

SIR ANTHONY (DERRICK) PARSONS

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British Diplomatic Oral History Project
Jane Barder interviewing Sir Anthony Parsons
on 22nd March 1996 at home in Devon.

JB: Sir Anthony retired from the Diplomatic Service in 1982 as Permanent Representative at the United Nations in New York. Post retirement he worked as a Special Adviser on Foreign Affairs to the Prime Minister, Mrs. Thatcher, from 1982 to 1983. He was appointed LVO in 1965, CMG in 1969, KCMG in 1975, GCMG in 1982. He was born in 1922; he was educated at Kings School, Canterbury and Balliol College, Oxford; and then I think you were in the Army when you went to Oxford - were you not?

AP: I was meant to go up to Oxford probably in 1940 when I was 18, but I went into the Army instead, like millions of the rest of us did, and at the end of the War I was seconded to the Palestine Government for three years and left in that disastrous scuttle we had from Palestine in 1948. I found myself still stuck with a Commission in the Army; I couldn't get out. Then I discovered to my great joy that the Army were prepared to release me from military duty to go back to Oxford, because my education there had been interrupted for a couple of years, and take a degree. I wanted to do English literature, but when I suggested this to the local General, who was interviewing me, he exploded and said that he wasn't going to let me go to Oxford and leave my military duties in order to learn poetry; and was there anything I could do that would be useful to the Army? So I said I knew Arabic, because I had been working in Arabic for the previous three years; so he said: very well, if you study Arabic then I'll let you go to Oxford if you can get yourself a place in the Oriental Studies School there, which I did. So I went to Balliol, the college which I would have gone to anyway if it hadn't been for the War, and I read Oriental Studies with Arabic and Turkish being my two languages. I was then stuck with another two or three years in the Army to work off the release from military duties that I had had. So after some argument about whether I should go back to Regimental duties I signed a piece of paper saying I forfeited all promotion beyond the rank of Major provided that I was permanently seconded to intelligence duties. So I went to the Embassy in Baghdad as Assistant Military Attaché, where I played out my time and had an extremely interesting job there; and then I joined the Diplomatic Service from there, having learnt all about it, as an over-age entry.

JB: That was in 1954.

AP: Yes, that was in 1954.

JB: Then you just spent a year in the Office and then went back to use your Turkish.

AP: Yes, I spent a year in the Office and then one day I met the Head of Personnel in the corridor and he said: it's about time we sent you somewhere in Europe; and I thought: that's fine; they will send me to Paris or Rome or somewhere like that and before I knew where I was I was in Ankara, obviously because of my Turkish. I was for four years the principal Turkish speaker in the Chancery of the Embassy in Ankara and taking pretty well all the political papers and also having special responsibility for studying the Turkish domestic situation. It was a fascinating time to be in Turkey because the country was in a kind of reverse transition - Ata Türk had secularised it, twenty years before; he had changed the Turkish language from the Arabic script to the Latin, changed the dress from traditional dress and so on and had made a determined resolution to transform Turkey into a western European Country; but by the time I was there Ata Türk's party had been thrown out of power and the Democratic Party, which was in power, was very much based in voting terms on the countryside and small provincial towns, which were, of course, still very traditional in their outlook. So you had a situation where in the big cities like Ankara and Istanbul and also in the Armed Forces you had the firm belief in Ata Türk's revolution and secularisation but the Government was putting a lot of money into building new mosques and that kind of thing; and so traditional Islam was beginning to return in the countryside and in the small towns and villages; you had this dichotomy between an European country, because of the revolution, and the re-emergence of a traditional Islamic country in part of the population. It was also, of course, in the period of four years during which the whole of the Middle East was more or less aflame. We had Nasserism sweeping the area, putting monarchies and pro-Western regimes at risk all the way from Egypt to the Persian Gulf. You had this clash between Iraq on the one hand and Egypt for pre-eminence in the Middle East. We had the Suez aberration which affected Turkey a great deal. Syria nearly went Communist. The Iraqi monarchy was brought down in a bloody revolution in 1958. British troops landed in Jordan and American troops landed in the Lebanon.

And all through this period the main preoccupation in the Embassy was the Cyprus problem. These were our last years in Cyprus and we were trying to decolonize the country without creating either major inter-communal strife or even worse an actual inter-state war between Greece and Turkey, both members of NATO. We succeeded in the latter, but not in the former.

JB: That was a four year posting; and then you went to Jordan?

AP: Then I went to Jordan. By 1959 when I was to leave Turkey (in any case I had been there too long for a First Secretary), Syria and Egypt were united in the UAR and the idea was that I would go and open up a Consulate General in Damascus subordinate to Cairo; but the resumption of diplomatic relations with Egypt /Syria kept on drifting into the distance - they had broken with us after Suez, of course - and so I was sent to Jordan, really in order to wait until Damascus opened up. That didn't happen; the whole thing dragged and so I went off to Cairo for 18 months or so.

JB: What as? Still First Secretary?

AP: Again I was kind of Oriental Secretary in Cairo - technically, I think, I was called the Press Attaché - but my main job again was to study the Egyptian internal political situation through the medium of the Press; because Egypt in those days was very very strictly controlled, a police state, and it was rather like being in a Communist country. You had to get your information through interpretation of what was coming out in the public media. That was one of my principal jobs, God help me. When I got to the office in the morning my first duty was to read all the Arabic newspapers and periodicals, not from cover to cover obviously, not the Art pages and that kind of thing, but all the political pages and the leaders, so I could inform some people of what was going on, not only in domestic terms but also in terms of foreign policy, because Egypt was at the time leading the newly born non-aligned movement between the two blocs - Nehru, Nasser, Nkrumah, Tito were the four originators of the non-aligned movement. "Non-aligned" to us in Cairo in those days seemed to be a process of giving the Soviet Union the benefit of every doubt and never giving the West benefit of any doubt! But still it was presented as non-alignment between the two blocs and there was some truth in that. And that was an exciting time because we were trying to resume full diplomatic relations, which we only got just before I left in the late summer of 1961.

JB: So what did you have until then - a Chargé or a British Interests Mission?

