



**JOHN W. YOUNG**

# Twentieth-Century Diplomacy

**A Case Study of British Practice  
1963–1976**

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## Twentieth-Century Diplomacy

In contrast to most works of international history, which dwell on particular relationships, strategies, wars or crises, the questions in this book concern the way in which diplomacy was actually conducted. The period 1963–76 saw significant changes in diplomatic practice globally. It was particularly a time of change for Britain as the country negotiated its declining world power and joined the European Community and as economic problems forced spending cuts. Looking at the reform of the British Diplomatic Service and Foreign Office as well as the role of ambassadors, the use of ‘special’ envoys, summits and state visits, John Young sheds light on how diplomacy was organised in order to put into effect the country’s foreign policy and on how diplomatic practice changed over time to make it more effective. Drawing comparisons with other countries, especially the United States, this study focuses on the means of diplomacy rather than the ends.

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*A Case Study of British Practice, 1963–1976*

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For my grandchildren





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## Abbreviations

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CHOGM	Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting
CO	Colonial Office
CPRS	Central Policy Review Staff
CRO	Commonwealth Relations Office (to 1966); Commonwealth Office (1966–8)
EC	European Community
EFTA	European Free Trade Association
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FO	Foreign Office
GATT	General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
MLF	Multilateral Force
MOD	Ministry of Defence
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
OAU	Organisation of African Unity
ODM	Ministry of Overseas Development
OPD	Overseas Policy and Defence Committee
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UDI	Unilateral Declaration of Independence
UN	United Nations
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WEU	Western European Union

## Preface

---

I say, emphatically, that it is necessary to the wellbeing of the state to conduct diplomacy ceaselessly, either openly or secretly, and in all places, even in those from which no present fruits are reaped . . .

Cardinal Richelieu, from his *Political Testament*<sup>1</sup>

As chief minister of France during the Thirty Years War, Richelieu was one of the first statesmen to understand that, for foreign policy aims to be pursued effectively, ambassadors must be posted to a wide range of countries, not just a few select capitals. The methods of his diplomacy were an essential factor in the cardinal's success abroad. Yet historians have generally been reluctant to pay much attention to diplomatic practice as an important element of government policy. This book analyses the practice of one country in a particular period, based on archival sources and adopting a historical methodology. The focus is on Britain, a significant player on the world stage but one in 'the second rank', during the premierships of Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Wilson and Edward Heath, 1963–76. These years saw significant changes in diplomatic practice globally, as improvements in air travel contributed to a growing frequency of international meetings, and there was a rise in the number of both independent states and international organisations. It was particularly a time of change for Britain, as the country moved from a world role and lingering imperial commitments to membership of the European Community, and as economic problems forced spending cuts on overseas posts and the need to boost exports led to an intensification of moves to use diplomats in trade promotion. There were also major changes in the way Britain's diplomatic machine was organised, with the merger of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Colonial Offices into a single ministry.

In contrast to most works of international history, then, which dwell on particular strategies, bilateral relationships, regional issues, wars or

<sup>1</sup> G. R. Berridge, ed., *Diplomatic Classics: Selected texts from Commynes to Vattel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004), 116.

crises, the questions here concern *how diplomacy was actually conducted*. For example, to take just one element, that of summits: how frequently did prime ministers engage in meetings at leaders' level and why? What advantages did they see in such meetings? Did their discussions achieve more than they would have done if they had been held at foreign ministers' level? How did bilateral summits differ from multilateral ones in terms of frequency, structure and tactics? Individual chapters look at a range of other issues, including the purposes and structure of the Diplomatic Service, the role of resident ambassadors, the use of 'special envoys', the exploitation of state visits to achieve policy ends and how London coped with the increasing tendency of states to break off relations for symbolic reasons. Throughout the book, comparisons are drawn with other countries, especially the United States. It is hoped that as well as encouraging historians of international relations to consider diplomatic practice alongside the other elements that they address, the book will provide a valuable discussion for those who already study diplomatic practice, that it will broaden understanding of British foreign policy in the period and that it will contribute to the analysis of such specific phenomena as summits, ambassadorships, state visits and diplomatic recognition. It may also provide a foundation for comparative studies between different countries and time periods.

