

The Role of HM Embassy in Washington

edited by

Gillian Staerck and
Michael D. Kandiah

ICBH Witness Seminar Programme

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Programme Director: Dr Michael D. Kandiah**

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The Role of HM Embassy in Washington

**Held 18 June 1997
in the Map Room, Foreign & Commonwealth Office**

**Chaired by Lord Wright of Richmond
Seminar edited by Gillian Staerck and Michael D. Kandiah**

Institute of Contemporary British History

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The Role of HM Embassy in Washington

Edited by
Gillian Staerck and Michael D. Kandiah

This witness seminar was organised by Dr Michael F. Hopkins, Liverpool Hope University College and by Dr M. D. Kandiah, Institute of Contemporary British History, London. It was held on 18 June 1997, in the Map Room at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Whitehall. It was supported by the North America Department of the FCO. The discussion was introduced by a paper by Dr Hopkins and was chaired by Lord Wright of Richmond. The principal participants were: Sir Antony Acland, Professor Kathleen Burk, Sir Bernard Burrows, Lord Greenhill of Harrow, Sir Nicholas Henderson. Further contributions were made by the Rt. Hon. Edmund Dell, Sir Jeremy Greenstock, Professor Sean Greenwood, Dr Saul Kelly, Professor Keith Kyle, Mrs Mariot Leslie, Michael Makovsky, Mark Pellew, Philip Priestley.

LORD WRIGHT OF RICHMOND

I would like to open by inviting Dr Hopkins to read his paper, and I will then say a word about my ground rules for conducting this seminar.

MICHAEL F. HOPKINS

Sir Julian Pauncefote (Lord Pauncefote, 1823-1902), diplomat. HM Ambassador, Washington 1893-1902.

Sir Harold Nicolson (1886-1968), politician, diplomat and author.

Architecture is symbolic of power, in ways traditional diplomatic historians do not always notice. Official buildings convey more than architectural preferences: they tell us something about power and the political values of an era. The official residence of Lord Pauncefort,* appointed as the first British Ambassador to Washington on 25 March 1893, was a modest dwelling. The British mission accurately reflected American views of their relations with other states and Britain's estimate of America's importance. It was situated in a Washington that Harold Nicolson* felt 'still retained the charm of a provincial, almost a county, capital, and the house

with its balconies, its bow windows and its sunblinds produced the effect of a large villa at Newport’.

It was not until the 1920s that the Embassy of present memory appeared, being built in 1928. The process by which it came to be constructed and the nature of the building itself demonstrated a changed view of the United States and the value of the British mission. As Nicolson explained,

It was felt after the First War that this gay but suburban residence did not correspond to the ever-increasing importance assumed by our representation in the United States. Sir Edwin Lutyens* was entrusted with the task of designing an Embassy which, while providing office accommodation for expanding staff, would at the same time be English in character and afford opportunities for lavish entertainment.*

Sir Edwin Lutyens (1869-1944), architect.

Harold Nicolson, ‘Marginal Comment’, *The Spectator*, 28 May 1948, p.644.

It is Lutyens’s design, therefore, that epitomises the British presence in Washington.

The desire to build so impressive an Embassy was indication enough of the growing importance of America for Britain, first revealed in the First World War and confirmed by the Washington Conference of 1921 to 1922. It is fascinating to recall how different were relations in that era. In March 1915 President Wilson* would say of the impending British blockade, ‘They are going to do it, no matter what representations we make. We cannot convince them or change them.’* The isolationist diplomacy of the Republic until 1940 delayed its full arrival as a major power, but once the United States became involved in the Second World War there was a rapid shift from London to Washington as the vital centre of power and decision-making. Washington clearly became the headquarters of the alliance. The major struggles over strategy and tactics were being fought, from spring 1942, ‘largely on American turf and reflected Washington’s internal rivalries and organisational priorities.* This was recognised by one representative of Britain as early as 1942:

Woodrow Wilson (1856-1924), American politician. President, 1913-21.

President Wilson to William Jennings Bryan (Secretary of State), 24 Mar. 1915 in Michael H. Hunt, *Crises in US Foreign Policy: An International History Reader* (New Haven CT: Yale University Press, 1996), p.29.

Theodore A. Wilson, ‘Coalition, Structure, Strategy and Statecraft’, in David Reynolds, Warren F. Kimball, and A. O. Chubarian (eds), *Allies at War: The Soviet, American, and British Experience, 1939-45* (New York, St. Martin’s Press, 1994), p.89.

Alex Danchev, *Oliver Franks: Founding Father* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), p.116.

The Korean War, 1950-3, resulted from the partitioning of Korea along the 38th parallel, the Northern zone occupied by the Soviets and the Southern Zone by the USA, and the conflicts between the rival Korean governments.

The Cuban Missile Crisis, Oct. 1962, resulted from the US discovery that the USSR was installing missiles in Cuba. The US demanded that they be removed and it appeared that there might be another world war until the USSR agreed to do this. There is considerable debate about the extent of Britain’s involvement. See M. D. Kandiah and Gillian Staerck ‘“Reliable Allies”: Anglo-American Relations’ in Wolfram Kaiser and Gillian Staerck (eds.) *British Foreign Policy 1955-64: Contracting Options*, (London: Macmillan, 2000), p.157.

It must be accepted that policy will increasingly be decided in Washington. To proceed as if it can be made in London and ‘put over’ in Washington, or as if British policy can in the main develop independently and be only co-ordinated with America, is merely to kick against the pricks. Policy will thus be increasingly Washington-made policy, but it need not therefore be American. It may be Anglo-American.*

After the war the British continued their pursuit of this goal, but the nature and the importance of ties progressively altered. In the Korean War* the Americans were dominant, but still wanted British military and diplomatic support and listened to British counsel. During the Cuban missile crisis* Britain did not automatically command American attention, either for her political weight or for the perceived value of her advice. By the time of the United States’ intervention in Grenada in 1983* the British were not even con-

Grenada, a British Caribbean colony that became independent in 1974. In 1983 the Commonwealth Caribbean Islands appealed to US President Ronald Reagan to intervene there after a military coup by a Marxist pro-Cuba group and fears that the situation had deteriorated.

Margaret Thatcher (Baroness Thatcher of Kesteven), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1979-90.

Sir Winston S. Churchill (1874-1965), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1940-5; 1951-55.

Franklin D. Roosevelt (1882-1945), American politician. President, 1933-45.

See Mark A. Stoler, 'The United States: The Global Strategy', in Reynolds et al., *Allies at War*, p.62.

sulted, though they were informed, about action involving a member state of the Commonwealth, and Mrs Thatcher's* objections were overridden.

The details, indeed complexities, of such changes can be charted more effectively in the role of embassies, for, if politicians initiated and directed policy, the centres of the conduct of Anglo-American relations lay in their missions in Washington and London. Since by 1945 the balance of strength in the relationship had shifted so heavily in favour of the United States, Washington was the more important of the two missions. Although there has been a growth in the frequency of meetings between the President and the Prime Minister and other ministers, the overwhelming bulk of relations has been handled by the two embassies, and more particularly by the British Embassy. To understand how that institution functioned is therefore of prime importance in evaluating Anglo-American relations. Its operations emerged from the interplay of the expectations created by the wartime relationship: the institutional interaction of the American political system and the Embassy, with its nationwide network of offices and its links with other British government bodies in the United States, and the contribution of key individuals.

The Second World War saw remarkable frankness between the two powers. There were close personal relations between Churchill* and Roosevelt* and most of the military commanders, as well as among the lower levels of the civilian and military establishment, which greatly aided smooth relations in the waging of war. Scientific and, above all, intelligence co-operation added to the friendship and the final victory. The British Embassy in Washington was at the heart of joint activity: it was 9,000 strong by the war's end. The relationship in war contained two main elements. First, financial, economic and military aid to Britain. Secondly, co-operation with Britain as an equal partner (for most of the time at least). British governments after 1945 wanted both of these things to continue. This was not just because this would be the best means of preserving British great power status, but because it was thought that this would be best for international affairs, since British experience could be allied to the power of the American novice. The prospects for achieving these goals were mixed. Some elements of the wartime relationship were ended, others were continued. How well the British could do would be influenced by the opportunities that the American political system gave them to pursue that policy. The newly-important American capital was the centre of a political system that afforded the British the chance to influence US policy-making. Washington was new to the idea of organising itself to operate as the centre of government of a great power. It developed this role side by side with the emergence of the partnership with Britain and was, as a result, influenced by its ally. Indeed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff were created as an American counterpart to the British Chiefs of Staff, so that they could speak to one another in the Combined Chiefs of Staff Committee.* The American system was

Sir Nicholas Henderson, 'The Washington Embassy: Navigating the Waters of the Potomac', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, Vol.1 (1990), p.41.

E. R. May, 'The American Commitment to Germany, 1949-55', *Diplomatic History*, Vol.13, (1989), p.436.

BJSM is now called the British Defence Staff.

Henry Kissinger, American politician. Assistant to President for National Security Affairs, 1969-75, Secretary of State, 1969-73.

Henry Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little Brown, 1979), p.90.

David Reynolds, 'A "Special Relationship"? America, Britain and the International Order since 1945', *International Affairs*, Vol.62, (1985-6), p.10.

Sir Robin Renwick (Lord Renwick of Clifton), diplomat. HM Ambassador to Washington, 1991-5.

Robin Renwick, *Fighting with Allies* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p.283.

Jeane Kirkpatrick, American diplomat. US Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 1981-5.

John Dickie, 'Special' *No More Anglo-American Relations: Rhetoric and Reality* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), p.258.

Sir Oliver Franks (Lord Franks, 1902-92), diplomat, HM Ambassador to Washington, 1948-52).

Sir Roger Makins (Lord Sheffield, 1904-96), diplomat. HM Ambassador to Washington, 1953-6.

Sir John Balfour (1894-1983), diplomat.

Sir Frederick Hoyer Millar (Lord Inchyra, 1900-89), civil servant and diplomat. Permanent Under-Secretary, FCO 1957-61.

extraordinarily open to foreign influence. US citizens were eager to hear what one thought about their politicians and their policies, they did not take offence if one entered into discussion, and even argument, about what was strictly their business.* The American federal system had no barriers to citizens of one state meddling in the affairs of another. After the Second World War these traditions, combined with the newness of high politics and the overlap and rivalry of the different branches of government that so fragmented decision-making 'opened for interested non-citizens extraordinary opportunities for effectively inserting their opinions and recommendations'.*

The principal means of offering opinions and recommendations was the British Embassy in Washington, the home of a large network of representation in the United States. There were the Consulates and Consulates-General around the country; British information services mainly based in the news capital of New York; the British Joint Staff Mission* for military co-ordination; and the delegation to the United Nations.

British diplomats had two central tasks: to ensure that their country's policies were understood and its interests were fully recognised; and to report the American government's thinking and trends of opinion in Washington and beyond. The way in which these tasks were accomplished was shaped by the nature of the American political system. The Embassy established contacts with its opposite numbers in the State Department and its separate divisions, and similarly in other US departments and agencies. This was done partly in committees and partly through personal contacts, for Washington was more personal and less institutional than Whitehall. The benefit for London was that it enabled them to have an input into American policy-making at an early stage, before the inter-departmental and congressional trade-offs. According to Henry Kissinger* they became participants in internal American deliberations.* The bonus for the Americans was that it gave them a 'natural ally, whose support could generally be assumed because of the similarity of interests and values and habit of advance consultation.* As Sir Robin Renwick* said, 'Britain thereby ensures that the United States is not alone'.*

How successful these contacts were utilised rested on the key figures. For John Dickie the quality of the collaboration 'depended upon the individual relationships: there was no automatic co-operation from the Americans for any diplomat just because he was British. Jeane Kirkpatrick* was not disposed to be of assistance to the British'.* We can now examine the records for the Korean War, and recognise the contribution of the Ambassadors, Sir Oliver Franks* and Sir Roger Makins,* and their senior officials such as Sir John Balfour,* Sir Frederick Hoyer Millar,* and Sir Bernard Burrows. But for more recent times we do not yet have access to the documents. The first accounts of any topic invariably emphasise the role of the politicians – particularly when they are their memoirs. Oral testimonies allow us to explore the involvement of

The Cold War refers to the state of hostility between the USA and the USSR, and their respective allies, in the period following the conclusion of the Second World War. The Cold War is considered to have ended with the collapse of the USSR in 1991.

In Aug. 1991 Iraq invaded and annexed the Persian Gulf state of Kuwait. This move was condemned by the United Nations, which insisted that Iraq withdraw from Kuwait by 15 Jan. 1992. On 17 Jan. the Gulf War began with the deployment of 'Operation Desert Storm' by an American-led UN coalition force. On 27 Feb. the war ended with the liberation of Kuwait City.

Muhammed Reza Shah Pahlavi, HM The Shah of Iran (1919-80). The Shah of Iran from 1941 to 1979.

On Britain and Korea see Anthony Farrar-Hockley, *The British Part in the Korean War*, two vols. (London: HMSO, 1990-5). For Franks and Korea see Peter Boyle, 'Oliver Franks', in John Zametica (ed.), *British Officials and British Foreign Policy, 1945-50* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1990), pp.198-205, and Danchev, *Oliver Franks*, pp.123-8. For a more detailed consideration of the issue of ground troops see Michael F. Hopkins, 'The Price of Cold War Partnership: Sir Oliver Franks and the British Military Commitment in the Korean War', *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Jan. 2001), pp. 28-46.