AP: We started out as a Trade Mission and then we became a Diplomatic Mission and then eventually in the spring of '61, I suppose it must have been, we got full diplomatic relations back. It was all very much bound up with de-colonisation. We, of course, were still the colonial power

in a great deal of sub-Saharan Africa. Cairo was awash with liberation movements from the British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, which Nasser was backing. He wanted footholds in our colonies in the form of Consulates and that kind of thing, which we weren't quite so keen on, because he was rather hostile to us; and so this all got tied up with the question of resumption of diplomatic relations, which took much longer than it should have done. So we had continuing crises in our resumption of relations with him, but I suppose a turning point really came when we realised that things weren't quite so bad as they might have been just after we had got an Ambassador back - Harold Beeley. Kassim, the military dictator in Iraq who had wiped out the monarchy in 1958, threatened Kuwait in 1961 as soon as we withdrew protection - a kind of preview of Saddam Hussein and the Gulf War - and the Kuwaiti Emir asked for British troops to deter the invasion. What we didn't want to do was to send British troops there against the wishes of Arab Nationalism which was sweeping the whole area at the time. So what we had to do was to get to Nasser somehow and tell him that we weren't going to send our troops to Kuwait for any imperialist reason; we were sending them there simply to deter an Iraqi invasion and at the request of the ruler of Kuwait. Strangely enough, this worked because by that time Iraq and Egypt were on the worst terms again. There had been a brief honeymoon when the monarchy was thrown out, but that had died down. And so, eventually, by extremely tortuous means, because we had no access to Nasser directly or even to senior Ministers at the time, we got the message that Nasser had given us the green light. When you think that it was only four or five years since we had invaded his country, that was rather surprising. So we went ahead and the Kuwait crisis died down. So that was a very interesting kind of signpost on our way back to our relationship with Egypt.

JB: So once relations were established you went back to the Foreign Office.

AP: I was due to go back to the Foreign Office; I had been abroad for several years and I was due for a posting back home. First of all I was offered a job which I didn't regard as involving an honest day's work for a relatively honest man; so I refused it and I had rather a row with the personnel department.

JB: What was it?

AP: I was offered the job of Head of the Middle East section of a thing called the Information Research Department which dealt out slightly seamy propaganda towards the Middle East. I

didn't want to do that as a job and equally I wanted to get away from the Middle East, because I had been doing nothing but the Middle East since 1945, sixteen years, and I thought it was time I had a change. Anyway I refused that job and there was a frightful row and I was told it was an order and I would have to resign if I didn't accept it - so I resigned. At the very last moment when I got back to England and had gone to say good-bye to Personnel Department, I was told that they had changed their minds and were going to give me another job instead. So I was sent to American Department where I became Assistant Head for the next two or three years until the beginning of 1964. That was interesting because Latin America was a part of the world I had never dealt with, but I read it all up and found that it was great deal more absorbing than I thought it was going to be. I was also involved with the Colonial Office with the de-colonisation of the main Caribbean countries and so we were de-colonising Trinidad, Guiana and the major Caribbean countries, which was very interesting. Also I was there for the Cuban missile crisis which was extremely exciting, because we really did think that we were on the brink of a third World War. I remember going home on the crucial Sunday and we all knew in the Office that if the Russian ships didn't stop, (the Russian ships which were carrying supplies to the missiles already deployed in Cuba), then the Americans were going to carry out a pin point conventional bombing attack on the missile sites the following morning. We had come to the conclusion that if this did happen, then the Russians would retaliate by carrying out a similar bombing attack on the American Jupiter missiles which were deployed in Turkey and that would have been the first rung of the ladder of escalation and God know where we would have finished up. So there was a moment of enormous tension and we really did think that this was perhaps the overture to the third World War.

JB: This was presumably before the days of 'Hot Lines' between Prime Ministers and Presidents. So how much contact was there?

AP: Well, we had the great advantage at the time that David Ormsby-Gore was the Ambassador in Washington and since he was a very close friend of Kennedy's he was more or less sitting in on Kennedy's War Cabinet. So he was able to keep the Foreign Secretary and the Prime Minister Harold Macmillan very closely informed the whole time about what was going on; but it was, I suppose, looking back on it now, with the possible exception of the Yom Kippur War of 1973, I suppose it was the closest the World came to an actual military collision between the super powers since the beginning of the Cold War.

JB: Rab Butler was Foreign Secretary at the time or was it Alec Home?

AP: It was Alec Home.

JB: No doubt he was unflappable?

AP: He was unmoved by the whole thing, but there was a great air of tension within the Office - and there was a great air of tension in the country. People really did think that this was going to be 'it'. I remember one quite interesting thing on that Sunday. My wife and I had been invited to lunch by a chap called Heath Mason, now dead, who was at the time Head of Northern Department which dealt with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and he had to lunch the Counsellor and no.2 at the Hungarian Embassy and so we spent the whole lunch talking to this Hungarian about the Cuban missile crisis and he was very interesting because he said: "I don't know what all you people are worried about", he said, "we in Eastern Europe have absolutely no doubt at all that the Soviet Union will climb down - Khrushchev has over-reached himself; he knows it and all he needs is some way off the hook; but he will climb down; there won't be a third World War". We didn't really believe him at the time! Thank goodness he was right.

JB: So from that job you went abroad again.

AP: Yes, I went to be Head of Chancery in Khartoum. I wasn't wildly enthusiastic to do that, but having had one cracking row with Personnel Department three years before I stopped short of going to the mat on the posting to Khartoum. I had always wanted to go to the Sudan; being a Middle East man and an Arabist I knew all about it. It was quite an interesting, it was a very interesting time now I come to look back on it. First of all the Sudan was extremely important to us then for reasons of overflying; we still had then a chain of military bases stretching from Britain to the Far East. I'm talking about 1964/65. And for convenience the best way for us to get aircraft to and from the Far East was via Libya, which was still a monarchy and very much under our thumb, across the Sudan to Kenya and then off over the Indian Ocean to the Far East. This meant we needed overflying rights on a blanket basis from the Sudanese Government. We had to renew them every three months (I forget now, it may have been every six months) so it was very important that we kept on good terms with the Sudanese Government, which was at the time a military Government. There had been a democratic multi-party system on independence in the 1950's, but this had been overthrown in 1958 by the military. It had a harmless side to it; it

wasn't a savage Government like present-day Iraq or Syria, but it was a military Government and we had to keep on good terms with them. I suppose that the most interesting conjuncture we had was that in the autumn of 1964 there was a revolution in Sudan and this was in a sense a forerunner of the Iranian revolution because it was the overthrow of a military government by purely civilian action. What happened was very much like what happened in Iran at the end of the 1970's; there was a shoot out between striking students and the Army. Well, on this particular occasion in 1964, the Communist Party which was underground, of course, decided to stir it up; and the Communist Party formed itself with all other political parties who were also underground into a kind of coalition; they called everybody in the country out on strike and it worked. Very interesting, because the Sudan is an enormous country, the size of Europe, and the cities like Khartoum are rather like islands in a sea of sand; everybody came out on strike, the airlines came out on strike, the railways came out on strike, the radio came out on strike, everything did; the whole country just simply died and the Army was left beating the air. They could shoot people out on the streets but they couldn't actually get anyone out of their houses and force them to go and open up a radio station or drive a train; so they were unable to bring reinforcements into Khartoum, because there was no way of getting them there. And after about four or five days of this they really had no choice but to surrender. The strike committee, which was this coalition of parties, said we will only reopen the radio in order to announce the resignation of the Government; well indeed that happened. There was a very dramatic moment when the radio came on; we were all in our houses; there was a curfew. We had our radios turned on and suddenly the radio came on and the Government announced that it was going to resign and there would be negotiations for a civilian government. It was most extraordinary, Khartoum was a very old fashioned city, I am talking about twenty years ago now, and suddenly as if from nowhere, every street was absolutely full of people, all wearing white and each one carrying an enormous palm frond. A fifteenth century scene.