There are many people without whom the book would not have come to fruition, in particular the Arts and Humanities Research Council, which awarded funding for a period of study leave during which I completed the writing-up. I am also grateful to the British Academy, which provided me with a grant to study the period 1964–70, and the University of Nottingham, which provided both financial support and study leave. Numerous academic colleagues had an impact on the arguments, including Richard Aldrich, Nicholas Cull, Mike and Saki Dockrill, Erik Goldstein, Sean Greenwood, Keith Hamilton, Peter Hennessy, Michael Hopkins, Matthew Jones, C. John Kent, Fredrik Logevall, Spencer Mawby, Jan Melissen, Philip M. Taylor, Donald Cameron Watt and Neville Wylie. Donna Lee and Lorna Lloyd read and commented on parts of the manuscript. I hope these will understand if I single out Geoffrey Berridge, a former colleague at the University of Leicester and one of the world's leading academic experts on diplomatic method, who influenced many of the ideas in this book and commented on the manuscript.

I am grateful to the following archives and libraries for their help: National Archives at Kew; British Library; Churchill College Archive Centre; Bodleian Library, Oxford; British Library of Political and Economic Science; Institute of Historical Research, London; the Official

Publications section of the University of Leicester Library; Liddell Hart Centre, King's College, London; National University of Wales, Aberystwyth; the Hallward Library at Nottingham University; the US National Archives; Lyndon Johnson Library, Austin; and the Virginia Historical Society, Richmond. Those who gave permission for me to see specific private papers collections are acknowledged in the bibliography and I would like to repeat my thanks to them here. Finally, I am deeply grateful to my wife, Helen, for reading over the manuscript and to her, my children – Julie, Linda, David, Frazer and Jacob – and my mother for their support.



# 1 Introduction

---

Even though I have never seen the King,  
I know whether he is a sage or a fool  
When I read his letter or I meet his envoy.

from 'The Hare Bluffs the Elephant', part of the *Pancatantra*,  
an Indian book of folk wisdom<sup>1</sup>

The ancient Indians talked of kings holding a 'triple power' of physical strength in money and arms, the knowledge that comes from good counsel and intelligence, and endeavour, by which they meant bravery and effort. But they were also well aware of the significance of diplomacy for dealing with enemies. In the *Pancatantra*, the king of the hares drives away a herd of elephants, not by threatening force, but by sending an experienced negotiator, Vijaya, to persuade them to leave. The tale, though short, contains a number of insights into the best way of conducting diplomacy. These include the importance of speaking with care, being succinct and adhering to instructions, if diplomatic missions are to be successful: 'For an envoy can build an alliance, so also can he split allies apart.' The tale also underlines the wisdom of rulers respecting the inviolability of envoys if diplomacy is to function: 'Envoys only repeat what they have been told. Kings must not kill them.'<sup>2</sup> The modern world may be much more complex, with the rights of embassies now enshrined in the 1961 Vienna Convention, but the same basic truths remain. Just as economic wealth, military strength, competent intelligence services, efficient government and social cohesion may impact on the success of a country's foreign policy, so does the way it conducts its diplomacy. Envoys may still build alliances and split enemies apart. Both roles were well illustrated during the presidency of Richard Nixon in the early 1970s, when diplomacy brought about the 'Opening to China'. This drew China towards the United States while hardening the rift between Beijing and Moscow. For America it also offset the image of helplessness

<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the translation by Patrick Olivelle (Oxford University Press, 1997), 115.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 114-17.

and military failure created by the Vietnam War, suggesting that the country could once again master the international environment.