George Bush, American politician. President, 1988-92.

David Owen (Lord Owen of Plymouth), Labour and SDP politician. Foreign Secretary, 1977-9, cited in Renwick, *Fighting Allies*, p.273.

Norman Schwarzkopf, American soldier. Commander Allied Forces, Gulf War, 1990-1, remark quoted in Renwick, *Fighting Allies*, p.266.

Sir Peter de la Billière, soldier. Commander of the British Forces during the Gulf War, 1990-1, remark quoted in Renwick, *Fighting Allies*, p.263.

others. Thus might we discover more about the role of the Embassy.

If the so-called special relationship was born in the Second World War, its continued vitality was most clearly tested in renewed conflicts. Any estimation of the quality of that collaboration, and of the Embassy's role in it, in the post-war epoch must be measured against the Korean War of 1950 to 1953, the first challenge to the Cold War* relationship, and the Gulf War of 1990 to 1991,* the most recent example of Anglo-American collaboration in war. How matters were handled in each case will tell us a great deal about the character and importance of ties. Since the exchanges between nations are not for the most part conducted at such a high level of urgency as a war, it is as well to look also at a political issue, to broaden that perspective. The problem of the fall of the Shah of Iran,* which developed into a crisis, occurred in a region that had been traditionally regarded by the British, and by the Americans until about the mid-1950s, as a primary responsibility of Britain.

An examination of alliance diplomacy over Korea and the Gulf illuminates the way the Anglo-American relationship operated and how it has changed. In both conflicts the British were at the forefront of support for tough action, backed the Americans in pursuing United Nations authority for such a response, and offered substantial forces for the task. Indeed, the British contribution was greater in the 1991 Gulf War, totalling 43,000 at its peak. Only as a result of the intervention of the then Ambassador, Sir Oliver Franks, did the British send ground troops to Korea.* Britain's greater commitment in 1990-91, despite relative economic and military decline, perhaps revealed a shift in relations. With the new US President George Bush* seeking to make West Germany his principal ally, Mrs Thatcher wanted to demonstrate Britain's value. She told her Cabinet not to worry, for the next crisis would reveal who were America's real friends. So it proved. To what extent was this the advice of the Embassy? Did it report encouraging signs which Mrs Thatcher developed? Or did Mrs Thatcher dictate a good deal of policy, as the contemporary belief would have it? Each of these wars confirmed Lord Owen's dictum that effective collaboration depends on personal relations at every level.* At the very top these became very good between Mrs Thatcher and Mr Bush. The military commanders also enjoyed a remarkable understanding: General Schwarzkopf,* the US supreme commander, said that he trusted the brains and judgement of General de la Billière, the British Commander-in-Chief. He in turn declared,

He [Schwarzkopf] and I were going to have to trust each other completely and tell each other what was going on, even if it meant on occasion sharing information which our own governments might have preferred to keep to themselves.*

The old joke reappeared that there were three centres of power in Washington – the White House, Capitol Hill and the British

James Baker, American politician. Secretary of State, 1989-92, Chief of Staff and Senior Counsellor to President 1992-3.

Zbigniew Brzezinski, American politician. Assistant to President for National Security Affairs, 1977-81.

Cyrus Vance (1917-2002), American politician. Secretary of State, 1977-80.

Jimmy Carter (James Earl Carter, Jr), American politician. President, 1977-81.

Hon Peter Jay, civil servant, diplomat and journalist. HM Ambassador to United States, 1977-9.

Denis Healey (Lord Healey), Labour politician. Secretary of State for Defence, 1964-70, writing in *The Time of My Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), p.113.

Embassy. Whether there was substance to that observation can only be answered by close scrutiny of the connections between the Embassy of Sir Antony Acland and the State Department of James Baker* and other branches of the government.

The collapse in 1978-79 of the regime of the Shah of Iran tested traditional diplomatic co-operation. The United States administration witnessed disagreement between Brzezinski,* the National Security Adviser, who advised the Shah to adopt a tough line, and Cyrus Vance,* the Secretary of State, who favoured the resignation of the Shah. Until the end of the year Brzezinski's view prevailed in American policy, but by December 1978 President Carter* recognised that the Shah had to go. When he left Iran in January 1979 the Americans, who had been his main foreign supporters, became the targets of the revolutionaries in the country. An unsuccessful attempt was made to seize the American Embassy in Teheran in February, and a successful one in November, after the Shah was allowed into New York for medical treatment. The loss of her main ally in the region and the hostage ordeal, which lasted until January 1981, left the Americans feeling somewhat enfeebled. They welcomed British support. We need to discover more about the role of Peter Jay* and Sir Nicholas Henderson, and their subordinates' working relationships with the Carter administration and the State Department of Cyrus Vance. How did the two powers assess developments? Was there regular and close consultation between them? Who were the most important figures in any exchanges?

Certain patterns emerge from consideration of these three topics. The British appeared to enjoy privileged collaboration with the Americans at all levels. Denis Healey* observed that the American system is very open to outside advice by individuals whose integrity is trusted and whose knowledge and intelligence are respected. He added that he had known quite junior Embassy officials make an important input to American strategic thinking, and so he made a point of seeing such junior officials on his visits to Washington. Why this occurred more with the British than with any other nation was a product partly of history, from the wartime collaboration to Cold War allies, partly shared values, which had facilitated that collaboration, and partly a reputation for reliability, a theme continually stressed by diplomats and politicians. The possibility of successful co-operation seems to revolve around three considerations: the tradition of confidential consultation; the nature of relations between the President and Prime Minister, and between the Secretary of State and the Foreign Secretary; and the role of the Ambassador. Good relations at the top made Anglo-American diplomacy run more smoothly, but there were many times when officials had close working relations even though their leaders were at odds with one another. Co-operation worked best when able individuals were involved under the leadership of the respected Ambassador. Do these findings correspond, I wonder, with the diplomats' experience?

WRIGHT

Dr Hopkins, thank you very much indeed. Now I think we need to remind ourselves that this is not a seminar about relations between the United States and Britain, it is a seminar about the British Embassy in Washington. I would suggest that we bear in mind all the time not just the points that Dr Hopkins has made, but specifically: the extent to which the British Embassy has been the main conduit between the United States and Britain in relations; the extent to which increasing use of the telephone and direct contact between ministers and between the Prime Minister and the President has affected that role over the years, if at all; the extent to which the two governments have made adequate use of their Ambassadors and their Embassies in each other's capitals. I have known of two instances during my career where the British Ambassador has very nearly been excluded from important business between the two governments, and I have known of one case where the American Ambassador was successfully excluded from important business between the two governments. We are going to start with a look at the Korean War, and Sir Bernard Burrows has kindly agreed to open up on this. He was Head of Chancery in the Embassy in Washington at the time. But may I ask all our speakers, and indeed everybody who intervenes, to bear in mind that it would be useful from the point of view of this seminar to treat this as a comparative study. In other words, while we shouldn't be diverted too far from our three main subjects, the Korean War, the Gulf War and the fall of the Shah, I hope that when people speak on these three subjects they will draw from their own experience in dealing with other crises, whether it is the Middle East, the Falklands, or the Cuban missile crisis.

**SIR BERNARD
BURROWS**

When Michael Hopkins invited me to take part in this gathering I told him that my memory was very defective after this length of time, and I cannot promise to tell you things about the Embassy conduct of relations over the Korean War in any detail. That is partly due to the lapse of time, and partly because, although as Head of Chancery I was supposed to know everything that went on, I did not personally conduct much business about the Korean War. The Embassy organisation at the level of counsellors and first secretaries was of a rather federal character, with different people specialising in different aspects being brought together by the Head of Chancery or the Minister or Private Secretary. I had once to intervene in the Korean War, when the Minister was on leave. Oliver Franks was in the Middle West making speeches, and a message came from the Prime Minister* which had to be communicated to the US government very urgently, urging them not to take some dramatic step that they were contemplating which we thought might have led to a greater degree of Chinese participation. So I duly had to do this, and the result seemed to me very satisfactory. The Foreign Office reaction was a rather grudging one, of ticking off Oliver Franks for not being there to do it himself.

Winston Churchill.

One other small item of machinery might be worth mentioning. Quite a lot of our time and effort at the Embassy at that time was taken up in travelling round the country and talking to various groups of Americans who appeared to be anxious to know about British foreign policy. I would find it quite impossible to evaluate how much effect this had, but it was something that we at the time considered important.

I would make two general points about the Korean War and the Embassy's part in it. First of all, with a high degree of hindsight, could we rightly afford the diversion of resources to this major military operation at that time, when there were so many other calls on British resources? Why was Oliver Franks justified in pressing for British participation with ground troops at that time, and what did we get out of it? The obvious answer to the second question is that it thought to help our claim to 'a place at the top table', which seemed to be of almost overriding value at that time. But in terms of the immediate reward, this was not very great, because, concurrently with the Korean War, we were dealing with the State Department about at least two aspects of policy in the Middle East: namely our relations with Egypt* and what I might call the first oil crisis in Persia (leading to the nationalisation of the oil by Mossadeq*). On those questions we did not receive a hundred per cent support from the American government – far from it. We were conscious of differences of policy and of the way in which our difficulties there were added to by it being fairly obvious that we were not receiving a hundred per cent American support. I am not saying it was justified, but that was a contemporary situation where one could say that the effort to support America over Korea did not seem to be reciprocated in this other sphere, which was of great interest to us.

Finally, the question of why this was so does introduce an interesting comparison between the policies with regard to the two areas. Because in the case of South Korea as far as I know our position was entirely disinterested: we did not have a position in that area, or indeed much in the Far East generally, which needed to be maintained or supported or regained. We were acting, when we supported the Americans, simply on the basis of Cold War considerations: we agreed it was necessary to try to do something to stop the communist advance in that area. Whereas in the Middle East, over our attempts to maintain our position in Egypt, over the difficulties of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company in Iran, we definitely did have positions that we wanted to maintain for British strategic or, if one can use these words, 'our present imperial interest'. And it was to a large extent those considerations which brought about the difficulties of aligning British and American policy on those areas. This has been recently expressed very clearly in a book by George McGhee,* who was largely in charge of American policy in those areas at that time, bringing out the difference in judgement. This was particularly true about Iran, where he is quite frank that there was this difference of opinion and that it was expressed between

King Farouk (who had been consistently anti-British) was overthrown by a coup d'état in July 1952 and replaced by a military council, led by General Neguib. Transition from monarchy to republic followed in June 1953.

Mohammed Mossadeq (1881-1967)
Iranian politician. Prime Minister
1951-3.

George McGhee, American diplomat. See George C. McGhee, *On the Front Line in the Cold War: An Ambassador Reports*, (Westport, CT: London, Praeger, 1997). See also: *International Community: A Goal for a New World Order*, (Lanham, Md/London: University Press of America, 1992); *Envoy to the Middle World: Adventures in Diplomacy*, (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); *At the Creation of a new Germany: From Adenauer to Brandt* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1989); *The US-Turkish-NATO Middle East Connection: How the Truman Doctrine and Turkey's NATO Entry contained the Soviet Union* (London, Macmillan, 1990).

the two governments. So much so that, at one point, we went behind his back and complained to the American Secretary of State that he was being less than helpful at least, as he frankly describes on the basis of our documents. That was a judgement based on two points: that the Americans were, as is well known, not in sympathy with our 'imperialist' position in the Middle East, and, more importantly, thought it was better to try to harness Egyptian and Iranian nationalism to an anti-communist direction, whereas we saw them as using this nationalist appeal largely against ourselves. What I am saying of course is to some extent a comment on the selection of the Korean War as the topic of that time, because I think the dealings we had through the Embassy with the State Department were possibly more interesting, on the grounds I have just mentioned, over the Middle East. But I think that it is worth bearing in mind the contrast between the disinterestedness of our attitude over Korea and the differences of opinion for partly historical, partly judgmental reasons over the various problems of the Middle East.

WRIGHT

Lord Greenhill, you were in the Embassy also. Do you have any particular Korean points you want to make?

LORD GREENHILL OF HARROW

Lord Greenhill of Harrow, *More by Accident* (York: Wilton, 1992).

Harold 'Kim' Philby (1912-88), civil servant and Soviet spy. One of the 'Cambridge Comintern' with Guy Burgess, Donald Maclean, John Cairncross and Sir Anthony Blunt. Philby defected to the Soviet Union in 1963 after more than a decade of spying.

See Richard J. Aldrich and Michael F. Hopkins (eds), *Intelligence, Defence and Diplomacy: British Policy in the Post-War World*. (London: Cass, 1994).

I was twice in the Embassy: once immediately after the war and then later. But, to a lot of people, what made a lot of difference in the relationship between the British and the Americans was that they had been together in the war. I was in North Africa, in Algiers, with American troops, so that when I got to Washington, I was very much at ease really. And they, to a certain extent, accepted one because they had relations with us in wartime dealings. I found, and I have recorded it in the books that I have written,* a lot of the work that I did in the Embassy was connected with intelligence things. There was Philby* and various other mischief-makers, and that involved a great deal of work and a great deal of mutual respect. But I don't remember much about the Korean War. The relationship with America right from immediately after the war was in my experience very easy. There was a good deal of frankness, which I have recorded, and there was a good deal of exchanging of secret information.*

WRIGHT

This is a fair comment, that the wartime alliance, and still the intelligence and defence relationship, has actually given the British Embassy in Washington a status, leaving aside personalities, which no other Embassy in Washington has ever had or is ever likely to have.