JB: So, unlike the Iranian revolution, not an Islamic revolution.

AP: No, no, absolutely not. The main component of the civilian success was the overwhelming size of the demonstrations which embraced all sections of the people; this massive wave of people marched from all directions on the Presidential Palace; there was great joy. The protests started with anti-militaristic academics from Khartoum University and the Communist party members. But as everybody went on strike, this brought in all sections of the people. But this new Government took some time to sort itself out; there was a long delay during which there

were some very serious shoot outs; eventually a revolutionary council came into being; a lot of people died in the mean time. The Communists had deliberately, in order to provoke the Army into firing to accelerate the process of negotiation for a civilian government, got about a thousand people to charge the Presidential Palace, knowing that they would be shot at; and they were. The Army fired automatic fire at them and hundreds of people were killed; but that had the desired effect.

In 1964 the then military President had paid a State Visit to Britain and, of course, had reciprocated with an invitation to the Queen to come to the Sudan. The Queen and Prince Philip were due on a State visit in March 1965. They were doing one to Ethiopia and then coming on to the Sudan. Well, by the time they got to Ethiopia civil war had broken out between the traditionalists and the communists in Khartoum and fighting was going on in the streets and they were full of bodies and so on. So should we allow the Queen to come or should we not? Well, we decided to confirm the invitation originally because it would have looked very bad if we were prepared to have the Queen come for a military Government but not for a civilian one. So my then Ambassador, Ian Scott, now long retired, took me as the main Arabic speaker along with him to the Revolutionary Command and his message to them was this: he said the Queen is now in Ethiopia; we had made all the preparations; we had been preparing for months for this visit; everything was laid on; she was due in 48 hours and shooting was still going on in the streets. He said to these characters, we can't have this. Look, I will cancel this visit - the Queen's visit. I will send her a message in Addis Ababa, unless each of you will order your political parties to stop fighting and make the visit a huge success. You must do this publicly on the radio while my Head of Chancery here, Tony Parsons, is listening because he understands Arabic; and they all said O.K. and they did! One by one, Communists, National Democrats whatever they were, all said: down tools, boys; let's give the Queen of England a first class visit; and it was a first class visit. The Queen came and it was a tremendous success; everything went according to plan; and she got a huge welcome everywhere. And the interesting thing was, as so often happens in these cases, we all wondered when she left whether the fighting would resume; but it didn't. They had downed tools and it was really too much of an effort to pick them up again and get down to business, as it were. So, in a sense, her visit actually stopped the civil war going on in Sudan.

JB: I am sure that you reported that to her.

AP: Oh yes, sure. To me I think that the highlight of the whole tour was that on the very last

evening the Sudanese Government gave a party for her on a river boat, a kind of relic from the 19th century, General Gordon stuff. And all the Revolutionary Council were there including the Communists; the then head of the Communist Party, now dead, God rest his soul, who enjoyed parties very much, came up to the Queen, (I was standing by her in case I was needed to do some bag carrying), and swaying slightly lifted his glass to her and said: Your Majesty, I would like to drink a toast to you; Your very good health; and I speak as the Head of Her Majesty's loyal Communist Party in the Sudan.

JB: You were there for about a year?

AP: Yes, just about eighteen months.

JB: And then you went on to this job with this rather strange sounding title of Political Agent in Bahrain.

AP: Yes, that's right. I was appointed Political Agent in Bahrain. I suppose I often used to think that although Bahrain is tiny - a population then of about a quarter of a million - I probably was able to apply more direct influence on events in my capacity as Political Agent than at any time since I'd been a troop commander during the War, because Bahrain was still a Protected State. I was there for four years, 1965 to 1969, and, as such, as I was not only the mini ambassador to the mini State, but I was also, I suppose, the Ruler's Foreign Minister and Defence Minister, because we were responsible for conducting Foreign Affairs and Defence. So I was seeing the Ruler, his brothers and top people literally every day; and we became very close friends and still are today. They ring me up here and we chat on the phone. I made close and abiding friends there. That too was a very interesting time for a number of reasons; first of all because we were struggling with our last days of colonial presence in Aden and the Aden Protectorate. Terrorism and guerrilla warfare were rife down there and this kind of infection, Nasserism one could call it, socialist, republican, anti-monarchist, anti-Western, anti-British; this movement was sweeping the whole Arabian peninsular; Bahrain was heavily populated for a tiny Gulf State; highly educated, they had had universal free education for a generation and everybody in the whole island listened to Cairo Radio; so there was quite an excited atmosphere; and we weren't very popular. Nor was the ruling family, because of the Nasserist propaganda.

Then in 1967 we had the Israeli War and my Political Agency was besieged for the whole period

and very nearly sacked at the end. It was saved by the Ruler himself coming down, unescorted, alone and personally dispersing the crowd which was rather remarkable. Then we had the situation where we had this very curious reversal of policy, when in November 1967 a Foreign Office Minister came out to reassure all the Gulf Rulers that we were going to stay for as long as they wished us to stay or needed us.

JB: This was a Labour administration.

AP: This was a Labour Minister of State - Goronwy Roberts - not the Foreign Secretary. He came out in November and told all the Sheikhs, including the Sheikh of Bahrain, that we would stay, according to our pledges to them, for as long as they felt they needed us as a protecting power. In January, he came back again with the reverse message that he put in rather skilful terms, saying when I last came I was unable to give you a date when we would actually have to leave the Gulf. Well I'm back here to tell you we have got one now; it is the end of 1971. That caused great perturbation in the island, particularly among the ruling family, because, of course, at that time Bahrain as a whole was claimed as the 14th province of Iran. So it was quite clear that we wouldn't be able to leave with any security for the island unless this claim was settled. So the whole of my time in Bahrain was permeated, as it were, by Aden and the knock on from that - the wave of Nasserism, and the difficulties of diplomatic relations with a country like that, when we had a military presence - we had military bases in the island - and the June war. Then our double decisions; first to stay, and then to go. Then the Iranian claim. There was never a dull moment.

JB: To what extent did you know about this dramatic change in British policy. Were you consulted?

AP: Well, it was rather strange really; after the June war the atmosphere in the Gulf changed completely. Hostility had been building up through the blandishments of Cairo radio, but after the Arab rout in the June war, Cairo and Damascus needed stability rather than revolution in the Gulf so that there would be no interruption to the flow of oil, the acquisition of money, and thereby the rebuilding of their military machines. So the propaganda was turned off like a tap overnight; it stopped and all the trouble and the incipient subversion stopped. We had had two or three people blown up by car bombs and that kind of thing and it looked as if Aden was coming our way, but it all stopped and the whole atmosphere changed overnight - it was uncanny. Now

in that atmosphere of tranquillity and relative friendliness, and a mounting financial crisis in Britain, it looked to all of us - the Sheikhs, and myself for that matter - as if the Government was going to have to announce a withdrawal from east of Suez. It came as an enormous surprise to us when Goronwy Roberts came out and said we're staying.

