ADNOC, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company and the various other oil companies. In most other sectors in Abu Dhabi, you had to have an Abu Dhabi agent, quite common in parts of the Middle East, you have to operate through the locals to give you legal cover. The oil companies were exempt from this until the Abu Dhabi Government decided to change the law. Overnight British companies dealing with the Emirati oil companies needed an Abu Dhabi agent. We had lots of companies who were about to sign multi-million-pound contracts who all needed agents, so they were contacting the Commercial Section, contacting me. 'We need an agent; we don't care who it is, it just has to be somebody who qualifies, an Abu Dhabi taxi driver will do; we need somebody.' I said, 'Hold on. You don't want to lumber yourself with

somebody who's not going to help you.' I drew up a short list of six who I thought were young up and coming Emiratis who were building their business and would give a decent service to these companies. I rang them all up and said, 'It won't come as a surprise to you that I am inundated with British companies wanting agents,' (because they were obviously instrumental in getting the law changed.) I said, 'I'm going to put people in touch with you. I've told them what the normal terms are, so let's not have any funny business. I've told them what the normal agency fees are, so can we agree that when I send people, you'll sign up?' This went on and in the course of the next seventy-two hours; loads of British companies signed up with these six agents, one of whom I'm still in touch with, Husain al Nuwais, who's become a multi-billionaire. He's very big; he would have been in his twenties at the time; he's now in his sixties. He's become rich many times over. They all signed new agency deals with British companies. The companies were pleased: the British Embassy had helped them. The Emiratis were all very pleased and they all rang me up and asked me where would I like my share to be paid. I said, 'What do you mean, my share?' They said, 'We've just made hundreds of thousands, millions of dollars in commission fees and this is going to continue into the future. We'd like to pay you a commission.' I said, 'No, you don't understand, this is my job. The government is paying me to do this. I was just doing my job.' They said, 'Yes, we understand that, but Swiss bank accounts are fine.' I said, 'No, I can't take the money; it's not legal; it's not ethical.' I think it was legal, but not ethical. They were rather bemused by this British approach and they said, 'All right. What can we do?' I said, 'Well, if you're that keen, you can take my wife and me out to dinner. So we went to dinner with them. I asked them, 'By the way, how much were you going to give me?' It came to a total of about £250,000. My salary at this time was not much more than £10,000, so it was quite a lot of money. I said, 'Everybody has a price. At least I know mine is more than that. I don't think it's technically illegal, but I'd probably have to resign my job and it's not enough to do that at the beginning of my career.' Anyway, that was their approach.

"Back handers" and commissions was fairly standard practise at the time. The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company was run by Algerians, and they had imported some of their "best practises". My wife worked for a Frenchman. She graduated in French, and she worked for this Frenchman helping him with his English and translating. He used to call her 'ma petite espionne', my little spy, because he knew her husband worked in the British Embassy. She came back excitedly one day and said, 'Did you know Joubé is the bagman for the French

companies bribing the Algerians.' I said, 'Yes, I knew that. Who? Where? When? How much?' 'Oh, I didn't get any of that information.' I said, 'Some spy you are.' He did insurance assessments and things, but he had a side line. A story from much later in life, after I had been knighted, I got a letter from HM Prison Pentland from Yves Joubé saying, 'Are you the William Patey whose wife worked for me in Abu Dhabi?' He said, 'I'm in prison, falsely accused of drug trafficking. Can you get me out?' I didn't reply. I thought that if there's anybody in my past life who I thought might be involved in drug trafficking, it's probably Joubé. Abu Dhabi commissions, corruption; it was my introduction to a world where what we call bribes, they call commissions and there is a clash of cultures. In those days it wasn't illegal for British firms to pay commissions to people who were associated with officials; that only became illegal much later on; 2003/4 the law changed. It was illegal to pay bribes in Britain, but it wasn't illegal for British companies to pay them overseas. It was part of the way things worked. Everyone had to pay a commission, so whoever got the contract the commission was paid. A bribe was when some favour was shown to you; here there was no favour shown; it was a price of entry, I think. It was quite an interesting concept, but we had to stay well away from that.

CMM: you were transferred to the Admin Stream and transferred to Libya. Were you doing a different kind of job there?

Second Secretary, Tripoli, Libya, 1981-84

Yes, because politics was very difficult in Libya, my job was split commercial and political, because of my commercial experience. There was another second secretary just commercial. It was a very frustrating place, because [Muammar] Gaddafi was in full flow then. He was trying implement his little green book which wouldn't have passed an O level Economics exam. The economics of it were ludicrous and we were seeing that being played out on the streets of Libya. Private shops were being closed; private restaurants were being closed; everything had to be publicly owned or co-operatively owned. You couldn't rent accommodation; it was a nightmare in fact. My first few months in Libya were very difficult.

The Ambassador was a guy called Michael Edes, not my favourite ambassador, and we had a Deputy-Ambassador who was Graham Burton, who was one of my favourite people in the Foreign Office. Before going out to Libya I was called to a meeting by Personnel Department. Graham was going out as Deputy Head of Mission; I was going out as Second Secretary and a guy called Frank Marshall was going as the Vice-Consul. Personnel called us

in and said, ‘Look, morale in Tripoli is very bad. You’ve all been chosen for your competencies in the jobs, but also because of your personalities. We want to see if we can boost morale in the Embassy. We all agreed that although we would be arriving at different times, we would within a few months of all getting there have a meeting and see what conclusions we’ve come to about morale.’ We did that. The conclusions we’d come to were that a) the Ambassador was a bit of a shit and b) there’s no booze. The rest of the Embassy wasn’t entertaining, doing what diplomats do, outreach, getting to know people; that just wasn’t happening, and they were all a bit miserable.

Libya was very difficult. Gaddafi closed supermarkets. When we first arrived there was an Italian supermarket, that was closed and he opened these great big department stores which were run by the Libyan department store company. At first, they were all very well stocked, but they had no system of ensuring ongoing supplies. Nobody had ever run a shop before. The Libyans had never seen these department stores with big escalators. The Libyans would go in with big trolleys and they believed the propaganda that the Leader will provide, because they would fill their trolleys up and just walk out. They had to introduce a system of security at the doors. It was bizarre. Eventually, the supermarkets were emptied and they never really restocked them. Eventually we were bringing in food supplies as well, with trips to Malta, trips out to Tunisia as well. If you saw a lorry with bananas, you’d follow it to see where it was going and buy the bananas off the back of the lorry, because they would be sold out. It was a difficult place to sustain life and that was the same for Libyans and diplomats.

It was always very difficult to rent a house. The house I was moving into when I arrived was taken over by a Libyan colonel. The Ambassador, Michael Edes, insisted that we would get it back, so I should live in temporary accommodation. I lived in temporary accommodation for eight months. When you are the new second secretary, you defer to the Ambassador and his confidence that we would get it back. After eight months I was pretty confident that we were never getting it back and I myself found somewhere else to live. Originally the place I found was too big and Graham moved in there; then I found somewhere else for me. It was all very expensive because Libyans were only allowed to own one home, so they couldn’t rent out homes, and there was always a degree of subterfuge going on if you wanted a place to rent. As I was leaving to go on leave, I said to Graham, ‘The Ambassador’s delusional. We’re never going to get that place back. I’m not living in temporary accommodation throughout my posting. If the Foreign Office is not prepared to rent this place, I’m not bringing my wife back. It’s not viable.’ They bit the bullet and rented the place. I said to the

Ambassador, ‘If we do get the house back, that’ll be fine; somebody else can live here because we’re all living in inferior accommodation.’ We never did get that place back. During my time, towards the end, the Admin Officer came to me and said, ‘I’ve just had the Colonel in who took your house. He’s been in complaining that the air conditioning doesn’t work anymore. Could we fix it?’ Talk of brass neck and cheek. I said, ‘I hope you sent him on his way.’ He said, ‘Oh, yes, I did.’ Libya was a very strange place, very difficult place.

Near East and North Africa Department, FCO, 1984-85

From Libya I went back to London. Originally, I was on the Libya desk; I went back into Near East and North Africa Department, NENAD, and then I was on the Libya and Syria desk. I was responsible for two countries that were pariahs. We no longer had an Embassy in Damascus, because we’d broken off relations with the Syrians following the Hindawi affair in which the Syrians had been implicated in a plot to bomb an El Al airliner and we had broken off relations. Roger Tomkys had been our Ambassador in Syria, and he had been recalled and we no longer had an ambassador there. Then, a month after I left Libya, we had the shooting of WPC [Yvonne] Fletcher in St James’s Square outside the Libyan People’s Bureau. They’d fired on a demonstration and killed WPC Fletcher in the Square. The police had that place surrounded because the gunshot had come from the Libyan People’s Bureau, and they were refusing to hand over the individual who had fired the shot. The Libyans then surrounded our Embassy and all my colleagues whom I had just left were all surrounded, and they were all being held hostage. That went on for quite some time until an arrangement was reached and, much to the chagrin of the *Daily Mail*, we had to let all the Libyans out, including the one who’d shot WPC Fletcher, and fly back to Libya at the same point that the Libyans allowed our people to leave. Diplomatic relations were cut off. Oliver Miles had arrived a few months before I left. I remember him saying to me, ‘Yes, we’re going to transform this relationship.’ It did get transformed, but not in the way he had envisaged it. He was recalled and you’ll remember Julia Miles leading the wives out singing *Rule Britannia*, which I and many others thought cringe worthy! However, for the tabloid press the biggest story was that we had abandoned the rabbits.

As I was on the Libya/Syria desk, I remember having Oliver Miles and Roger Tomkys both coming into NENAD to say, ‘And when are we going to restore relations with Libya and Syria? When do you think we’ll be going back?’ I said to them, ‘Over Mrs Thatcher’s dead body. You guys need to go and find other jobs. There’s no way you’re going anywhere near

Libya or Syria any time soon. It's just not in the realm of politics.' I remember telling them both that this wasn't going to happen, nor did it, because we went on from there to the West Berlin discotheque bombing in 1986, which then led to the US bombing of Libya. I was also one of the Resident Clerks, the Foreign Office Emergency Officer. We now have a 24-hour Operations Centre. In those days you had six Resident Clerks who took a turn each of spending the night in the Foreign Office in a little flat. Four of them spent one night a week, one did the weekend, and one was off. They all had different day jobs. I happened to be the Resident Clerk the night that Ronald Reagan asked Margaret Thatcher to be able to use an RAF base, Upper Heyford I think it was, from which to fly longer-range bomber aircraft to attack Libya. They needed our permission to do so. I remember Geoffrey Howe, then Foreign Secretary ringing me at about one in the morning; I'm in bed – it's a sleeping watch, you're not always up all night. He said, 'I'm coming over. We've got a request from the Americans that we'll have to process overnight.' Geoffrey Howe comes over in his black tie (he had been at dinner in No 10 when the request from Reagan arrived) and I'm there in my dressing gown and he tells me that Ronald Reagan has asked permission to use a British airbase because they are going to bomb terrorist targets in Libya. I said to the Foreign Secretary, 'That's a co-incidence because I'm the Libya desk officer.' He said, 'That's handy. What do you think?' I said, 'It's going to be very difficult to say no.' We get the team assembled. Graham Burton who was now back in London as Head of Security Co-ordination Department which was the new established counter-terrorism department. He assembles a team; they come in. We consider all the options; we get the legal advice, submit a paper to the Prime Minister for 7am the next morning, which basically says it'll be very difficult to say no. We agree to the Americans using our bases. The French had refused so they were having to go round France, which comes to another point later on for historians.

You might think that was all very exciting, but, because we weren't engaged with Libya and Syria, there wasn't really enough policy work going on. At the time I was a bit bored. I thought, I don't want to spend another two years doing this. The Iran-Iraq desk was getting busy and they were under real strain. They had somebody on that who really wasn't up to the job, so we did a swap. He came and did quiet old Libya-Syria - after the bombing there was nothing much happening - and I went to do Iran-Iraq in Middle East Department.

Middle East Department, Iran/Iraq Desk, FCO, 1985-86

Iran and Iraq had been at war since 1980. We were under a lot of pressure at the time on arms sales to Iraq. We had a ban on arms sales to Iraq, but then we had a problem with dual-use equipment. There was quite a bit of controversy over that, the Matrix-Churchill affair. That's how I got involved with the Scott Inquiry, because I was responsible for the licencing; I was running the Foreign Office's end of the licencing of dual-use equipment to Iraq. It was an inter-departmental process with the Department of Trade and the Ministry of Defence. We were saying this is permissible because it is not lethal weaponry; it may have dual use, but we think it has a legitimate civilian use. We were signing these things off and putting up advice to ministers. Then it got quite complicated. You remember Matrix-Churchill were supplying tubes to Iraq and then it became more obvious that these might be being used by Iraq to develop a long-range gun, the super-gun. We had authorised licences for Matrix-Churchill because it was dual use, and we didn't have any evidence that it was anything untoward. But as evidence began to mount, I remember getting a report just before Christmas that basically said we think the Iraqis are trying to develop a super-gun and Matrix-Churchill tubes are part of this process. I remember that report coming in and circulating it to everybody who was allowed to see it in the inter-departmental committee and saying, 'We really need to meet early in the New Year to give advice to minsters and to consider a) whether we'll licence future sales and b) whether we should rescind licences that are already extant'. That was setting up the advice to ministers. This did happen, we met in the New Year, and we decided that we would not rescind the licences we had already approved because that might open us to legal challenge from the company, but we would not issue future licences and that's the decision ministers took. Further down the line, that became the subject of the Scott Inquiry about whether the Government had lived up to its own pronouncements. Geoffrey Howe had said if there were any changes to our licensing regime, he would inform the House of Commons and there was a big debate on whether he had changed the regime and whether he had informed the House and whether the regime was the right one. It became quite controversial, led to the Scott Inquiry and I became a witness at the Scott Inquiry.

I was one of the early witnesses to explain the process, what we had done, what ministers knew and all of that. I told them about the process and how we were aware that it was dual use; these were the rules we were applying and that we had authorised licences, but when we got the intelligence, we reconsidered. When did you get the intelligence? I said, 'Well, the

intelligence came on my desk …' These were the days when it was all paper. 'The intelligence report came just before the Christmas break.' 'What did you do with it?' 'I circulated it to the appropriate departments and set up a meeting first thing in the New Year to consider what advice we would give to ministers.' 'What happened to the intelligence report between then and when you gave advice to ministers?' 'I put it in my Top-Secret cupboard.' Headline next day: *Top Secret Report Languishes in Cupboard Over Christmas,* as if somehow the civil servant wasn't taking this seriously. The fact was there was no urgency to it; there were no pending licences and ministers subsequently took the decision not to rescind the licences that were already extant, so it was neither here nor there. It was my first brush with an Inquiry and being quizzed by a QC. It was hostile, the questioning. The Foreign Office said I could have a lawyer with me, but I thought why should I? I'll tell the truth. But you do feel that you are in the dock and that they are there to find where the wrong-doing and in some cases, I suppose, whether Ministers or civil servants have covered up. Trying to explain the process – they hear what they want to hear, and the Press want a good headline. The idea we'd have cancelled our Christmas holidays to hold a meeting for something that wasn't urgent! Not everything that is important is urgent. It was important but not urgent. That whole Iran-Iraq saga was an interesting job.

I did a year on the Libya-Syria desk and then a year on Iran-Iraq, so two jobs instead of one and then I went to PUSD in 1986. PUSD was the department within the Foreign Office that serviced the PUS (Permanent Under Secretary) and the Foreign Office's dealings with the Intelligence agencies, because at that time neither GCHQ nor SIS were avowed; they were secret organisations. The Foreign Secretary was also the person who had to speak for GCHQ, because it was an intelligence agency with an external focus. I was the desk officer for GCHQ. That was the very secret side of the job but at the same time the Government were trying to de-unionise GCHQ. The Foreign Secretary was having to answer for this in Parliament, the de-unionisation. I was dealing with that bit of it, the Parliamentary side of the de-unionisation, the public side, and the secret side of it. I remember reading the submission that had gone up before about de-unionisation, saying 'this is not likely to be controversial.' I thought, the Foreign Office person who wrote this has clearly never been in a union. Given my background, I knew exactly how controversial it would be. It was a very schizophrenic job. One minute I'd be briefing the Foreign Secretary about something Top Secret and the next moment I would be briefing him on what he had to say in Parliament about the de-unionisation. Eventually both GCHQ and SIS were avowed, and I think the de-unionisation

was an important catalyst for this. It was fascinating and I did that for two years. Then I went to Australia in 1988 as Joint Intelligence Committee Representative (JICREP)

Joint Intelligence Committee Representative and later Head of Political Section and Intelligence Liaison, Australia (Canberra), 1988-1992

I think the reason that I got the JICREP job in Australia was because of my now quite extensive intelligence background, so I was a good fit for that. They also had a policy that after you had done your stint in the Arab world, they liked to send you somewhere nice and civilised and you often found that a lot of Arabists were spread around Canada, United States, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa. I think they were trying to give us a rest from language stress after all that Arabic. The JICREP job in Australia was interesting and I thought Vanessa ought to have a bit of civilisation at some point, where you don't have to worry about everyday life, where your next bottle of wine or your next piece of meat is going to come from. By then we had a six-month old and we were planning to have more kids, so to be somewhere civilised where you can bring up young children: that was the thinking when I applied for that job.

It was an interesting time in Australia because 1988 was their bicentennial, so The Queen was visiting, Margaret Thatcher visited and wanted to re-set the relationship. She came out with the aim of getting away from the traditional British-Australian relationship in which the Brits think of the Australia as a recent colony and the Australians think of us as Pommy bastards, trying to have a more modern relationship. It was a very deliberate attempt to re-set the relationship. Indeed, for a while we had a Cabinet sub-committee on Australia every month. Ministers would meet and Margaret Thatcher would ask them what they'd done to further the modern relationship with Australia. We got a lot of attention, and we got a lot of visitors by ministers, so it was quite an interesting time. The Aussies were going through a whole period of introspection about who are we? Are we a European outpost? Are we an Asia-Pacific country? And they began to find their own way which I think has matured over the last thirty years. They are in the Asia-Pacific, that's where they are located, but they are still part of a wider Anglo-phone cultural world; the intelligence relationship is intact and the broader global outlook is intact, but they also have good relationships with Asia.

Australia was a very easy place to operate in so not much of a professional challenge. Boring. Gareth Evans was the Foreign Minister at the time and he was one of those foreign ministers, intellectual foreign ministers, who would set out the strategic vision in regular

speeches. I had a big collection of his speeches on my desk. Sometimes you might get a request from London saying, 'Without consulting your hosts, tell us what their attitude to x would be.' In Australia that was easier to answer than it was in other countries. Or you would get instructions, 'Could you ask the Australians what their position on this is, or what position they would be likely to take?' I get this telegram; it would be sent off at the end of the working day in London. I would get it almost instantly because of the time difference at the start of my working day. I would ring up my Aussie pals in the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and ask them. They'd say, 'You could come over or I could send you the submission we've just sent up to Gareth Evans.' I thought, 'That'd be nice.' They would send over their submission which would lay out what their thinking was. I'd send a diptel back saying, 'They haven't made up their mind yet, but this is the way they're thinking, and they think the Minister will choose this.' The ideal answer. I'd send that off at my close of play. Again because of the time difference they would have the answer as soon as they were back at work the next day. It made me look very efficient. But I didn't really have enough to do. The JICREP role on its own did not fill my day. The FCO cut the position of First Secretary Information; so I took that on as well. I still wasn't fully employed; I was doing as much as I could to fill my time up even with this new relationship. The journey times were zero; the communications were good; it was a function of how easy a country Australia is to operate in. Things that would take me three days in Saudi Arabia would take me ten minutes in Australia. I remember saying to the High Commissioner, Sir John Coles, who'd been in Mrs Thatcher's office – we'd all become priority-objective orientated by then, 'I've sent a list back to Whitehall of all the reporting requirements, all the things I'm doing and asked them to rate them zero to ten of value. I've given them a list of other things I could conceivably do, topics I could cover, and asked them to rate them zero to ten.' I got this back, very helpful. The things that I was doing were all in the six to ten category and the things I might do were all in the zero to three category. I said to him, 'I could fill my day up with all this rubbish that nobody wants or I could just accept that I haven't got a full-time job. I'd like to go and start to play golf in the afternoon a couple of days a week. Is that all right? I'll work any hours you want me; I'm not shirking here, but I'm not going to sit in the office and pretend.' He said, 'No, that's fine. I know where you are.' That's where I took up golf, in Australia, and amateur dramatics as well. I used to appear at the Canberra Rep. There was no professional theatre, so the Canberra Rep was the nearest we got. They had professional directors and we had a full-time theatre manager and we had a physical theatre, but the actors were all unpaid, so I did a couple of productions a year. My youngest son was born there, so

he's an Aussie. It was a lovely posting, but that's what probably shaped my willingness to go to Sudan, Iraq and Afghanistan later on. For professional satisfaction and value, somehow I wasn't temperamentally suited for cultured, civilised capitals.