SIR NICHOLAS HENDERSON

This is a central feature of the Embassy's life, the *raison d'être*. If you are talking about the importance of the Embassy and the role of the Embassy in the context of the relationship between the two countries from 1945 to the present day, those subjects you mentioned are very important, but I don't think they are necessarily the most

The European Recovery Programme or the Marshall Plan (1948-51). In June 1947 US Secretary of State George Marshall announced an aid package, eventually estimated at US\$13.5 billion, to facilitate postwar European recovery.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. Formed in 1949, this treaty provided the basis of an alliance between Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France (until 1965), Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, the USA and the UK. Greece, Spain, Turkey, West Germany and then the united Germany joined subsequently.

The Suez Crisis arose when the Egyptian Government nationalised the Suez Canal in 1956. The UK and France launched a military attack around the canal region, while Israel invaded the Sinai. These countries were forced to withdraw in the face of severe world-wide condemnation.

Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890-1969), American general and politician. President, 1953-61.

Harold Macmillan (Earl of Stockton, 1896-86), Conservative politician. Prime Minister, 1957-63. At the time of Suez, in 1956, Macmillan was Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Harold Wilson (Lord Wilson of Rievaulx, 1916-97), Labour politician. Prime Minister 1964-70 and 1974-6.

The Falklands War broke out in April 1982 between the UK and Argentina over territorial rights over the Falklands Islands in the South Atlantic (which the Argentineans call Las Malvinas).

KATHLEEN BURK

Linkage: *quid pro quo*, in expectation of receiving one favour for another.

WRIGHT

Casper Weinberger, American politician. Defense Secretary 1981-7.

important. What Denis [Greenhill] has said, concerning intelligence and defence, and Bernard [Burrows] has said, concerning the whole problem of the Middle East, are of crucial importance. But the most important things in the role of the Embassy in the 1940s, and possibly the whole of the period I mention, were our roles in the creation of the Marshall Plan,* and the creation of NATO.* I don't believe NATO would have come about without Oliver Franks's role and the contribution of the British Embassy. The Americans were at sea over Europe and needed the British Embassy to play their part. When people try and draw up a balance sheet of what we put into the relationship, compared with what we got out of it, the one that is most important is that we helped, and in fact made it possible, for America to create NATO.

Then you must mention the great nadir of our relationship, in which the Embassy's exclusion was very important, which is Suez.* Of all the things that divided us, that seared the relationship, Suez is far and away the most important issue, in my view, of the whole of the 30 or 40 years there following World War II. The extraordinary thing about that was of course that the Embassy was, by the British government largely, excluded from playing a role, except when Roger Makins attended a meeting between US President Dwight D. Eisenhower* and Harold Macmillan.* Macmillan reported erroneously that the President had approved the idea of the invasion. Makins, who was there, was able to refute this. But it didn't have any effect.

Moving on a bit, our role, or non-role, in the Vietnam War is an absolutely crucial part the Embassy had to play, a very difficult part. The Wilson* government was not prepared to get involved in the Vietnam War for all sorts of reasons, but it put a tremendous strain on the relationship. Because for ten years Vietnam was the most important thing for America.

If you come up a little more to the present day, the role of the Embassy was a crucial factor in the Anglo-American relationship during the Falklands War.* This was far more important to us, frankly, than our involvement in the Korean War.

I was struck by Sir Bernard Burrows's comment about linkages,* that the US did not implement linkage, that is to say the idea that, if the UK helped the USA in Korea, the US would help the UK in the Middle East. It is quite striking that, over the twentieth century, this is repeatedly the case, i.e. that the UK will adjust and modify its position in the expectation and hope that the US will respond by doing the same, and the US almost never does. I would like, I think, some comments by practitioners to what extent this continues with the FO and is never fulfilled.

I wonder whether there isn't an exception there in Weinberger's* role in the Falklands. I would have thought that is a very clear case of linkage, isn't it?

HENDERSON Yes.

SIR ANTONY ACLAND I think the role of the Embassy surely differs according to whether there is or isn't an identity of policy. In the case of Korea, as Bernard [Burrows] has said, we didn't have a real national, imperial interest in it. But Oliver Franks thought it was right to have British forces committed to that United Nations enterprise. In the case of the Falklands, (and Nico [Henderson] is absolutely right, the role of the Embassy was totally crucial, because we had a very major essential interest, which not all of the American administration shared. And more than any other single institution, I should have thought, the British Embassy succeeded, together with the Prime Minister [Thatcher] and other ministers and so on, in persuading sections in the American administration which were doubtful to support us over the Falklands War. The Embassy, particularly, played a vital role, as did Nico [Henderson] himself, in persuading American public opinion that what we were doing was honourable and right. The feature of the Gulf War was that there was a total identity of policy, in a way, and that identity of policy, set the scene for the activities of the Embassy.

WRIGHT

Sir Anthony Parsons (1922-96), diplomat. UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 1979-82.

But just going back to the Falklands, if I cannot save Nico [Henderson]'s blushes, the fact is that the co-operation between you and Tony Parsons* in New York was not only absolutely crucial in terms of executing British policy, but also in countervailing Mrs Kirkpatrick's very ambivalent position.

HENDERSON

As I recall that it was hostile!

ACLAND

Thomas Enders, American politician. Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, 1981-3.

Enders* was ambivalent, but Kirkpatrick was hostile.

WRIGHT

But that was a very interesting, and a very encouraging, example of two British missions working together in a sort of pincer movement to involve the Americans.

HENDERSON

Yes of course, you can't deal with it and there is no reason why you should, but the relationship with the Americans in the UN is another very important aspect.

HOPKINS

Absolutely.

GREENHILL

I could tell a flippant story, and that is that when the new Embassy was built in Washington the Home Office sent out a man to check up that all had been right, and he discovered to his horror that we had installed in the Embassy single sheets in the lavatories instead

of rolls. And everything was brushed aside while those rolls were installed!

WRIGHT

Does anybody want to raise any points on Korea, before we move on?

HENDERSON

Clement R. Attlee (The Earl Attlee, 1883-1967), Labour politician. Prime Minister 1945-51.

Of course we claim that it was due to the British, partly the Embassy but largely Attlee's* visit there, that the Americans didn't drop the atomic bomb on China. I am not sure that is right, but it is certainly part of the mythology of the relationship.

WRIGHT

Can I just ask a question of Sir Bernard [Burrows]. All through my career, and through most of our careers, we have known of the growing tendency of Presidents and Prime Ministers to talk to each other. Sometimes attempts are made to bypass the official machine, happily not very often, as this is a very inefficient way of doing business. But do you have any recollections of the direct relationship between the Prime Minister and the President, and how did it work, and in your experience how did it differ from later relationships?

BURROWS

I can't say whether I do. The example I quoted was contrary to that – when I had to deliver this message, it was a message from the Prime Minister, which was sent through the Embassy.

HENDERSON

Harry S. Truman. (1884-1972) Democrat politician. President 1945-53.

The Potsdam Conference, held 17 July to 2 Aug. 1945, to discuss the future of defeated Germany between the heads of state of the UK (Attlee), USA (Truman) and the USSR (Stalin) and their foreign ministers.

Well, the first relationship after our European war relationship between the President and Prime Minister was disastrous. Churchill asked Truman* to stop off here on his way to the Potsdam Conference,* and Truman, reflecting what was then the American view, said, 'I don't want to be seen by Stalin to be ganging up with you against Russia.' And it was a very serious strain on our relationship and one that affected that relationship for a time: the Americans' readiness to do business with Russia rather than with us.

HOPKINS

I just wanted for a second to return to the Iran issue: I know it is slightly off the point. You said that you thought that the Americans were unco-operative on Iran. My reading of the documents, the messages between Sir Oliver Franks and the Foreign Office, is that his position wasn't a solid British government stance on Iran, he was more sympathetic to the American point of view. There was a middle way. I was wondering whether it was your experience in the Embassy that there was almost a double sense of frustration: the Americans weren't making enough effort, in response to our effort in Korea, to be understanding about the Middle Eastern stance. And the British government were being more hard-headed, taking too much of a side of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. One interesting aside, by the way, is that Sir Oliver Franks, when he retired as

Ambassador, sought to secure a directorship of the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, which they duly turned down.

BURROWS

I can't point to any inference of that particular in my mind. There was a curious little thing brought out in George McGhee's book. It may be well known, that during George McGhee's time at Oxford Oliver Franks had been his tutor.

HOPKINS

I just wondered whether the Embassy felt that they were fighting two battles: they were trying to persuade the British government to be more reasonable in the light of the deals that the American oil companies were pursuing and so on.

BURROWS

On this occasion, when Oliver Franks was instructed to convey the misgivings about George McGhee he reports having done this rather laconically, and said that the Secretary of State's response was non-committal.

HOPKINS

I know that on one occasion he did actually fail to pass on a criticism, and later the Foreign Office minuted they were glad that, in the light of circumstances, they didn't insist that he pass that on. So sometimes messages that were asked to be passed on weren't passed on.

WRIGHT

David Ormsby Gore (Lord Harlech, 1918-85), diplomat. HM Ambassador in Washington (1961-5) and a close friend of Robert Kennedy, US Attorney General, and his brother President John F. Kennedy.

John F. Kennedy, American politician (1917-63). President, 1961-3.

Sir Oliver Franks did not, I think, react to Foreign Office instructions with the words of the British Ambassador to Iceland on one occasion, who said, 'I assume you do not seriously wish me to carry out these instructions'.

Before we move on to the Gulf War, I don't think really we can have a discussion about the role of the British Embassy without a brief reference to the Cuban missile crisis and the role of David Ormsby Gore.* I was his Private Secretary, Denis Greenhill was his Head of Chancery, and we both had a very close opportunity to see a quite extraordinary, if not unique, relationship between the British Ambassador and the President of the United States. A personal relationship – I mean the degree of consultation between Kennedy* and Ormsby Gore was, I think, well beyond anything that has been written down, in my experience. I personally know, as you do Denis, that the British Ambassador was frequently consulted on American domestic political problems. It was an extraordinary relationship.

GREENHILL

They spent weekends together.

WRIGHT

Aden was a Crown Colony and a British Protectorate. In response to growing Arab nationalism, the South Arabian Federation of Arab Emirates was established in 1959 and Aden joined in 1963. In 1965 Egyptian-sponsored unrest led to civil war and Britain withdrew in 1967. Aden became the People's Republic of South Yemen, with links to the communist bloc. US policy was dichotomous: Cold War hostility to the communist bloc versus historical antipathy to colonialism.

ACLAND

Saddam Hussein, Iraqi soldier and head of state. President since 1979.

Sir Charles Powell (Lord Powell of Bayswater), civil servant. Prime Minister's Private Secretary 1984-91.

Indeed. Frequent seminars in each other's houses, and so on. That was a very remarkable relationship, but it is worth remembering that, at the same time, there were some very considerable differences in British and American foreign policy going on, notably on Aden.* Probably you are right, there wasn't very much linkage between the co-operation and the advice that we gave on Cuba with the American attitude on Aden. Antony [Acland], can we turn to the Gulf?

I will try to stick to the role of the Embassy, but I am not absolutely sure that one can separate the role of the British Embassy from Anglo-United States relations as a whole. And I think that you have got to see the role of the British Embassy and judge it in relation to the activities of other instruments which were used in pursuit of a particular policy.

With regards to the Gulf War, 1990-91, that period, as far as the British Embassy and the British government were concerned, seems to me to have been a rather tidy period. It was a period of agreed policy, of harmony and of close and very fruitful co-operation. Tidy in the sense of a beginning and an end: because we were involved in a very special way from the very beginning, and we were actually involved in the end in a very special way as well. Now just to set the scene for that, you will all remember that by a lucky coincidence President George Bush and Mrs Margaret Thatcher, as she then was, happened to be in Aspen, Colorado, celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the Aspen Institute, when Saddam Hussein* invaded Kuwait. They were both there. She was meant to be having a holiday after her visit to Aspen, but that went by the board. There were, of course, immediate consultations. I was involved in those consultations. Commentators have suggested that George Bush wouldn't have taken such a tough and definite line over Saddam Hussein and Kuwait had it not been for Mrs Thatcher. I don't agree with that proposition. Nor does Charles Powell* and he was involved in all the discussions. But I have heard him say in public that the President in the end would have sent half a million of his countrymen to war halfway round the world – a very courageous decision. From the very beginning the President recognised that he probably would have to do so. And actually, Lady Thatcher, I know, has told two people who are writing a book which is relevant to this that she also agrees that he would have done it anyway without her. But, of course, he derived enormous encouragement and support from the fact that she agreed with his policy, which was that, if Saddam Hussein couldn't be negotiated out of Kuwait, he would have to be fought out of Kuwait. She made her agreement very clear from a very early stage in the discussions. She stayed on

The Strategic Defence Initiative (SDI), colloquially known as 'Star Wars'.

John Major, Conservative politician. Prime Minister 1990-7.

Brent Scowcroft, American soldier. White House aide and Assistant for National Security Affairs, 1989-93.