JB: Ah, so that was the surprise; not the second one.

AP: That was the surprise. I remember saying to him - we had private discussions before I took him up to the Emir's palace - I remember saying: "are you absolutely sure? Because these people are all expecting you to say we're off; and if you say we are going to stay it is going to have an electric effect. Are you absolutely certain that this is what you want to say?" He said it has been to the Cabinet and this is what is to be said. So there was enormous relief, because the Bahrainis were very apprehensive about being left on their own, mainly because they realised that if we left and there was no external protector the Shah, for reasons of prestige, was going to have to do something; there could be a war across the Gulf. Anyway their economy was in poor shape.

JB: They didn't have any oil then?

AP: They had had very little oil for a long time; it has virtually disappeared now. They are refining quite a lot from Saudi Arabia, they have a bit of their own and a half share in a small Saudi field. The Bahraini economy mainly rested, as it does now on service industries - banks, insurance, entrepreneurs, trade and all that sort of thing - and of course the British military presence was putting a lot of money into the economy; so there was general worry about it. This wave of relief was very quickly dissipated a couple of months later when they came and said yes, we are going after all. I must confess I kind of half thought this was going to happen, because, as we were saying, what surprised me was the original decision to stay. But it was a terrible shock and unfortunately the Emir was absolutely devastated by this decision to go into reverse. I think if Goronwy Roberts had come out the first time and said "Look, we have a financial crisis. I think that it is the time to pack it in - let's have four years' transition," the Emir would have taken it as something anticipated; but it was the 180 degrees about-turn that really did for him.

JB: And the Foreign Secretary who presumably made this decision and put this through the Cabinet was Michael Stewart?

AP: Yes, Michael Stewart.

JB: Well, what was Michael Stewart like as a Foreign Secretary?

AP: I saw quite a lot of him because I went on from Bahrain in 1969 to be Head of Chancery in the Mission in New York.

JB: Your first posting in New York.

AP: Yes, my first posting to New York. I had asked in my post preference form, which from that moment I ceased to fill in, for another small independent post, because I had enjoyed being Political Agent in Bahrain. So they sent me to be Head of Chancery in New York. So I reckoned that if that was the way they went about it I wouldn't bother to fill those forms in. But when I was in New York, as Head of Chancery, the Foreign Secretary came out quite often. I both liked him and respected him, I thought he was a man of absolute unshakeable integrity and honesty, I never felt that he was playing at being a politician. Perhaps too straightforward for such a post. I don't know what his view was of the Gulf position. I suspect that there was a strong majority in the Cabinet for making that decision the first time round in the autumn of 1967 and that he had probably been in favour of it but I'm guessing because I think that it would have been his nature not to have wanted to perpetuate this kind of rather archaic east of Suez quasi-imperial role that we had the whole way from Singapore through. I doubt that, except for those on the Defence and Strategic side, there were many people who were very much in favour of staying. Although the Americans, at the time, were very keen that we should stay.

JB: So, did you find that being Head of Chancery was a pivotal position in that particular UK Mission with Security Council business? You were regarded as having had enormous success later on in your last post at the UN; did you feel that having had that earlier training in the intricacies of the UN helped later on?

AP: Oh yes, enormously. Because not only was I Head of Chancery in New York. I went back to London in 1971 and was Assistant Under-Secretary responsible for the Middle East and United Nations; and it was all invaluable as preparation for my last posting as Ambassador in New York. As Head of Chancery, as I'm sure you know, the only main Committee which I sat on the whole time was the Security Council so I got to know the Charter absolutely backwards. I got to know

all the ins and outs of the Security Council, how to work that machine, because that was what I was doing the whole time. When I got back to London I was doing it again only from the other end for another three years; so by the time I came back finally in 1979 I really felt I knew how to operate the UN, particularly in this main stream Security Council role as well as I knew anything.

JB: As well as your Head of Chancery!

AP: Exactly!

JB: Were there any particular issues that you were dealing with when you were an Under-Secretary?

AP: Well, in those days, you see there again, I have been terribly lucky because ever since 1945 right up to the moment when I finally retired, I have never had a boring job. Not many people in the world can say this; they have been varied but something has always happened. I mean, I always say, without being all that frivolous, that I owe the fact of getting to the top of the Diplomatic Service to two things, legible hand writing, because there were very few typists when I first joined, and being in the right place at the right time where things have been happening. When I got back during the three years I was Under-Secretary, the Middle East was again in a pretty dodgy situation and it all culminated in the Yom Kippur war of 1973 which again brought the super-powers very close to a collision on a live battle field on the southern end of the Suez Canal. Then we had the Rhodesian business going on the whole time and although I wasn't the Under-Secretary for Africa, since Rhodesia was one of the principle UN subjects I was involved with it nearly all the time. There was never a time when I was Under-Secretary when there wasn't something going on in a UN context, principally to do with decolonisation. In a book I wrote - which was published a year or so ago about the UN, the Security Council and all the rest of it - I described myself in the introduction as decolonisation man; because ever since 1945 when I was in Palestine I never had a job which hasn't had to do with decolonisation of our Empire, or someone else's Empire or lots of Empires in one form or another, either at the UN or in the Middle East or in Africa, either just post or during a decolonisation period.

JB: So then you went as Ambassador to Iran 1974 - 1974 to 1979 - and lived through what turned out to be that tragic end of a dynasty. I know that you have written about it.

AP: I suppose, in a way, it would have been difficult to have had a more interesting or varied Post during those five years; because when I went there, I went on the heels of the quadrupling of the oil price; and, of course, I had been dealing with that as Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office up to the day before I flew out to Iran; and, of course, we had had the crisis in England - the three day week and the whole place plunged into darkness - the fall of Heath's Conservative Government. I was appointed to Tehran by Heath's Government but by the time I got there, Wilson was Prime Minister.

JB: That Ambassadorship must have been one you were glad to have.