Mrs Thatcher and other Conservative ministers came out to re-set the relationship, but in Australia we had a Labor Government. It was Bob Hawke and Paul Keating. It was a three-time elected Labor Government. Gerald Kaufman, the shadow Foreign Secretary passed through, and I said to him, 'Why are Labour not more interested in Australia?' thinking we needed to thicken up the relationship and the Conservatives didn't quite speak the same language as the Australian Labor Party. I thought if we wanted to thicken the relationship, we should have Labour Opposition figures come and engage with them. That was my 'British interests' hat and also a little bit of me said, 'Labour ought to be learning some lessons here.' I said, 'You guys should come out here'. That led to a visit by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Tony Blair was the shadow Employment Secretary and Gordon Brown was the shadow Trade Secretary. Both young and up-and-coming. They came and the High Commissioner said, 'You handle the visit.' I took them round and introduced them to all the Aussie politicians, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating. They had a good programme and there was time at the end before they'd gone, we had breakfast, just the three of us. I was saying to them, 'You're in Opposition. Everything Margaret Thatcher does is measured against her core philosophy. You may not agree with it, but everyone understands what it is. What's your core philosophy?' I remember Gordon Brown coming up with a ten-point plan. I said, 'Yeah, that doesn't sound like a core philosophy. It sounds like a plan.' We had a conversation when I probably revealed my predilections. I didn't say I was Labour, but they might have guessed anyway. That was the first time I'd met them and I was struck by how Gordon Brown seemed to be senior one, the leader, and Blair was very much the junior of the two. Gordon took most of the initiative and the talking. I was very surprised because it wasn't that long after their visit to Australia that John Smith died and Tony Blair became Leader of the Party and if you'd asked me on the basis of that trip, I would have thought it would be Gordon Brown. Blair was quite quiet; he was obviously very bright, very intelligent, but if you'd asked me after that visit who would be the next Leader of the Labour Party, of these two, I'd have said Brown. They'd have to say how much a trip to Australia and seeing a three-time Labor Government in power influenced their future pragmatism and reality check that led to Labour's return to power in the UK. The Australians didn't mess about with Clause Four and left-wing theory; it was all about delivery. It struck me that they

had a lot to learn from a successful government. It was '92 when I left Australia at the end of a very happy time, a very easy time, I thought, and came back to London and I became Deputy Head of UN Department.

Deputy Head of United Nations Department, FCO, 1992-94

These were the days when you could predict your career. You were four years away as a first secretary. You came back; you were then a 5S, as they called them, an Assistant Head of Department and that was your stepping stone for counsellor. These were all very predictable times. I was sent as Deputy Head of UN Department. Again - I don't know how this reputation got around - I was sent basically to look after Glynne Evans. She was the Head of UN Department and Roger Bone was the Assistant Under Secretary at the time who covered international organisations. Roger Bone had me into his office and said, 'Look, your predecessors have all been chewed up and spat out by Glynne Evans. She's quite a tough operator and we've chosen you because we think you're robust enough to survive it.' I said, 'Very good, thank you very much.' He said, 'But I just want you to know that if you have any trouble you can come to me.' That was my introduction to Glynne Evans who I'd never met. She was Head of UN Department throughout my time.

CMM: Was she a difficult boss?

Yes, she was. I liked her in the end, but she was a nightmare. She was a hopeless man/woman manager. Unusually at the time, we had five female Heads of Section in UN Department: the First Secretary in charge of Humanitarian Affairs was a woman; the First Secretary in charge of Political Affairs was a woman; across the board: Head of Institutions, Head of Peacekeeping, Human Rights Unit. We had these five Sections and they were all headed by women, all of whom had major difficulties with her. I was in this sandwich: I had my female boss and five direct reports were all women. She was a workaholic. Her work style was she would attend meetings all day and so people couldn't get hold of her and then she would come back about six o'clock and expect to deal with all departmental stuff requiring others to work very long hours. It was a time when the long-hours culture was under attack. I remember Glynne standing in my doorway once at about seven o'clock, maybe later. All our lights were on, everyone was there. She said, 'Yup, this is the busiest department in the Foreign Office.' I said, 'Or it could be the least efficient.' I'd got to know her quite well by then.

It was tricky, because we were dealing with a lot of things. Peacekeeping was very big; it eventually ended up with its own department. It was during the Bosnia crisis and we had peacekeepers in Bosnia; we had peacekeepers in Africa; it was UN reform. We were out of UNESCO and we were under pressure to get back into UNESCO. There was Security Council business. David Hannay was the Ambassador in New York. Not easy. When you're talking Hannay and Glynne, you're not talking about happy underlings. They were not well known for their empathy or their care and attention. There was a time when Glynne was ordered to go on a top management course to see if she could improve her management skills. She wasn't given a choice. The PUS said, 'You're on it. This is not a request; it's an order.' They were telling her she'd have to change; there were too many casualties. She went off on this management course and she came back with an action plan and the action plan had to have a mentor. She had to appoint someone as mentor to hold her to this action plan. She said to me, 'Would you do it? Would you be my mentor?' I said, 'Show me the action plan.' It was things like: Don't rubbish everyone's opinion immediately; give people time to explain their point of view. What I would regard as normal behaviour. She would go into these departmental meetings and she would start off with the best intentions and then she'd revert to type. I'd say, 'Glynne, point four!' She did get better, but she did fall out with all sorts of people. If you stood up to her, she was fine. If you wilted, you were a goner. She loved to be around soldiers. She was a force of nature and took no prisoners. If you accepted her for what she was, you could deal with her but you did have to be a particular personality.

It might be something to do with that generation of women in the Foreign Office. It was a time of promoting diversity and she hated the idea that women might be promoted because they were women, because she'd got there under her own steam. She was not very sympathetic to them. It was that generation of women who had really put in the effort. She was bright and she delivered. She was very good at producing a foreign policy result, peacekeeping for example, but there were a lot of casualties, a lot of debris. The other women couldn't cope with her. Roger Short was Head of Personnel Services; he'd been my boss in PUSD. He rang me up one day and said, 'I've had Glynne on the phone. She's complaining about the standard of dress of females in the Foreign Office, about their sartorial elegance.' I said, 'What did you say to her?' He said, 'I suggested that I invite all the women in the Office to parade before me in the morning, so I could check them out. She thought for a moment I might be serious.' We had one woman in the Department who liked

leather mini-skirts, another one who was a twinset and pearls person; they were all different. They were all acceptable, but Glynne didn't think they were properly dressed. We used to have UN talks with different foreign ministries; we'd have them with the Americans; we'd have them with the Germans; we'd have them with the French – headquarters talks. The French ones were always in late February, I think, and I realised later they coincided with the Hermès sale in Paris. For me it was an absolute crash course in management, how to do it, how not to do it.

CMM: 1992 to 1994 was the Bosnia War. Did you go out there?

WP: No, no, that was Glynne's war. She did all Bosnia; peacekeeping was hers. 'You run the Department, William.' Bosnia was her war.

UNESCO – we wanted to get back into UNESCO. We'd left with the Americans because we didn't think their budget was properly spent. Most of the time we were trying to get the UN to reform itself; we were a pain in the neck. We had a whole Section trying to get the agencies to spend their money better. The Americans would never put the hard work in; they would threaten to withhold money, but they didn't put in the hard work of trying to reform it. They were always debtors and would never pay their dues. We paid our dues and we put the hard work in to reform the agencies. We had a lot of Security Council reform stuff; that was quite active at the time and a big rise in humanitarian affairs as a subject matter and human rights as well. I went to New York a few times and to Geneva, but Bosnia was Glynne's. UND was a great introduction to multilateral affairs at a time when the international system was still functioning especially the UN Security Council. After two years in the job I was looking for promotion so focused on what I would do next.

Overseas Inspector, FCO, 1994-95

In 1994 I applied to be an Overseas Inspector which is a head of Department/Counsellor level position. Up to that point Overseas Inspectors tended to be counsellors who were not necessarily going to rise much higher and might have another one or two jobs left in them, usually people in their late fifties. The Chief Inspector at the time (who later became the Permanent Under Secretary at the Ministry of Defence), Kevin Tebbit had an idea to perhaps try something different, by having a younger officer leading an inspection team. It was a bit of an experiment because this would be my first job as a counsellor, with what might be regarded as more limited experience at the senior level. They tried this as something new and

I was happy to do that. I was happy to become an overseas inspector; the idea of travelling the world looking at embassies for two years appealed to me. It was a nice lifestyle: two months away, two months off. It worked well for the family. I had young kids but when you were home, you were home. The normal rules were that an incoming inspector would shadow an outgoing inspector and inherit their team and the teams would change over at different times. I went out to New York to shadow the Inspector I was taking over from. We were inspecting New York and parts of the United States, so that was my introduction. I remember, it's one of the things that sticks in my mind about that – I mentioned David Hannay, the Ambassador to the UN and he was President of the Security Council at the time. There was quite a lot of problems with morale in New York and quite a lot of people were suffering burn out, good people as well. That's one of the aspects that Overseas Inspectors look at, how well the mission is being run; is it focussed on the right things; does it have the right resources. It's not an audit, as such; it is meant to be a management consultancy look at the Embassy. You take the views of all the customers: in Whitehall, what do you expect from the Embassy? What are you getting from them? Are they delivering? That sort of thing. Your job is to take a holistic view of it, a sharply focussed view. We get to New York and it's quite clear in the course of the inspection that morale is not brilliant. I can't remember the Inspector I was taking over from – I was just an observer – he said to David Hannay, 'We're picking up that morale is not very good.' Hannay said, 'What's that got to do with me?' 'I'm President of the World; I haven't got time to worry about morale.' Never occurred to him that he was responsible for running the show. It was classic Hannay. I was thinking we've got Glynne in London and Hannay here! It's a surprise we get anything done at the UN, but we did, because people are ambitious, and they did it. But there wasn't much tea and sympathy or loving care and attention. That was my introduction to inspections!

I did three inspections, and I can't remember what order they came in. I did South-East Asia, South Africa and Italy. We were supposed to go to South Africa in February 1995; we got a message saying we would have to change the dates because Her Majesty was paying a state visit to South Africa. Would it be OK to switch the dates to May-June of that year? I tried to contain my enthusiasm because I'm a rugby fan and May-June happened to overlap with the Rugby World Cup. I was being invited to take my team to South Africa, visit Durban, Johannesburg, Pretoria and Cape Town where we had missions, in any order I liked. I got the programme for Scotland's games and I managed to cover all of Scotland's games, which was

absolutely fantastic. It was not that controversial, given that our resources were evenly spread and the World Cup happening there at that time was an added bonus.

I do remember Italy. I think I was known as the Butcher of Italy. Italy hadn't been inspected for four years, and the previous inspector left the Inspectorate to go for a counsellor job in Italy. I think I had eight years' worth of fat to deal with. Our inspection of Italy was brutal in terms of what cuts were made. There was uproar. I closed the Consulate in Venice; I downgraded the Consulate in Florence from a UK-based position to a locally-engaged position; I cut the Minister job in Rome, David Colvin, that was bitter; I downgraded the Consulate-General in Naples from a Grade 4 to a Grade 5; got rid of the Honorary Consul in Genoa – that was no longer required. On a ten-million-pound budget we saved 1.4 million, so it was quite brutal, but I could have gone further in terms of efficiencies. We spent nearly two months in Italy. They had a very complicated system for moving us around, involving flights, trains and pre-positioning drivers, which I eventually put paid to. I said, 'Look, why not just rent a van and I'll drive it? We'll be on our own. I'll drive around Italy, and it will be simpler.' The advantage of that was I got to plan everything and visit a few nice spots along the way. I said to my team, 'Here we are. We're the time and motion guys. I know it's a tradition that we work twenty-three hours a day. If we are going to set an example, we're not going to do that. We're going to work long hours, but regular hours and we're going to do things efficiently. We're not going to use more words than necessary; our reports are going to be much more succinct, much shorter. At the same that we're doing this, we are going to reform ourselves.' They were all for that. So we'll be eating out in the evening, one asked. "Too right we'll be eating out in the evening". A nice new Italian restaurant every evening and, 'By the way, on our way from Rome to Florence we're going to spend the night in Siena, because I've never been there.' My team were happy. Our reports were a third of the normal size; they were readable, and they were no less valuable, in my view.

We started in Rome and my key point of contact was David Colvin, who was the Minister and the Deputy Head of Mission. Patrick Fairweather was the Ambassador, lovely man. I spent a lot of time with David saying, 'OK, how do these Consulates work? What are the demands on your time?' I must have spent in total over twenty hours, chatting away about how everything was run and organised. The information we had to go on was the information London told us, what all the departments in London told us and what came out of people's own mouths in response to our questions. There was no science to this; it wasn't a trick. You tell us what you do, tell us why you do it, tell us who wants you to do this, tell us

how you do it, tell us what resources you've got to do it and we'll tell you what London are expecting from you. I go to Venice, and we have a Consulate in a beautiful palazzo right next to the Galleria Accademia, frescos on the ceiling. It's the Canaletto view. I stand there and I'm looking at a Canaletto. Marvellous view. I also knew, because I'm a historian, it's the longest serving diplomatic mission Britain's ever had, having closed Padua some centuries before. I interview the Consul, and I interview the staff. I say, 'I suppose this is a really important place, lots of visitors, lots of consular cases.' 'No, no, no. We don't really do consular work here. People who come here can look after themselves. Rarely do we have a big problem. When Michael Heseltine had a heart attack here, somebody came up from Rome to deal with it. No, no, our big mission is commercial; we're here for commercial reasons.' I said, 'Apart from tourism, what sort of commercial work is there in Venice?' They said, 'We also go to Verona; there are big chemical factories in Verona.' I said, 'Oh, yes. I've just been to Milan and Milan covers commercial work for the whole country and they have specialists in the chemical industry and the car industry.' They said, 'Oh, yes, but we go to Verona as well, because there's stuff they can't do.' I said, 'So you're covering chemicals in Verona when there are specialists in Milan. How long does it take them to get from Milan to Verona?' 'About two hours.' 'How long does it take you to get to Verona from here by the time you've got the ferry?' 'About two and a half hours.' I said, 'OK, it takes you two and a half hours, and it takes them two hours and the specialists are there. So what bit of the chemical industry in Verona do you cover?' 'Oh, the bits they're too busy to do.' I write up the report and say, there's nothing here that can't be covered from elsewhere and this is a very expensive place to operate. We should close it. I was standing on the Grand Canal and saying to myself, Am I really going to recommend closing this? That recommendation was accepted, but a few years later it was overturned. There's a big lobby in the House of Lords for Venice. There was no real push back from the Office on Venice; they thought it was the right decision, downgrading Florence to a locally engaged consul. The days of needing a Consul to certify ships in Genoa had long gone; although the Consul offered to do it for free, because he liked the status. I said, 'That's fine. As long as you don't get paid, you can keep the title of Honorary Consul.' Naples, again, was downgraded to a First Secretary, which was quite generous, because they had to cover Sicily and Calabria and there was the Mafia.

Then I said to David, 'And I'm recommending cutting your job. You've got a Counsellor Political and a Head of Management, and you've got a senior Ambassador. The Counsellor

can substitute for the Ambassador. That's what happens in most big places; the days of minister-level deputies in a country which is a close ally and, in the EU, are over. We could dispense with your job.' He said, 'But you haven't talked to me about my job.' I said, 'What do you think I've been doing talking to you for what must be over twenty hours? I have been questioning you about what you do in relation to the whole network in Italy and I'm not seeing anything that couldn't be done differently; couldn't be done by other people and you're quite an expensive resource.' He was livid and they fought it hard. When I got back to see Kevin Tebbit, he said, 'I know you're doing the right thing, but as long as we get the rest through, I'm going to compromise on this. I'm going to concede that David can stay on to the end of his tour and he won't be replaced at that level.' It was all part of the politics. Because they were so busy fighting that, they agreed to all the rest. I had a fabulous time and learned a bit of Italian in the evening. I was quite pleased with myself after two months; I got stopped by a family in Rome at the end of our time, asking for directions in Italian. Not only could I give directions in Italian, but I knew the way. They were out of towners; I knew Rome quite well by then. 'Va dritto e gira destra dopo a sinistra.' They must have thought these Romans are nice.

The really controversial one was South-East Asia where I had to inspect Burma, Vietnam, Thailand and Laos. In Burma and Vietnam, we had two very tricky Ambassadors. In Burma we had Julian Hartland-Swan, who was known by his staff as 'Heartless-Swine.' He was a very old-school autocratic ambassador. In fact, there was a young man, who is still in the Foreign Office now, who was thinking of leaving the Foreign Office at the time and I persuaded him to stay, saying that this was not behaviour that was any longer tolerated in the Foreign Office and this autocratic approach would not survive and he should not give up his career because of this one man. The Ambassador in Vietnam was Peter Williams. He was another Ambassador whom the staff loathed. It was part of the Inspector's role to address a letter to the Ambassador about our overall findings and the state of morale in the Embassy. We also showed our draft reports to relevant staff in the Embassy so they could correct factual errors or provide additional information. I found out that some inspectors left that letter as they were leaving the country. I always delivered it to the Ambassador twenty-four hours before I left, so he (they were all hes in this case) would know what I was saying.) The letters to Hartland-Swan and Williams were frank and pretty damning in terms of their management style, the impact it had on the Embassy and how out of touch they were with modern thinking. They were less than happy. One of them, Williams in Vietnam, sent a

letter to the Chief Inspector, Kevin Tebbit, making all kinds of accusations against me, how I hadn't done x and y, undermining his authority. Kevin knew me well by this time. He says, 'The PUS has had this letter. I've told the PUS that he can trust your judgment and there's nothing to worry about, but he wants to see you.' I called on the PUS who asks me for more background. I was able to provide additional colour that I had not included in my original letter. I told him 'This man is a nightmare. The staff want to resign. His style is diminishing our presence in the place. The staff don't want to work for him and he's so old-school that we shouldn't be having this in the Foreign Office.' He said, 'What do you think I should do?' I said, 'If I were you, I'd sack him. I know you don't sack anybody …' He was eased out. But if it was me and I was in private industry I would sack him. He was so bad. His letter of complaint rather backfired on him because it gave me a chance to tell the PUS directly that this was not the standard that you want young people to follow. This is beyond the pale. I learned the art of difficult conversations in that job.

Deputy Ambassador and Consul General Eastern Province, Saudi Arabia (Riyadh) 1995-98

After my year as an Inspector, they decided to send me to Saudi Arabia as Deputy Ambassador and that's when I had to consult my wife. I knew if I went to Riyadh, I would be embarking on a mainly Middle East trajectory for the rest of my career and this would have to be a joint decision.

CMM: That was the moment that your career turned back to the Middle East and focussed on trouble spots.

Saudi Arabia was my second counsellor job, an important post, Deputy Ambassador, but it was also my recognition, as I said to Vanessa, 'Once I do this, my trajectory is going to be the Middle East. The likelihood is that I'll do Riyadh, if I'm lucky I'll get Head of Middle East Department afterwards. From Middle East Department I'll go somewhere in the Middle East and that'll be me. That's how it turned out and going to Riyadh the first time was a conscious decision I was orientating myself back to the Middle East when lots of my other colleagues had made deliberate efforts to evade it.

CMM: This is the second interview with Sir William Patey for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

CMM: William, we are going to take up the story today in 1995. That was the year in which you went to Riyadh in Saudi Arabia for the first time, as Deputy Ambassador and Consul General Eastern Province. Would you like to take it from there?

Yes, that was my first Middle East posting at Counsellor level. I had been promoted to Counsellor eighteen months earlier, when I was the Overseas Inspector, and this was a conscious decision to go back to the Middle East. I hadn't served in the Middle East since my time in Libya in 1984. I had been in London; I'd gone to Australia; I'd come back to London and been Deputy Head of UN Department and then been an Overseas Inspector, so I had been out of the Middle East for ten years and even then, my Arabic wasn't brilliant. Ten years after Libya I really had to start learning it again, to revise it, but it was a conscious decision to go back to the Middle East. I discussed it with Vanessa, my wife. I said, 'If I do this, this is me re-investing in the Middle East and this is where I am going to be concentrating on for quite a bit of my career.' I didn't realise it was going to be nearly all of it. I was still interested in the Middle East because I'd been dealing with the Middle East prior to going there. Even in London, I'd been dealing with Middle East matters. Vanessa, always the trooper, said, 'Yes, I can do Saudi Arabia.' So, it was a joint decision. My children were at primary school at the time, which was perfect; there was a British School in Riyadh. We certainly wouldn't have gone anywhere we couldn't have taken our children, but there's a very good British School in Riyadh, so they both went to the British School; I was an ex-officio trustee of the British School. It was actually a very nice posting for a young family because there was the usual domestic assistance. In Australia we always had trouble with baby-sitting; for this, the kids were a little bit older, and we had live-in help, so that was good.

David Gore-Booth was the Ambassador; I'd known David before, but we only overlapped for about six months. He was succeeded by Andrew Green, a very different character. I got on well with both, but most of my time there was with Andrew. They had very different personalities. Andrew was a devoted Christian, a member of the evangelical Alpha Group. I'm basically an atheist, though I had to pretend to be a Christian in Saudi Arabia, because there atheism is beyond the pale. The Saudis couldn't get the concept of not believing in God; when you filled in any forms for the Saudis you had to put 'Christian'. I'm culturally Christian, so it wasn't a problem.