HRH Prince Bandar bin Sultan Bin Abul Aziz, Saudi diplomat. Ambassador to Washington, 1983-.

Douglas Hurd (Lord Hurd of Westwell), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary 1989-95.

Tom King (Lord King of Bridgwater), Conservative politician. Secretary of State for Defence 1989-92.

Desert Storm was the military name for Gulf War operations.

Major-General E. H. A. Beckett, soldier and diplomat. Head of British Defence Staff, Washington, 1988-91.

in Aspen. We went to various scientific and other institutions. We went to the Climatological Institute in Boulder, Colorado, and then we went to the SDI* research centre in Colorado Springs, and then into Cheyenne Mountain to watch all the items in outer space being monitored. She went back to Washington and told him that, if he had to commit troops, she would commit forces as well. So from the very beginning there was an absolute identity of policy and a joint commitment to fight if necessary. That was the background to the operations of the Embassy and how we were having to conduct ourselves.

Now what were the instruments for working out the modalities, the details of the policy, and working out the strategy and the tactics. There were a large number of strands which are worth mentioning, into which must be fitted the role of the Embassy. There were of course the telephone calls between the Prime Minister* and the President. There were telephone calls between Charles Powell and, mainly, Brent Scowcroft* in the White House. There were constant exchanges at very many levels between the Embassy on the one hand and the White House and the State Department mainly on the other, from the President and from Jim Baker downwards. I used to see the President regularly, either with other Ambassadors who were particularly important, notably Prince Bandar bin Sultan,* the Saudi Ambassador who was a key figure because of the role of Saudi Arabia, or I would see the President officially or privately throughout this whole period, and Jim Baker too. And members of my staff were always in and out of both the White House and the State Department. Not, as I emphasised at the beginning, seeking to change policy, but seeking to find the best ways of implementing that policy. There were visits by Douglas Hurd* and Tom King* to Washington. There were Jim Baker's visits around the world, during which he almost invariably came through London, in his efforts to set up that extraordinary coalition of countries which in the end faced Saddam Hussein in the desert as part of the team for Desert Storm.* There was an occasional visit by a representative of the Cabinet Office, mainly perhaps to deal with what Denis Greenhill has mentioned: the important intelligence relationship. There was an intense exchange of intelligence, a step up both in the gathering of intelligence and the assessment of the intelligence that was gathered. And the fact that the intelligence agencies were represented as always in the Embassy in Washington. They very often took the lead, sometimes supported by visitors from London.

Then, of course, the British defence staff was another major player in handling the strategy and the tactics and the details. It is still a large number of people, headed by General Beckett,* running into hundreds, but not nearly as large as it had been. They worked in great detail with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Pentagon, and with General Schwarzkopf's operational command, discussing what equipment was required, what supplies were needed, what forces could be earmarked. There was a great discussion about which inoculations should take place and the medical preparations that

were necessary, as we got nearer to the point where it was clear that Saddam Hussein was going to dig in his toes and not withdraw from Kuwait. They didn't know whether they were going to be faced with chemical or nuclear or biological weapons of one kind or another. I don't think that we had sufficient supplies for the operation: we had to go to the Americans for that. They had a limited supply as well, but on the whole it was a question of co-operation and mutual help.

Then of course there was the public relations side. Not as intense as when Nico [Henderson] was Ambassador at the time of the Falklands War, because we didn't have to explain our policy. The President was explaining his policy to the American public and to the media, and that was our policy as well. We didn't divert from it. But inevitably one did quite a lot of television interviews of one kind or another.

All these links and activities seemed to me to be complementary, the one to the other. It was important, indeed essential, that everybody should be properly informed about everything that was going on. The point which the chairman has made about the Embassy being kept in the dark about exchanges didn't really apply. I made it quite clear that it was perfectly ridiculous for me not to be told very quickly about any exchanges the Prime Minister had with the President or that Charles Powell had with Brent Scowcroft, because, as I have said, I saw the President fairly regularly, formally and informally, and he would expect me to know and he was surprised if I didn't. And that by and large worked pretty well. We had in the Embassy a regular mechanism, meeting initially several times a week and then every day as the date of the invasion drew nearer, for sharing all the information that I heard about that came in from the Foreign Office, Number 10, and from the Cabinet Office. We had intelligence and representatives there, so we shared the information and we identified the tasks that had to be done or the loose ends that had to be tied up.

All these activities, in which I think the Embassy was prominent and in a way the co-ordinator in Washington, led the Americans to conclude and to say, from the President, Jim Baker, Dick Cheney,* Colin Powell,* Norman Schwarzkopf, Brent Scowcroft, downwards, that they realised again that, when the chips were down, there was only one wholly reliable ally, and that was Britain: both reliable politically and militarily competent. Some of the other members of that strange coalition were politically reliable but militarily incompetent, and some were militarily competent but politically dubious.

As I said at the beginning, it was a tidy episode, because we in Britain and, through me, in the Embassy were involved at the very beginning in Aspen, and at the very end. When the Iraqis were dislodged from Kuwait and those wretched, hungry, tattered, frightened troops were clogging the road to Basra, streaming out of Kuwait without shoes, without equipment, Douglas Hurd was in Washington. He and I went to see the President about how long it

Richard B. Cheney, American politician. Defense Secretary, 1989-93.

Colin Powell, American General and politician. Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1989-93.

would go on, what were the next steps, and when the operation should cease. We talked about that and the Foreign Secretary at the end said to the President, 'What are your ideas about the cessation of hostilities?' The President said, 'Actually, I was about to have a meeting to discuss this. I have got Colin Powell and Dick Cheney, the Defence Secretary, outside. As you all have been involved from the very beginning, why don't we have a joint meeting to decide what happens?'. So they came in and at that meeting they talked it through. There was a presentation by Colin Powell about the military situation, and the President, with Douglas Hurd's agreement, decided that the military operation should cease. This was at 3 o'clock in the afternoon, 3.30 p.m. maybe, and he went on television at 6 o'clock and announced the cessation of hostilities. So it was unusual, in that it was a fairly short operation with an identity of policy which we were trying to implement together. I think that the Embassy, as part of that procedure, played a big part in it. But in these days, with the ease of communications, of confidential speech on the telephone, of confidential faxes and all those instant messages, the Embassy is going to be one player, but a complementary player, to all the other members of the team. It works provided everybody is kept informed. By and large I am confident and satisfied that we were.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much indeed. I should just say from my position as Permanent Under-Secretary in London at the time, that rings entirely true. I would only add two points, minor caveats. One is, and I have already referred obliquely to this, that there was an occasion, an embarrassing occasion, when there were talks with the Americans in London at which we were asked explicitly to ensure that the American Ambassador was not present. And this was extremely embarrassing, because he certainly got the impression that it was at our request, and it hadn't been. The second is the problems which we did have, and which you and I remember well Antony [Acland], about dissemination of information. Mrs Thatcher was rightly extremely sensitive about the safeguarding of secret information, particularly secret operational information about the war and military preparations. This led to some fairly considerable operational difficulties, particularly for this building, where we were trying to conduct a very complicated international operation of keeping our allies on side, particularly in the United Nations. But there were specific instances where the records of conversations were under very, very strict instructions that they were to be seen only by the Foreign and Commonwealth Secretary and the Defence Secretary personally, and one official, and one official only, in the Ministry of Defence and the Foreign Office. Sir Michael Quinlan,* who was Permanent Under-Secretary at the Ministry of Defence, and I agreed that it was not efficient or sensible that he and I should be the only officials in our respective departments, because it was more important that the senior official

Sir Michael Quinlan, civil servant.
Permanent Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence 1988-92.

Sir Nigel Broomfield, diplomat and civil servant. Deputy Under-Secretary (Defence) 1989-92.

who was actually conducting the daily emergency meetings to implement policy should be the one to know about these particular secret activities. So in our case here Sir Nigel Broomfield* was nominated as the official, under my command, who was allowed to see these papers which I was not allowed to see. It was not in my view a very efficient way of working, and it also, and I say this quite genuinely, increased my anxiety, because we were similarly not allowed to send these to the British Ambassador in Washington. We got over this in the end. But I am afraid Antony [Acland] you are guilty as the man who said that it wasn't known how many undiscovered burglaries there had been in New York the previous year – there were some undiscovered things that we were not allowed to send you, in spite of very strong pleading with Number 10 that we should be allowed to. I am glad to say that there were only one or two instances of this. And I seem to remember that with typical percipience you became aware of them. Indeed I think on the files in thirty years' time, the correspondence between Sir Antony Acland and myself will no doubt hit the point.

BURROWS

I don't think this is relevant at all, but that reminds me very strongly of a much more sinister case of restriction of papers in this building. During Suez I had been posted to the Gulf but I was on leave in London not very long before it erupted, and visiting the Foreign Secretary in his room. A meeting had just been held and on the table where they had been having the meeting I couldn't avoid seeing the number of papers marked at the top 'UK ministers' eyes only'. And I gathered, as a result of this, that I wasn't told in the Gulf what was happening.

WRIGHT

Anybody else round the table who wants to weigh in at this point? From the floor?

SEAN GREENWOOD

I have a question not relating to the Gulf directly, but more picking up the point that Sir Nicholas Henderson made about the relationship between the Embassy and the American government. During the Gulf crisis it was generally smooth. During the Cuban crisis it was exceptional; during Korea very good. What does this tell us about the relationship during Suez?

HENDERSON

It wasn't the fault of the Embassy.

WRIGHT

We all have our views about what went wrong on Suez, but one thing that did undoubtedly go wrong, as Sir Bernard [Burrows] has pointed out, was the lack of dissemination of what was going on among the officials and diplomats who really needed to know what was going on. Not only was Sir Bernard kept in the dark in the Gulf, but Sir Humphrey Trevelyan* in Cairo didn't know that there was a military operation until he actually heard on the BBC that the

Sir Humphrey Trevelyan (Lord Trevelyan, 1905-85), diplomat. British Ambassador, Cairo, 1955-6.

RAF had bombed Alexandria. Now Sir Humphrey was the British Ambassador to Egypt, but was kept as far as I know completely in the dark about everything to do with Suez. Perhaps this sounds rather a bureaucratic answer to your question.

GREENWOOD

So it wouldn't have made any difference if the relationship had been very good?

HENDERSON

Sir Anthony Eden (Earl of Avon, 1897-1977), Conservative politician. Prime Minister 1955-7.

John Foster Dulles (1888-1959), American politician. Secretary of State, 1953-9.

I think the fact that Eden's* relations with Dulles* were really bad had something to do with it. Not a great deal, but Eden wasn't interested in concerting with the Americans. He was on very bad terms with Dulles and somehow had convinced himself that he was against us and that the Americans wouldn't help, partly because of the American lack of sympathy to us about our whole Middle East policy. But it is a very crucial difference, but you have got the world's expert on the subject behind you.

SAUL KELLY

I did a lot of work with Sir Roger Makins (Lord Sheffield) on the Suez crisis for his memoirs and am continuing it in my own book. What I have discovered is that the Embassy did play a role, despite not being informed by London of the military preparations. Sir Roger Makins on quite a number of occasions sent warnings to London about the results of using force. Despite this blackout of information from London, he almost sensed what was going on and issued very stern warnings. So despite that, the Embassy was playing its role, really, in Suez.

WRIGHT

That's useful, thank you. Keith [Kyle].

KEITH KYLE

The Sèvres Protocol (24 Oct 1956) was a secret agreement between UK, France and Israel to make a political and military response to Egypt's nationalisation of the Suez Canal.

With Suez one must distinguish between the large part of the crisis, in which the planning in London was for a possible invasion of Egypt because of the Canal Company seizure on the one hand, and what happened in the last week of October. There was no secret about the first within the restricted group of civil servants from the departments concerned with the planning who had the security clearance *Terrapin*, and no concealment in principle from the Americans. The key Embassies were aware in a general sense of what was being prepared and it was in relation to this that Sir Roger Makins very properly gave his warning, because it had not been sufficiently grasped in London that the United States would not go along. The Sèvres Protocol* and the collusion with Israel were totally different, cutting out all but a handful of British civil servants from the decision process and scandalising the US administration.

WRIGHT

Thank you very much. Anybody else, going back to the Gulf?

HOPKINS

I was going to suggest a comparative question here. The Gulf War is a long time after the Second World War collaboration, and the

Korean War collaboration, where the British and the Americans themselves thought that the British were an important power in the world, although declining by the 1950s. Did you sense, looking at the collaboration in the Gulf War and your own experience of the earlier period of British history, that the Americans greatly appreciated our reliability, our what you might call national psychology, but saw us as a fairly small player, bearing in mind that we were less than 10 per cent of the overall force. Do you think that in effect we punched beyond our weight, to use a boxing metaphor? How highly did they rate our contribution?

ACLAND

I would have thought very highly. Obviously numerically much, much smaller, but proportionally to our forces a very significant contribution. What did we supply, 43,000 troops? 40-45,000? And they had about half a million. So we were nearly 10 per cent of that. And what one has read in both of their memoirs, the co-operation between Norman Schwarzkopf and Peter de la Billière was, not between equals, but I am sure that Norman Schwarzkopf relied tremendously on Peter de la Billière. They had their disagreements, as any commanders in a theatre of war would, but it was very close and they undoubtedly respected each other. The Americans at that stage, and I think it is true generally, no longer liked to be alone, and that was the importance of this coalition of forces, that was the importance of Britain: we were there and committed. I suppose we were the second largest contingent. The Saudis or the Egyptians put nothing like that in, and were not of the same competence. And I think that they saw it as a very significant contribution, and a rather unusual one, and they saw that the activities of the British forces actually in the operation were of extreme importance.