This book is about what can be learnt from studying the diplomatic practice of one country in a given time period and is designed to throw light on two main questions. First, how was diplomacy organised in order to put into effect the country's foreign policy? To this end it looks at the reform of the British Diplomatic Service and Foreign Office as well as the use of such institutions as ambassadors, envoys, summits and state visits. Second, a subject that must be at the centre of any historical study, how did diplomatic practice change over time to make it more effective? It will become clear that, even in a comparatively short period, practice did indeed change in important ways, especially with an expansion of the roles played by professional diplomats, a growing frequency of multi-lateral summits and innovations in the way states communicated. Thus, in contrast to most works of international history, which dwell on particular political strategies, geographical issues or conflicts, the questions here revolve around how diplomacy was actually *conducted*, focusing on the United Kingdom under the administrations of Alec Douglas-Home, Harold Wilson and Edward Heath in the years 1963–76. It is a book about the means of diplomacy rather than the ends. It is not, therefore, a traditional study of foreign policy in the sense of studying crises, conflicts and particular international relationships.<sup>3</sup> It is not an analysis of a particular set of decisions on a given area of policy.<sup>4</sup> Neither is it a study of

<sup>3</sup> A number of works have already been published on British international policy in the years 1963–76. These include studies of policy towards particular countries, regions and conflicts: Jonathan Colman, *A 'Special Relationship'?: Harold Wilson, Lyndon B. Johnson and Anglo American relations 'at the summit', 1964–68* (Manchester: University Press, 2004); David Easter, *Britain and the Confrontation with Indonesia, 1960–66* (London: Tauris, 2004); Ilaria Favretto, 'The Wilson Governments and the Italian Centre Left Coalitions: Between 'Socialist' diplomacy and realpolitik, 1964–70', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2006), 421–44; Geraint Hughes, 'British Policy towards Eastern Europe and the Impact of the Prague Spring, 1964–68', *Cold War History*, vol. 4, no. 2 (2004), 115–39; Matthew Jones, *Conflict and Confrontation in South East Asia, 1961–1965* (Cambridge: University Press, 2002); Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952–67* (London: Cass, 2003); Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates, 1955–67* (London: Routledge, 2005); Sylvia Ellis, *Britain, America and the Vietnam War* (Westport: Praeger, 2004); and John W. Young, 'Britain and LBJ's War', *Cold War History*, vol. 2, no. 3 (2002), 63–92.

<sup>4</sup> Such as the studies in this period of the withdrawal from East of Suez or entry to the European Community: Saki Dockrill, *Britain's Retreat from East of Suez* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Matthew Jones, 'A Decision Delayed: Britain's withdrawal from Southeast Asia reconsidered, 1961–68', *English Historical Review*, vol. 117, no. 472 (2002), 569–95; Anne Deighton, 'The Second British Application for Membership of the EEC', in Wilfried Loth, ed., *Crises and Compromises: The European project, 1963–69* (Brussels: Bruylant, 2001); Oliver Daddow, ed., *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's second application to join the EEC* (London: Cass, 2003); Helen Parr, *Britain's*



the way foreign policy is made in Britain,<sup>5</sup> the machinery of government in this area, or of diplomacy as a career.<sup>6</sup> All these elements are relevant to an understanding of the context in which British diplomatic practice was put into effect, and for this reason they will be discussed in chapter 2. But they are not the central subject matter.