It was an interesting posting. The Saudis themselves were going through difficult times: the price of oil had gone down to $9 a barrel at one point. King Fahd was king, but he got quite ill during my time there, so Crown Prince Abdullah was acting as Regent. The Saudis were going through what I came to understand was their usual attempts to modernise and diversify away from oil, which were never very successful. We were also beginning to see, although it wasn't fully acknowledged by the Saudis, indigenous terrorism in Saudi Arabia. We saw the bombing of the Al-Khobar Towers, the American Marine Base in the Eastern Province, and a bomb in downtown Riyadh in 1995. Al-Khobar was attributed to the Iranians, because it was anti-American, but this was the same time that Al Qaeda was bombing the USS Cole in Yemen, and the attacks on the American Embassy in Nairobi and in Tanzania. [Osama] Bin Laden was in Sudan during this period. In 1996 he had had to escape to Sudan and then he was kicked out and sent off to Afghanistan. This was a time when Al Qaeda was not at the height, if you regard the height as the bombing of the Twin Towers, but it was the beginning of that period running up to the Twin Towers.

The Saudis were in what I would call a denial phase: since in their mind there was no such thing as indigenous terrorism in Saudi Arabia. We had a couple of incidents, small-scale terrorist incidents in which small bombs were placed in the cars of some British citizens who'd been involved in the booze business. Alcohol is banned in Saudi Arabia, but there were lots of illicit bars and importing of alcohol. There was a group of Brits who were involved in this and because of the people who had been targeted, the Saudis decided that the perpetrators were rival booze dealers, which didn't ring true with us, because we knew that these people tended to co-operate and collaborate. Our thought was that this was indigenous terrorism: Islamists would object to the fact that people were involved in the alcohol trade, and they would regard them as perfectly legitimate targets. The Saudis arrested and convicted three Brits who became known as the Booze Bombers. That was a running sore throughout the latter stages of my time there and continued under Simon McDonald, who succeeded me and who had to deal with most of the fallout. That was the beginning of that terrorism period.

My biggest issue was the murder of an Australian nurse, Yvonne Gifford. The Saudis picked up two British nurses and accused them of the murder. The Saudi method of investigation was to pick up likely suspects and these young women had put themselves in the frame because they had used the dead woman's credit card. The Saudis, not unreasonably, thought they might have killed her and taken the credit card. But there is a background to this. The

nurses used to give each other their cards, because they were on duty at different times, and say, 'Could you get me some money?' It wasn't unusual for this to happen. That put them in the frame; they were arrested; I don't think they were beaten. We were pressing for consular access, but we didn't get it until they had confessed and then we saw the confessions. As soon as they saw the Consul, they said, 'These are not our confessions. We didn't do it.' They were convicted in a Saudi court and faced the possibility of a death penalty. That didn't happen because the first thing we did was to get the Australian family of the victim to waive their right to the death penalty. The Saudis said to us, 'Under our system, they'd be subject to the death penalty unless the family of the victim waived that.' That all got very messy, with compensation being paid to the family. At one stage I was going to have to fly out to Australia to persuade the family that a) these women didn't do it and b) that the Saudi convictions were unsound. There is a system in place by which you pay the family compensation. A very helpful company put up some money for that to happen, because the families of the two nurses didn't have that sort of money. The Australian family at first said, 'Let the Saudi justice system take its course.' Then they came round to the idea that maybe the Saudi justice system wasn't that great, and these women weren't guilty. Then a substantial sum of money, nearly a million Australian dollars, was given to charity. From the Saudi-British relations point of view we could not allow these nurses to be executed or detained. I don't think the Saudis would have executed them, but there was constant pressure to get them out of prison. The family was saying to me, 'But they're innocent.' I said, 'Look, they may well be innocent. I don't have to believe in their innocence. All I have to tell you is that this trial was not fair. I'm not going to argue with the Saudis whether they were innocent, one way or another. Our argument is that this trial was unfair and that these women should be released.' Eventually they were released from jail, but they were never pardoned, which became a bone of contention for the nurses later on and in Saudi Arabia their convictions stand.

It was Tony Blair, who was elected in 1997, who got the deal done during one of his visits to Saudi Arabia. I don't know where Andrew Green was, but it was Ghazi Al Gosaibi, the Saudi Ambassador to the UK, and me who were having to draft the communiqué without admitting that the nurses had done anything wrong and to get them released without suggesting in any way that we thought the trial was fair. We were still negotiating that up to the last minute of Tony Blair's visit. He successfully got them released, so that was a big

triumph, without British-Saudi relations going down the tube. That was a running theme through the three and a bit years I was in Saudi.

Andrew Green was quite strategic and left all the management of the Embassy to me. He basically said, 'I leave this to you. Tell me what I need to know.' We had all sorts of problems. In those days I think we had the remnants of Personnel Operations Department. Why they thought sending recovering alcoholics to Saudi Arabia was a good idea, or sending people whose marriages were in trouble, thinking they were going to patch them up in Saudi Arabia. It was a very stressful for everyone, because it is a very strange posting. You have this whole alcohol thing. Diplomats were able to bring in alcohol, with the Saudis turning a blind eye, providing you didn't abuse the privilege. There were embassies that sold it on the open market, because the prices for black-market alcohol were astronomic, very tempting. Some embassies, that's how they ran their embassy: visa fees and alcohol smuggling. Fortunately, Treasury hadn't reached the stage that we had to self-fund in Saudi Arabia. Although I thought if I reported back too much about what other embassies did, Treasury might get an idea in their head. Andrew said, 'You sort all that out,' so I had to monitor the orders being put in by the whole Embassy and also make sure that younger people weren't being put under pressure by expatriates to provide the booze for parties and that sort of thing. I sent a thing round to the Embassy saying, 'Look, this is for your own consumption and entertainment at home. I'm not saying you can't take a bottle of wine as a gift to your host, but do not be put under pressure to supply alcohol for other people's parties. And you must not sell it.' I said, 'I like a drink, and, after the Ambassador, I have the biggest entertaining load in the Embassy. Anyone whose order is bigger than mine will be summoned to explain themselves.' That way I gave them a criterion. There were no major incidents involving alcohol during my time. I said, 'If you are being put under pressure, come and talk to me. I'll deal with the people, the expats, directly.' In the end, as I discovered in places like Libya, without having alcohol to smooth the entertainment path, morale in embassies is not good and their efficiency drops because there is less networking. We had a reasonable supply of alcohol to oil the wheels of diplomacy, but you did have to monitor some of the temptations that were there. Andrew was famously abstemious and there was one point when my order was bigger than his. I went to him and said, 'Here am I monitoring all the rest of the Embassy and I've told them if any of their orders are bigger than mine, there'll be questions. I noticed that one of my orders was bigger than yours last time, shouldn't I check with you?' He said, 'Don't be silly. I trust you.' It was quite funny. He threw the parties he needed to

throw, but he could make the gin go a long way. We got on very well; I liked Andrew. He was a good Ambassador and saw us through the difficulties.

CMM: You mentioned Tony Blair coming out in connection with the release of the British nurses. Did you have a lot of high-level visits?

WP: Yes, quite a bit. The Defence Minister obviously came out; BAE Systems were always renegotiating and defence contracts were massive. I thought when I was Deputy and when I went back as Ambassador that I was lowly paid arms salesman. There were two contradictory things: a very positive security relationship, post the Gulf War with big arms sales contracts, a big trade relationship and on the other hand you had a British press that regarded Saudi Arabia as the most egregious offender against human rights that the world has ever seen. You had that balance and there was always pressure because of consular cases, and it wasn't just our own consular cases; there would be other foreign nationals on death row so that was always a big balancing act to be struck. I used to have frank discussions with Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch. I would say, 'Keep doing your job. That's your job. My job is to balance it all. I can't allow human rights to be at the exclusion of everything else. We have to raise human rights with Saudi Arabia; we have to address the issues, but the Government's position is that we are not making the whole of our political, economic and security relationship dependent on Saudi Arabia improving its human rights.' If you cut off every contact, it wouldn't make any difference. I said to Amnesty and Human Rights Watch, 'All power to your elbow. I'm not saying you shouldn't do it. The fact that we get grief for what you do, we can handle that. And we will raise human rights in our own way.' And we did.

As a direct result of our experiences with the nurses and the booze bombers, we got what I regard as one of our successes, persuading the Saudis to adopt DNA and forensic evidence. People said, 'Why are you engaging with the Saudi police?' Actually, by engaging with the Saudi police, we were able to persuade them that DNA and forensic evidence were tools to help them, and that their methodology of picking up the most likely suspects and beating a confession out of them would lead to them getting the wrong people and if that means that the terrorists are still out there, then it won't work.

We had a case where the brother of the Procurator Fiscal in Scotland happened to be passing a well-known bookstore in Riyadh, called the Jarir Bookstore, when a bomb went off. Because he was in the vicinity – he was in hospital as a result of being a victim – they

decided that he was the perpetrator, and it was a bombing that had gone wrong. We were able to persuade Prince Nayef, then Minister of the Interior but never the most open-minded person - that this was ludicrous. This was a cause celèbre, that this victim had made a confession. We sent over forensic specialists and DNA specialists and Saudi police adopted a lot of the methodology which meant they weren't totally reliant on confessions, which was what they were up to until that point.

They came back to us some time later and said, 'This DNA stuff is really good, and this forensic stuff is really good, but we can't persuade the Saudi judges; they don't know how to receive this evidence.' The Saudi judges were saying, 'This is on the computer; it's just made up.' Then we had to send judges over to train the Saudi judges in how to interpret the DNA etc. It was sensible, low-key, behind-the-scenes work. If it moved the Saudi police away from picking up the suspect which circumstantial evidence pointed to and then beating a confession out of them, that was a big achievement in human rights terms.

It paid dividends later on – we may come to that later on, when I go back as Ambassador in 2007 – because between my time in Saudi in '98 as Deputy and as Ambassador in 2007, those early years of the noughties, the Saudis were no longer able to deny indigenous terrorism, because Al Qaeda planted bombs outside the Ministry of Interior; they attacked ex-patriate compounds in Al-Khobar and in Jeddah; there was a three-year period when Al Qaeda were perpetrating numerous terrorist acts in Saudi Arabia and that led to a much closer engagement on counter-terrorism between the UK and Saudi Arabia under Prince Mohammed bin Nayef, which was in full swing when I went back in 2007.

CMM: Did you have good access to the royal family and the active members who ran the country?

WP: It was very difficult. Obviously, when the Prime Minister came out and when ministers came out, the Ambassador would take them to see the King and the Crown Prince. You didn't have regular access to the King and the Crown Prince at the time. That changed a bit. It was quite an opaque system. The whole government wasn't run by royals and we did have some access; the Ambassador would certainly go and see, and I had access from time to time to, Prince Sultan, the Defence Minister, Prince Nayef, the Interior Minister and the Crown Prince who ran the National Guard, because we had British companies dealing with those ministries, so we would go and see them. It was a bit like Kremlinology. You were feeding off scraps; that's what made it so frustrating. There were lots of princes you could talk to, but

the princes who mattered were the top six or seven. The Governor of Riyadh, I would call on him; I was the Consul General for the Eastern Province; he was the Governor, Prince Salman, now the King. You'd call them, take visitors, but you'd never get into a discussion about what was driving them, what was worrying them, what the politics were. There was usually some business to transact, so you didn't have a frank discussion about terrorism, how that might play and how they were dealing with the Islamist opposition and what their plans for reform would be.

You would deal with a lot of Saudi businessmen. The interesting thing about Saudi Arabia was that, though power rested in the King and a few princes, there was a technocratic level of government. The Minister of Finance was a technocrat; Prince Saud was the Foreign Minister so you would have access to him; and there would be other non-royal ministers that you'd have access to. The generation we were dealing with had all been off doing their PhDs in America or Britain; they were very bright, very well connected. People like Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who was Ambassador in Washington; when he came back, he was the National Security Adviser for a time. I would see him. When you were chargé, you were more likely to get access to these people. What I discovered about Saudi Arabia was that your first three years is an apprenticeship when you are getting to know people and then when you come back again, these people all know you and you go up a level. I suffered a bit because I hadn't done my second secretaryship in Saudi; people like Simon McDonald had been there before and Derek Plumbly: they'd all done their apprenticeship in Arabic there, whereas mine had been in Libya. It was always useful to do a couple of stints in Saudi because on the second stint you reaped the dividends of your first time.

For the language, I had to do three or four months before I went, getting the Arabic back. Doing business, you mostly didn't use Arabic, because the people you're dealing with had all done PhDs in the western world. When you needed your Arabic was essentially when you were talking to the King or the Crown Prince. I would never trust my Arabic, because the issues were too important, so they always had first-rate interpreters. King Abdullah didn't speak very good English at all; Prince Saud always spoke in English. His English was flawless; I wouldn't have dreamed of speaking Arabic to Prince Saud. In my first term, there wasn't the social media stuff either. I only spoke Arabic when I went out into the sticks; you'd go out to the provinces and that's when you'd come across the governor who didn't really speak English and you'd come across officials who didn't speak English. But in Riyadh and in Jeddah you were dealing with fluent English-speakers. It was frustrating in

that sense that you weren't having to use your Arabic all the time, therefore it didn't get to the level of fluency that you would want.

King Abdullah's interpreter became Ambassador to Washington and then Foreign Minister, Adel Al-Jubeir, he was the most amazing interpreter. When he went to Washington, he would get flown back for important meetings to be King Abdullah's interpreter. I remember when Blair met King Abdullah, I was the chargé at the time, and Al-Jubeir was the interpreter. King Abdullah would speak a very strange Arabic, very staccato and monosyllabic. Al-Jubeir was so good that you would think you were having a real conversation. He would understand and would know the policy so well as an adviser to the King that when the King said something, he would expand on it and speak to Blair in a way that there was a conversation going on. The King said about half of what he said, but he wouldn't make stuff up. The King might not have said that, but he was thinking it. He was an interpreter par excellence. I always felt sorry for him. He's the Ambassador to Washington and he has to schlep all the way back. He would obviously come back when the American President was over, but he was also dragged back when the British Prime Minister came as well.

I loved Saudi Arabia; there was a high level of jeopardy, I thought, but I absolutely enjoyed it. It was frustrating in terms of commentating on the politics as there was an awful lot of guesswork. In London there was always a fear that Saudi Arabia, a big, important strategic ally, with a system of government that didn't make any sense, was bound to fail one day. There was always the fear that what happened in Iran would happen in Saudi Arabia. I remember doing a paper on whether there could ever be a coup d'état in Saudi Arabia. I concluded that it would be impossible, because the Saudis had very carefully divided responsibility for the various military capacities amongst all the senior princes. Prince Sultan was in charge of the Army. The National Guard, which was another separate military force, raised from the ranks of the Bedouin, was under Prince Abdullah's command. You had the Ministry of the Interior forces which were quite significant, under Prince Nayef and the Air Force was a separate command. The degree of collusion among these various bodies to have mounted a coup against the Al-Saud without anyone finding out, we concluded, rightly, that it was virtually impossible. So we could rule out a coup. What about an Islamic revolt à la Khomeini? Our conclusion was that the Islamists existed; they had capacity; but they didn't have the capacity to overcome the Al-Saud who, unlike the Shah, did not have a particularly repressive intelligence internal network and who made sure that the economic benefits of oil

were evenly distributed. I remember saying many years later to President Karzai, if only you could introduce a system in Afghanistan which the Al-Saud had. The Shah was an isolated figure whereas the Al-Saud had a really big network; the Saudi middle class were invested in stability in a big way and invested in the status quo. Because of the way that the Saudi royal family worked, there was a means of redress. You could go to your prince who would listen to your grievance – twenty thousand princes gave you quite a big network. There was a system within the family to listen to these grievances, a *majlis* system. We were constantly reassuring Whitehall that it was stable, short of a black swan incident, assassinations and all that; an insurrection from below was not going to happen. I remember every ambassador would send a dispatch, saying, 'I'll give the Al-Saud another five years.' I remember sending a report just before I left, saying, 'It's normal as an ambassador leaves to put his money on the Al-Saud surviving for another five, I'm going to stick my neck out and say they'll be here for at least ten.' That was in '98. I think they sent me back in 2007 so that I would be there if it happened. As I left in 2010 I said, 'I'm going to give them another ten.' They're still there. It doesn't mean that it wouldn't happen. There was always the fear. I remember the report that was done on why and how we missed the fall of the Shah; the conclusion of that report was that it was not a failure of analysis, it was a failure of imagination, because we couldn't imagine the Shah falling. I always had this in the back of my mind in Saudi Arabia: OK, the analysis is right. Have we got the imagination to contemplate the Al-Saud falling? We would subject our reassurance to critical analysis and use our imagination. How could this come about? The security and stability of Saudi Arabia is a primary British interest – I don't know what the current Embassy are saying, but I'd be surprised if it was different.

Special Adviser to Richard Butler, UNSCOM, 1998.

CMM: In 1998 you were appointed to be a Special Adviser to Richard Butler.

WP: I was but circumstances prevented me from taking up that post. I came back to London in '98 and I think the idea was that I was being groomed to take over from Edward Chaplin, who was Head of Middle East Department at the time, but there was a gap, so to fill this gap I worked on a special project with Derek Plumbly, who was Director of the Middle East, on [UN] Security Council Resolution 1284. At the time we were still trying to make the oil for food deal for Iraq work. Sanctions against Iraq were being eroded; Saddam [Hussein] had his PR machine going, saying, 'Look at this; look what it's doing to the babies; babies are dying; we've got no incubators or medicine.' He was deliberately trying to manipulate world

opinion, rather successfully. So I was helping as a supernumerary to Middle East Department, talking to the Russians and the French and others, trying to get this Resolution passed. The French were quite difficult at points and the Russians certainly were. I remember in those negotiations, telling them, 'The alternative to sanctions is war.' That was in '98. We did eventually get it through, UNSCR 1284. At the same time, we were enforcing the no-fly zones in the north and south of Iraq which were becoming increasingly difficult to police. We had the UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission) Inspectors going around trying to find weapons of mass destruction and the various UNSCOM reports coming out. For most of my time in Saudi Arabia, Hans Blix was there, but he had been replaced by Richard Butler, who was a bit more aggressive. There was a sense in No 10 that the trigger for war with Iraq might be pulled by Richard Butler and Tony Blair wanted some greater control over any decisions on this front. They had a wheeze that they would impose a British adviser – Butler already had a Russian - on Richard Butler in UNSCOM. He hadn't asked for an adviser, but he was told he was getting one, a British adviser, and it was to be me. My job was going to be to make sure that Britain and the United States had some control over what came out of UNSCOM that wouldn't provoke a military conflict. That was the idea.

I went to New York, just before Christmas '98. Jeremy Greenstock had the unenviable task of telling Richard Butler that he was getting a British adviser. I was in New York, but Jeremy was waiting for the right moment to give Butler the news. Butler didn't embrace me with any great enthusiasm but accepted that it would be difficult to refuse. I'd been in New York for only three weeks when there was a series of incidents which took place over the no-fly zones, and we started bombing Iraq. That was the end of UNSCOM. UNSCOM was untenable; Iraq was rejecting UNSCOM. It wasn't neat. Indeed, there was some aspiration in Whitehall that, despite the bombing, we could resume UNSCOM. No one in London was telling me to come home; everyone in London was saying, 'No, no. UNSCOM is going to be restored, and you'll be needed.' They'd signed the lease on the apartment I was living in for three months. I'd been there a month, and I said, 'Look, UNSCOM's dead. You know it; I know it. I'm coming back because my wife and kids are in London.' I said, 'I'm still around, if you're right and UNSCOM is resurrected, but I'm pretty confident.' Of course, UNSCOM was never resurrected.

Head of Middle East Department, FCO, 1999-2002

Eventually in 1999, I can't remember the exact dates, I became Head of Middle East Department, and took over from Edward, so I was responsible for the policy on Iraq. We were still trying to have the policy of containment through oil for food. As Head of Middle East Department, I was trying to keep the international coalition against Iraq operating; no-fly zones were still going but becoming increasingly difficult. We were having to take out Iraqi radars as the Iraqis were getting more and more sophisticated, and there was the possibility that we might lose a plane. That was the history of my time in Middle East Department, the build up to the Iraq War.

My period there was dominated by Iraq and Iran. Robin Cook was Foreign Secretary at this time. We were also trying to see if we could engage with Iran, have a more constructive relationship with Iran, which Robin Cook was having none of. I remember a meeting in Robin Cook's office when I'm trying to persuade him that we should at least give it a go, to see if Iran could be brought into the fold more. We were still worried about their nuclear ambitions; we hadn't got to the stage of sanctioning them. We were trying to get them to be more co-operative over Iraq, after all, we'd done them a favour in Iraq, curbing the ambitions of Saddam Hussein after the first Gulf War.