AP: Yes, I was very glad to have that because, undoubtedly, of the countries that I dealt with as Under-Secretary, Iran was probably the most interesting. We were still allies in this thing called the Central Treaty Organisation. Iran, with the oil price hike, had certainly become in the top fifteen of our worldwide export markets. 36% of our military sales were going to Iran. The Shah had enormous influence over the newly independent states in the Persian Gulf. He was also spreading his wings at foreign policy, trying to combat radicalism in Africa. He had very large-scale ideas about foreign policy. So there was an awful lot to do; it was very very busy. For the first couple of years or so the commercial boom was unbelievable; everybody in the world was flocking to Tehran to get trade. I can remember they turned the Hilton Ball Room into a bedroom, they had five hundred beds in there. Chairmen of companies from all over the world were sleeping on beds in the Hilton Ball Room! I was probably receiving personally say between five and ten Chairmen of companies every day. My Commercial Section was like Wembley Stadium! It was just packed with people the whole time; it was a fantastic boom. That all started to die down by about 1976; it was damned exciting while it lasted but, of course, in a sense it was at the bottom of the revolution because the whole thing was overdone. Lots of people would say that the oil boom was the preliminary trigger to the Iranian revolution because you had this vast increase in money pouring into the country - the five year development plan was doubled overnight by the Shah and as a consequence the ports blocked up; ships were waiting for up to five months to unload and the whole transportation distribution infrastructure broke down. Although there was a tremendous amount done in the way of industrialisation and so forth, enormous bottlenecks developed. So it wasn't very long before the boom turned into a bust; and because of this clogging up of the whole economic system you got shortages where there had been a glut before. So by 1977, shall we say, you had a situation where members of what one might call the artisan class in the towns and cities in Iran, who had just acquired refrigerators,

washing machines, televisions etc. etc. found that the electricity was being cut off for eight hours a day, because of overload and so all their nice new toys weren't working. They had enough money to order a car but, of course, the production wasn't enough so they couldn't get the car they'd ordered and anyway the streets were already choked by cars that were already on them. Villagers were pouring into the towns and creating shanty towns all around them. The whole country was clogging up and this produced a backlash. The people of Iran had never really accepted the legitimacy of the Shah after he had been put back on his throne in 1953 by the British and the Americans. They were prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt and this is being rather philosophical - they were prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt as long as he delivered the goods; and up to about 1975 he did deliver the goods. The country was transformed. Travelling in Iran, one of the most wonderful countries in the world to travel in, one saw this extraordinary chrysalis to butterfly element developing before your eyes. One would come to a small town and half the town would be medieval and the other half modern like a kind of an English suburb. In the modern factories like the car factories, volume car factories, the workers were earning in real terms rather more than their British equivalents and they were beginning to live a pretty high life but then, of course, in the local village where they were still scratching at the ground they were living in medieval circumstances. The country was in this very rapid state of transition and it just blew up in the boom and the bust. Now all the time the Shah's most implacable opponents had not been the Communists whom he feared, the radical left; it had been the traditional religious classes. So when everything went wrong in about 1977, and the Shah rather unwisely and I think under very strong American pressure, started to liberalise politically, because he had run the whole place with an iron fist before. The Shia Moslem Mosque was able to use its power as a State within a State to mobilise the people countrywide in opposition. So all the way through 1978 you got this mountainous, cumulative waves of strikes, disorders, riots, demonstrations and so on. It was still very difficult for us to see how unarmed civilians would actually get rid of an extremely powerful and centralised military regime which it was. (The army was still huge then, of course). Exactly what had happened in the Sudan happened in about September of 1978 in Iran. The mullahs who in effect were leading this nationwide anti Shah movement started calling people out on strike on the basis - "we will go back when the Shah goes" - and like the Sudan on a vast scale, gradually, incrementally, everybody came out; and this had a kind of extraordinary knock on effect. Iran is a huge country. The modern economic sector went on working because they were doing very well - the shoe factories, the car factories, the steel works and all that, but they had to pay their workers in cash obviously and the cash was brought ...

JB: The Banks were working?

AP: First of all the air line went on strike so the Banks couldn't actually get the cash to the provinces, because they were so far away you couldn't send it by truck; it would take days. So the workers in the modern sector gradually started coming out; and then the Banks went on strike, so there wasn't any cash for anybody unless the strike organisers allowed enough to get by. They allowed enough oil to keep the people able to cook and warm themselves in the winter but not enough for exporting. So that cut off the country's main export. Then the Customs went on strike so the raw materials for industry couldn't get in. So all the factories had to come out and once the workers left their factories they joined the revolution. So by the end of 1978 pretty well all the country, willy nilly, had joined the revolution. It really was an extraordinary experience. It must have been just the same, I suppose, only more so I think, as being Ambassador in Paris in 1789 or in St. Petersburg in 1917. It was, I suppose, the most interesting experience of my life to see the gradual disintegration of this highly centralised, incredible powerful military regime, led by this awe-inspiring or meant to be awe-inspiring figure of the Shah. I remember when I said good-bye to him in January 1979 when he was on his way - he was leaving in next two or three days - he said: do you think there is anything I can do even at this late stage to reverse this situation and I said: no, Your Majesty; you are in a 'no win' situation.

JB: You mentioned the Americans earlier on and American pressure; what kind of quality were your American colleagues in Tehran at that time?

AP: Well, it varied very much. I had a very close relationship with them, of course. My first American colleague was Dick Helms who had been head of the CIA and my second was Bill Sullivan who had been Ambassador in the Philippines and had also been a kind of prime mover in S.E. Asia business, Vietnam etc. - a very nice man and we got on very well. I think in the early days of the revolution the Americans tended to ignore the warning signs of discontent and to emphasise the positive side of "progress" as told to them by the Shah and his entourage. I understood this from my time in Iraq years before in the early '50's. We had so much at stake in Iraq and right through until the monarchy was overthrown, we tended, when looking at the internal situation always to accentuate the positive and rather underestimate the negative moves. To illustrate this attitude I remember the time I was in Turkey in 1958. In January (six months before the Iraqi revolution when the King of Iraq and Nuri Said were murdered) there was a

meeting of the Baghdad Pact Council of Ministers in Ankara and our Ambassador in Baghdad, now dead, came over for it. He and I were sitting side by side at lunch in our Ambassador's Residence in Ankara. Selwyn Lloyd, our Foreign Secretary, was there because he had come out for the Baghdad Pact meeting. I said in a rather cheeky way to my next door neighbour, the Ambassador from Baghdad, "When do you expect your young officers' revolution?" and he blew up and said that is absolutely typical of people like you, who were in Iraq a long time ago and think you know all about the Middle East; it is just not like that; the economy is booming; everyone is thinking of their economic betterment and not of politics etc. etc.; and we had a row. I said "I know a lot of people in the Iraqi Army who have been longing to emulate Nasser ever since 1952 and I can't believe they have gone away and become loyal." We had a row and eventually Selwyn Lloyd had to come and shut us up! In a funny kind of way the Americans were in the same position in Iran; they had so much at stake. We talk about our arms sales being large, which indeed they were, but the Americans ..! The whole air force and a lot of the Army was American and they were a lot of Americans in the country - something like 50-100 thousand I should think. They had everything - I mean Iran was very much part of the whole American system. Nixon had used the Shah as his principal kind of surrogate as it were for maintaining stability in the whole area. So I thought for the first couple of years I was there, before Bill Sullivan came, that the American Embassy was much too optimistic about the whole thing. I am not saying that I saw that the Shah was going to be overthrown, but I always took the view that at the bottom this was a third world country and that anything could happen, that there could be a violent change overnight, though there didn't seem to be any indication of it in the early days. At Chancery level they were always far more optimistic than Dick Helms and me and slightly resented sceptical analysis about what was going on. I understood that all right. Sullivan came when things were beginning to turn bad anyway; he was only there about 18 months in all; and he took a much more sceptical view from the outset; and we saw it very much in the same terms although neither of us - until it was very late in the day - anticipated this complete collapse of the regime at the hands of the civilian opposition.