### Defining diplomacy

In an everyday sense, diplomacy may simply be defined as ‘tact, skill or cunning in dealing with people’.<sup>7</sup> Such attributes are certainly of value to professional diplomats, but the definition is too vague to provide a guide for academic study. In the United States ‘diplomacy’ is also frequently used as a synonym for ‘world affairs’ or ‘foreign policy’. This is the sense in which it is used in Henry Kissinger’s study, *Diplomacy*, which is really a history of international relations since the Congress of Vienna.<sup>8</sup> But the value of this usage is diluted by the very fact that it confuses diplomacy with something much broader. Another former US secretary of state, George Shultz, gets nearer to the mark when he writes that ‘diplomacy is the method – some might say the art – by which relations between nations are managed. It is the manner, as distinct from the content, of foreign policy’.<sup>9</sup> The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines it more fully as ‘the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys; the business of art of the diplomatist; skill . . . in the conduct of international intercourse and negotiations’. Surprisingly, it was only first

*Policy towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain’s world role, 1964–1967* (London: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> The 1960s and 1970s were something of a golden age for such studies in Britain: David Vital, *The Making of British Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1968); Karl Kaiser and Roger Morgan, eds., *Britain and West Germany: Changing societies and the future of foreign policy* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Roy Jones, *The Changing Structure of British Foreign Policy* (London: Longman, 1974); William Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1975); and James Barber, *Who Makes British Foreign Policy?* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1976).

<sup>6</sup> On the specialist ministries and the diplomatic career, see: Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office, 1925–68* (London: Heinemann, 1978); Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Diplomats: The Foreign Office today* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977); D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971). Later studies include Simon Jenkins and Anne Sloman, *With Respect Ambassador: An inquiry into the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1985); John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapman’s, 1992); and Ruth Dudley Edwards, *True Brits: Inside the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> *Collins Concise Dictionary* (Collins, 1990), 353.

<sup>8</sup> Henry Kissinger, *Diplomacy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994).

<sup>9</sup> George Shultz, ‘Diplomacy in the Information Age’, research paper (US Institute of Peace, Washington, 2003), 1.

used in this sense by Burke as late as 1796.<sup>10</sup> It is this sense which will be used to guide the analysis here.

Harold Nicolson, in his seminal work *Diplomacy* of 1939, also recommended the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, though he used the term ‘diplomatic practice’ to differentiate his focus on the methods and structure of diplomacy, from foreign policy in general. Geoffrey Berridge, one of the leading contemporary experts, makes the definition in a rather different way: ‘diplomacy consists of communication between officials designed to promote foreign policy either by formal agreement or tacit adjustment’.<sup>11</sup> This has the advantage of differentiating it from the use of force, propaganda and law in the international sphere. It also leads on, as does the *Oxford English Dictionary* definition, to the study of the *methods* of communication in the international sphere. These include the use of foreign ministries and diplomatic services, the employment of ambassadors and envoys, and the official contacts between governments either bilaterally or multilaterally, including via international organisations. The levels involved can range from the lowest official in a diplomatic post up to the head of state. Before Burke, diplomacy was usually referred to as ‘negotiation’ and, while today this gives too narrow an idea of what diplomacy involves, there is no doubt that the promotion of international negotiations is part of the diplomat’s role. International negotiation is itself part of a process, a relationship between different entities. In the modern world the entities are generally states, but the term also includes international organisations and protagonists in civil wars. Negotiation is most likely to be successful when relationships have been carefully nurtured, which takes us back to the role of ambassadors and envoys, summits and state visits in promoting contacts and understanding.

### The study of diplomatic practice

The study of diplomatic practice has been growing in Europe and North America in recent decades, with a few journals now dedicated to it.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Burke adapted the word from the French *diplomatie*, but even this was only used from 1791 according to Paul Robert, *Dictionnaire alphabétique et analogique de la langue française* (Paris: Société du Nouveau Littré, 1968).

<sup>11</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 15 16; G. R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice* (second edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 1. See also G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (first edition Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 62 3.

<sup>12</sup> *Diplomacy and Statecraft* (Routledge) has been published since 1990 and it was joined in 2006 by the *Hague Journal of Diplomacy* (Nijhoff). There are also relevant articles in the *Negotiation Journal* (Harvard).