I remember a meeting in Robin Cook's office at a time when he was under a lot of pressure from Ann Leslie, who used to write a column in the *Daily Mail*; under the pseudonym Black Cat. She was always criticising Robin Cook. I'm there having what I'd call a robust exchange with the Foreign Secretary. I remember Sherard Cowper-Coles was his Principal Private Secretary, Michael Jay was the PUS, Peter Westmacott was the Political Director, so I was technically the most junior official in the room, and it turned out to be a blazing row between me and the Foreign Secretary. When I was setting out the case for engagement to him, he said, 'What's Ann Leslie of the *Daily Mail* going to say about that?' I said to him, 'Whatever you do Ann Leslie in the *Daily Mail* is going to have a go at you, so why don't you do the right thing?' It was quite a fierce debate; we were standing up. He's from Glasgow and I'm from Edinburgh. There was one point when we were just a couple of Scotsmen having an argument. Something went through my brain, I thought if I just dropped my head, I could give him a Glasgow kiss (a sharp, sudden headbutt to the nose, usually resulting in a broken nose.) Common sense prevailed and I didn't give him a Glasgow kiss. I never told him that my mother had made me go and canvass for him when I was a thirteen-

year-old and he was a prospective councillor in Edinburgh. I never revealed my political leanings at the time, but this was in the back of my mind when I was having an argument with the Foreign Secretary. I didn't win the argument because he wasn't interested in engaging with Iran. It was rather ironic, because later Jack Straw accused me of kyboshing his attempts to engage Iran, but that's a different story.

As I come out of the room, Michael Jay and Peter Westmacott said to me, 'Well said, William, that really needed saying.' I said, 'I noticed that I was the only one saying it.' When I got back to my office, Sherard rang me up an hour later, saying, 'The Foreign Secretary wants you to know he has no hard feelings. He respects you standing up for your point of view.' I said, 'Sherard, the Foreign Secretary hasn't given this another thought.' I said, 'Kind of you to be worried about my feelings, but I'm OK.'

CMM: I don't recall where Robin Cook stood on Iran.

WP: He thought he'd get criticised for doing it and he didn't think it was worth trying. It wasn't a big deal. Iraq was the big disagreement. My last day as Head of Middle East Department was spent with Robin Cook. I left Middle East Department in March 2002 (I'm getting ahead of myself, but it's a Robin Cook story.) By this time, it looked like we were going to war with Iraq, post 9/11, and Robin Cook had already been replaced by Jack Straw as Foreign Secretary. He was then Leader of the House of Commons and Clare Short was Development Secretary but being sidelined. Robin Cook asked to see me to discuss Iraq. I rang up Jack Straw's office – it was already known by this time that Robin was a prominent dissident and was probably on the point of resigning, which he didn't at that moment. They said, 'He's a government minister, you can go and talk to him.' I had a one-on-one with him in my last day, when he was basically probing me on how sound the evidence was on weapons of mass destruction; could containment work; why this rush to war? I remember saying to him, 'I think containment can work. I think Saddam is a long-term threat. He's not an immediate threat though and I think containment still has some life in it, although it's getting weaker and weaker by the day. The question we'd have to answer if we went to war with Iraq was why now? What's the threat? That's a question that's difficult to answer,' I said. 'But the Americans have already decided. The Americans are going. The question is whether we are with them or not.'

On the weapons of mass destruction, I already knew that the 'dodgy dossier' was in train, because just before that Alastair Campbell had promised the press a dossier. 'If you knew

what we know …' The press said, 'You'll have to tell us.' He said, 'I'll give you a dossier.' There was a dossier in March 2002 which was hurriedly put together, which tried to convey the analysis, the assessment, that we had of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction, which was essentially what we now know in retrospect: Saddam wanted us to believe he had these things. We knew he didn't have a nuclear weapons programme – no one disputed that. We knew he wanted to retain some of the intellectual capacity of his nuclear scientists, but we believed he had a biological and chemical weapons programme. We couldn't understand why, when the inspectors were going into facilities, the Iraqis were holding them up at the gates. We could see them from satellites, transporting stuff outside. Why, given that the sanctions were predicated on his weapons of mass destruction programme, did he not want to get sanctions lifted? Why did he not want UNSCOM to give him a clean slate? There was a whole behavioural pattern within Iraq which convinced us he was hiding something. We now know – you have to put yourself in the mind of a dictator – he wanted other people to believe he had this capacity. He wanted to be able to use it to threaten the Gulf and to hold the Iranians, for all sorts of reasons. And indeed, there were defectors coming out of Iraq who weren't involved in his programmes, but who believed he had them. There was a degree of intelligence that any sensible person would conclude – if you were in the JIC (Joint Intelligence Committee) – that there was something there. The question was, how much of a threat did it represent at that time? These assessments only became critical because Blair had decided that we were going to go with the Americans, come what may. The Americans didn't give a toss about the weapons of mass destruction. The Americans had decided to go to war with Iraq because there was unfinished business. Saddam Hussein was a threat to his own people: he was a threat to the Gulf and 9/11 gave them a pretext for reshaping the Middle East.

Let's go back to 9/11. Here are we in the Foreign Office, in the lead up to 9/11, working hard to contain, get intelligence, get material on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We no longer had UNSCOM; we didn't have the inspectors anymore. We were trying to hold together a coalition in the Security Council to keep sanctions on Iraq, to limit Saddam's capacity to rebuild his military, so it wasn't just weapons of mass destruction, it was his capacity to rebuild his economy and to rebuild his military infrastructure. That was the rationale: containment, surround him, make sure he is in his place. That was becoming more and more difficult as the French and the Russians were wanting to open up. The French government was under a lot of pressure from French companies trying to do business with

Iraq. We had our own issues with the Scott Inquiry that went before. The Russians were breaching sanctions and trying to develop a relationship. So there was a lot of international pressure. The Americans were getting a bit frustrated with all this. Colin Powell was in charge of the Iraq file and the State Department were our allies, but the Pentagon and the Vice President, [Dick] Cheney, and [Donald] Rumsfeld were not, but they weren't in charge of the file, because it was still diplomacy we were talking about. That's where we were in the run up to 9/11.

I remember – a story against my powers of predicting the future – on the day of 9/11, I was over at Shell, across the river, having lunch with them and briefing them on the state of the world and the Middle East, telling them about Iran and where we were on the Gulf: basically, it's a bit of a mess, but it's a predictable mess and nothing much is going to change. I did say, 'Unless there's some black swan event.' I think 9/11 counts as a black swan. Our relationship with Saudi Arabia is rock solid; the Gulf – Shell was being pressured by the Saudis to get invested in gas. It was a *tour d'horizon*, but nothing much that's unusual. That was the lunch. As I had been talking to them, 9/11 was happening. I think I got back into the Office after the attack on the first tower, before the attack on the second. We were all watching on the telly and when the second one was hit, we turned to one another and said, 'Al Qaeda.' We didn't have any evidence for that – but it was Al Qaeda. The Middle East had just changed. Very quickly we were all scrabbling around to prove it was Al Qaeda; you get the intelligence it was Al Qaeda; and then we were having discussions with the Americans. Very quickly we see where the Americans are heading with this, because they wanted to link Al Qaeda with Saddam Hussein. There's obviously the Taliban in Afghanistan; we have to do something about the Taliban. There wasn't really an argument about going to Afghanistan and either getting the Taliban to hand over Al Qaeda or we're going to deal with them directly. I don't remember a debate about that that lasted very long. We all knew Bin Laden was in Afghanistan and we knew it was Al Qaeda; NATO and we were all going to go with the Americans. At the same time as we were preparing to attack, because it's obvious that the Taliban are not going to hand over Bin Laden, the Americans tried to make the link between Al Qaeda and Saddam Hussein: citing the Iraqi based Ansar al-Islam, which was an Al Qaeda derivative. Ansar al-Islam may be an Al Qaeda affiliate, but they're anti-Saddam Hussein. There was no intelligence to link Saddam with Al Qaeda and the Americans backed off very quickly. They knew we weren't going to buy that. But clearly, in retrospect they were already saying, 'We're going to go to Iraq as well.' We could

see that by late 2001. I remember giving evidence to the Chilcot Inquiry; Peter Ricketts and I were the first witnesses at the Chilcot Inquiry. I remember saying - 'The drums of war could be heard from Washington within weeks as far as Iraq was concerned.' That became the headline of the *FT* the next day.

I think in retrospect – although I didn't know this at the time, that Tony Blair had committed us to go with the Americans much earlier than March 2002, whilst I was briefing Robin Cook that the difficult question to answer will be, why now? It seems to me that a decision had been made and certainly in Tony Blair's mind and in discussions with the Americans that 'come what may we shall be with you.' I was dealing with Elizabeth Wilmshurst (the Foreign Office Legal Adviser who resigned over the Iraq War) at the time and it was clear where the Americans were going. She was always on at me and others about the importance of having a sound legal case if we were to go to war. In the build-up the direction of travel became clearer. Clare Short and DFID were excluded from the meetings, and eventually Robin resigned.

CMM: You saw which way the Americans were going. Did you have a sense at the time of why this was so important to them?

WP: Unfinished business. I remember going to Kuwait with Margaret Thatcher on the tenth anniversary of the liberation of Kuwait in 2001, before 9/11. The Kuwaitis had invited her for the tenth anniversary and then realised that she wasn't actually the Prime Minister at the time of the liberation; it was John Major, so they invited John Major too. The Kuwaitis had forgotten that the Conservatives had stuck the knife in Thatcher's back between the start of the war and the liberation. So there was Thatcher and Major, both going over for the tenth anniversary with an official government delegation. Brian Wilson was the Minister for the Middle East and I went as the senior official accompanying this delegation. It was all paid for by the Kuwaitis, so we were all flying first class. On the plane out I could see Margaret Thatcher asking somebody something and them pointing at me; she'd obviously asked who the Foreign Office official was. She came over to me basically to have an argument about why didn't we finish the job the first time in 1991. "We should have gone all the way". She blamed John Major for not doing that. I said, 'Well, Prime Minister, I think you'd have found it quite complicated. You remember the revulsion when we had the turkey shoot when all the retreating Iraqi troops from Kuwait were strafed from the air, the revulsion from that, kicking an enemy when they were down.' I said, 'There was no UN justification for it: the

Iraqis had surrendered. And frankly, we'd got out of that war with minimal casualties; I don't think there was much enthusiasm to take it further.' She was having none of that. Throughout the whole weekend, whenever there was an opportunity, she kept coming back to the idea that we should have gone all the way and finished the job.

The Kuwaitis have a series of guest palaces which they put their guests in, (Banyan). Margaret Thatcher was in one of them and John Major in the other. They put us in with John Major, so they kept the two of them apart. Why? The Kuwaitis are not completely stupid. It was at the end of this weekend when we were going back, when Margaret Thatcher had mentioned this more than once. At breakfast on the last day John Major said, 'If that woman says we should have gone all the way to Baghdad one more time …' We were all waiting … 'I'm going to say something.' I really liked John Major; I had a lot of dealings with him, but I thought that really summed it up.

The point of that huge diversion was, if Margaret Thatcher was thinking that, I can imagine that the Americans were thinking that. This man Saddam was a pain in the neck. They could see containment was fraying and here's a golden opportunity. People like Zalmay Khalilzad who was in [the] NSA at the time, (he later became Ambassador to Iraq), and the other neo-cons were thinking that the Americans could re-shape the Middle East. They argued that Saddam Hussein is our enemy; he has got weapons of mass destruction; he could give those to terrorists, now was the opportunity to finish the job we started in 1991.

There was no rationale about what would happen next. OK, they had this vague notion that they would get rid of Saddam Hussein and that would reshape the Middle East and about a resurgence of pro-American governments in the area and maybe democracy would follow without any plan at all for post-Saddam Iraq. That was our biggest failing. Because Clare Short was an opponent of any decision to go to war and because in Cabinet she argued against it, she was sidelined. It was clear we were going to war. I remember I said at one point, 'Should we do some scenario planning? Should we draw up some contingencies?' Nobody was interested in that. What Middle East Department was asked to do was to make the case for war. The 'dodgy dossier' was part of that. I remember when the first draft of the dodgy dossier came across my desk, I said, 'This is hopeless. It's not going to convince anyone.' It was a collective effort by the intelligence agencies cleared with the Ministry of Defence and the FCO. When the first draft came there was a deadline; Alastair had set a deadline. I said, 'We cannot release this document.' I was told, 'Alastair said, so we've got

to give him something.' It went up to No. 10 and common sense prevailed and that version was sent back. I never saw it again until it was released many months later in 2002. There was a six-month process in creating the dossier, which was a massive mistake, because all the nuances you have with intelligence – on the one hand, on the other, on the balance of probability, yes – were lost, because what Tony Blair was trying to sell was a slam dunk: the man's got weapons of mass destruction, therefore he's in breach of the existing Security Council resolutions. Because we didn't get a second resolution, we decided we did not need it and that the existing resolutions gave us the necessary legal cover. This was not a view shared by Elizabeth Wilmshurst who later resigned. Americans are very good at getting lawyers who agree with them. We're never quite so good at getting lawyers to agree with us.

CMM: Can I just circle back to the constructive engagement with Iran.

WP: That didn't really go anywhere. Iran was seen as a threatening power and a malign influence. I remember that their big objection was that we didn't recognise them as an important player and an important power. We didn't recognise their history; they were an important nation. We said, 'Of course we do. We appreciate your massive civilisation, Persian history, all of that. That's why we want to have a good relationship with you.' What I realised much later on was what they meant when they said we didn't recognise them as an important player was we didn't recognise them as a regional hegemon. We weren't prepared to recognise their regional influence, that they were the most important regional player. We were allies of Saudi Arabia who they regarded as desert Bedouin, without the deep cultural, historical presence that the Iranians had. Indeed, we did refuse to recognise their regional dominance, but we could have said, 'It depends how you use that regional influence.'

Dealing with the Iranians was quite tricky at the time because there was another issue that was never resolved in my time, an aftermath of the siege of the Iranian Embassy. We had got rid of the MEK (Mujahadeen-e-Khalq), the Iranian terrorist group who'd taken hostages in the Iranian Embassy in Prince's Gate in 1980s. The Embassy, while I was Head of Middle East Department, was still unoccupied by the Iranians and in a state of disrepair. They had never gone back into it, even though we had restored the Embassy to them. The SAS had gone into the Embassy, blowing the windows out; they'd rescued everyone. You'd think the Iranians would be grateful, but I inherited a long-running dispute over how much we were going to pay them to restore the Embassy to its former glory. Kensington and Chelsea Council wanted to repossess it, because the neighbours were complaining about it leaking.

We had to persuade Kensington and Chelsea not to take it, because if they repossessed it and put a compulsory purchase order on it, we would lose our compounds in Ferdowsi and downtown Tehran. I was having to deal with the local authority, saying, 'You can't do this, because the Iranians will reciprocate, and we are still trying to get this agreement going.' This is running all through my time. Eventually we get to a figure. We offer them two and a half million pounds as compensation for having rescued their Embassy. I have to say I was not very patient with them. At various times I said to them, 'Hold on a minute, didn't we get rid of the terrorists?' Really, you'd think they'd be paying us. Various Iranian delegations came over, because these were official talks, not the behind-the-scenes ones. I remember one Iranian delegation coming into my office and I said, 'Oh, before you sit down at the table, I want to show you something.' I took them round behind my desk which was still one of these old-style desks. They were a bit bemused. I said, 'Look, no levers. You always accuse the Brits of pulling levers in the Middle East. Not a lever in sight.' They were quite grim. I thought it would break the ice with them but no, they were having none of that. We get to negotiations, and we get to a figure. of two and a half million pounds, which is a lot of money for the Foreign Office to fork out. That's when they wanted to start negotiating again. I said, 'Look, this is our final offer. You can take it or leave it, but we are not going to negotiate any more. We've been negotiating; we've made compromises: this is it. This is not the bazaar. You can take this offer, it's on the table, whenever you're ready to accept it, give us a call.' In classic Iranian style, they didn't do it as long as I was Head of Middle East Department, but they did the deal with my successor. It was a bit like the American hostages: once you've reached the deal, they don't want to lose face, so they waited for Reagan to replace [Jimmy] Carter as President.

HM Ambassador to Sudan, 2002-05

CMM: You'd had a lot on your plate during your time as Head of Middle East Department, so you went off to be Ambassador to Sudan in 2002 for a little rest?

WP: I had done three years in MED, and it was time to go, abandoning the ship before we went to war, maybe? No, it was a natural progression. I was leaving because I had been appointed Ambassador to Sudan. It wasn't an obvious choice, because in those days it was expected to go to an SMS2 ambassadorship (Senior Management Structure) somewhere. I said to Alan Goulty, who was the Director of Middle East Department - he'd replaced Derek Plumbly – because I think Ambassador to Sudan then was Counsellor level, 'I think it's time.

I think I've done a good job in Middle East Department, handled some tricky stuff. I'd rather hang about and wait for a job coming up at the next level.' Alan persuaded me. I hadn't been dealing with Sudan in Middle East Department; it was NENAD (Near East and North Africa Department), so I hadn't really been paying attention to it, much. Alan said, 'We're expanding in Sudan. We are part of a troika: the US, the UK and Norway have agreed to appoint special envoys. We are going to try to make a big effort to end the civil war in Sudan. It's going to be part of a big diplomatic effort. DFID (Department for International Development) are heavily invested in it. They've got one person there, but they're going to expand. I guarantee you that within six months the ambassador will be upgraded to SMS2; instead of SMS1.' He persuaded me that there was a big job to do, and it would be really interesting and the Embassy would get bigger as a consequence of this.

He was true to his word, absolutely right. That's where I got hooked on conflict, on being in a world where I am not really interested in normal bi-lateral relationships. That was the flavour of my career from then on, with Saudi Arabia being the aberration. I went to Sudan in May 2002 – I never seemed to get a long time between postings. I remember on my appointment, soon after Robin Cook was replaced by Jack Straw as Foreign Secretary, the Foreign Secretary wasn't showing much interest in Sudan, but DFID was. Clare Short had decided, wisely in my view, that the only way to end poverty in a place like Sudan was to end the war, so she invested in diplomacy. When I went to see her on my pre-posting briefings, Clare Short being rather feisty, said, 'You diplomats, you don't know how to spend money.' She had a jaundiced view of the Foreign Office. I said to her, 'Secretary of State, that's because we don't have any. I will happily spend yours.' It was fascinating to be in a diplomatic post where there was money for diplomacy, because she invested in it when we were hosting conferences, and we were hosting envoys. The product of our work was that the troika had managed to persuade the Sudanese to open formal peace negotiations under the auspices of the AU (African Union.) The African Union appointed an envoy, General [Lazaro] Sumbeiywo to lead the peace talks. We were privileged observers, the troika. For the whole time I was there we were involved in the Naivasha talks, the peace talks, that culminated in 2005 in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement for Sudan, which meant that the war between North Sudan and South Sudan, the SPLA, the Sudanese People's Liberation Army, and the government of Sudan came to an end. So that bit of the civil war ended, and the South Sudanese, as part of the peace agreement, after six years would hold a referendum with the option of remaining part of a united Sudan or breaking away and forming a new

country, which they eventually did. The Republic of South Sudan was born, peacefully, six years after the Agreement. In the lives of the Sudanese, it was quite a momentous agreement to be involved with. Alan Goulty who had persuaded me to go to Sudan was the UK Special Envoy for Sudan with American and Norwegian counterparts.

The bulk of our time there was involved with that, but in parallel, in 2003, a year after I got there, the whole Darfur crisis blows up. It's a bit like whackamole; you're dealing with one war and then another one starts. We had the horrendous period of ethnic conflict in Darfur, fuelled by the government supporting one party, the Arab tribes, who became the Janjaweed, who have now become the RSF (Rapid Support Forces). There's a great long history. They are the armed horsemen and camel riders, the nomads, driving the Zaghawa and the Masalit both ethnic African tribes, off their land into camps. This ethnic war was going on throughout the time we were negotiating between the north and south, trying to see this to a conclusion and not allow the ethnic conflict in Darfur to derail this. We didn't allow it to derail it, but it didn't bring peace to Sudan because you had this Darfur conflict. And not all the issues were resolved in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, because the Nuba Mountains, the Kordofan, remains part of the north, but they still have a break-away group of the SPLA who don't accept the north. Then there was the Blue Nile, which was another part of Sudan; they still had a break-away group that wanted to join the south, but they were undisputedly part of the north. Like all agreements, there are compromises made that leave ongoing disputes.

CMM: Did the violence reach Khartoum?

WP: No, one of the conclusions that I came to was that you can't have a civil war going on for fifty years, which this one had been, if the war is in the capital. The war didn't reach Khartoum. Indeed, though there was something like a million internally displaced people all around Khartoum, from all over, it was a very peaceful place. I had no close protection; I didn't need it. I used to visit the war, but the war didn't visit me. My wife was there the whole time; my children came out to visit – they were both at boarding school by this time. I even took them down to the Nuba Mountains. We had a famous visit where we invited friends out for Christmas, my best friend from university and their three children; my two children came out.