I can tell you one anecdote. I had to ask General Schwarzkopf after the whole thing was over whether he would accept an honorary British award. I think the British government decided to give awards only to people who had actually served in the theatre of war, and he was the commander-in-chief so he qualified for a British award. It was slightly complicated, because I was at some British festival in Birmingham, Alabama, and he was at the Kentucky Derby, and our staffs talked to each other. I knew him reasonably well, but he had been out of Washington most of the time when I was there. I said to him, 'General, this is the British Ambassador. I have been asked by the British government and by the Queen to inquire whether you would be happy to receive an honorary British award for the fact that you were commander-in-chief in the theatre of war where British troops were involved'. And without a moment's hesitation, he is a very genuine man, he said, 'Ambassador please will you return in appropriate language my thanks and gratitude for this honour. Of course I accept. I accept immediately. And please tell the Queen, and tell the British government, of my gratitude. But will you add this, that the award is a great honour. It is icing on the cake. But the real honour was to have had those

wonderful British soldiers, sailors, air men and marines under my command in that theatre of war.' He said it to the Queen when she gave it to him in Tampa, Florida, when she came on her State Visit. And that is absolutely genuine. So I think he would say, 'Yes' We made an extraordinary contribution.

HENDERSON

William (Bill) Jefferson Clinton, American politician. President, 1992-2000.

Richard Holbrooke, American politician and diplomat. US Ambassador to Germany 1993-4, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Canadian Affairs, 1994-6, Special Presidential envoy for Cyprus, and Special Envoy in Bosnia and Kosovo 1997-9.

Can I just take this point a stage further. Do you not think that, with our diminishing power, which I think continues to diminish, does it not in the long run have some impact? I think that Clinton* doesn't really bother to take us into account as much as previous Presidents, although he is friendly. He goes ahead, it seems to me, to decide which countries are going to be allowed to be admitted into NATO. In the old days we would certainly have been consulted more intensely. Look at how he uses Holbrooke.* Holbrooke is now going to play a great role over Cyprus in fact, which is very much our soil. I just wonder. I think we could hoodwink ourselves if we think that the decline in our military power, which is very serious, won't have some impact.

HOPKINS

What I was going to ask, if I may, is the same question about linkage. We have heard about the Korean War: we made a contribution, we were reliable, and so on. Did you notice linkage on other issues in your time in the Embassy as a result of our contribution over the Gulf? That the Americans were more accommodating on issues that might have been that little bit difficult prior to the collaboration?

WRIGHT

I can think of one Gulf-related point which, in a sense, was a linkage. Something which the Americans agreed to do for us, which I don't think they would have or did agree to do for anybody else. That was to give us a share of the Japanese financial contribution to the cost of the Gulf War. I doubt whether any other ally got such a contribution.

HOPKINS

Not even the French?

WRIGHT

I doubt it. I don't know.

ACLAND

I don't know that I can think of anything absolutely specific. But the fact that we were involved, supportive from the beginning, agreeing with the policy, providing a significant military contingent had a very good effect on the relationship. It will be quickly forgotten, no doubt. But the effect is implanted in George Bush's mind, Jim Baker won't forget and neither will Dick Cheney and Colin Powell. But the present generation, they weren't involved and it won't mean much to them. I think one mustn't be starry-eyed. I have always disliked the phrase 'the special relationship'. I think it is a slightly meaningless phrase and I have never used it. But there is

still an identity of considerable interest in trade and investment and there are exchanges of every kind. These things, because our interests are together, still make quite a powerful underwater cable joining the United States with Britain. But it is diminishing. When you think that, by the year 2000, the population of the United States will be 40 per cent Hispanic, it is very different from the idea of the wartime relationship. There is the Eastern seaboard and the seat of government where there will be a residual identity of interest. But we mustn't bank on it. If there were another crisis, where the Americans really wanted our support and we had an identity of interest, they would be saying again that, when the chips are down, we know who is a reliable ally. But, until that happens, you have that crisis, you have that identity of interest, you have our supporting them. This will continue to fade and diminish, I am afraid.

BURK

I was struck by Sir Antony [Acland]'s point that the US no longer likes to be alone: to walk alone. I wondered partly whether that was what you saw as one outcome of the Vietnam War, when in many respects they were alone, or whether this stems from something else? And then, together with the idea of your identity of interest in the Gulf War and the fact that the UK had such leverage, at least implied, during that period, whether you think that the UK has this influence when it agrees with the United States? And to what extent it has very much if it doesn't agree? For example, if there is a crisis on, but the US and the UK do not agree on the outcome or what the modalities ought to be, how much influence is there then? How much need is there for a companion who is not wholly in accord with the US position?

ACLAND

I think it depends tremendously on the extent of America's national interest in the issue. If they haven't made up their minds: if they are uncertain, if they are groping, if they are fumbling for a policy, then I do think still that there is an ease of communication and consultation with the British which probably doesn't apply with any other country and that there we can have a big input. They still respect our intelligence input. They still respect the fact that, like them, we have representation in most parts of the world and knowledge about most parts of the world. If they really want to do something and have made up their minds, they are going to do it. I don't think we are going to be able to ride them off. If they are fumbling, if they are groping for a solution, and because they don't want to walk alone they want someone with them, we will have influence. I think they will still probably look to us as the country of influence most likely to join them in a policy. The Germans might join them perhaps. The French are most unlikely to initially, and not spontaneously, but they will if there is a real identity of interest. If the Americans were saying to themselves, 'Don't quite know what to do. We think we should do this, but we must do it in concert with others. Who can we go to for support?' I think they would put

us fairly high on the list. Not necessarily if it is in the American hemisphere – if it is Latin America, Mexico or Brazil or whatever – but if it is elsewhere in the world. That is my feeling anyway.

BURROWS

I think it is worth considering, in judging the force of the relationship, the recovery from disasters, like the disaster of Philby, etc. How soon, with what difficulty or with what ease, did we recover from that? I was involved in conducting the relationship much later. But certainly, at that time, one could say that the Americans had had their own disasters which perhaps made that easier. And secondly Suez. What was the relationship like after Suez, which, so to speak, was the low point perhaps? And what light does the process of recovery from those things shed on the underlying relationship and its role for the future?

WRIGHT

We might keep that in mind after the break.

HENDERSON

Alexander Haig, American general and politician. Secretary of State 1981-2.

If I might say a word on something arising out of that. There is a very profound influence at work, and that is the guilt the Americans felt about their attitude to us over Suez. It certainly came into play very noticeably at the time of the Falklands. Haig* said to me at countless times, 'We are not going to do another Suez on you'. And they felt that, although they didn't think we were right about Suez, they thought also that they were wrong. This I think was very important.

MIKE MAKOVSKY

I have two questions. One is to Sir Antony [Acland]. Could he say why he felt in the Gulf War that there should be some cessation in the hostilities? This is an important political issue in the States. And secondly, if any of the participants could shed light on why Britain should side with the Americans in various crises, if there is no clear *quid pro quo* for doing so? You may hope there will be, but you don't necessarily expect it. We sometimes perceive that one reward for siding with the Americans is that, in the eyes of other countries, you may have more influence if you are seen to be closer to the United States.

ACLAND

On the first, there were two elements in the minds of Colin Powell, Dick Cheney and the President. They felt that they had a mandate. The President certainly, as a politician, felt that he had a mandate to liberate Kuwait and to restore the legitimate government. As those wretched Iraqis were streaming out of Kuwait on the road to Basra it looked as though that mandate of the UN had been fulfilled. The President would have loved to have seen the end of Saddam Hussein, if he could have gone on and destroyed him. But I think he was right. And Douglas Hurd thought he was right. If they had tried to go further and actually interfered in the governance of Iraq in bringing Saddam Hussein down, it would have been against the

UN mandate. It would have destroyed the coalition. And they faced an unpredictable and uncertain future in Iraq. Who would they have put in power? The Vietnam precedent, of getting bogged down in a foreign country after a certain period of time, was very much in their mind. But in addition, General Powell said that the American pilots were increasingly uneasy about hitting the sitting ducks. They were just hating it. These wretched people were clogging up the road and the pilots couldn't miss. The Americans just didn't want to go on. I think Powell wasn't absolutely sure that they would be willing to go on. So it was a combination of the two, which meant that they took the decision that afternoon to bring about the cessation of hostilities.

On linkage, it is always difficult to be absolutely clear about these things. I think one of the areas where we probably benefited from the support we gave America, although I am not absolutely sure that I can put my finger on specific examples, would be defence contracts, where I think they perhaps gave us the edge because of the support we had given them over political issues. And that of course was very important. On the question of the effect it had on our relationship with other countries, I would judge that to be mixed. I suspect that other countries were slightly envious if we were seen to have the inner track with the Americans. And that probably didn't do us any good, actually. At the time of de Gaulle* there was obviously the thought, and I think it has persisted post-de Gaulle, that we were a bit of a Trojan horse: we were the Americans' stalking horse in Europe. Because we were seen to be close, that may have created a tension with our European friends and partners.

Charles de Gaulle (1890-1970),
French general and statesman.
President, 1958-69.

MARK PELLEW

I was Counsellor in Washington when [Sir] Antony [Acland] was Ambassador. On the leverage, I think over the years there has been quite a lot of very direct benefit in terms of defence contracts, and specifically on the renewal of Congressional funding which might not have otherwise not been renewed. For example, things like the Harrier AV8B, which I remember as being sometimes quite difficult until the Gulf War made the military feeling so much closer.

I wonder if I might make another comment about how the Embassy has operated, since that really is the topic. It does seem to me that we haven't really mentioned Congress so far in the discussion. I don't know whether we will come on to that, but it is a fact that, when we have an identity of interest with the United States, we don't have to argue our case so hard with the public and Congress. But where we did not have identity of interest, and his goes back to the Falklands and what Sir Nicholas Henderson was saying, we really had to work extremely hard with Congress. And that has been over the years a very important part of the role of the British Embassy.

HENDERSON

The Irish Republican Army. A militant organisation that evolved from the Irish Republican Brotherhood (The Fenian Society), a 19th-century revolutionary movement desiring an independent Irish republic.

Ronald Reagan, American politician. President, 1981-9.

If I might make another diversion, about Ireland, which hasn't been mentioned. This is a major problem really for the Embassy in Washington. And I can't say that I think they have been very successful in diverting the American government from allowing, permitting, or not preventing, the continuation of arms money and supplies to the IRA,* without which the war in Northern Ireland would not have continued. This is a travesty in our relationship, frankly, that American help is responsible for the continuation of hostilities in Ireland. Nothing we can do, not even Maggie with Reagan,* seems to stop it. It is an amazing problem in the relationship, and not one that is ventilated much.

WRIGHT

I wonder if you could both say anything about the degree of jointness of activity between the British Embassy and the Irish Embassy in Washington. Is there any degree of joint activity?

ACLAND

The Anglo-Irish Agreement, 15 Nov. 1985, between the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, relating to co-operation between the two countries on the governance and security of Northern Ireland.

Dr Anthony (Kenny) O'Reilly, industrialist. Chairman H. J. Heinz Co. Inc. since 1987.

The American Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Senator John Glenn, Astronaut and politician. Democrat Senator for Ohio since 1975.

Yes. And of course, whilst you had no Anglo-Irish Agreement,* what the Americans disliked very much was having to choose between Britain and Ireland. The Anglo-Irish Agreement, when it was signed and agreed, gave at least a joint and common platform, which was helpful during the time that I was there. The Irish Ambassador and I used to go to Irish events, where one was trying to develop a relationship between the Catholics and the Protestants. There was a holiday scheme, at which Tony O'Reilly* used to come and speak and gave quite a lot of Heinz money for it. So there was a certain amount of joint activity. I agree broadly with Nico [Henderson] that, although one put in enormous amounts of effort, it was the main activity for the Information Services in New York and Washington to try to explain the realities of the Irish situation. We didn't make a huge amount of headway. There was good co-operation with the FBI,* over Irish terrorists who were in America, or people who were aiming to supply major weaponry like missiles and so on to the IRA. The FBI knew about these people, and from time to time arrested them and frustrated their plans. Again, Mark [Pellew] may be able to remember a number of instances of that.

Just to go back to the relationship with Congress, it was curious that, from time to time, when the State Department agreed with the British Embassy or the British Embassy had persuaded them to endorse our point of view, or if they had a point of view which they thought that we would endorse and support, they would quite often say to us, 'Will you write to Senator Glenn* about this. Will you take it up with him. Will you call him. It is better if it comes from the British Embassy. It will carry more weight than if we do it from the State Department'. You can think of cases like that Mark [Pellew], I am sure. But they used to try and get not only the British Embassy, but I think others, to do the lobbying for them and sometimes they thought it was more effective.