JB: So you went from there to the United Nations.

AP: I went back briefly to London because when David Owen was Foreign Secretary he decided to appoint two deputies to the Permanent Under-Secretary who at the time was Michael Palliser; one of them was Tony Duff and the other one was me. Tony Duff looked after most of the first world, plus Rhodesia and I looked after the greater part of the third world, the Middle East etc.,

etc ... So I did that job until the summer and then the Government changed and Ivor Richards, who was my predecessor in New York was a political appointment. He had been an MP until he lost his seat. He left, of course, and I headed off to New York for my last job.

JB: One always associates your time there with the Falklands. I don't know if there are other things you would like to mention about your time there.

AP: Well, again I used to regard the UN - and I am sure Sir Brian Urquart would agree with this - I regarded the UN both in my first manifestation and in my second as a place that really existed entirely to deal with the Middle East and Southern Africa. So during the whole of my three years there were recurrent Middle East crises. In the summer of 1982, at the time of my farewells, the Israelis were invading the Lebanon; so the Middle East crises were going on the whole time. The first thing I had to deal with was Rhodesia, because I arrived in New York just after the Lusaka Commonwealth summit, where the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary had sold this scenario of the Lancaster House Conference which I thought was pretty good. I remember the meetings we had in London between the Conservatives coming in at the beginning of May and my departure for New York shortly afterwards. I remember that it was the Prime Minister, Mrs Thatcher, who at one of these meetings when she had conceded that to recognise Bishop Muzorewa and remove sanctions was not an option ...

JB: She had been persuaded of this.

AP: Yes, she had been persuaded of this and admitted she had been persuaded. I remember one meeting when she said: why haven't the Anglo-American proposals worked? and somebody, not me, said because they have been so barnacled by amendments that they are unimplementable. And she said how do we decolonize a colony where there is no problem at all? and somebody again said: we get all the parties around a table at Lancaster House; they work out a constitution that suits them all; they then have an election on that constitution and that's good-bye. She said: let's go down that road and see what happens. First we had to sell this, of course, to some international body or we would have been scuttled. I was able to say we would never get an imprimatur from the United Nations; it was too divided - East-West, North-South, non aligned-British Imperialism. This is really where the Commonwealth came in, because there is no other body in the world which included all geographical views included developed countries, developing countries, the lot and had enormous influence if it wanted to exercise it within the UN

because it comprised something like 50 members and half the non aligned movement. The Prime Minister sold this to the Commonwealth Heads of Government at this Lusaka summit and away we went but, of course, in New York the following five or six months were extremely tense because there was a powerful air of suspicion that we were somehow going to try to legitimise the regime under the influence of Ian Smith. And all through the Lancaster House conference this suspicion was maintained; and it was being fostered, of course, by the Soviet Union and the radical Africans; and if it hadn't been for the Commonwealth people we would probably have been sunk. I worked very closely with the Commonwealth Africans and the Caribbeans. The UN, as you know only too well, is not quick to change its views on deeply entrenched values. I remember going to the podium in December to announce to the assembled General Assembly that agreement had been reached at Lancaster House and that we were launched on a transitional period - the same day I was standing in the side of the General Assembly at the time when the deputy foreign Minister of Tanzania, whom I knew very well - the same day or it may have been the following one, the General Assembly passed its standard Rhodesian resolution by an enormous majority which took absolutely no account of the fact that there had been a Lancaster House conference at all - let alone the transitional period. One really had a feeling of despair, of towing this brontosaurus through this treacherous swamp - impossible to change course! Anyway the transitional period was also a nightmare; the suspicion was widespread particularly because there were South African troops actually in Southern Rhodesia, Beit Bridge and so forth. This became known; we had a nightmare Security Council on this and we got to the stage where there was a resolution which I simply could not get the Africans to water down one more word, however hard my very co-operative Commonwealth colleagues tried and we had the message from the Muzorewa/Smith regime that if we had to veto this resolution they would opt out of the whole process; this would show that the international community was an enemy. So we did what we had never done before, which only the Chinese had done before; we decided not to participate in the vote at all. We couldn't vote for it; we didn't want to abstain; and we certainly didn't want to veto and scuttle the whole transitional process. So we just didn't vote at all and all my colleagues were looking at me waiting to see at what point I would raise my pencil. They simply couldn't believe it when I didn't raise it at all. I couldn't stop laughing at the end and they all started laughing too!

JB: So what did that do to the vote?

AP: It passed. Everybody voted for it - the French, the Americans, everybody voted for it and we

just didn't vote and so it was 14-0. We got over that and then we had another final Security Council which was very interesting because my Soviet colleague, the Ambassador who was a great friend of mine was away, but his no. 2 I liked - he had lost a leg at Stalingrad, he was very fiery. We were running up to the elections, the final elections in Rhodesia, and he loosed off a tremendous blast at me about how we were going to cheat the new electorate and bring it about that Muzorewa was in. So I was asked to draft a reply. I started out by saying that if any British subject wanted a lesson in how to conduct free and fair democratic elections, I thought that the last country in the world was going to be the Soviet Union and carried on in that vein for about a quarter of an hour. We had a very rapid series of exchanges with extremely bad-tempered rhetoric for about another half an hour and then it all calmed down. My African colleagues came up to me afterwards and said: for God's sake don't do that again. But I said we really cannot sit back and take that from Russia; and they said: no, we do understand but we cannot have this thing blown off course, so do cool it; don't raise the temperature; there are plenty of Africans in the background who would like to upset the whole thing. I was really interested about that. So they really wanted to carry it through.

JB: Do you remember which particular Africans?

AP: Zambia, Nigeria, Ghana, all the leading ones. On the Council at the time we had Zambia, Nigeria for most of the time, I can't remember who the third African was. It was really, I say this with no kind of sentimentality at all, if it hadn't been for the existence of the Commonwealth I don't think we would have got through this and eventually it came out all right as Zimbabwe. So that was one very interesting thing I started out with. Another was the Russian invasion of Afghanistan where we actually took the lead in stirring up the non-aligned movement to take the matter to the Security Council and then onto the General Assembly where the Russians couldn't veto it.

JB: You mean we, the British, not the West.

AP: We, the British, but behind the scenes. The Americans, for some extraordinary reason, were very reluctant to make a move - I never quite understood why. So we did a lot of talking again to Commonwealth non-aligned countries, saying: if you want to show the world that they are wrong and that the UN is not simply a tool of Moscow which criticises the West the whole time and never does anything to Moscow, for God's sake we have got to do something now, when one of

your non-aligned partners has just been invaded by 100,000 Soviet troops. And eventually they did get into action, and the Russians duly vetoed and then it was taken on under the united for peace resolution to the General Assembly and of course, there was a increased vote against the Russians year after year thereafter, which I think had a marginal effect in their eventual decision to withdraw. I don't say that they minded all that much, but the fact they had lost what they regarded as being the almost automatic support of the non-aligned world did have some impact on their policies. I have to tell this little anecdote - the Russians vetoed in the General Assembly and a few days later I got a lot of letters saying what an excellent speech I had made, from people in America and I got a few letters saying that you did a good job in that debate, but it was disgraceful to see you laughing and joking with your Soviet colleague immediately after the vote. Then I remembered what had happened; we had all voted and the Russian had vetoed and he turned to me and said: you know Tony, vetoing is rather like adultery; the first time you do it, you feel rather ashamed of yourself; but after a while it really becomes great fun. We were both sitting back laughing and of course, the television cameras were on us.