The whole peace process started in the Nuba Mountains with an agreement called the Birkenstock Agreement, which was brokered between the US and the Swiss to bring a

ceasefire in the Nuba Mountains, so that there was a ceasefire between the government and the rebels. This ceasefire was holding because there was a group of peacekeepers, led by a Norwegian General, with a British Colonel as Number Two and about thirty others around monitoring this cease fire. When I get there, the Norwegian Brigadier General comes to me and says, 'Ambassador, we've got this ceasefire, but I am constantly trying to raise money to keep us going. It's not under a UN resolution or anything. I need some political cover: will you chair a committee?' It was called the Joint Military Mission; we formed something called the Joint Military Commission, with me as Chair and the Ambassadors of all the participating countries being on the Commission. I provided political cover. When he needed me, I would fly down and I would negotiate with the government of Sudan on political issues. I used this Commission to extract money from the contributing countries to fund it. It was a very weird *ad hoc* body which worked. The ceasefire was holding and if it didn't hold, there was no prospect of the big agreement ever being concluded.

This Christmas when the family was out, General [Jan Erik] Wilhelmsen said, 'We're having some trouble holding the line. I need you to come down and talk to Abdelaziz Al-Hilu,' (he was the rebel commander.) 'I need you to persuade him that the ceasefire needs to hold and that certain activities are not permissible.' I said, 'Can you wait till after Christmas. I've got my whole family here and I've got friends staying.' He said, 'Bring them down.' He had this Russian plane and the whole family went down. He made a big thing of it. He used it brilliantly. He said, 'Here's the Ambassador coming with his family and his friends to ensure that peace is maintained.' We visited Abdelaziz Al-Hilu. I said, 'Here I am; my family can come with me because there's peace.' They had the best holiday they'd ever had. We were there for two or three days. My wife and my friends were taken by the women and shown around all the villages. We were meeting the rebel leader and his team under a tree. The women were doing all the hard work, carrying the water up the hill. My wife said to the women, 'Where are the men?' and they said, 'They're at the office.' The office is under the tree; they never do any work. We were quite happy to do that, to bring our families, and we used it and shone international light on it. That peace held the whole time until we concluded the big agreement. The irony was that once we had concluded the main peace, they were left in the north and the rebels are still there.

Jack Straw was Foreign Secretary by this time and though he hadn't shown a lot of interest in Sudan up to that point, Darfur was an international crisis, front and centre, so Jack Straw as Foreign Secretary came and visited. I took him to Darfur. We took him to the camps, and we

explained to him what was happening: with bands of lightly armed Janjaweed committing atrocities. Jack Straw said to me, 'We could sort this with five thousand troops.' I said, 'Don't even go there. There's no way you could do this with five thousand troops. This area, Darfur, is bigger than France. A western army would be lost here. These people can disappear back to civilian life and reappear in an instant.' That was the mentality at the time. It was upshot of Tony Blair's 1999 Chicago speech, on the right to protect involving humanitarian intervention. We can fix it by sending troops. I said to him no way. The AU eventually sent peacekeepers, but they were so diffuse they couldn't do very much at all. In fact, they sent peacekeepers during my time and they did their best, but it was a hopeless task. Jack Straw's view was that five thousand well-trained troops could sort this out. Yes, if the enemy turn up to fight, but they won't turn up to the fight and then you'll spend your time running round defending your camps. He fortunately took that advice and didn't pursue it. He turned up in Darfur in 40-degree heat with no head gear. Luckily, I'd just bought a couple of new hats at M&S and I gave him one of my hats. My kids saw it on telly and said, 'Isn't that your hat, Dad?' I said, 'Yes, Jack Straw nicked it!'

It was rather schizophrenic: there we are talking to members of the military regime governing Sudan and you're trying to persuade them that they've got to compromise. The Norwegians were very close to the SPLA and the Americans had the big lever – lifting of sanctions was what the government wanted. By default, we were spending more time with the Northern side, trying to soften them up and find what their angles were and trying to persuade them. There was that bit going on. Then you've got Darfur happening. I went to Darfur thirteen times in my time there, flying over to see what was happening, talking to people on the ground, supporting the UN, supporting the NGOs, trying to get the Sudanese governors to do what they should be doing, protecting the civilians and dealing with these marauders.

Later on, they appointed a guy called Ahmed Haroun as Minister for Humanitarian Affairs; he was one of the supporters of the Janjaweed and heavily implicated with them. I think he may now have been indicted by the International Criminal Court. I remember going to see him to say, 'What is happening in Darfur is unacceptable. I've just come back. I've been flying over and seeing the villages burned. I've got my own pictures of the raids happening as we were going, talking to young women who had been raped by these people.' I remember relaying this to him and he said, 'It's impossible. You could not possibly have spoken to a Sudanese woman who had been raped, because any Sudanese woman who'd been raped would have killed herself out of shame.' I said, 'These women had no reason to lie to

me. They were traumatised. They had to be persuaded to talk to me. So don't tell me that this isn't happening.' It was like talking to a brick wall.

We had a microcosm of Sudan in the Residence. Our cook was an Arab from the north; our maid was Dinka, from John Garang's tribe; we had another staff member who was Nuer and one who was a West African immigrant who had found his way there. They were always falling out and being horrible to each other, a bit racist. I had to have them round and I said to them, 'In my house, you're all equal. I'm not having any of this nonsense. If any of you can't live with the others, then you'll be going.' One day David, who was a Nuer, went missing. I had heard that a warlord, aligned with the government, was rounding Nuer up on the streets of Khartoum. Turns out that David had been rounded up by this warlord (Brigadier Paulino Matip [Nhail]). He may have been a Brigadier in the army, but he was basically a Nuer warlord. I sent a guy over to the camp to say, 'This guy works for the Ambassador. You'd better release him or there'll be terrible consequences.' It was all a bluff, but some people still thought the UK had more power than in reality. It was a throwback to the times of colonial District Commissioners who maintained law and order without any real means of enforcement. But it worked and they released David; he's all filthy; he hadn't been fed, but I asked, what happened to the others? I made some enquiries. They had all been driven south to fight for this warlord against the SPLA, but not in a truck, in a container lorry, in a container. Half of them died on the way. Outrageous. I was livid. I asked the UN if they could fly me down to the south, to this warlord's encampment. It's a bit like Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. I'm in this warlord's encampment; I go into this tent which is completely black. I don't even know he is there until he opens his mouth, because he's got white teeth. This guy's so black you couldn't see him, because it was so dark in the tent. The Nuer are famously very black. The north Sudanese call them Azrak, which means 'blue' – so black there's a bluish tinge to them. I explain in less than diplomatic language that this is unacceptable; this sort of behaviour will lead to the Hague. I explain what the International Criminal Court is and that he would find himself before the International Criminal Court. He'd never heard of it. The interpreter didn't want to interpret it and I said, 'You tell him.' It was a pointless exercise in the end, but I was so angry. As I was coming back – I was on my own with the Second Secretary – I thought, this guy could arrange for me to have an accident and nobody would know. I had no protection. I get back to Khartoum and I call on the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, who I was dealing with regularly over the peace talks. He said to me, 'I've just heard that you've

been down south threatening Paulino Matip [Nhail], with the International Court at the Hague.' 'Yeah he's a madman.' I said, 'He needs to know.' They were highly amused that I'd been down there to read the riot act to this guy. You put up with an awful lot of horror going on around you and just occasionally you think "this must not stand".

Tony Blair came out to Sudan. This was a moment when you discover the woman you're married to and how wonderful she is. Vanessa was a great fan of *The Thornbirds*; she had a crush on Richard Chamberlain. There is one bit in *The Thornbirds* when he comes back – there's some crisis going on - and says to his wife, 'Make stew for a hundred.'

We were reaching a stage in the peace negotiations when it looks like we are going to get an agreement. The Sudanese are desperate to get sanctions lifted; they're desperate for respectability. Tony Blair was visiting Ethiopia, and I persuaded them that he should drop in to Sudan. The Sudanese would be delighted, and it would help. He was going to do a two-hour stop-over in Sudan on his way to Ethiopia. The delegation to Ethiopia was huge: it was Paul Boateng, the Chief Secretary, Hilary Benn, the Development Secretary; this was a big thing in Ethiopia, a big delegation of DFID, Treasury and FCO officials; a private planeload going off. The plan was for Tony Blair and his team to come into Khartoum, meet the President, get back on the plane and go off, job done, perfect, Sudanese delighted. The night before, there's a security threat in Ethiopia. They can't land at night, so they've got to stay over in Khartoum. I get a request that says that we need to book a hundred hotel rooms. Unfortunately, the President of Iran was visiting and every hotel room in the place had been taken over, so there were no hotel rooms: none to be had. I said, 'We'll do our best. We'll accommodate everyone at the Residence; we'll feed them at the Residence. We'll do it.' I went across to the Residence (it was just across the garden) and I said, 'Vanessa, you remember *The Thornbirds* and 'make stew for a hundred'? How about dinner and breakfast and accommodation for a hundred?' We turned the Residence into a doss house. We had three spare bedrooms for each of the ministers. For all the officials – we got mattresses and camp beds. It's quite a big area, the Residence. We got the dining room set up as a breakfast room buffet and we got the cook going, so we fed people.

Blair came, met the President, stayed the night and left the next morning. Vanessa was an absolute star, brilliant. It was interesting to see Tony Blair interacting with the others. The No. 10 staff were very protective. When he wanted to break from this mayhem, he had the pool to himself. We were told nobody was to go near the pool when he was relaxing there.

Benn and Boateng had to arrange times that they could meet him. I got on well with Hilary Benn and Paul Boateng. They weren't difficult. When someone from No. 10 started to give orders as to how breakfast would be handled; "The Prime Minister will have his table, and this is who'll sit at it." I said, 'Hmm, as it my house I think I'll be at his table, and I think my wife will be there too. You can have whoever else you like there, but we'll be there. We'll be having breakfast with the Prime Minister and the two ministers will be there too.' I had to lay down the law. Some of the accompanying party obviously didn't get much sleep at all, though we farmed out some of them to other people who were happy to put them up. They all took it in good part, and they were very grateful and effusive to Vanessa. Because Blair was there for the day, we arranged to have all the staff round and he met them in the garden and shook their hands and it became a proper visit. Then it was in *Private Eye*, Tony Blair shaking hands with the Sudanese maintenance guys in their blue overalls. Do you remember it was Jack Straw who shook hands with Robert Mugabe by mistake? The cartoon was Blair shaking hands with these guys in the garden, saying, 'You're not Robert Mugabe, are you?' After that we had to have a press conference in the garden and it became a full-blown visit, all organised at a few hours' notice. The Sudanese were delighted; I got a lot of brownie points from the Sudanese for the Prime Minister having visited. That was my first encounter with Tony Blair, whom I subsequently got to know a lot better.

I knew John Sawers (later Chief of SIS) from old; his kids went to the same Sevenoaks school as mine. They used to live in St Margaret's where we live, so John was an old friend. In August 2005 we were at the Edinburgh Festival and John was there with his wife Shelley. We met them at the C Club in Chambers Street – John was Political Director at that time. We were just chatting and John asked me what I would be doing next. I said, 'I don't know. I'll wait for something decent to come up.' He said, 'How about Iraq?' I said, 'A bit dangerous.' He said, 'If you did Iraq, you'd get Saudi Arabia afterwards.' Sudan did become SMS2 for most of my time there; so going to Iraq would have been SMS3 and that was promotion and the Saudi job was the biggest job for an Arabist. I said to him, 'John, that's an interesting offer. Of course, you and I know you cannot guarantee Saudi as a posting.' He said, 'We'll put in a good word.' I said, 'Let me just consider Iraq on its own merits regardless of Saudi.' I went back and talked it over with Vanessa, because it was an unaccompanied post, highly dangerous. Having been in Sudan, I thought, yes, I'd like to do this. At the time, we were getting to the stage where we were trying to transition out of Iraq, with a new Iraqi constitution and all of that. I went back to John and said, 'Yeah, I'd quite like to do this.' I

got the job; I don't know whether there was anybody else in line for it or not, but I saw off all the competition!

HM Ambassador to Iraq, 2005-06

Vanessa was in London; I was in Baghdad. It was a six-week on, two-week off rotation. I had a very senior deputy, because they were in charge for two weeks out of every two months, so you needed someone senior; my deputy for quite a lot of my time was Catherine Royle, who had come from being Ambassador in Venezuela, to be the Deputy Ambassador. It was a very big embassy at the time, with the consulate general in Basra.

During my time in Baghdad Vanessa was worried (the conflict was all over the news with bombs going off and the like) but she consoled herself that I was safely ensconced in the Green Zone the whole time. I never enlightened her until after I had left that I was the one who went out of the Green Zone most. A lot of the government were in the Green Zone, but I was going to Basra, travelling to other places. I didn't emphasize that to Vanessa. I had a very good close protection team of 12 people. They stayed six months, and I was there fourteen months, so I had three close protection teams. I always used to give them a farewell party when they left and I used to say, 'The fact that I'm here to give you a farewell party is testament to the fact that you've done your job.'

Going to Iraq was the only time that I got my instructions directly from the Prime Minister. I was invited to No. 10 to see Tony Blair; I remember him telling me how important this was to him politically, unsurprisingly, and what he wanted to see happen in Iraq. This was a period when we wanted the Iraqis to draw up a constitution and for that constitution to be voted for in a referendum and for there to be elections held under this new constitution. My job would be to do everything I could to ensure that this happened and for a new government to be appointed following elections. This would create the conditions to hand over to the new government. He added for good measure, and it would be very good if we could also create the conditions where we could reduce the number of troops in Basra in Iraq, because we needed more troops in Afghanistan – this was the surge that was going to happen in Afghanistan. I sometimes can't restrain myself. I remember saying to the Prime Minister, 'Yeah, and what am I going to do in the afternoons?' It seemed quite a big agenda for one year. It was one of these intensive periods. I like clear instructions from the Prime Minister; I know exactly what I had to do and what the priorities were.

I flew out to Iraq to take up my post on the same plane as Jack Straw, the Foreign Secretary. I found myself arriving at a new post and hosting a high-level visit. I joked, 'It's not very often that the Foreign Secretary delivers his new Ambassador. This is obviously a very special occasion.' At Baghdad airport we get into this Puma helicopter, because it's too dangerous to travel by road. Classically, the British had named the road from the airport into town 'Route Irish' because you go down this straight dual carriageway and you would certainly be shot at. We go in this helicopter, and we're handed a flak jacket and a helmet. I said, 'What's this?' They said, "we sometimes get shot at from the ground". I said, 'Shouldn't I be sitting on the helmet then?' They explained that we'd fly over the rooftops at seventy-five feet, because it took an RPG (rocket-propelled grenade) over a hundred feet to arm itself, so if they fired an RPG at you, it might hit you but it wouldn't explode. You learn a lot about guns and weapons in Iraq. 'But' they said, 'we don't know what route we'll take, because we fly in a zigzag. We fly at seventy-five feet, but the electricity wires are at a hundred feet, so we will be going up and down to avoid the electricity wires.' It was the most horrendous journey. Jack Straw and I are looking at one another from opposite sides of this Puma, pretending to be cool. We were both terrified. I eventually got used to that journey, but I thought I'm never going on a fair ground ride ever again. You never quite knew how long it would take from the airport, because it could take five minutes or twenty minutes, depending. That was my first visit with the Foreign Secretary, meeting all the staff, calling on the government. It was quite a baptism of fire.

Iraq was fascinating. None of this messing about with your credentials. Within a few days you present them to President [Jalal] Talabani, and you have complete access to all the ministers; you're a player in the game. The American Ambassador is the biggest player, but the British Ambassador is the next biggest foreign player. You're a member of the National Security Council of Iraq. Not many Ambassadors get the chance to be a member of the National Security Council of another country. But the reality was that between us, the US and the UK had over 110,000 troops in Iraq responsible for internal and external security. That whole process of drawing up the constitution and ensuring it was approved made for a fascinating time.

It's interesting the different versions of history. I later read Zalmay Khalilzad's book; he was the American Ambassador, who'd arrived about a month before me. He was the American Ambassador the whole time I was in Iraq. In his book he writes about the constitutional process, the difficulties of reaching agreement. At one point the two main groupings (Shias

and Kurds) think they have reached agreement. Khalilzad calls me to a meeting with the Iraqis to see if we can finalise the constitution at his Residence. In his book he objects to this constitution, this version of it, because it doesn't include the Sunnis. Well, in my version of it, he's about to agree this constitution and I say, without any instructions, because how could you get any instructions for this? 'My government couldn't agree to this constitution.' The Shia and the Kurdish politicians say, 'Why? We're in agreement.' I say, 'This is not a constitution that my government could support because it doesn't make enough provision for Sunnis to participate; it doesn't make provision for the possibility of amendment of the constitution.' The Sunnis were about 25% of the population. They claimed the majority, but they weren't. When they say they're the majority, they add the Kurds, who are about 25%, to themselves, and they say all the Kurds are Sunni, which is not exactly accurate and 45% becomes 50%. But in reality, the Shia are a majority. The Sunnis are about 25%, but the way the referendum was drawn up was that if it were rejected by two of any of the provinces, it would not pass, and there are three Sunni provinces. There was a practical reason as well why this didn't work. I said, 'You've got to include the Sunnis.' In Zal's book, he's the one that raised the objection. In fact, I was the one who raised the objection. Zal then later agreed with me and we had further negotiations and brought enough Sunnis into the process. The constitution we got was still flawed, but it passed muster. It was voted yes in two of the Sunni provinces, so it was passed in the referendum.

Part of the whole problem was that the constitution had the de-Ba'athification Commission enshrined in the constitution. De-Ba'athification was still being used by the Shia as a means of attacking their Sunni opponents. They know that half the Shia were in the Ba'ath Party as well, but that didn't matter. It was an instrument of political manoeuvring, and I argued that it didn't need to be in the constitution. I didn't win that argument: it remains in the constitution to this day and it's ludicrous. It was part of the negotiation. The Commission couldn't agree the constitution and as we neared the deadline for the constitution to be agreed – I think it was August 13th – they still hadn't reached agreement, we had a smoke-filled room in which the American Ambassador and myself got together with Masoud Barzani, Talabani, the President, the Shia leaders, Abdul Aziz Al-Hakim and various other Shia leaders, to hammer out a constitution, with me almost representing the Sunni point of view. I was talking to the Sunnis. There was a deadline, but we did what you always do with a deadline: midnight on the 13th lasted for three days. We kept going until we eventually reached an agreement. The constitution is flawed, and Iraq suffers from it to this day, but to

get an agreement there were lots of areas where there couldn't be a decision, so they were left 'to be decided by legislation in the future.' Not a single one of those issues has been resolved by legislation since, because if you couldn't reach agreement on these controversial issues when the gun was being held to your head, you certainly aren't going to do it later on.

One lesson I learned about constitutions was that delaying agreement on the constitution was better than rushing it through however expedient that appears at the time. But at the time there was pressure from London and Washington to get it done. In fact, when we were coming to the referendum, it was touch and go whether the Sunni provinces would vote for it or not, in October. I remember telling Nigel Sheinwald, 'A no vote may not be the worst outcome for the future of Iraq,' but that was not what they wanted to hear. The constitution was passed, and elections were held.

The elections did not produce a clear result as to who would be Prime Minister, but it was clear that the candidate would have to come from the United Shia Alliance (UIA), a collection of Shia parties who had the most seats. There was a video conference between President [George W.] Bush, Tony Blair; Dick Cheney was there, a brooding presence who didn't say anything, Donald Rumsfeld. We were in Baghdad with the American General and Zalmay Khalilzad, the two Brits and the two Americans. Condoleezza Rice was Secretary of State by now and she was in a tent somewhere, one of these tents for secure comms, in a hotel room. It was the first time I had received my instructions along with the US Ambassador from the US President and the UK Prime Minister; "anybody but Al-Jaafari". Ibrahim Al-Jaafari, who was the current interim Prime Minister at the time and had ambitions to be the next Prime Minister. Our instructions were clear; Al-Jaafari had been ineffective, and we needed someone else. There were a lot of negotiations between us and the Shia as to who would be an acceptable Prime Minister. I always thought that Adil Abdul Mehdi would make the best compromise. He had been a Communist; he'd been an Islamist; he'd been in exile in Iran, but he had good links with other people. He eventually became Prime Minister much later after I'd left, but he was checkmated by Al-Jaafari, who said, 'If I can't be prime minister, it can't be him.' So, then we had to go on a search for somebody else.