WRIGHT

I must say I have found considerable respect in the State Department for the extent to which the British Embassy has developed its relationships with Congress and with other agencies. I remember once, when I was your guest Nico [Henderson], being taken down to the State Department by Robin Renwick, who was then Counsellor looking after defence and disarmament questions. I asked the relevant department of the State Department how far there was any difference of policy between themselves and the Arms Control Agency. And they said, 'Don't ask us. Ask Robin Renwick, he is the greatest expert in town'. It was genuinely said. I am very glad that Congress and the FBI and so on have been mentioned because, I think in any seminar on the British Embassy in Washington, you cannot emphasise too much the extent and importance of the Embassy's contacts with other parts of the administration other than the State Department and White House,* which is of course absolutely crucial. But the variety of contacts is very progressive, and of course accounts for the still very considerable size of the Embassy staff.

The White House. The official home of the US President that houses the State Rooms, his private apartments and offices of his staff.

EDMUND DELL

We sent troops to Korea. We sent troops to the Gulf. Presumably we did this because successive governments thought that it was in the British interest so to do. Is it sensible to take that sort of decision in the expectation of some return? Has our policy been too much influenced by the expectation of some return?

WRIGHT

You mean return from the United States? Because certainly I think our relationship with the Gulf and with Saudi Arabia weighed quite heavily on ministerial minds here in the decision to send troops to the Gulf. Of course the relationship with the United States was all-important.

DELL

I am merely saying these decisions were presumably taken because they were in British interests. Now if you are acting in a British interest, do you then expect a return? Because the attitude of the United States presumably is: you are acting on a British interest, why should you expect a return.

HENDERSON

Can I just say on that, that the general theory was that goodwill created goodwill. And maintaining goodwill with a country that can at some stage be of help to you is worthwhile, even if you can't see the way in which that is going to be supplied. Mrs Thatcher of course didn't believe this at all. She thought it was simply Foreign Office waffle to talk about goodwill or long term. She thought that anything she did should immediately be backed by some corresponding gesture. But I don't honestly think that is a general view. Being friendly with all sorts of areas of America without being able to say when that is going to be fulfilled, I am sure that is worthwhile.

But further to a point you made, Chairman, not just the Congress

but the press is so crucial in America. Compared with being in an Embassy in any other country, the Embassy in Washington deals with the press directly without any inhibition. In a way it is safe to say like the French Embassy would here, for example, or the German Embassy.

WRIGHT

I think we should move to our third item on the agenda, which is the fall of the Shah [of Persia]. I am extremely sorry that Peter Jay isn't here, who was Ambassador in Washington at the time. But we have his Private Secretary. So Jeremy [Greenstock] we might ask you if you would like to add anything.

JEREMY GREENSTOCK It is difficult actually, because I wasn't there at the time. I left in 1978. So that period is not a personal experience.

HENDERSON

I'd like to duck it too, because I came afterwards! But I think I can say something that is pertinent to the Embassy's role after the fall of the Shah and concerned the taking of the hostages at the American Embassy. They were held hostage for a very long time. We then became very involved as an intermediary with Teheran, to try and ease their conditions and bring about release. I think we failed. But we certainly achieved a great deal of gratitude from the Americans. When Mrs Thatcher made her first visit as Prime Minister to Washington in December 1979, a new philosophy, a woman Prime Minister, the most important public issue for the Americans was the hostages. It was a tremendous insult to them to have their Embassy invaded and 52 people taken. I remember Mrs Thatcher, being briefed by the Embassy on her night of arrival and asking, 'What shall I do and what shall I say publicly about this thing that I am bound to be asked about?' All the officials were saying, 'Be very careful. Because you don't want to commit yourself and make things worse for us in Teheran'. But Peter Carrington* said, 'Margaret, you have got to come out immediately in support of the Americans and say we are foursquare behind them'. So on the lawn of the White House the next day Carter made his usual sort of very warm remarks about the arrival of the British representatives, and Mrs Thatcher then got up and launched this tremendous tribute and praise for the American courage and commitment. Mrs Thatcher's relationship with America was based on that, long before she had anything to do with Reagan. Of course, the hostage thing was a fiasco. Brezhinski was instigating this hopeless attempt to put a raid on with helicopters. It was a complete catastrophe and failed, and led to Vance's resignation. But we were involved in ways that have been suggested. Although we weren't perhaps being involved militarily, they could talk to us and rely on us and we did do a lot of intermediary work.

The 6th Lord Carrington, Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary, 1979-82.

HOPKINS

Just a minor point. If I am not mistaken, the British Embassy was about the only Embassy in Washington to predict that Carter

Jimmy Carter won the 1976 presidential election in which he stood as Democrat candidate against the incumbent Republican President, Gerald Ford.

BURROWS

In 1951.

WRIGHT

Special Operations Executive, a British Second World War covert operations organisation.

Kermit Roosevelt (1916-2000), American intelligence officer. Grandson of President Theodore Roosevelt and cousin of Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Kermit Roosevelt is credited with directing the 1953 CIA coup that ousted Iranian Prime Minister Mosaddeq.

BURROWS

WRIGHT

ACLAND

In the wake of congressional investigations into CIA clandestine dealings with the Islamic Republic of Iran during the 1980-8 Iran-Iraq war, Colonel Oliver North was found to have diverted funds to aid the guerrilla operations of the right-wing Contra rebels against the Marxist Sandinista government in Nicaragua. When the story became public, a political furore erupted.

Rear-Admiral John Poindexter, American soldier. Presidential Adviser on National Security Affairs 1985-6.

would win in the presidential election.* To some extent that had a knock-on effect, according to John Dickie in his analysis of these things, in that the incoming administration appreciated that they saw them as a presidential team and so on.

I don't know that there is an answer to this, but there is a historical parallel. When the Shah had to leave the first time,* in the Mosaddeq period, he came back very shortly afterwards largely due to concerted action by the Americans and British, in spite of the difficulties I referred to earlier about our policy on the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company and so on. Nevertheless, when that particular trick was done there was very effective co-operation in bringing the situation back. Certainly, when the final fall of the Shah took place, no doubt the circumstances in Iran were totally different. But was there the same degree of co-operation as there had been earlier to prevent the fall of the Shah at that time, and failure to restore him?

I suppose one relevant point is that which I think you mentioned earlier and which has been discussed in this seminar. That is that the generations were different. In 1952 nearly all the *dramatis personae* on both sides had either fought in the armed services together, or had served in SOE* or similar organisations during the war. For example, Kermit Roosevelt,* who was heavily involved in Iran at that time. He had very, very strong links with the British, I can't remember whether he had been in SOE or what. And that I suppose must by definition have applied to a lesser extent later on when the Shah was removed a second time.

And one also could say the interventionism climate had changed.

Yes, indeed. Antony [Acland], is there anything you can say on the arms for hostages affair, Oliver North* and all the rest of it, that throws any light on the Embassy's links and activities?

I suppose it was an example of the Embassy not being wholly plugged in and not really being able to find out exactly what was going on, rather than the reverse. I think that we suspected, in London and elsewhere, that attempts were being made to set up a deal. Indeed I remember talking, I wasn't Ambassador, to Poindexter* about it. I reported that he was very opaque and you couldn't really make head or tail of what he was saying. My message to him was that it was a great mistake, and that was the position of the British government, to make concessions to hostage-takers. Once you caved in to blackmail it merely encouraged similar incidents elsewhere. And he took note of that. But he didn't make any comment really of any significance about their activities. So it was an area where, although we were probing and we were suspicious, we weren't able to get an absolutely clear picture of what they were

about. I always question a bit how much the President really knew himself, and I think, having known him, he was a great decentraliser ...

HENDERSON

That is a very flattering way of putting it!

ACLAND

...that he let people get on with it. But Nico [Henderson], you have been Private Secretary to ministers, and so have I. You go in to them and say, 'It would be a good idea at such a stage, wouldn't it, if we could do so and so and so and so'. But they are thinking about something else – about a speech they have got to make – and they say, 'Yes, of course'. You then think you have got the all-clear. I think that was partly what happened with Reagan: that Pointdexter and Ollie North went in and gave a general indication of what they were trying to achieve in Iran and Nicaragua and so on. But he might have been thinking about something else and he sort of nodded and they thought they had got the all-clear. But I don't suppose he ever knew the detail.

BURK

I was wondering how the Embassy deals with the Opposition in the United States. That is to say, in many countries of course administrations don't really like diplomats of other countries being too close to the Opposition. On the other hand, in the United States, is it accepted that you have to? How do you decide whom you ought to get to know in due course? How do you go about it without raising tensions with those in power? You have to, obviously, if you are going to work Congress. Can you cover it by saying you are working Congress? How do you actually go about it?

HENDERSON

There is no problem whatever. Everybody is the Opposition in America really, to the White House.

BURK

So how do you decide who you ought to pay more attention to?

HENDERSON

Well, who are the creators of all kinds, for and against. But there is no hostility on the part of anybody in the government if an Embassy or Ambassador should see members of the Opposition. None at all. They assume we are in touch with everybody, which one has to be.

WRIGHT

Jonathan Powell, civil servant. Chief of Staff to Prime Minister Blair since 1997.

Tony Blair. Labour politician. Prime Minister since 1997.

I don't think, as far as I know, that the Embassy lost any credit with Bush through the widespread knowledge in Washington that the Embassy had actually deputed one officer, Jonathan Powell* who is now working for Mr Blair* as chief of staff, to be the main point of contact with the Clinton team. I don't think they lost any credit for that.

HENDERSON

Clinton did mind the involvement here of Conservative Central Office. They certainly minded that. The corollary of all this is that the one thing you have to be sensitive about is anything to do with the presidential election.

GREENSTOCK

There are two sorts of answers to your question. One is that the Opposition is always in several think-tanks around the country, usually on both coasts. So you keep very strongly in with those think-tanks, whether they are Democrat or Republican. And it doesn't matter which President is in the White House, they expect you to talk to the think-tanks. When the Democrats are in, the Republicans are all working away, rather like [the] Labour [Party] for a number of years, producing ideas, and you keep up with those ideas. As an instance of the second type of involvement, I think nobody has played both sides of an election better than Peter Ramsbotham* did in 1976. He was actually the last diplomat to have dinner in Atlanta with Jimmy Carter in April 1976 before Carter closed his door to doing that. Yet he kept up relationship with Kissinger, which was extremely good, up all the way through December after the election, when they knew that he had been playing the Carter team very strongly all the way through, just as we played the Clinton team in 1992. When Carter came in, both administrations reckoned Peter Ramsbotham was the most plugged in political Ambassador in Washington in early 1977. And yet they removed him, because they thought they could find somebody better. But the Embassy was seen by political Washington to have played that election extremely well. I don't have experience of any other election year, but I think that it normally happens that way – that the Embassy plays it extremely well on both sides of the political divide.

Sir Peter Ramsbotham, diplomat.
HM Ambassador to Washington
1974-7.

ACLAND

I really do think it is difficult in America. I don't think you quite have, as in other countries, a system of a clear government and an Opposition. They all talk to each other. You have after all a Republican President and Democrat-controlled Congress, or *vice versa*, and they just assume that you will be in touch with the influential people from either party, or with the media who might have particular views. You wouldn't be doing your job if you didn't.

WRIGHT

Is there anything you or Nico [Henderson], or indeed Jeremy [Greenstock], would like to say about the offshoots in the United States of the Embassy, namely the Consulates General and the Consulates, in this context?

ACLAND

They are engaged in a whole lot of activities. They are obviously engaged in, particularly: trade promotion, inward investment, public relations trying to get the message across over Ireland, but also talent spotting. Again Mark [Pellew] can comment on this. But they were in touch with prominent Governors and the Congress-

Mrs Pamela Harriman (1921-97), society hostess and diplomat. US Ambassador to France 1994-7.

men and Senators from the states for which they were responsible, and would send in political reports to the Embassy. When I was there, and I wasn't there for the 1992 election, we had through various means spotted Bill Clinton as the likely person to get the nomination for the Democrats. I don't know quite how that talent spotting took place, whether it was our Consul General in the area. Clinton wasn't a big player on the Washington scene, but the famous, notorious, Mrs Averell Harriman* had spotted him and put him into her political action committee a long time back and thought he was smart and so on. That was one of the activities, certainly, of the Consuls, to send in political reports to the centre. And if I, or my predecessors, went out on a tour to attend some event in their districts, they'd try and ensure that we met these important people. We would always call on the Governor automatically, and form a judgement on what he or she was like and their influence.

WRIGHT

D'Amato-Gilman Iran/Libya Sanctions Act, 1996, and Helms-Burton legislation, 1996, were enacted with the intention of penalising firms that trade with these countries.

Capitol Hill is the seat of the US legislature.

We have I am afraid failed as seminarists in much of our discussion on the fall of the Shah, but that is partly because of the absence of people. But we ought perhaps just to note that there is a really rather major difference between the United States and the United Kingdom at present on an Iranian issue in the whole D'Amato legislation* and so on. Jeremy [Greenstock] perhaps you can confirm, or deny, that the Embassy in Washington still at this moment spends quite a lot of time trying to influence people on the Hill* on European views of D'Amato legislation.

GREENSTOCK

Sir John Kerr, civil servant. Head of Chancery, HM Embassy, Washington 1984-7, Assistant Under Secretary of State, FCO 1987-90, HM Ambassador, Washington 1995-7, Permanent Under-Secretary and Head of Diplomatic Service, FCO from 1997.

No Embassy has attempted to have the effect on the Hill that John Kerr* has had over the D'Amato-Helms-Burton and indeed US-UN decisions. He has left, I think, the majority of work with the Administration to be done by the Minister and others in the Embassy, but he spent an enormous amount of time on the Hill and had quite an effect. You do have to spend time on it. You have to go round all of them individually again and again.