JB: And Namibia?

AP: Namibia was with us the whole time and I thought myself and still do, that we were very close to a UN stage-managed solution on Namibia in 1981 because we judged that a very large constituency in South Africa had come to the view that their heartland would be better defended from the Orange river than further North and we thought that the probability was that they would be prepared to leave Namibia. Well, when the Reagan administration came in and abandoned the pressure that we had all been putting on the South Africans to implement the 1977 UN resolution setting out the path to Namibian independence, they went to what is laughingly known as constructive engagements. Well, OK, Namibia eventually became independent; but that was really a consequence of the end of the Cold War and the removal of super-power support from each side in turn. I still feel that that was a wrong change in policy - a hell of a lot of people died, especially in Angola, as a result of this delay of what - seven years - before the thing came out in the wash; and that we were much closer to an agreement than anybody thought. I know that somebody like Brian Urquart would agree with that. Now what else; Rhodesia, Namibia, apartheid, of course, with us all the time, endless debates on apartheid and Angola, Southern Africa permanently with us, the Middle East permanently with us and then, of course, the Falklands, which was very exciting. If you are going to fight a war, the best place to fight from is an armchair in New York! It was interesting, the Falklands, because we had never been to the

Security Council before with this dispute. It had only touched the fourth committee; it had scarcely been to the plenary of the General Assembly and it hit everybody by surprise. The day before the invasion I got the word to call an emergency meeting of the Security Council which I did. I rang up my colleagues in turn personally, saying would you be down at the Council in an hour's time, the invasion of the Falklands is pending. My American colleague, who was very mixed up with Latin American policy, said that I had gone mad and that she would block the vote.

JB: That was?

AP: Jeane Kirkpatrick. I said if you are going to block me from having a meeting you will have to do it in public and I shall insist on a public meeting so ..? My Russian colleague said: it is April 1st and I know this is an April fool joke, the kind of the thing you do the whole time, but you don't know your own rules; it is after mid-day. I had quite a problem persuading him that this was serious and he had better get down there quickly. Eventually we got the Council in action, with a very junior member of the American Delegation turning up to enable us to have fifteen around the table. We got a statement from them so that was all right. We knew it wasn't going to stop the Argentines but at least it put us on a good footing for what was to come. Then the next day when the invasion had taken place we decided in the Mission that if we were going to get a resolution - we didn't think the odds were good but we must do it quickly, avoid all the negotiations over blue drafts and black drafts and I don't know what other drafts, we must slap down something that we could live with - we must demand that Argentina withdraw and we must get a vote on it within 24 hours because if we allowed it to drag out it would be fatal. So we did exactly that; we put the resolution down in final form and there was a very vigorous debate. It was the only really interesting debate I ever engaged in in the UN because nine tenths of the Security Council simply did not know anything about it. So it was pristine; you could see people changing their minds as a result of the debate - as a result of what other people were saying in the course of the debate - unheard of in the UN.

JB: There were no preconceived ideas.

AP: Very few - obviously the Latins were preconceived and obviously I was preconceived, but nobody else was. The Latins were going on historical aggression by the British and this was a redemption of that aggression and the non-aligned movement had declared on Argentine

sovereignty on eighteen previous occasions. I avoided the sovereignty issue, because I knew I was on a very sticky wicket on that and concentrated entirely on the illegality of the acquisition of territory by war, my eye being on the Arabs. So it was really a battle between those two principles and to my amazement we won it - we got our resolution. We had to delay a day to let the Argentine Foreign Minister arrive, but it was a serious live debate and I really didn't know until the pencils were raised a) whether we had the votes or b) whether somebody would veto it.

JB: How much ... there must have been frantic consultation with London throughout this time and how much were you pursuing an independent course?

AP: We drafted the resolution in the Mission, then cleared it with London, and they just let us get on with it. In fact I think that I was one of the very few delegations - I only went back to London once on the fatal day of the resolution being voted on, when one of the delegates told me his Government had had a change of heart and were going to abstain as opposed to voting in favour so I wound up London, at the top level, to get that re-reversed, which it was.

JB: In the capital concerned?

AP: By telephone to the Prime Minister and that was done. I remember just before the vote - I mean there were some intricacies which I won't bore you with as they are very technical UN intricacies, which we had guarded against - such as losing our vote because we were a party to the dispute and so on and we were challenged on that; fortunately we had drafted in such a way as to get away with that. But I remember, very dramatic, just before the vote, the Argentine Foreign Minister passed a note down to my Russian colleague who was sitting on my right. I was too much of an Officer and a Gentleman to peer over immediately but Ham White my no.2 was sitting behind me so I said to him: what does that note say? and Ham had a quick sideways look at it and what that note said was, which was in a way prophetic, only a veto will avoid a blood bath. Well, he abstained.

JB: And did he abstain because he was convinced in that Security Council discussion?

AP: He abstained because he saw that we had the non-aligned majority and the Russians always like to follow the non-aligned group. When he saw that I had the three Africans and others from the non-aligned movement except the Latins but I did have one Latin - Guiana, most of whose

territory was claimed by Venezuela so they were on our side. So I had one of the Latins, the three Africans, I had the Arab - Jordan - we had ten, one more than we needed. So the Russians were literally going backwards and forwards to the telephone the whole day and I didn't know what ? was going to do until he raised his pencil and I wasn't entirely sure of the Chinese but I thought they were more likely to abstain. But of the others - Spain, Panama, Spain, of course, was one of the western Europeans who were 100% on the Latin side, in fact, they were stage managing the whole Latin campaign. So we got as many as we could have got and I think, but I don't like to boast about it because this is a team effort as it were, because we weren't doing the voting. What that gave us was support from the European Community and from the UN as a whole, which really lasted almost to the very end and as long as we could demonstrate that we were doing, which we did do, our absolute utmost to get the Argentines off the islands peacefully (and we did make enormous efforts to do this) then that support was sustained. Resolution 502 was a kind of basis for our diplomacy and it also, I think, helped to unify the House of Commons because if we had either failed because of the lack of votes which we thought was a distinct possibility or because the resolution had been vetoed our whole position would have seemed much more shaky.

JB: And it would have been difficult for some members of the Labour Party ...