The United Islamic Alliance were about to choose a leader (Ali Adeeb) who was going to be Prime Minister: not a great choice, but acceptable to us and the Americans and everybody else. They were going to hold their meeting at which he would be affirmed as leader. Three hours before that meeting I had a call from the US Ambassador Zal Khalilzad, who said, 'I'm

meeting Nouri Al-Maliki. Do you want to come?' I said, 'Yes, why are you meeting him?' He said, 'I'll tell you when you get there.' Nouri Al-Maliki was someone I had identified as the most sectarian of the Shia leaders. There was a time under Al-Jaafari when we were looking for an interim Minister of the Interior and Al-Maliki's name came up. I said, 'He's the last person we want. He's so sectarian. He's the one using the De-Ba'athification Commission to attack legitimate Sunni politicians; he'd be an absolute nightmare as Minister of the Interior.' Why was Khalilzad asking me to a meeting with Al-Maliki? We had made it known that Al-Maliki was unacceptable. I go to the meeting, no pre-brief with Zal. Zal and I were there chatting with Al-Maliki about the future of Iraq and about the imminent appointment of a prime minister. Al-Maliki says, 'If it wasn't for the British and American vetoes, I would be the choice of the UIA,' which was true, probably. Much to my surprise and with no forewarning, Zal says, 'There is no American veto.' Al-Maliki turns to me and says, 'What about the British?' I say, 'Well, we had assumed that the UIA were about to choose their prime minister. We don't see any reason to change that,' ducking the question of whether there was a veto or not, but certainly not endorsing him. Anyway, we have some more pleasantries, and Zal says to me, 'Do you mind if I have a word with Al-Maliki alone?' OK, so I go out of the room and I know exactly what is happening. Zal is negotiating the terms of American support for Al-Maliki. With the American objection withdrawn, Al-Maliki was chosen as the UIA candidate. He proved to be one of the big disasters of the Iraqi prime ministership. I said to Zal, 'What changed your mind?' He said, 'I'd been having conversations with Washington overnight and they think Al-Maliki is likely to be more amenable.' He was amenable for a while, but the American tactics pushed Iraq right into Iranian hands.

The Americans might be forgiven for choosing Maliki once. However, in elections some years later when Ayad Allawi (our preferred candidate in 2006) did get enough seats to form a government they stuck with Maliki. He proved to be a complete disaster.

Before the elections in 2006 we had assumed Ayad Allawi, the secular leader and senior politician, who had good links with Shia, Sunnis and the Kurds, would win enough seats to hold the balance of power. We were helping him by seconding communications directly from No 10. But Allawi was both mercurial and lazy. He was getting money from the Saudis, but he wasn't spending it all on his election campaign. We were saying to him, 'Yep, we think you could be the next prime minister.' We said, 'We don't think you could win a majority of seats, but we think you could have enough seats to hold the balance of power. In

those circumstances when the Shia alliance doesn't have enough seats to form a majority there will be an opportunity for you to become PM at the head of a broad coalition.' We calculated that he needed to get about forty-five seats. He ended up with twenty-five. He assumed we were going to deliver the prime ministership for him regardless of the number of seats his party won. In the circumstances the Shia alliance had enough seats that it was clear the PM would have to come from their grouping. If Allawi had secured more seats, an alliance with the Kurds and some of the moderate Shias might have been possible. He was a very difficult leader, even with his own supporters. He wasn't very collegiate. He was a bit of a disappointment. He got his act together for the second election, after my time, and that was the moment when the Americans could have backed him, but they stuck with Al-Maliki, who has been a disaster. That was all fascinating stuff. It was a bit different from the usual bi-lateral visits and relationships. Iraq was the one place I could tell ministers they couldn't come, because we were overburdened with visits. I used to ration them. The Prime Minister was out two or three times during my time.

I learned several lessons in Iraq. The biggest lesson was how democracies are very impatient when it comes to state-building. We went into Iraq with the best of intentions, in terms of delivering an Iraqi democracy, but we didn't have the patience to build up the institutions. We rushed straight to elections, when the institutions weren't there: a non-political army; independent courts, a free press, civil society organisations; none of them was in place. We thought that by going straight to elections and political parties, everything would be fine for handing it over. We were trying to build up the institutions; we were trying to build up an army that could sustain itself, a police force.

Brits were responsible for the police force in Basra. I remember saying, 'This isn't working. We're trying to build the Hampshire police in Basra when what we need is the RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary). We need an armed police force that's capable of defending itself and resisting the militias.' That advice was listened to and we got Ronnie Flanagan, the former Chief Constable of the RUC, to come out and look at the set up and make some recommendations. We were forever having to disband corrupt police forces because they were being infiltrated by the militia, and we were starting from scratch. Ronnie Flanagan came out and delivered a report on how to do things better suited for the sort of armed environment we had in the South. We decided, OK, we'd try and produce a police force with the Iraqis on the right lines, a more militarised police force able to defend itself.

I remember a week after the Flanagan Report Nigel Sheinwald rang me up and said, 'How's it going with the new policing arrangement? I've got to go and brief the Prime Minister and he's going to ask me about Iraq and the police force.' I said, 'It's going swimmingly. Everything's up and running; the police are operating absolutely brilliantly.' He said, 'Really?' I said, 'Don't be daft. It's a week since we got the report. Give us time. It takes time.' Ultimately, we were in the hands of inter-Shia politics.

Iraq was forever throwing up interesting challenges. We had a number of hostage crises during my time. Norman Kember and Rory Carroll were both taken in Baghdad on separate occasions. Norman Kember came to Iraq under the auspices of a Christian peace group who were anti-British and anti-American, and who believed they could bring peace to Iraq. They were pacifists, against the military and Norman Kember had signed an agreement that if he was taken hostage, there was to be no military used to rescue him. It was not long after he arrived in Iraq that he was taken hostage. He was kidnapped by Sunnis who were likely to hand him over to Al Qaeda so the only way we were going to get him out was by rescuing him, because there was not going to be negotiations with Al Qaeda. On past experience AQ would use him for their own propaganda purposes and eventually kill him. For an Embassy a kidnapped Brit takes top priority with all the necessary resources allocated to dealing with the crisis. But uniquely in a country like Iraq we had significant military and intelligence assets to deploy. A crisis group was established in London. If there's to be any military action to rescue him, this has to be authorised by a Secretary of State, unless there isn't time, in which case the Ambassador has the authority to do so. I ring David Richmond who was Director General of Defence and Intelligence, the senior official dealing with this in London. I said, 'For your own information, I just want you to know I've authorised an operation which could lead to the freeing of Norman Kember. I've taken the decision because there isn't the time to consult COBR (Cabinet Office Briefing Rooms) the Foreign Secretary or any other Secretary of State. I just thought I'd let you know.' There was some sucking of teeth at the other end. David Richmond said to me, 'I'm glad you've taken that decision.' I thought, quite right. Why not? How is somebody all that way away in London going to decide? It's crazy asking someone else to do it. I knew that my career was on the line, because if it all went wrong, I had done it and I'd be the scapegoat. I said to the officer in charge, 'There's some sucking of teeth at the other end, but go ahead.' A few hours go past. One of the finest moments of my diplomatic career was when I was told 'Ambassador, our man in the helicopter wants to talk to you.' He said, 'We've got Norman Kember. He's alive. No casualties.' I thought, oh my

God, that's good. They raided the place where Kember was chained to a radiator, and they freed him. According to press reports, he was ungrateful. He wasn't. The peace group was ungrateful; he was grateful. In the lead up to this, his wife came out to Iraq. The peace group had contacted me to say you do know that he has signed this agreement that there's to be no military rescue. I said, 'Well, unless I can talk to Norman Kember now to see if he's changed his mind, the only other person who matters to me is his wife. I'll ask his wife what she wants to happen.' I said to her, 'The group is saying that Norman's got this pre-nup, if you like,' and she said, 'He's an idiot. You do what you have to do but bring him home.' I said to her, 'There's no negotiation going on. This is Al Qaeda. Eventually, they'll kill him, but if we get a chance, we'll rescue him.' She said, 'You go ahead.' Ironically, I flew back on the plane with him to Heathrow and the press were all trying to get access to him and find out what plane he was on. We were in first class. I think somebody from the *Daily Mail* had got on the plane. Norman Kember was in front of me and I was keeping the press at bay. It was a happy ending.

Another happy ending was for Rory Carroll who was a *Guardian* journalist who got kidnapped by a Shia group. That was an interesting one, because one of my good mates is Ewen MacAskill, who is a *Guardian* journalist, who did the Edward Snowden report. When the Guardian correspondent in Iraq was kidnapped, Ewen was straight on the phone to me before it had gone through FCO channels and told me the circumstances in which Rory had been kidnapped. So the golden hour was really the golden hour. He told me that Carroll was going to meet some Shia groups, so he was pretty confident that he had been picked up by Shia. I said to Ewen, 'Thanks for that. We'll get on to it.' I got onto all my Shia politicians, Ahmed Chalabi, all the various factions and I said, 'It looks like a Brit, a *Guardian* journalist has been kidnapped by Shia militia. This is not going to do you any good. We expect this from Al Qaeda, we don't expect it from you guys. If you know anything about, do your best to get this guy released.' I put the feelers out to all these people. The crisis centre gets established. I thought that Rory was a British citizen. Just as we were going through all that, I get a message from the Foreign Office telling me that Rory Carroll is an Irish citizen and we're to do nothing without the say-so of the Irish government. Imagine trying to operate like that. In the meantime, while this message is coming to me, Ahmed Chalabi rings me and says, 'He was picked up by a Shia militia. I've secured his release. He's in my villa. Would you like to come and collect him?' I sent a message to the Foreign Office saying, 'I am about

to mobilise my security team to go and collect Rory Carroll. Should I wait for the Irish government's approval?' I went and picked him up and he was released.

My third hostage crisis was in Basra. Two of our [military] guys end up by being confronted by Iraqi police in a gunfight in downtown Basra. They can see that this isn't a good idea and they surrender and get arrested and taken to Basra police station. We know that and we know they are our people, so we are in touch with the Iraqis and let them know that they are our people. Indeed, we send a Major down to the Iraqi police station to identify them and say, 'Yes they're ours.' You may remember there was a scene of a British soldier getting out of a burning armoured personnel carrier. There was a big group of Shia rioters around this police station, and we've got the place surrounded, trying to ensure that our guys are safe. We're telling the Iraqis that they are our people. You should release them to us. In the meantime, we've got the Basra police station monitored by drones and we see through the drones two humans being exfiltrated in the boot of car from the police station, which we assume are our people. We can't identify them; all we know is that there are two warm human bodies coming out of the police station. We follow the car to the Shia flats, which is a big area dominated by Shia militia groups. The military come to me and say, 'We think our guys have been taken out of the police station. We think we know where they are. We don't know how long they're going to be there. We want to mount an operation to rescue them. Can we do that? We don't have time to do the usual business.' I said. 'Yes, by all means.' 'But there's one complication.' 'What's the complication?' 'Well, before we go in and rescue them, we just want to make sure that that isn't two other people, that they're somehow fooling us and that they're still in the prison.' I said, 'So how are you going to do that?' He said, 'Well, we've got to do it really quickly, so we're just going to run a tank through the wall. Is that OK?' I said, 'That's going to raise some political issues with the Iraqi political establishment. Is that the only way you can do it?' They said, 'Yeah.' 'OK then.' That's what they do. They run a tank through the wall, discovered that the prisoners have gone, that they are our two people, who then get rescued from the Shia flats. I'm left with having to answer to the Iraqi Prime Minister about why a British tank has gone through a prison wall and straight into the prison. We are having a full and frank exchange of views, this is with Al-Maliki he's the Prime Minister now. I said, 'Prime Minister, these were the circumstances and there wasn't any other way of doing it. Clearly, the Basra police had handed over our people to militias, militias that you and I know are trying to kidnap British soldiers to try to get the release of their prisoners. I am apologizing for the fact that our soldiers ended up in a

firefight with your policemen. I am apologizing for everything, up to the point where your police handed our soldiers over to the militia. I am sorry for all that. Everything that happened afterwards, I make no apology for. The prison we knocked down? We built it; we'll rebuild it. You've got nothing to complain about.' How did he take that? He's never been my best friend. It was John Jenkins who took over from me. I said to him, 'You may find the Iraqi Prime Minister is quite cool towards British envoys, because he certainly hates me. I've never been his friend; I tried to stop him being prime minister; I authorised a tank to drive into one of his prisons and I've accused him of not doing enough to contain Shia militia in the south, so Al-Maliki and I have never been good buddies.' I always use that as an example. Sometimes diplomacy is not about being mealy-mouthed, with soft words; sometimes it is telling it how it is.

CMM: This is the third interview with Sir William Patey for the British Diplomatic Oral History Programme, Catherine Manning recording.

Director Comprehensive Spending Review 2006-07

CMM: William, last time we had a wonderfully vivid account of your time as Ambassador to Iraq, which was obviously an exciting and dramatic experience. In 2006 you came back to London to be the Director of the Comprehensive Spending Review. Would you like to start off by explaining what the Comprehensive Spending Review was and what was the Foreign Office's part in it.

WP: Yes, I was between postings. I came back from Iraq in the anticipation that I would be the candidate, the favoured candidate, for Saudi Arabia. I had about an eight- or nine-month period – the job didn't come up for that period of time. Peter Ricketts, the Permanent Under Secretary, approached me and said, 'You've got a bit of time. I'd like you to lead the team to handle the negotiations on the Comprehensive Spending Review.' The Comprehensive Spending Review is something that happens every few years. It doesn't happen every year; it's a three- to four-year cycle when the Treasury says to every department, give us your plans for the next three or four years and we'll discuss them and negotiate them and we'll set your spending plans for that period. It's essentially two negotiations, one with the Foreign Office itself, because everyone in the Foreign Office has their own spending plans. So you are negotiating with the officials of the Foreign Office about their plans going forward, but the most important aspect is the negotiation with the Treasury, because they have to agree to those plans. That's the framework for this. The Foreign Office usually sets up an ad hoc

team rather than just have the Finance Directorate deal with it, because it's time-consuming, all-consuming, and the Finance Directorate has to run the day-to-day finances of the Foreign Office, so it's usually done by a separate body. I had no experience of the Administration, apart from the time when I was an Overseas Inspector, so I had a little bit about looking at the Foreign Office, how it organises itself, and negotiating with the organisation over its resources, but I had never been the Finance Director; I'd never really had a job in the Administration, so I said to Peter, 'Why me? It's not really my background.' He said, 'You'll have a team of financial whizz kids with you; you'll have help. I want a Rottweiler to deal with the Treasury.' Peter obviously regarded me as not the usual diplomat; he wanted a Rottweiler and that was my qualification for the job. I did have a very good team. There were only four of us. Jan Thompson, who was later the Ambassador to the Czech Republic, was my deputy and then we had two very bright young men who did the figures and worked out what would work and what wouldn't in terms of the maths.

I had one condition. Dickie Stagg was the Chief Clerk and at the time the title has changed but basically it is the most senior official below the Permanent Secretary, who runs the Foreign Office. I said to Dickie, 'This job will run all the way through to the summer when the actual agreement with the Treasury is struck. I'll only take this job on the condition that it doesn't preclude me from bidding for Saudi Arabia.' I was given that assurance at the time. Sometimes the assurances you get, certainly from the Foreign Office, are not worth the paper they're not written on. This was my assurance.

We spent the next six or seven months inviting the Foreign Office departments to justify the money they already had; and where they could make savings. In their fantasies they could bid for what they wanted, but these were fantasies: we were talking about the Treasury here who were already indicating that every department was going to have to take cuts, so we were inviting the Foreign Office to set out their plans. That was quite a difficult negotiation with colleagues and then you come to the Treasury. When you're dealing with the Treasury, the Foreign Office is usually dealt with by the bit of the Treasury which also deals with the Ministry of Defence. Given the Ministry of Defence's budget, the Foreign Office's is a counting error on the back of an envelope, but they still had to take it seriously and they still had to engage with us. They came to me and said, 'Every department is going to have to take big cuts. You accept a ten per cent cut right now and we'll do a deal, and you'll end up better off than all the other department. If you agree to a cut early, we can dispense with all this.' I said, 'Who are you kidding? Do I look as if I've come up the Clyde in a banana boat?' (I'm

not sure that was a phrase they understood.) I said, 'You always do this. I've read enough to know that you always do this, then other departments get away with better deals. We'll argue our case. If you're proposing ten per cent cuts, we're going to tell you what that means in real terms. We're going to tell you how many embassies that means closing; we're going to tell you what programmes it means shutting down; we're going to explain to you what a ten per cent cut means. Indeed, we don't want a cut, we want more money, because Britain needs to do lots of different things. The Foreign Secretary has ambitions to do x, y and z.' It was Margaret Beckett who was Foreign Secretary at the time. She wasn't there for very long, but she was there for all my time on the Comprehensive Spending Review team.'

We embark on this negotiation and the Treasury really resent it, because the real money to be saved for them is with the Ministry of Defence, but they've got to spend time with us. It was a fascinating time; we had as many difficult arguments within the Foreign Office as we had with the Treasury: making them justify their bids, looking for savings in case we did have to produce savings. We went all the way to the wire with the negotiation. The best bit of it all was getting a phone call from the Director of Finance at the MOD, who was leading their Comprehensive Spending Review, saying, 'What did you say to the Treasury? I've just had the Treasury team over here and they seem traumatised. They said they'd just come from the Foreign Office, and they'd never been talked to like that before.' So having been given my instructions by the Permanent Under Secretary I was to be a Rottweiler, a Rottweiler I was. I think they were expecting a smooth-talking, polite diplomat and that's not what they got. We had a long negotiation with them, and we were still holding out; we were one of the last to settle. We genuinely needed the money to do what the Government was saying it wanted to do. Ten per cent 'efficiencies' the Treasury used to call them were cuts. You could always find some efficiencies somewhere, but ten per cent meant cuts. We had a list of twenty posts we were going to have to close and we presented all that. We ended up getting a deal with the Treasury, but before that, in the middle of all this, I am bidding to go to Saudi Arabia, to Riyadh.

Dickie Stagg says to me, 'This Comprehensive Spending Review is really important. The job in Riyadh starts in May; we won't have finished this process until July. We need you to stay on.' I said, 'Hold on a minute, Dickie. You and I know that I only took this job on conditions. By the time we get to May, my work is done. This is about politics; this is about the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor reaching a settlement. The work has been done. You don't need me.' He sucked his teeth. I said, 'OK, here's the deal. I'll do both jobs. If I

get the job in Riyadh, I'll go out to Riyadh and I'll do my job in Riyadh and while I'm there I'll finish off the Comprehensive Spending Review. I'll do both at once.' Dickie and I had what I would call a full and frank exchange of views. He didn't contemplate it for very long, but he did try to say that this was very important for the overall Foreign Office, i.e. your future is irrelevant to all this. I said, if necessary, I would take it to the Foreign Secretary, but in the end I think my offer to do both jobs at once left him with few options. So he let me bid on this basis, having wanted me to stay on the basis of two-months of overlap. I bid for the Riyadh job and got appointed to Riyadh. We managed to wind up the negotiations pretty sharply and, indeed, it was all in the political realm with Margaret Beckett. I didn't have to do anything at the end, because it had all been sorted out. We had a very successful negotiation with the Treasury in that we didn't get a ten per cent cut; we took some cuts, but we had eventually what we regarded as a fair settlement. But in classic Treasury terms, the day before the spending plans were to be announced by the Chancellor, they sent their offer of settlement to the Foreign Office saying here's what we agreed and oh, PS, we're removing the hedge you get for foreign currency. Up to that point, the Treasury took the foreign currency risk, because our budget was expressed in pounds; we were spending it in all the different currencies of the world and there was a hedge. The Treasury removed that at the last minute. It was a classic Treasury move. We didn't know what that would cost us; we knew it would cost us something because we'd either hedge it or we'd take a risk. You could gain on it or you could lose on it, but the smart thing to do was to hedge it. They got their twist in the end, because we held out long enough and they had to come to a deal with us because the Chancellor couldn't finish his budget and we were the smallest bit of it, but they got their own back by inviting Margaret Beckett to make a fuss over a relatively small amount the day before the budget and Gordon Brown would have slapped her into line. In the end you can only win minor victories against the Treasury.

HM Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, 2007-10

CMM: You got to Saudi Arabia as Ambassador in 2007. Now, Saudi Arabia must be the job if you are an Arabist.

WP: Yes, it was the top job. It was the only job, other than Iraq, that was SMS3 (Senior Management Structure 3); Cairo had gone down to SMS2; all the other big ones were SMS2s. Saudi Arabia was the only other SMS3 job, and it was regarded the top job for an Arabist. My assumption was that I would go to Saudi Arabia and retire as a young man and go off and

do something else. I would be 57/58 at the end of my posting to Riyadh. Still time for a second career in business; I'll throw myself into this and end on a high.

It was nine years since I was last in Saudi Arabia - I left in '98. Not much had changed at all. It wasn't such a huge transition. When I first went to Saudi Arabia it was King Fahd; King Fahd had become ill and Crown Prince Abdullah was effectively in charge but hadn't become King. Not a lot had changed: Fahd had since died; Abdullah had become King. Abdullah was his brother, and they were working their way down the brothers, that is the sons of Ibn Saud. King Salman, who is King now, will be the last brother, the last son of Ibn Saud, to be King. Ibn Saud died in '53. There are other brothers still living, but, for one reason or another, they are not regarded as King material. Muqrin is not officially in exile, but he lives in the United States. He was Crown Prince for a while, until he was pushed aside by MBS, Mohammed bin Salman, the current Crown Prince. There is still Mohammed bin Nayef, a grandson of Ibn Saud, but he got pushed aside for MBS to take over. We've had the sons of Ibn Saud. Abdullah was an interesting case because he wasn't one of the Sudairi Seven. The Sudairi Seven were seven full brothers; they all had the same mother, a favourite wife of Ibn Saud. Fahd was the first of them to become King with the others Sultan, Nayef and Salman lined up to follow. Abdullah was the next competent half-brother after Fahd but if he became King, it would be important that he did not interfere in the succession to follow of the other Sudairi brothers. Abdullah's succession wasn't always guaranteed, but when Fahd became ill and Abdullah became Crown Prince his position was secure. He was effectively ruling as Crown Prince when I left in '98 and was fully established as King when I got there in 2007.