MARIOT LESLIE

One of the interesting things we have now is that, from time to time, we get a chance to hold up a mirror to ourselves by seeing what the French and Germans diplomats who now are working in the Foreign Office and our Embassies say about the way we do things. And we have the interesting exchange visits between the German Embassy in Washington and the British Embassy in Washington. We swap diplomats, at I think first secretary level, and then they each make a report on how they found the other side. What the German report said was that they were astonished at the degree of contact with the Hill the British Embassy had. They had absolutely no idea that our Embassy put that so high on their priorities for. They admired our ability to keep the door open, which the British Embassy had repeatedly done, because they found it very difficult to do sometimes. Also, our contacts right across the Amer-

ican administration, and not just in the State Department, were much more extended than they had imagined or thought possible.

WRIGHT

Is it fair to ask you, as the only person in this room who has worked in the *Quai d'Orsay*, how you see the difference of the way in which we in Whitehall use our Embassy in Washington and the way the *Quai d'Orsay* use their Embassy in Washington?

LESLIE

The *Quai d'Orsay* had a sense of being on alien territory in Washington and very much a siege mentality. A great deal of what they were doing was to do with spotting the issues where France wanted to profile itself as being different from America. And obviously, in my time there, which was in the early 1990s, there was no hint or foretaste of French attempts to reintegrate into NATO. So that France didn't have that intensely military relationship either, I'd say, during the end of the Gulf War, in which they were conscious that their military contribution was nothing like the British one. The Gulf war called into question a lot of things which they were proud of, which was the independence of their contribution to the West without having integrated in NATO in order to do it. So it was a neuralgic relationship.

BURROWS

I was going to raise the European question more generally. To what extent does the Embassy now feel there is a difficulty between the close relationship with the United States and the European relationship? And do the Americans see this as making a change? It has often been said that we have, to some extent at least, lost our special relationship, because we are now part of Europe and because the Americans want to deal with Europe, and mainly, I think with Germany. To what extent does the Embassy deal with that sort of situation? How much does it feel either inhibited by or, less likely, strengthened by the European relationship in its dealings with the United States? Or does it see that as reducing the value, weight, efficacy of the one-to-one relationship?

WRIGHT

Raymond Seitz, American diplomat. Political Office, US Embassy, London 1975-9, Deputy Chief of Mission, US Embassy, London 1984-9, and US Ambassador, London 1991-4.

I suppose the *locus classicus* on this is the words of the former American Ambassador to London Raymond Seitz* who said, I may be slightly misquoting him, that closer integration of Britain with Europe was an indispensable part of the British-American relationship. I know the word 'indispensable' occurred, but I may have slightly misquoted him. Mariot [Leslie], have I got it right?

LESLIE

I think what he said was that Britain will only be heard in Washington if it is heard in Paris and Bonn. But he probably said what you said too.

WRIGHT

Antony [Acland] would you, as the most recent Ambassador in Washington present, like to comment on that?

ACLAND

General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The Americans, I think from Kissinger onwards, accepted that Europe existed, as a Community and then as a Union, and 'official Washington' thought that Britain must be part of it. They wanted us to be part of it and they didn't like seeing British leaders standing on the sidelines shouting solely criticism into Europe. They thought that that was where we should be, that we would be more useful to them and that we would be listened to more if we were, to coin a phrase, at the heart of Europe. That is what they expected. I think there were times when they wanted us to be central and influential because again, as I said, they thought that we were perhaps more likely to take a decision more sympathetic to them than some of the other Europeans. Moreover, we would be able to influence negotiations a bit in their favour. Not just because we were close to America, but because we had an identity of view. I think of various negotiations over the GATT* round, which went on and on and on. I think they felt that our position, which was worked out with considerable difficulty among the various departments here in Whitehall, was closer to theirs and more reasonable, and that if we were listened to in Paris and Bonn this could be to the Americans' advantage. But they didn't see any conflict between our membership of Europe and a continuing close relationship with America, so long as it was in our mutual individual and independent interest.

WRIGHT

Dean Rusk (1904-94), American politician. Secretary of State 1961-9.

George Ball (1909-94), American politician and diplomat. A former Deputy Secretary of State.

Denis [Greenhill], you might like to comment. My recollection of the early 1960s is that the administration were very ambivalent about Britain and Europe, but this of course was at the time of our exclusion from Europe by de Gaulle. I seem to remember that both Dean Rusk* and George Ball* found it quite difficult to make up their minds whether they actually wanted Britain to become a full member of the European Community or not. Am I wrong?

GREENHILL

I don't think I can give an answer to that.

BURK

Grand Design of the Kennedy Administration.

George Ball was very keen that Britain should join Europe. It was the whole Grand Design.* He was one of those who most pushed it.

WRIGHT

I think perhaps what I am talking about is the difference of emphasis between George Ball and Dean Rusk.

HENDERSON

Robert Schuman (1886-1963)
French politician. Prime Minister 1947-8; Foreign Minister 1948-52.

European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC).

By and large really from the time that Schuman* proposed Coal and Steel,* from that date the Americans thought it was in our interest and their interest that we should be going into Europe. I am in no doubt about that.

KYLE

Treaty of Rome, 1957, agreeing to set up the European Common Market, and signed by Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

Douglas Dillon. American diplomat and politician. Ambassador to France 1953-57, Under-Secretary of State 1959-61, Secretary to Treasury 1961-65.

Winthrop Aldrich (1885-1974), American academic, lawyer and diplomat, US Ambassador in London 1953-7.

The negotiation of the Treaty of Rome* coincided with the build-up of the Suez crisis. In October, Dulles sent a message to Douglas Dillon* and Winthrop Aldrich,* Ambassadors in Paris and London, and said, 'We must try and think out what has gone wrong with the relationship between Washington and our closest European allies.' Then he referred to the negotiations over the European Economic Community. He said, 'We want the Europeans to unite. And our experience of countries uniting is that they must have somebody to unite against. Maybe we should have to go through a period of awkward relationships within Europe, so that they can unite against us, but it is in America's interest that they unite. Aldrich was deeply shocked at this unorthodox idea. He had no opinion of Dulles to start with, and it was even lower after he said that.

ACLAND

Beltway is the ring-road around Washington.

There were lingering fears in that sense when I was there. They were worried that the aim was to create, as they called it, fortress Europe. And one had to try and disabuse them that the creation of the Single Market would be disadvantageous to them. But in some quarters, I think particularly 'out there', outside the Beltway,* there was this worry, a lack of comprehension of what we were about, that we were uniting and that in some way this was going to be against the United States. And that was a great part of information effort again. You talked about the Consulates. But all of us went round the country making speeches trying to explain what the Single Market was about and why actually it was advantageous to American exporters and manufacturers and industrialists.

WRIGHT

On the other hand I suppose, to quote Kissenger, the fortress would at least have had one advantage. It would have had one telephone number.

Nico [Henderson], one crisis that we haven't mentioned at all is Grenada. Do you want to say anything about the role of the British Embassy there?

HENDERSON

I wasn't there then, so I can't. It annoyed Mrs Thatcher a great deal I think.

ACLAND

Sir Geoffrey Howe (Lord Howe of Aberavon), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary 1983-9.

Again, I remember that quite well. It was a case where perhaps like the arms to Iran and so forth, Irangate, the Embassy wasn't able to get significant advance warning. You remember the embarrassment that Geoffrey Howe* was put under in the House of Commons.

HENDERSON

But I think it was worse than that, because I think they had spoken on the Sunday evening and Mrs Thatcher had said, 'I am very doubtful about that'. Reagan said, 'I will get back to you' and he didn't. He went straight ahead. I think that's the sequence.

DELL

Bermuda II Civil Aviation Agreement 1977: US/UK bilateral agreement governing commercial airline routes, charges, frequency of flights, etc.

US Ambassador to UK in 1977 was Anne L. Armstrong.

There has been very little reference in this discussion, there has been some but very little, to the thought, that perhaps this cosyng up to the Washington administration through the British Embassy and otherwise has repeatedly been contrary to British interests, particularly in the economic field. We have hung on to American interests in the economic field, for example by sticking to the exchange rate longer than we should have done. I have one specific instance. It is just a footnote as compared to the major questions that have been discussed around the table. I started renegotiations over the Bermuda civil aviation agreement.* I was advised not to do it by Sir Peter Ramsbothom, although I must say that in the end when I had done it he was enormously helpful. I was advised not to do it by the Foreign Office. I did it. And the effect was a great improvement, a very substantial improvement in Britain's civil aviation relations with the United States. I had been advised not to do it by the American Ambassador* in London, who by odd coincidence happened to find out that I was thinking of doing it. He then said, 'Please don't do this. You will end up worse than you already are'. In fact we ended up substantially better than we previously were. Now this feeling exists that we have, in order to maintain our relationship with the United States in certain areas, in order perhaps to get some return for bearing with them on all sorts of issues, repeatedly sacrificed British interests. Now I would have liked to have heard some response to that irreverent thought from the very distinguished gathering round this table.

ACLAND

Civil aviation matters, of course, one remembers vividly, and I think my recollection is that, when I was there, we fought our interests extremely hard: there was no cosyng up over that. The Americans were always hammering us for traditional slots, landing rights, and reductions in landing fees and so forth at Heathrow and Gatwick. I don't remember at all sending any sort of message to London saying we must be nice to them about civil aviation matters, otherwise ...

DELL

James Callaghan (Lord Callaghan of Cardiff), Labour politician. Prime Minister, 1976-9.

With respect, this was after a new framework had been created by the new Bermuda agreement. It almost led to the suspension of civil aviation between the United States and the United Kingdom. This led Carter, on two occasions speaking to Callaghan,* saying, 'For God's sake get Dell off this thing, because you are going to ruin our relationship'. Fortunately my Prime Minister was absolutely staunch on the subject and backed me to the hilt. As a result we got a good agreement. But once that new framework had been agreed, yes, then it was easier. But at the time the feeling was this would be an impediment to the close relationship we want with the United States. Now as I say, that is a footnote for me to push this thing of economic policy generally. We have, as a result of cosyng up to the United States, acted for long periods contrary to British economic interests.

HENDERSON

On civil aviation, and on Concorde, they tried to stop Concorde landing in the United States. I have to admit it was before my time, but the Embassy played a tremendous role with Congress and with all sorts of interests. As a result of that, largely their doing, we got landing rights, which we wouldn't have done otherwise.

DELL

With respect, the achievement of landing rights for Concorde at New York was a result of the decision by the British and French governments to go to the courts. The administration and Congress were no help at all. It was the United States courts that enforced landing rights for Concorde at New York.

PELLEW

Sir Oliver Wright, diplomat. Private Secretary to Prime Ministers Sir Alec Douglas Home and Harold Wilson 1964-6 and HM Ambassador, Washington 1982-6.

Just one comment on the economic issues. Oliver Wright,* who was Ambassador when I joined the Embassy in 1983, used to say that it was a measure of the strength of the relationship that he always had at least half-a-dozen good economic rows going on with the Americans at any one time. We fought very hard on things like civil aviation, agriculture, aircraft subsidies, unitary tax and extraterritoriality. I do not recall a single occasion when we pulled our punches because it was felt it would damage the relationship. On the contrary, we regarded those issues as being, in a sense, ring-fenced from the main relationship.

WRIGHT

Edmund [Dell], can I just reassure you that, when I was Permanent Under-Secretary, I followed the example of my distinguished predecessor. I frequently reminded the Embassies abroad, not just the Embassy in Washington who didn't need reminding, that they should base their arguments not on good relations with the governments but on British interests. Because I can think of several cases where we actually didn't particularly want good relations with the governments, I think Antony [Acland] you certainly led the field in reminding people of that.

ACLAND

Can Edmund [Dell] give examples? I am trying to think broader than just particular issues, where our major economic interests have been damaged because we have had this close relationship with America or have, for whatever reason, agreed with them. I don't know. What examples come to your mind there?

DELL

The major single example is the maintenance of sterling, first at a fixed rate, secondly at too high a fixed rate, thirdly not floating, which was the other option, for far longer periods than it was in the British interest so to do. And the reason this was done was because it was the view of the American administration, and this was reflected in the attitude of the British government, that it would expose the dollar if sterling was devalued. And indeed, when sterling was eventually devalued in 1967, it did expose the dollar, and four years later we had the Nixon measures of 1971. Now that deci-

sion, to maintain a fixed rate of sterling, and too high a fixed rate of sterling, was I think greatly influenced by a wish not to disturb the American dollar and therefore the American administration. I would say that is a prime instance where this cosyng up was contra to British interests.

WRIGHT

International Monetary Fund (IMF), established 27 Dec. 1947 following proposals made at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference. The IMF provides cash which is reserved to countries so that they can offset temporary problems with their balance of payments.

We ought to take note of the fact that the British Embassy in Washington has a role other than the relationship with the United States government and the United States. That is that the finance minister, as he is called, is also governor of the IMF* and the international bank.* It think it is just worth noting, when talking about the role of the British Embassy in Washington, there are those additional roles with international organisations.

LESLIE

International Bank of Reconstruction and Development (IBRD).