Much of the focus has been on contemporary developments, such as the increasing role of non-governmental organisations in international discourse and the growth of 'public diplomacy', whereby international actors seek to influence the press and popular opinion. There are several works on the changing role of foreign ministries, diplomatic services and ambassadors since the Cold War.<sup>13</sup> Yet diplomacy still forms only a small part of the study of international relations, where the focus tends to be either on the nature of international relationships and general explanations of its interactions, or on the processes of foreign policy-making.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it is sometimes seen as highly significant. Hans Morgenthau, for example, as a key writer of the 'Realist' school, emphasised the importance of states and power in the international system; but the closing chapter of his seminal work, *Politics among Nations*, was dedicated to diplomacy. Here there was a message of hope, in that 'the ultimate ideal of international life – that is, to transcend itself in a supranational society – must await its realisation from the techniques of persuasion, negotiation and pressure, which are the traditional instruments of diplomacy'.<sup>15</sup> Where Morgenthau believed that an international 'society' had yet to be created, others have argued that transnational elements like trade, domestic factors and moral concerns have already created such a society. Here the significance of diplomacy is obvious. Members of the 'English School' effectively adopt a 'constructivist' approach to this question, accepting that states are the primary actors in the international field, but arguing that these 'construct' their interests from interacting socially with one another: 'A state does not know how to act because it is a state; it acquires its identity through interaction with other states'.<sup>16</sup> Viewed in this light, diplomacy, like the balance of power and international law, is a primary institution of

<sup>13</sup> On the post Cold War period, see, for example: Andrea Cascone, *Comparing Diplomatic Services: Structures, networks and resources of the ministries of foreign affairs of EU and G8 member states* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2002); Andrew Cooper, ed., *Niche Diplomacy: Middle powers after the Cold War* (London: Macmillan, 1999); Richard Langhorne, *Who are the Diplomats Now?* (London: HMSO, 1994); Jan Melissen, *The New Public Diplomacy: Soft power in international relations* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007); and Kishan Rana, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to chief executive* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2004). There are also such specialist works as Raymond Cohen's two books, *The Theatre of Power: The art of diplomatic signalling* (London: Longman, 1987) and *Negotiating across Cultures* (Washington DC: Institute of Peace, 1991).

<sup>14</sup> This is not a theoretical work, so theory is touched on here only briefly. For a fuller discussion of the place of diplomacy in theoretical approaches, see Mai'a K. Davis Cross, *The European Diplomatic Corps* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 13–22.

<sup>15</sup> Hans J. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1967), 548.

<sup>16</sup> The argument is developed in Robert Wolfe, 'Still Lying Abroad? On the institution of the resident ambassador', *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, no. 33 (University of Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1998), 6–16, quote from 10.

international society, a significant factor in the way states interact but also a way in which they are 'socialised'. Embassies are set up in other countries because this reflects the fact that a state is part of international society and is recognised by others as such; their very existence helps to reproduce the international system or society.<sup>17</sup>

Turning to historians, the literature dedicated to diplomatic method is again quite limited in volume. In addition to a few general histories of diplomatic practice that go back to the ancient world,<sup>18</sup> there are some studies of particular eras,<sup>19</sup> various works on international organisations or multilateral negotiations,<sup>20</sup> and a small number of thematic books that combine political, scientific and historical methods to look at certain elements of diplomatic practice.<sup>21</sup> More numerous are biographies of diplomats<sup>22</sup> and accounts of international negotiations and summit

See also Iver Neumann, 'The English School on Diplomacy', *Discussion Papers in Diplomacy*, no. 79 (The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations, 2002).

<sup>17</sup> For key writings of the English School on diplomacy, see: Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), chapter 7; Karl Schweizer and Paul Sharp, eds., *The International Thought of Herbert Butterfield* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2007), chapters 19–21; and Martin Wight, *Power Politics* (London: Penguin, 1979) especially p. 113, where Wight says: 'The diplomatic system is the master institution of international relations.' The importance of diplomacy to the creation of international society is not confined to the English School, however; see, for example, K. J. Holsti, *International Politics: A framework for analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), chapter 8.