Relations with the royal family are always important in Saudi Arabia. Certainly, we had had a very successful visit by the Prince of Wales when I was there in '95-'98. He liked Saudi Arabia; he made a very important speech about Islam in which he was beginning to talk about understanding other faiths. Our royal family was highly respected. The Saudis, being a monarchy, realised that there was an A-list of royals, and our Queen was at the top of it. Of all the monarchies in all the world, we were right at the apex. The respect for The Queen was profound. The Prince of Wales developed a relationship with Saudi Arabia through his interest in and understanding of Islam. He wrote his Oxford speech on Islam, and we were benefitting from such discussion in the early days. I remember when the Prince of Wales came to Saudi Arabia in 1997, I organised the visit; I was Deputy Ambassador at the time. I remember saying to his Private Secretary at the end of the visit, 'I know you get a lot of diplomats telling you that this is a wonderful visit, and the Prince of Wales did really well.

This genuinely is an area where he has made a significant difference, and we have got into parts of the royal network that we don't normally get access to and he is genuinely respected.' What amazed me was the Private Secretary said, 'Would you tell him that?' I said, 'Sure.' Because he doesn't always know when he is having an impact and he seemed quite shy. I had a private audience with the Prince of Wales and said to him what I had just said to his Private Secretary, and he was genuinely pleased. I made it clear to him that I'm not the sort of person that will tell you this if it's not true, so you can take it from me. It was genuine and when I became Ambassador, I tried to get him back more often, because he did have a big impact in Saudi Arabia.

CMM: In your notes you mention counter-terrorism cooperation and dealing with Prince Mohammed bin Nayef were important during your time in Saudi Arabia.

WP: Mohammed bin Nayef at the time that I first went there was the Assistant Minister of the Interior. His father, Prince Nayef, was the Minister of the Interior and he was the Assistant Minister. He was the one who led the CT cooperation with the United Kingdom. We had really close working relations with him, countering Al Qaeda. That cooperation was very strong and we helped them build up their special forces, their counter-terrorism forces. He was the chap with whom we had most contact with because that aspect of our relationship was very important. The Saudis had just gone through a very difficult terrorist campaign. Last time we talked about the booze bombers and how there was an indigenous terrorist campaign, and they were in denial. By 2003, 4, 5, it was on the streets of Saudi Arabia. It was Al Qaeda. There were bombs outside the Ministry of the Interior that went off. There were audacious attacks on ex-patriate compounds in the Eastern Province; there were British nationals who were dragged along behind pickup trucks and killed. There was a clear and present threat in Saudi Arabia. The Saudis were jolted out of their complacency and Mohammed bin Nayef's big success was that he was brought into the Ministry of the Interior, and he cleaned the place out of Islamists. There was a load of Islamists and sympathisers in the Ministry of the Interior. He cleaned them out and turned the Ministry of the Interior into a serious counter-terrorism force, because it was existential for them. They weren't doing it for us. But then they became serious partners; by the time I got there, they were serious partners on counterterrorism. That was an important component. The other aspects of our relationship were the defence relationship, the economic relationship, but the counter-terrorism relationship had grown in importance with the Saudis realising that there was both a threat to them and to our wider interests. It's ironic that later on Mohammed bin Nayef

became the Crown Prince but was pushed aside by MBS, so he's now still in Saudi Arabia under house arrest. He was a threat to MBS, a political threat. He had been Crown Prince; he was a grandson of Ibn Saud; he's older than MBS and he had held more prominent positions than him. He's no longer a threat now because MBS had dealt with that; but he's still under house arrest. I think MBS has made sure that his wealth has been taken into the Saudi state coffers. He was one of the ones who, much later on, in 2017, became a guest of MBS at the Ritz Carlton – him and Prince Waleed – until they handed over a large part of their dosh. An amazing story.

When I was Ambassador MBS was not such a prominent figure but worked for his father who was still Governor of the Eastern Province, including Riyadh. Looking back on my time as Deputy Ambassador in the late 1990s MBS along with his younger brothers would be allowed into meetings by his father Prince Salman. I remember a visit by the Lord Mayor of the City of London and at the end of a meeting with Prince Salman these kids would come in and join us. MBS would have been about a nine-years old at the time.

The Al Yamamah legacy is quite a tricky one. It was a contract that started in the time of Mrs Thatcher, which was very lucrative for us, but if I said that the accounting was a bit unusual, that would be an understatement. Originally, we got paid in oil. It was a government-to-government contract. Al Yamamah means dove in Arabic. There is a certain irony in naming a contract for fighter jets "al Yamamah". The Saudis really wanted American advance fighter jets, but Congress would never allow them to get them. For the Saudis the next best thing was the UK Tornadoes and then Typhoons. We were probably the only country in the world producing advanced fighter jets of at least some sort of comparable operational level as the Americans. It was a programme not only to sell the jets, but to train their pilots and to maintain their jets, so it was a massive contract. The Saudis, because it was a defence contract, wanted to sign it with the British government, so we signed the contract with the Saudi government and then we had a back-to-back contract with BAE Systems. BAE Systems delivered the contract on behalf of the British government. BAE Systems have a massive presence to this day in Saudi Arabia. Originally, we were paid in oil. In the early days the Saudis didn't have a lot of cash available, so they didn't like the vagaries of a contract in which when the oil price went down, they would end up having to subsidise it from somewhere else. It was a contract which was outside the normal government finances, so it wasn't handled by the Ministry of Finance, it was handled entirely by the Ministry of Defence, run by Prince Sultan who was the Crown Prince for quite a long time and also

Minister of Defence. In Saudi Arabia at the time major princes had their own fiefdoms and accounting practises may not have always been up to the standards of the National Audit Office! We had this oil for arms contract which led to all sorts of controversies. What happened was we got two hundred and fifty thousand barrels of oil a day and we'd sell that oil on the market and the money would go into the Al Yamamah account, a Ministry of Defence account, held by our Ministry of Defence, and it would then be used to pay BAE Systems. But it was an account that was controlled by the Saudis, because they would say what you had to pay out. There were some items that they would ask us to pay for that might not have been entirely related to the provision of Tornado jets – the odd trip to the Caribbean for the head of the Air Force and their families. There were certain expenditures, all ordered by the Saudis; there was no corruption on our part about it, but it wouldn't have passed a Treasury accounting test if it was the other way round. Eventually, we persuaded the Saudis that this was no way to run a contract. It started in the eighties, and we are in the noughties by now and King Abdullah was no longer very happy with this arrangement because this whole fiefdom was run by Crown Prince Sultan: this defence contract was his fiefdom. The Saudi National Guard had been Abdullah's fiefdom – we had a separate contract with the National Guard but that wasn't paid for in oil

We eventually got the Yamamah contract on to what I would regard as a sounder basis, through the Ministry of Finance. It remained a government-to-government contract but was no longer paid in oil.

It was always controversial; there were always stories appearing in the media about various Saudi officials who were corrupt. As part of this contract, we also paid for an aircraft to be serviced for Prince Bandar Bin Sultan, the son of the Crown Prince, sometimes known as "Bandar Bush", the Saudi Ambassador to Washington. He had his own plane, but it was paid for out of the Saudi Ministry of Defence budget, with monies from the British Ministry of Defence Al Yamamah account – their money, but in our account. All the other aspects of Al Yamamah had been what I call tidied up, but this was one anomaly that remained. Questions were asked in the media about whose was paying for Bandar's plane. I was tasked with sorting this out: this had to stop. We wanted to close this Ministry of Defence account; we wanted to transfer all the remaining money to whatever account the Saudis designated, and they could start paying for their own planes. Bandar's no idiot; he'd seen all this controversy. I rang up Bandar and say, 'I'd like to come and talk to you about closing this account and ending the arrangement for your plane.' He's in Jeddah with the King – the royal family

decamp to Jeddah for half the year, and I arrange to fly down to see him. Then he rings me up and says, 'Can you come earlier because once we've concluded our business, I want to go and brief the King.' I say, 'I can't get there any earlier because there aren't any flights.' I have to get commercial flights from Riyadh to Jeddah. He said, 'I'll send a plane.' There was a pause, and he can hear my pause and he says, 'Not that one. I've got another one.' I said, 'Oh, good.' 'It's a Falcon jet.' I fly down in Bandar's plane to see him and he understands perfectly. I said, 'You tell us which account. It can be a Ministry of Finance account; it can be a Ministry of Defence account. It just has to be a Saudi government account, and we'll transfer all the money. What you do with it is entirely Saudi Arabia's business. It's your money; you have it. We don't want to be seen paying for things that then get criticised.' He was fine with that and that was what I'd call the last loose end of the legacy of Al Yamamah's unusual financing arrangements. The contract went on; we're still supplying Typhoons, but all budgeted for; it's in the Saudi Ministry of Finance budget.

CMM: In a traditional society, to be a good person you have to look after your family, your followers and clients.

WP: That's what a tribal leader does and that's what they were, big tribal leaders. I remember hearing at some point that Prince Sultan, who was Minister of Defence and one of the huge beneficiaries of the various defence contracts that were going around, was short of cash. I said, 'How can he be short of cash?' They said, 'He's got this vast network of followers and people who are dependent on him and it all trickles down to them.' That was the same with all the princes. Try explaining that to *Private Eye* or the *New Statesman* or the *Guardian*; you might come over as an apologist for a system of corruption. But it was one of the reasons why Saudi Arabia has remained relatively stable. When you had the Arab Spring and the dictatorships falling one by one, Saudi Arabia didn't go that way; not least because they had billions to pump into the economy to help, the system of patronage and tribal largesse that filters down. Whether that will remain with the current system of more concentrated power, we shall see. So something that successive British governments were extremely embarrassed about and had to handle as delicately as they could, imposing our accounting system on the Saudis was never going to work.

CMM: You had a series of politicians visiting.

WP: Yes, we had Gordon Brown when he was Prime Minister, a sort of emergency trip. Gordon Brown had not been Prime Minister for very long and then made a statement

essentially blaming the Saudis for high oil prices. I think this was in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008; he criticised the Saudis for artificially maintaining high oil prices. They were very cheesed off about that, so I persuaded No. 10 that he really ought to come out to Saudi Arabia and begin a dialogue with them and he did. He came out in the middle of an Islamic summit and he was guest of honour, which then became very delicate because the Chinese also turned up, the Vice-Premier of China, and I had to have lots of negotiations with the Saudis over precedence, because they wanted to put the Vice-Premier of China before the Prime Minister. I thought, we're having none of that. There were also sorts of protocol machinations that we had to go through to make sure it was OK. When he came, Gordon Brown was very good indeed. What we got out of that was an agreement that we would try to work together, we as oil consumers but also as oil producers, to try to stabilise the market. Because what the Saudis wanted and what they've always wanted was for oil to be in a relatively stable price range. Saudi oil is cheap to produce, and they were keen for more marginal sources of oil to stay in the ground. They were looking for the dream price. We wanted stability in the oil market too, so there was a meeting of minds on what we would try to do about it. The upshot of that was a sort of producer/consumer dialogue. It was quite a good visit in the end, quite focussed on this issue. Gordon Brown was very good; he got on quite well with Abdullah. Tony Blair had been there a few times, and he got on well with Abdullah. At that time the Saudis' dream price was between $50 and $80 a barrel. Their budget was on $50 but they didn't want to go higher than $80. They had a big dilemma, because they had a capacity of twelve and a half million barrels a day; but they were only producing just over ten million barrels a day, so they could up production and bring the price down, or withdraw it. But they also had the dilemma to keep maintaining that twelve and a half million, they were going to have to keep investing. For them it's an art form. As more producers came along, OPEC's share of the market – and Saudi Arabia basically drove OPEC – was falling and it was less than thirty per cent. Russia was a big producer; United States, Canada. There were lots of other producers, so their ability to control the market was much more limited unless they were willing to pump more or take it out of the market. This is why their recent collaboration with the Russians is so important for them, because that's another big producer and they can have greater sway over the market. That's realpolitik, not because they love Russia. Very few prime ministerial visits that I have dealt with are as focussed as that one, because they're usually about broader issues and take a long time to arrange. This was arranged at quite short notice.

David Miliband came as Foreign Secretary. He was the new Foreign Secretary and it was the first time I'd met him. I remember his visit because, as he was arriving, I got a call from Prince Saud bin Faisal, who was the Foreign Minister, to tell me that the King was unwell and would not be able to receive the Foreign Secretary. All our Foreign Secretaries want to meet the King; and if they don't the visit might not be regarded as a big success. When David arrives, I break the bad news soon after he gets off the plane. His face drops. In the car on the way from the airport he's chuntering away, 'Can't you do something about this?' While we were in the car I rang the King's Head of Protocol, a guy called Mohammed al Tobaishi, and saying, 'I'm with the Foreign Secretary. He's terribly disappointed. He's got a message from the Prime Minister …' (we always say they have a message from the Prime Minister in order to secure the call.) I could tell that Tobaishi was not spinning me a line and that the King was genuinely ill. When we got to the Residence and I had built in time for a delayed plane, so his first appointment was not for twenty minutes. Most prime ministers and foreign secretaries I've dealt with are perfectly happy to have twenty minutes down time on their phone. But Miliband: 'So what are we going to do for twenty minutes?' 'What would you like to do for twenty minutes?' 'I don't know. Tell me something.' 'Would you like a history of Saudi Arabia?' Yes, so for twenty minutes I gave him a history of Saudi Arabia. The whole visit was like this, completely manic. By that time, after Sudan and Iraq and Saudi Arabia I'd had a lot of ministers and a lot of prime ministers and I'd got into helping them, giving them down time so they could read their papers, but Miliband, no. Go, go, all the time. He was still going on about not seeing the King. He asked me, 'What will they think about me being so young?' I said, 'Yes, they will think you're young, but I'll tell you something I wish I'd told Michael Portillo when he came.' He had come when I'd been Chargé d'Affaires many years ago, and he'd been young. I didn't tell Michael Portillo not to be overawed by the surroundings and that they are all much older, you are the British Defence Secretary and that counts. I hadn't told Portillo that, because I thought he might have worked it out for himself, but he hadn't, and he was rather overawed. I thought, wasted opportunity. It stuck in my brain. So I said to David Miliband, 'Yes, they'll think you're very young, but remember you're the British Foreign Secretary and that counts for something here.' David was the last person I needed to prop up. At one point I said to him, 'Do you ever relax?' 'What do you mean?' 'You're quite manic.' We had a very good visit, and he goes back. I'm back on my next break; Peter Ricketts calls me in. He said, 'I just wanted to have a word. The Foreign Secretary gave us some feedback on his visit to Saudi Arabia. He said he thought you were a bit relaxed.' I said, 'Compared with him, anybody's relaxed.' It

was quite funny. If you're someone who thinks they're on their last posting, you can be a little bit relaxed. Even when we were in the car, he was on social media. I said, 'What are you writing? I want you to clear it with me, if you're writing about your visit to Saudi Arabia.' So he did, before he tweeted anything, I insisted he let me see what he was saying, in case it led to an uproar.

Tony Blair had been appointed the Quartet Envoy to the Middle East, so he came to Saudi Arabia in that capacity. Although Tony Blair had visited Saudi Arabia during his time as PM he was a more frequent visitor in his Quartet role. But he was also doing his consultancy business, so he used to come in his role as a Quartet envoy and at the same time as a consultant. He and I had an arrangement that I would come with him to the King when he was on what I regarded as official business, Quartet business, and when he moved off official business, I would take my leave. He had come as Prime Minister when I was Deputy Ambassador, and we got the two British nurses (who had been tried and convicted of murdering Yvonne Gifford) released from prison and expelled. On one of his Quartet visits after he was Prime Minister, he said to me, 'You know, I wish I'd known as much about the Middle East when I was Prime Minister as I do now.' I said, 'Yes, that would have been good. But you did have a whole bunch of people who would have happily told you about the Middle East, but you weren't really listening to the Arabists.' He was very much more understanding of the Palestine issue then. He did reflect that he now knew a lot more about it and that would have been handy to know when he was Prime Minister. But he also said to me, 'Do you know what my biggest mistake was?' No, I was intrigued to know what his biggest mistake was. 'The Freedom of Information Act.' He said, 'Why didn't you civil servants tell me what a bad move that would be?' I said, 'Oh, yes. Had we told you that this would lead to all sorts of problems, you would have thought we were just covering our backs.' And I said, 'I'm sure they did tell you.' He said, 'But they weren't forceful enough. You're right, but it was a big mistake.'

CMM: The period you were in Saudi Arabia, 2007 to 2010 was the financial crisis. Was there any effect there?

WP: Not hugely. The Saudis had invested in the western banking system, like everybody else, but Riyadh wasn't the centre of it like the Qataris and the Emiratis, because they didn't have quite the same amount of spare cash around. Saudi Arabia was neither part of the

problem nor part of the solution; unlike some of the other Gulf countries their assets weren't tied up in the same way. They didn't really have a sovereign wealth fund at the time.

CMM: What about social life in Saudi Arabia?

WP: The sort of entertainment that you got invited to by Saudi princes, or the King, were either official banquets or weddings. The weddings were very entertaining for the women and very boring for the men. My wife got invited to all sorts of the women's side of the wedding, which were really big parties, with dancing, but no men. Lots of food, lots of gaiety. Vanessa used to tell me about it afterwards: it was a place where Saudi mothers and Saudi sisters would suss out brides for their brothers. She said she used to say to Saudis, 'You'd better be nice to your sister, because she's going to pick your bride out for you and if you treat her badly, goodness knows what you'll end up with.' The women were all in their finery, elaborate gowns. Vanessa said she'd never seen so many low-cut dresses or slit skirts. At some stage in the evening the groom would be brought in and they would all cover themselves up. It was a women-only event and they were fun. The men would sit around and drink coffee and chat: not my idea of a party. But then you had groups of Saudi friends, who were just like any friends: some of them drank, some of them didn't. Your Saudi friends would come to dinners and parties at the Residence. Saudis who would bring their wives, if there were no other Saudis there; Saudis who would be happy to bring their wives, no matter who. There were different people, and they were all different categories. You had to be fluid. I did say to Vanessa, 'You know what I'd like to invent? I'd like to invent a dinner table, and I could feed into my computer who was coming and then the table would sink below the ground and everything would be re-set and it would re-emerge with a new placement.' As the evening went on, just before dinner, I would be adding chairs and taking them away.

CMM: Did you have a Saudi social secretary who knew who everybody was and could dash round?

WP: No, we had a Lebanese one, who basically wanted to be the Ambassador's wife. She used to greet the guests at the door. Vanessa got rid of her. We had trouble with the social secretaries, because you'd never get a Saudi. We inherited Sherard's social secretary, because I think Sherard's wife had stepped back a bit by this time and so she had got used to being more prominent. We inherited her and her prominent role was not appreciated by the lady of the house. We did a different format, and I had to get involved quite a lot.

Then we would do the ex-patriate community as well. We agreed to host eight to ten balls or parties in our garden. We were grateful to Sir Alan Munro, who during the Gulf War managed to acquire a massive extension to the British Ambassador's Garden. The garden when it was originally built was lovely, very nice, with a swimming pool. Then there was this huge extra area where you could seat three hundred people with a stage, so we would let that out to societies, the St George's Society, the Caledonian Society; the Hash House Harriers and various people. I think some societies were formed for the specific purpose of having a party at the Embassy! They would contract with a hotel and sell tickets or give them away. They would get that at cost. We didn't charge them for the event, but we said we need you to give a donation to charity. Vanessa was Chair of an international Children in Need charity and we raised about a million dollars over a few years and we gave that to some Saudi charities, to some Sudanese children's charities and some British charities. What it did was, it got us on side with the ex-patriate community, who themselves had their own vast range of Saudi contacts. It's a very opaque society and you had people there who had very close and intimate relationships with some of the biggest businessmen in the country. You couldn't get Saudis to come to that sort of thing. Most events went off smoothly but there were the occasional problems like the time when guests at a St George's Society fancy dress ball came as crusaders and posted pictures online. This incensed some Saudi Islamists who issued death threats. Stupid.

CMM: What was the highlight of Saudi Arabia?

WP: Getting the nurses out of Saudi Arabia, that was the highlight. That was such a shadow over such a long period of time in Saudi Arabia. The Prince of Wales's visit was one of the highlights, earlier on. The Queen didn't come to Saudi Arabia during my time. In 2010 she was doing her last Gulf tour and she didn't have the royal yacht any longer, and she couldn't do all six Gulf countries, so there was a big debate going on, backwards and forwards. She was going for [Sultan] Qaboos's fiftieth anniversary in Oman and it would have been very difficult for her to go to Oman without going to the UAE, so Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar all wanted her to come and she couldn't do all of them and Saudi as well. I volunteered to say, 'If Her Majesty doesn't come to Saudi, that'll be OK with the Saudis. The Saudis will not see that as a slight. If she only goes to Oman and the UAE, that'll be fine, and because she is not coming to Saudi Arabia that will make it easier to placate the Qataris, the Bahrainis and the Kuwaitis.' You could almost hear the sigh of relief from the Palace down the phone. I'd actually been in UAE when she did her last visit in 1979. I think I did the Palace a service by

volunteering not to have her and the Saudis were fine. They were very grown up about it, nice as it would have been to see Her Majesty.