The examples you were quoting are very interesting, yet 1971 was before we joined the European Community. It does seem to me that our membership of the Community since then has actually made quite a difference to the way we could deal with economic disputes with the United States. In other words, it has always seemed to me in my diplomatic career, that Britain has been the European country which has said, in the most vocal way, that it hasn't liked the American attitude to the Siberian pipeline incident, it hasn't liked what America has done on extraterritoriality, and it hasn't liked Helms-Burton. Actually very often the most vocal opponents of these bits of American economic policy in the European Union has been Britain, using our Embassy in Washington as a spearhead of what is often a rather effective attempt to influence the Americans by our department. And very often it has supported the Commission representatives in Washington, who have only the British Embassy as an effective backup bilaterally in what they are trying to do. I do think our membership of the Community did actually transform that relationship, by giving us a new sense of clout when we were faced with an American economic ruling.

ACLAND

Sir Roy Denman, diplomat. Director-General for External Affairs, EEC Commission 1977-82, Head of Commission of European Communities Delegation in Washington 1982-9.

It also gave one an excuse, in a sense, not to be cosy, because you could always say this and that are Community competencies and the negotiations have got to be undertaken by the Community. Yes, we worked very closely with Roy Denman,* but so did the Germans and the French. Very often you sat there, with Roy as a sort of spearhead to do the talking to the US Trade Representative, and we would back down. But it was easier cover I think not to be cosy, because of the fact that we were at that stage a member of the European Community.

BURK

One or two thoughts. I agree with almost everything Edmund Dell has said about the relationship, especially the financial relationship. It is worth noting, and this is in reference to Mark [Pellew]'s ring-fence comment, that, although the United States and the UK have frequently had strategic and political objects in common, they have

equally frequently over the past two or three centuries been commercial and financial competitors. And there is no obvious reason why they should work together there. So it obviously is safer for the political and strategic relationship if they *do* ring-fence the economic difficulties, because these are constantly recurring. The sterling one was a particularly public one, and that brings me to my second comment/question. I am glad you brought up the point about the Minister of Economic Affairs in the Embassy. I think that is an extremely interesting one. Two things spring to mind. One is, to what extent are the fractious relations with regard to external affairs between the US Treasury and the US State Department, which frequently happen, especially over sterling in the olden days, mirrored in the UK relationship? I presume you will say these things are sorted out in Whitehall before it gets to Washington, but it would be interesting to know if there are different approaches by the Treasury and the Foreign Office to these economic and financial problems with the United States. One particular episode one wonders about of course is the 1976 IMF crisis.*

Alec Cairncross and Kathleen Burk,
*Good-bye Great Britain: The 1976
IMF Crisis* (London and New Haven,
CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

HOPKINS

Can I just make a comment which to a degree contradicts what Kathleen [Burk] and Edmund Dell have said, and they know far more about these financial issues than I do, so I step warily. Certainly in the period I know more about, in the 1940s and early 1950s, I think the British perceived that they were pursuing a national interest in the financial area. The British were interested not only in trying to remain 'at the top table' politically and militarily, but also financially. If you take the 1949 devaluation crisis, there are papers from the Treasury and the Foreign Office talking about trying to establish a financial Anglo-American partnership, similar to the partnership in NATO. And immediately after the devaluation of the pound an economic minister was sent to the Embassy specifically to co-ordinate regular financial conversations. The British were interested in being a world power financially, having a reserve currency role and so on, and I think they did perceive that they were pursuing a British interest and not simply succumbing to the greater economic power of the Americans.

WRIGHT

We have about seven minutes to go, and I see the last item is general reflections. Some of you may think that we have been on general reflections for quite a long time, but Michael [Hopkins], can I ask you if you think there are any points we haven't covered?

HOPKINS

There is one thing that occurred to me, largely as a result of a tea-time conversation with Mark Pellew. A very good test of how effective an Embassy is, is how it handles an issue where there is clear disagreement between the two parties. You start off with, for example, the Concorde landing rights, and the Americans are firmly against it. And the degree to which there is some movement on the part of the Americans shows the extent to which the Embassy is

having an influence. If, whenever you look at a series of incidents, every time there is disagreement it is the British who change, clearly that is a one-sided relationship. So one interesting test of the relationship at any particular time is how frequently the disagreements result in a victory for the persuasive powers of the Embassy. Is there a trend from the 1940s to the present day where that happens less frequently? Or is it very much a case of intent on the merits of the arguments and so on?

WRIGHT

Can I just make one comment before we get reactions, and that is that one could see the implication of your question as being that there is one view in Washington, which disagrees with one view in London. I just want to make the point that even more than in London, it is extremely difficult in my experience, and I expect everybody else's, to identify one view on almost any subject in Washington. And the role of the Embassy is therefore very often to push around the undergrowth and try to get one view to influence another.

PHILIP PRIESTLEY

I would like to give one example, and that is [Sir] John Kerr's lobbying on chemical weapons promotion. Off the record, he turned around the views of senior Senators, who were very, very careful about it, to say the least, so that they voted in favour of ratification. Now if that is not exercising your influence, what is. And another thing, the administration was lobbying as well, and not meeting with a hundred per cent success, shall we say.

LESLIE

Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations ended in 1994 with achievement of various agreements.

Rio Environment Summit, June 1992.

I can think of two other examples. I don't think the Uruguay Round* would have proceeded the way it did, without Britain actually bringing the US to an agreement with practically all the other parties. I don't think the Rio Environment Summit* would have gone the way it did, if Britain hadn't brought the US to an agreement that was against what the US negotiating bottom line was, but they brought them to agreement.

WRIGHT

And in both cases the role of the Embassy was crucial.

LESLIE

Convention on the Prohibition of the Development, Production, Stockpiling and Use of Chemical Weapons and on their destruction, 8 Aug. 1994.

1996 meeting of NATO foreign ministers which agreed to improve the European Security and Defence Identity (ESDI) within NATO, so European Allies could contribute more effectively to Alliance activities and missions, and to reinforce the transatlantic partnership, allowing European Allies to act by themselves if required.

Absolutely. With chemical weapons, I won't go into all the details, but again, the final conclusion of the Convention* involved a reversal of an American position under British persuasion. There are many other examples like that. The Berlin meeting on the European Security and Defence identity in NATO last year* involved a British brokering of very diverse positions. I think we can underestimate, because it is not in our interests to quote the details in public, the extent to which Britain assisted the outcomes.

KELLY

One thing we haven't discussed is the links between the British Embassy and the other Commonwealth missions in Washington, and particularly during the crises. We have talked about Korea, but there was also Indo-China in 1954, and then later Grenada, after the American invasion, when the Caribbean forces pulled together to help the Americans out, and so on. From my study of Sir Roger Makins and the Washington Embassy, his links with his Commonwealth opposite numbers, particularly the Canadian and New Zealand Ambassadors, were very important in co-ordinating the Commonwealth position. Particularly during the Indo-China crisis, the New Zealand Ambassador was used as a stalking horse for the British and American position in the UN. The Commonwealth link was obviously a much stronger relationship in the past, but I wanted to know, perhaps in the Grenada crisis, whether, after the invasions, there was any co-ordination between the British Embassy and the Commonwealth Mission in Washington?

WRIGHT

Sir David Hannay (Lord Hannay of Chiswick), diplomat. Minister, HM Embassy, Washington 1984-5, UK Permanent Representative to the United Nations, 1990-5.

I think the person who could take up this subject best is David Hannay,* who is not here. Certainly, during the Gulf War, I suspect that David Hannay had contacts with his Commonwealth colleagues, indeed with every colleague in New York. But there was quite a lot of Commonwealth co-ordination to keep the alliance on track.

HENDERSON

It depends very much on the issue and who are the Commonwealth representatives. But one relationship of continuing relevance is that of the British Ambassador with the Canadian Ambassador. That will I think always be close, for very obvious reasons.

ACLAND

Yes, I'd agree with that. I think it depends slightly on the calibre of the individual Commonwealth Ambassador. Canada was always important as a neighbour and trading partner of the United States. But occasionally there would be the Australian or the New Zealander. As an institution the Commonwealth is different from the European Union. We had regular monthly meetings with the Ambassadors of the European Union. We exchanged information. We talked about a common position on legislature, whatever was going on, and sometimes formulated policy. But the Community *had* to have a common position eventually on the trade issues, where it was a matter of Community competence. And no such requirement involved a Commonwealth policy, and actually by definition it almost certainly couldn't very easily. If there was a problem in any part of the world, the Africans might take one view, the Asian countries a different view. I think when I was there we had infrequent meetings really over lunch. We'd get them together and see if there was a common theme that they were all interested in. It was fairly insubstantial, but that is not to say that we didn't work closely with individual Commonwealth Ambassadors who had influence.

WRIGHT

And the degree of access and influence differed enormously. Your New Zealand colleague was actually banned from any contacts above Under-Secretary level for most of your time, because of New Zealand's nuclear policy.

HENDERSON

Well we had an annual dance, where the different steps were open to all...

WRIGHT

Gavotte diplomatique!

ACLAND

Gerry Adams, Northern Irish politician. President of Sinn Fein since 1983.

It might be interesting to go back to one point – you win some you, lose some. The Embassy wasn't able to stop Clinton giving a visa to Gerry Adams.* You really need to look at the detail and go back to all the papers.

I think an area where there was a lot of consultation was the whole business of disarmament and arms control. Here the expertise of the British Embassy on the subject, acting very often on instructions from London, had a big effect. It wasn't a question of 'winning some'. It was getting our point of view in and getting it accepted. There was a tremendous area of exchange there, where our position was respected, because we were one of the nuclear countries and so on. In the discussion with Bartholomew, I think that we got our point of view accepted 50 per cent of the time or perhaps rather more. But one would have to do a rather careful study of the papers and reports to make a tally.

WRIGHT

Certainly in the days when Denis [Greenhill] and I were in the Embassy in the early 1960s, we had a Chancery Officer dealing with the Commonwealth full time. But a lot of his role was actually tutorial, because there were new Commonwealth missions in Washington who in those days looked very much to the British Embassy to help them, even to the extent of helping them find houses and so on. That clearly is a role that no longer applies.

BURROWS

There is another rather peripheral aspect of a similar question we haven't touched on. That is the relationship between British and American representatives in the world, notably in international organisations other than the UN, such as NATO etc. that I have experience of. I would say there was a greater facility of intercourse between them than others. It depended largely on the personalities of course.

WRIGHT

And that I am sure still applies, though of course, since your day, we have regular structured European co-operation meetings between Heads of Mission with our European partners, of a sort which doesn't I think happen with America. Though at NATO, I think you probably saw your United States colleague more often than any other.

HENDERSON

There is just one other thing which we haven't touched on, and that is the hoary old subject of whether modern communications of all kinds have reduced the role of Embassies, and particularly in the case of Washington. It is a very pertinent subject. I have the view that I think it has changed the role of Embassies, but I don't think it has necessarily diminished it. I am sure all of you are asked frequently, 'What's the point of an Embassy in the modern world?' One of those favourite questions, which hasn't really ever been adequately analysed in periodicals or lectures is why, in fact, Embassies may be different, but still have a role?

WRIGHT

I think possibly we might discuss this further over a drink in an informal way in a corner. I would just say that I think that the extent to which communications can diminish the role of an Embassy, depends very much on the way in which the headquarters deal with communications. In other words, it needs a conscious effort on the part of home departments to ensure that the Embassy is not sidelined.

HENDERSON

The sort of thing people say is, 'Well surely, when the Prime Minister or the Foreign Secretary can fly to them, why have an Embassy at all?' It is so often said.

ACLAND

Selwyn Lloyd (Lord Selwyn-Lloyd of Wirral, 1904-78), Conservative politician. Foreign Secretary 1955-60.

Ernest Bevin (1881-1951), Labour politician. Foreign Secretary, 1945-51.

There is a very simple answer, isn't there. From my observation, thinking of the time when I joined the Foreign Office and started as a junior Private Secretary to Selwyn Lloyd,* the speed of activity has enormously accelerated. Whether it is of use is another question. This is together with the pressure on visiting ministers and the meetings they have to attend. Ernie Bevin* he went to Washington and New York by sea. Nowadays they rush around the world. And yes, they have meetings with their opposite numbers. But for those meetings to be fruitful, much more preparation has to be done by the people on the ground, on the basis of instructions from London. I saw it. I was in Washington for five and a half years. Originally the ministers would come on a Sunday night and be briefed by the Embassy. They'd spend Monday dealing with the department in question, whether it was Department of Trade, State Department, White House or whatever. They'd spend Tuesday on the Hill, go to a press conference and go off overnight. Fairly rapidly, Tuesday vanished and they came on the Sunday, had a briefing, spent a morning with the department in question, spent an afternoon on the Hill, had a press conference, and went back overnight. And at the end of my time, Douglas Hurd and Tom King were coming by day. They took the Concorde to New York. They chartered a plane from New York to Washington. They had lunch with Jim Baker or the President and so on, then rushed out to see Lloyd Bentsen* or whoever was crucial, followed by the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, a press conference and then went back. And with the best will in the world they hadn't got the

Lloyd Bentsen, American politician. Secretary to the Treasury, 1993-4.

time to devote themselves to the detail of the complicated agreements and to clinch it, unless the whole thing had been set up tremendously well in advance.

WRIGHT

Nor the follow-up. We have shot past the time a bit, and I would like to thank all of you, and particularly the participants round this table, for taking part in the seminar.