AP: ... to stay on board. So I think it did matter. Even at the end when - I was very anxious the whole time, that the thing should be over as quickly as possible because I could see what was happening in the UN where as we started out demonstrably as the victim and the Argentines as the aggressor, the vote proved that - as we started retaking South Georgia, bombing the airfield at Stanley, sinking the Belgrano etc. the perception started to reverse itself and it began to look as though here's a horrid NATO country clobbering a poor third world nonaligned State, that kind of thing. I could see this happening. It never got too bad. The Argentines for example never dared to try to mobilise the General Assembly through a 50% vote to get an American cession; they hadn't got the votes. But we did have to veto the final resolution which was when we were assured - we had virtually taken the islands - which was calling for a cease-fire and I took the view, on instructions but I knew it was right, that there could be no question of a cease-fire unless it was concurrently accompanied by total Argentine withdrawal. I couldn't quite get that into a resolution and I was forced by one vote to veto, but by that time it didn't matter.

JB: And the invitation to then become a special adviser to Mrs. Thatcher after you had retired; do

you think that resulted from the Falklands thing or other contacts you had? How did it come about?

AP: Well, we knew each other pretty well. When she was leader of the Opposition I had invited her up to Tehran before the revolution. And I thought: well there is going to be an election some day and she might win it and it would be handy if she knew all the nobs there. I knew she hadn't much experience of foreign policy, foreign countries and so on. She stayed with us for a week in Tehran. I had shaken hands with her when she was Education Minister in the Heath Government but I had never properly spoken to her. Well you get to know somebody quite well in a week. So we did know each other quite well and then I saw quite a lot of her in the first months, first few weeks between the Government being formed and my going to New York, mainly over Rhodesia. And then, of course, we had a lot to do with each other during the three years I was in New York and I came home quite often and we used to meet. I suppose the Falklands did influence her. But we like each other and she wanted a foreign affairs adviser.

JB: She hadn't had one before.

AP: No, there hadn't been one since the dreaded Sir Horace Wilson was Chamberlain's foreign affairs adviser. I remember Lord Gladwyn coming up to me when I was having lunch with somebody in some place in London and Lord Gladwyn stumped up to me and said: do you regard yourself as the new Sir Horace Wilson? I said no. I thought myself that it was a reasonable enough appointment because I think she felt that she had been kind of ... No. 10 was a bit sort of naked in a way. Her only kind of foreign policy advice was coming from a Counsellor, her Private Secretary John Coles, very good indeed - now Permanent Secretary. I also think in her mind she wanted to replicate the American system, have a kind of competitor to the Foreign Office advice. I made it plain to her that I wouldn't accept the job on those terms, that I would only accept it on the terms of co-operating with the Foreign Office, not competing; and I insisted on this. I said: if we can't do it this way, I am not going to touch the job and I insisted also that I personally checked with the Foreign Secretary - Francis Pym - that it was not over his dead body; because I said that if it is, I am not going to do it; because I have spent my life in this Service and I am not going to start tampering with it now. So Francis Pym agreed that so long as it was a personal appointment, so long as it was me, because we knew each other, it was all right. I tried my best for the year I was there to oil the wheels between the Foreign Office and No.10, rather than set up a competitive institution.

JB: And was that a difficult task, to oil the wheels?

AP: It was and it wasn't. I don't think I did any harm, but I am not sure how much good I did. I enjoyed working with Mrs. Thatcher. I told her beforehand that I disagree with you on most subjects; perhaps you should get an adviser who is more agreeable and she said no, that she thought I'd enjoy my rows with her. And so we started off on those terms and we did have some tremendous set-to's but they were always very good tempered and she always encouraged me to disagree. She didn't expect me to be a 'yes man'.

JB: What were the issues that you were disagreeing about?

AP: The whole kind - for example the Middle East. I don't think we quite saw Arab/Israeli in the same light. I remember her saying to me, on one occasion, when I was explaining both sides of the problem - she said: you know Tony, I am very proud that I don't belong to your class. I said: what class do you think I belong to? She said: I am talking about upper middle class intellectuals who see everybody else's point of view and none of their own - a marvellous remark, I thought. I told her I would only do it for a very short time. I think she would have been glad if I had stayed on, but I thought to myself that if I stay - I stayed on for six months after the 1983 election - I felt that if I stayed on further I would never leave and I want to live another life before I die; I want to do something else. I had worked for the Government ever since I grew up. I would like some freedom. And I left entirely at own volition on the very best terms with her.

JB: And she appointed, what, Percy Cradock to succeed you.

AP: Yes, she appointed Percy as my successor.

JB: He's been the only successor.

AP: Yes, he's been the only successor.

JB: Presumably Charles Powell sort of took on that role.

AP: Charles Powell obviously became more of a kind of senior adviser as it were to her than the

previous - going back to the beginning of time - list of Foreign Office Private Secretaries had been.

JB: But when you were doing it, was your job meant to be to think Foreign policy far ahead or was it meant to comment on issues of the day or write speeches?

AP: Well, it was really a combination of many things. I saw it in many different ways. I was for example a member of the JIC. I represented her on the JIC so after each JIC meeting I would give her my personal view of which matters were important, which she should concentrate on, which look as if they were going to blow up into major crises, and which looked as if they were going to die away. I commented on anything which came in from the Foreign Office which I thought was misguided, but at the same time I told the Foreign Office I was doing so. I tried to anticipate with the Foreign Office how her mind was developing on individual subjects and vice-versa too. I would also try and look ahead in terms of general foreign policy. I would try very hard with the Falklands in mind to identify potential crises. Was Cyprus going to blow up in such a way as to draw us in? What about Hong Kong? That kind of thing. I suppose what I was really trying to do, which I don't think that she perhaps intended, was to provide her with a certain kind of assurance that she wasn't going to be caught short again as she had been over the Falklands.

JB: Throughout your career you never had any dealings in administration, management posts.

AP: No, thank God!

JB: How do you feel about changes that occurred in the Diplomatic Service in your time or even since?

AP: Well, I have been out a long time and I don't know what changes there have been. Well, I hope very much that the integrity of the Diplomatic Service isn't being dissipated by this ideological passion for fragmentation and privatisation that seems to be running through this country at the moment; because I think the fact that it has operated as an integrated unit for so long now has been of great value to the country and of great value to individual political parties. I have hardly noticed when one Party has gone and the other Party has come in; I carried on with my work in the same way and I hope that is still the same. I don't believe that the modern communications revolution has made diplomats irrelevant - faxes, E-mail, Ministers jumping in

and out of aeroplanes the whole time. I was still in service, when, in my last days in New York, these devices had just come in. I don't think they really made any difference except that they did produce very much more paper than we had before, which was bad. I don't believe there will ever be a substitute for people on the spot reporting politically on the nature of country 'X', its political stability or instability, its friendliness or unfriendliness to us or to Europe etc., etc. I don't believe that fleeting visits and the public media and things like that, although much more comprehensive than they were, will ever really substitute for that; so I think that you will always need political diplomats for that reason alone. Also there is an absolute mass of day to day work with a Government to which you are accredited.