I expected to be in Saudi Arabia for four years; that's what I was planning for. My plan was to do four and then retire. I can't remember who it was, but then the suggestion of Afghanistan came up. Sherard Cowper-Coles had gone from Saudi to Afghanistan, because in 2008 we'd got serious about Afghanistan, because we had such a stake in Afghanistan, a hundred thousand troops, ten thousand British troops, so without belittling the people who had gone before, they started sending more senior ambassadors, and they had no ambassadors who spoke Dari or Farsi, because we hadn't been in Afghanistan since we closed the Embassy in the late 1980s. The nearest they got was sending Arabists; Sherard was the first top rank ambassador to go. He'd been there for two years of my three in Saudi and then they sent Mark Sedwill to replace Sherard in about 2009; Sherard had been there 2007 to 2009 then Mark replaced Sherard. Half-way through Mark's term he decided that he wanted to be the NATO senior civilian representative, so he became the civilian equivalent of David Petraeus. They hadn't thought they would need someone for another year, so I got a tap on the shoulder to say will you go to Kabul. I thought, why not? It sounds really good; I quite like the idea of Kabul. This is my dream job: a hundred thousand troops, the biggest embassy, I think it was bigger than Washington at the time, about two hundred staff in Kabul and another hundred down in Helmand, so I said yes.

HM Ambassador to Afghanistan, 2010-12

I had about three weeks to pack up in Riyadh; Vanessa had gone early, back to London and I had three weeks to get from Riyadh to Kabul. I was coming back to London to get briefed and then going straight out to Kabul. I think two of those three weeks were taken up with being stuck in Riyadh, because of the Icelandic volcano that grounded all the planes. I was stuck; I couldn't get out. I was packed up and two weeks of my three-week break was spent sitting in Riyadh and I had to find a way to get out. I thought maybe I could get to Ankara and then go overland. You could fly out of Saudi but you couldn't get into Europe. The nearest you could get was Istanbul, or even Vienna, but you couldn't book a train ticket and the last thing I wanted to do was to get to Istanbul or Vienna and be stuck waiting in a train queue. At least I was comfortable in my Residence with somebody feeding me, as opposed to standing in a queue for two weeks. It was quite controversial because there were lots of stranded Brits and stranded pilgrims. The first BMI flight to go out, obviously there was

quite a bit of demand for it and we used what influence we had to get on it. Then I thought we'd better make sure that some of these other high-profile pilgrims who have been stuck are on it, so I made sure there was enough cover. It wasn't just the British Ambassador on the first plane out; I made sure there was a good dose of stranded pilgrims on the plane. So I managed to get out and have a quick week's handover. It was quite a quick transition. I've never really had much of a transition between postings; there's always been an urgency to them.

CMM: In Kabul you weren't in the old Embassy?

WP: Tragically, we'd given it to the Pakistanis. When Partition happened in 1947, when Pakistan became Pakistan and India became India, there was a clause there that said if we ever left Kabul, the Pakistanis would get it as part of the Moghul inheritance; it was the most magnificent Residence. There it was in ruins. I went round to see it; it was in a dodgy part of town by then. The Pakistanis wanted to knock it down and build something else, but I think they've been stopped from doing it. It was the nearest I got to a grand residence. My actual Residence was a little three-bedroom villa just opposite the Embassy. At least I had my own one, because in Kabul we were in a kind of protected compound, in a protected enclave, a bit like the green zone in Iraq. It was basically an Embassy zone and we had an embassy which we had managed to prise out of the hands of the Bulgarians. The Bulgarians had had a big embassy during the Russian time, quite a solid, big embassy. By the time I got there we had managed to buy this from them because they needed a much smaller embassy. We built them an embassy at the bottom end of the garden, so we had everything else. We were renting two streets, two long rows of villas opposite the Embassy and were renting all of them. It was a secure-ish compound and there were no entrances onto the other street, which was a guarded wall. Basically, people were sharing these villas and that was where all the staff lived and I had a villa to myself. It was not a grand residence, although I put up a lot of ministers; the Estonian Prime Minister stayed with me; all sorts of allies came and stayed. Various allies' prime ministers would come to visit their troops and they didn't have anywhere to stay so sometimes they would come and stay with me.

CMM: Did you travel outside Kabul?

WP: Yes, it was very good. We had a Beechcraft aircraft which was designed for us to be able to fly our staff up and down from Helmand to Kabul. The only way out for the staff was to fly to Helmand and get on a helicopter to the airport and fly out on a military aircraft,

though later on there was a civilian aircraft that we could use, but the only flights out of Afghanistan were via Kabul. I used to say I had my own aircraft but it essentially was for the staff getting up and down from Helmand. But what it did do was it enabled me to fly to other parts of Afghanistan so I could get it to fly to Herat, to Mazar-e Sharif and to Jalalabad and Kandahar, so I got around. It was not easy to travel by road, but using the plane, I could get about. It was also possible to get lifts on British and American military planes. With a hundred thousand American troops and ten thousand British troops, so there was always some sort of military lift. I got around quite a lot, but mainly my focus was Helmand, Kandahar and Kabul, because that's where the British effort was concentrated. We would fly elsewhere to talk to the Governors to find out what was going on. Our development programme was focussed on Kabul and Helmand but it had an impact everywhere. We were trying to create a new state and it was important to see how that was impacting in other areas. Afghanistan is a beautiful country, physically very beautiful; Helmand is a bit of a desert. It was fascinating to see what the Americans had done in the 1950s, the whole agricultural project.

CMM: You had a number of visits. Did you take your visitors around the country?

WP: Within about a month I had a visit by the Prime Minister, David Cameron. He had just won the election and within a month of me getting there we had a visit by the Prime Minister and we had a visit by a triumvirate of the Foreign Secretary, the Defence Secretary and the Development Secretary, so William Hague, Liam Fox and Andrew Mitchell came, the three of them together. They were a group and we took them to see the President and we took them down to Helmand.

That led to a very interesting discussion, because we had a twenty-two-seater plane. They all had their private offices with them and they all had their advisors, so they were quite a big group when they arrived. I told them they could have the Foreign Secretary plus five, the Defence Secretary plus five, the Development Secretary plus five and then there was me and my two bodyguards; that's the plane full. Andrew Mitchell who was Development Secretary said he needed more space on the plane for his people. I said, each minister would have the same number of staff to accompany them. Andrew said, 'Hold on, there's six for Defence and six for DFID and nine for the Foreign Office.' I said, 'What's the nine for the Foreign Office?' He said, 'Well, there's William Hague and his five and you and your two.' I said, 'I'm not Foreign Office; I am Her Majesty's representative. I represent the whole of

government. I might just as well be allocated to DFID or Defence.' He said, 'Nice try.' I said, 'It's not a nice try. That's how it's going to be.' Cabinet ministers can be very bolshie. I have had to point this out before. I'm not Foreign Office; I'm the British Ambassador; I represent the government. They often forget this.

It was very interesting when those three came out. They were all Secretaries of State and I would hear Liam Fox and Andrew Mitchell arguing about who was going to say a few words at this event and who was going to speak up. William Hague never indulged in all this. The moment would come and William Hague would stand up; he was *primus inter pares*. I thought, good on you! The Foreign Secretary was in the lead. He became my favourite foreign secretary. I told him that as I was leaving the Foreign Office.

Cameron came out at quite a difficult time because there was quite a lot of pressure to get more troops into Helmand. David Petraeus's was pursuing his inkspot strategy. Petraeus was asking for a surge in troops to deliver a decisive blow to the Taliban and pacify the country. He also had his own political ambitions at the time – he hadn't entirely given up being a Republican candidate to oppose [Barack] Obama – he was a political general. He used to say that Obama couldn't politically say no to him on increased troops and Obama because of the political cost even though Vice-President [Joe] Biden was against it. He got his way although not as many as he had asked for. We ended up with an additional thirty thousand extra Americans, twenty thousand of whom went to Helmand where our troops were under the greatest pressure from the Taliban. Having poked the wasps' nest, we were having trouble dealing with the wasps. I remember John Reid's words when Labour were in, 'We're going to Helmand and we'll leave without firing a shot.' It didn't quite turn out like that, so it was a very difficult time. Both Obama and Cameron were having difficulty arguing against the military logic of the generals. If the campaign is not going well more troops is often the preferred solution to achieve the military objectives. The political solution is often more difficult and not always immediately available. We'd made so many mistakes in the past: the first mistake being not inviting the Taliban to Bonn in 2001. Even though we were reaching out to the Taliban, to bring them in politically, Petraeus's strategy was to defeat them first and then invite them, but by then, however many troops we had we'd never have defeated them, in the sense of driving them out, because it's their home. We were on a hopeless strategy. At the time you don't quite know it's hopeless because you're so absorbed in trying to implement it and do your bit that it's not till you sit right back, later on you think, that was doomed from the start.

Talking to the Taliban: we did, we tried to talk to them. I talked to them. I remember the Americans flying me up to Sangin in one of their Ospreys. It's an aircraft that the Americans originally thought was too dangerous: it's a helicopter that turns into a propellor plane in mid-air. It takes off vertically and in mid-air the propellors drop forward and you go forward. It seems like defying the laws of physics, but it was a very useful plane in places like Helmand and Sangin. The Americans took us up to Sangin, which was famous for the Brits losing so many of our soldiers trying to take up some generators for the dam. It's a real Taliban hotspot. We were in control of Sangin; the Americans had put troops up there and were holding it. I fly up to Sangin to see what is going on and meet the Governor and I say to the Governor, 'It would be nice to meet some of the local people.' He said, 'They're all Taliban.' I said, 'Well, it'd be awfully nice to meet some.' He arranges a meeting. We were in the Governor's office and he looks out of the window – it's on top of a hill – and this great convoy of pick-up trucks was coming. He said, 'That's your visitors; that's the Taliban.' They come; they are the local tribal leaders, the local village elders. We were having a meeting and chatting; I was explaining why we were here, why we want to leave, what aspirations we have for the country. We're not invaders; we don't intend to stay longer than we need to hand over to the Afghans. This old bearded turbaned guy stands up and gives me a lecture on how Muslims are oppressed in Britain and how terrible it is. I said to him, 'Have you ever been in Britain?' He says no. I said, 'And what is this based on?' 'Ah, we know.' I said, 'If I were to tell you we had a Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw, who had more mosques in his constituency than he had churches, would that convince you that Muslims weren't being oppressed? We have members of the government who are Muslim; we have members of the House of Lords. Muslims worship freely, are integrated into our society. My last posting was Saudi Arabia where Christians had to be Christians in secret and were persecuted. So don't tell me about persecution. You're talking from a position of complete ignorance.' I turned to the American colonel who was in charge and I said, 'I don't think I've won over any hearts and minds here.' He said, 'No, but my boys feel really good about it, these people getting a proper telling off.' It made the Americans feel better, but I wasn't making any difference.

At some place, later on, there was some talk of pushing back up into Sangin – we lost Sangin at some point – and having a military thrust back into Sangin. I said, 'A waste of time, because when the troops leave the Afghan army will never be able to hold it. It would be a waste of manpower. We've got to accept that some parts of this country, whatever happens,

will remain in the hands of the Taliban and there's no point in us expending young lives on something we can't hold on to.' By the time I left I was convinced that Helmand would revert to being a Taliban stronghold no matter how much we invested in it and it was never going to be the paragon of democracy and women's rights that we were hoping. The best that we could hope for was that the big cities would be run by the government and you would have an agrarian, rural population that would be operating at a slightly different level. But anybody who wanted to go to university, or women, would have to leave that part of the country. That might have been a model for Afghanistan, but the Taliban were never really interested. Once the surge had happened and they realised that they would not be completely defeated, they would just wait us out. The famous Taliban saying: 'You have the watches, we have the time.' That's exactly what they were doing and they were right. In the end the Americans decided they'd had enough and they negotiated the withdrawal of troops without any conditions whatsoever. The Taliban were just waiting for us to leave.

Looking back on conversations I used to have with President Karzai, he would rather annoyingly tell the Americans they were fighting the wrong people in the wrong place. 'You should be fighting the Pakistanis, who are hosting the Taliban. The Taliban, the Pushtuns are our people.' He was right up to a point, but a bit frustrating if you are investing so much in the country. By the time I got there Karzai was very suspicious of the Americans. I used to spend the first twenty minutes of any meeting I ever had with him, dispelling his latest conspiracy theory of what the Americans were up to. I would say, 'Why would they want to do that? They've got all these troops here. They want to get out; they want to leave the country, so why would they do that?' 'Oh, well, you don't understand them.' I used to say, 'I now think he did it to wind me up. He would calculate that whenever I had come to call on him I would be asking him to do something so if he diverts me with a twenty-minute rant about the Americans, I'd have less time for whatever it was I wanted to get out of him'. I stopped falling for it after a while and got my business done first.

CMM: What did you feel about Karzai?

WP: He understood Afghanistan; he didn't know how to handle us.

CMM: Was he corrupt?

WP: His brothers certainly were. He hasn't left the country with a load of money, so it's hard to say. He wasn't overtly; you didn't hear all the time that the President takes this, that and

the other. His brother, Ahmed Wali Karzai, in Kandahar was certainly corrupt. They accumulated power and influence. They didn't give their permission without money. Karzai's brother and the Vice-President's brother were both corrupt. They ripped off the Kabul Bank to the extent that it went bust. I remember going to see Karzai and Fahim Khan, the Vice President saying, 'Kabul Bank is about to go bust; both your brothers are complicit; they've stolen the money.' The economists were telling me that the equivalent in terms of the Kabul Bank's size in relation to the Afghan economy, would be if the CEO of the Royal Bank of Scotland had robbed all its assets. I told them that their brothers should give all the money back ($700 million) and they should go to jail for what they've done. They were both unsympathetic. I said, 'We can't go on supporting this.' They said, 'Do what you have to do.' That was part of the problem, we'd invested so much in Afghanistan, the nuclear option was for us to stop funding it, pull out and that would be disaster. They played on that. In the end we let the Kabul Bank go bust with its bad debts and we formed a new Kabul Bank with better controls and no brothers of the President and the Vice-President, because you need a banking system. We were stuck. The Attorney General, the most senior law officer was the most corrupt. The legal system was compromised. I said to Karzai, 'You need to sack him.' 'No, I can't do that.' Lawyers whom we were employing from our own Department of Justice resigned saying 'I can't work with these people any more.' So you'd have some successes somewhere and failures elsewhere. It was constant. You sometimes wondered, why should I care more about this country than they do? There was a little bit of that. But there were worthwhile people around, but you never quite knew what they were up to.

The work with women was a good bet. Women were being educated; fifty per cent of the students at university were women. Schooling – we'd had twenty years of women's education and we were building up institutions. We were building up the civil service, but the trouble with that was it was a distorted system, because the ready-made administrators were usually Afghans who'd been overseas who had been educated. To get them to come back, we'd to pay them inflated salaries which then became the norm. So there were all sorts of distortions. When you're in a hurry, as we were, and twenty years is still a hurry, when you're in a hurry you use all sorts of short cuts and it leads to all sorts of distortions. It's convinced me that western democracies can't nation-build. We do not have the patience. The only way you can do it is if you're in control of the politics for long enough to build up the institutions over decades. We probably needed a viceroy to rule there for twenty years and build up the institutions from scratch, because it became very frustrating. We were only

there for – the generals were there for six months, a year; I was there for two years; some of them were there for six months. By the time I left I had a much better idea of what was needed, but I was leaving. The learning curve is very steep, but you're making so many errors and mistakes. We spent hundreds of millions trying to fight the drug trade and when I left the drug production was higher than it was when I arrived. Not due to me, but just circumstances. That convinced me that dealing with the supply side isn't possible. It's the demand side you have to deal with.

My reluctance to engage with the Taliban came after the assassination of President [Burhanuddin] Rabbani. I saw the former President Rabbani who had been appointed a Peace Commissioner, so his job was to try to bring factions together. I had seen him at his house the week before he was killed. The week after I had seen him, a Taliban had come to his house in Kabul and, as Afghans kiss on each cheek, had exploded a bomb in his turban and killed them both. Blew their bodies everywhere. I called on his son a week later, Sallahudin Rabbani, who became the foreign minister. It may have happened in the same room – they had good painters and decorators. I wasn't quite able to look a Taliban in a turban in the eye after that.

I also appeared on an Afghan TV comedy programme. We were supporting all sorts of things: a free press and we were encouraging Afghans to be critical. Afghan TV was producing a satirical TV programme a bit like 'Yes Minister', I can't remember what they called it. We were talking about this programme and that it was good that they were laughing at their own officials. They'd asked the American Ambassador if he would appear and he'd said no. I said, 'Poor substitute, but I'll appear.' They wrote a script in which I appeared as myself and because I am Scottish, they had this notion about wearing a kilt. The script they'd written was that there was a corrupt minister who was coming to see the British Ambassador about some development money they wanted to get. In order to persuade the British Ambassador, the Minister's staff had told him that the British Ambassador is Scottish, so you've got to wear a kilt. The actor, quite a famous Afghan actor, refused to wear a kilt. They compromised and he wore a sporran round his neck. It was the weirdest thing. It was all being filmed in my actual Residence and the scene is that I am in my tennis gear and about to go and play tennis and I haven't got time to see this guy. The script is me brushing him off, so he has to talk to my deputy, Catherine Royle a woman. It is much funnier in Dari!

Afghanistan was tough, but I loved the challenge. I had a big team with a lot of good people: Lindy Cameron, who is now our High Commissioner in India, was my Head of Office in Helmand. The satisfying thing was the brightest and the best of the Foreign Office wanted to do this: they were all up for it. So having done Iraq and Afghanistan, there are quite a lot of new ambassadors who've worked for me and I quite enjoy seeing them moving onwards and upwards. When I am asked what my favourite postings are, I always say Baghdad and Kabul, they were professionally the most exciting. I met some good people and had real challenges, interesting times, professionally very satisfying, but challenging. People trying to kill you all the time, shoot at you, fire missiles at you. You don't get used to it, but it becomes part of your working life, part of your normal life.

But it wasn't my final challenge. When I retired, I was asked to be Chairman of Swindon Town Football Club. I was approached by the owner of Swindon Town, somebody who wasn't interested in football. He had been a mathematician and devised an algorithm that led to the founding of Betfair, the online gaming company. He'd made hundreds of millions of pounds on Betfair and he was now a businessman. He was interested in racing, but some of his friends, so-called friends, had sucked him into being a minority shareholder in Swindon and then managed to extricate themselves, leaving him the majority shareholder in Swindon with Paolo di Canio as the manager. If you're not a football fan, you won't know Paolo di Canio is a mercurial Italian who played for West Ham; he was a great player but essentially is a fascist, a big Lazio supporter. What a great player he was! Quite a good coach, but manager? No way. He'd been brought into Swindon and he'd brought Swindon up from Division 2 to Division 1. He was spending £3½ to £4 million of Andrew Black's money every year to try to get them up to the championship, breaking all sorts of rules, fair play rules and all sorts of things. There was a little bit of a crisis at the club in which Andrew Black wanted to get out but didn't know how to. He wasn't somebody who liked difficult conversations, so he approached a mutual friend of mine and asked if he knew someone who could be Chairman of our football club. He said, 'I know someone who has just retired from Afghanistan as Ambassador and was in Iraq and had been in Sudan.' He said, 'He's a football fan and might be up for it.' I get interviewed by this chap at the RAC Club in Pall Mall – I say interviewed but I am the only candidate for the job. I ask him, 'Why me?' He said, 'I've looked at your CV,' he said. 'You've dealt with warlords in Sudan; you've dealt with Saddam Hussein, militias in Iraq; you've dealt with the Taliban in Afghanistan. I need someone to deal with Paolo di Canio. You look as if you've got the right background.' It

was my experience of dealing with warlords that got me the job of Chairman of Swindon Town and, actually, he was right. Paolo di Canio was more difficult than any of them. I was there for one season and my task was to sell the club and allow Black to withdraw. He had hoped he could sell the club and get all his money back, because he had sunk about ten million pounds in debt. At one stage I tried to get the Qataris interested; they were interested, but they were taking too long with their due diligence. Due diligence! I was offering them it for ten million: you can have this club and you can take where you like. Anyway, we eventually sold it to a consortium from Luton, having written off the debt. I convinced Black that he wasn't going to get his money back. All that was going to happen was that he would waste a lot more. To keep the club out of administration and give me time to sell it, I had to sell our best player, Matt Ritchie, who went on to play for Scotland. I sold him to Bournemouth and Paolo was so incensed he resigned. That was a bonus because we could sell the club on without his cost base which was more than fifty per cent of the salary bill of the club. It was a triumph all round really.

My diplomatic career ended up in being very useful in a football chairmanship. I always say to my colleagues when they're thinking of leaving, 'You may not think you have acquired any skills, but I can tell you, if you look back on your career, you've acquired a multitude of skills that can be useful in many, many avenues.'