<sup>18</sup> Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method* (London: Constable, 1954); Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and administration* (London: Routledge, 1995).

<sup>19</sup> For example: Donald Queller, *The Office of Ambassador in the Middle Ages* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967); Garrett Mattingly, *Renaissance Diplomacy* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1955); M. S. Anderson, *The Rise of Modern Diplomacy, 1450–1919* (London: Longman, 1993).

<sup>20</sup> On Britain and multilateral negotiations in the 1960s, for example, see: Donna Lee, *Middle Powers and Commercial Diplomacy: British influence at the Kennedy trade round* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999); David W. McIntyre, 'Britain and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2000), 135–58.

<sup>21</sup> These include: G. R. Berridge, *Talking to the Enemy: How states without diplomatic relations communicate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994); David Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The evolution of international summitry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996); and M. J. Peterson *Recognition of Governments: Legal doctrine and state practice, 1815–1995* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997). A broader analysis of diplomacy, drawing on historical examples and sympathetic to the English School, is Christer Jonsson and Martin Hall, *Essence of Diplomacy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>22</sup> Among the best biographies of professional diplomats of the twentieth century are: Martin Gilbert, *Sir Horace Rumbold: Portrait of a diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1991); Brian McKercher, *Esme Howard: A diplomatic biography* (Cambridge University Press, 1989); and Norman Rose, *Vansittart: Study of a diplomat* (London: Heinemann, 1978). There are also works on particular ambassadorships, such as Gaynor Johnson, *The Paris Embassy of Lord d'Abernon* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002) and Michael Hopkins, *The Ambassadorship of Oliver Franks in Washington* (London: Frank Cass, 2003).

meetings.<sup>23</sup> However, these works tend to provide a detailed, historical account of their subjects and the attention paid to diplomatic practice is actually minimal; they also tend to highlight a few high-profile personalities or conferences, rather than giving an appreciation of the richness of the field. This paucity of work is not surprising, since most international historians concentrate their attention on the foreign policy of particular governments or on particular wars and crises, alliance relationships or regional problems.

That is not to say that the study of international history is in any way narrow. It has expanded over recent generations, away from old-style 'diplomatic history', which tended to limit itself to dry exchanges between diplomats, or 'what one clerk said to another clerk', as one critic put it.<sup>24</sup> It now embraces such broad background factors to decision-making as economics, changing technology, belief systems and mind-sets, the psychology of key figures, bureaucratic structures and cultural influences. Many of these factors have their source in the *domestic* experience of states rather than in the international arena, although international historians have also explored the links between foreign policy and such areas as defence, propaganda and intelligence. Indeed 'the history of international relations', as the subject area is increasingly known, has tended to become an amalgam of historical approaches and themes. Yet, in both traditional diplomatic history and its more 'international' form, an interest in diplomatic *practice* has been rare.<sup>25</sup> There are a number of books about diplomatic practice in the medieval period,<sup>26</sup> but in the modern era it is almost as if diplomatic practice is

Additionally, there are numerous biographies of non professional diplomats, such as foreign ministers and prime ministers.

<sup>23</sup> For example: Telford Taylor, *Munich: The price of peace* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1979); Keith Eubank, *The Summit Conferences 1919 60* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); Margaret Macmillan, *The Peacemakers: The Paris conference of 1919* (London: John Murray, 2001); Alan Sharp, *The Versailles Settlement: Peace making in Paris, 1919* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991).

<sup>24</sup> G. M. Young, *Victorian England: Portrait of an age* (Oxford University Press, 1936), 103. But for a defence of diplomacy, see Schweizer and Sharp, eds., *Butterfield*, chapter 2; and Jeremy Black and Karl Schweizer, 'The Value of Diplomatic History: A case study in the historical thought of Herbert Butterfield', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 17, no. 3 (2006), 617–31.

<sup>25</sup> A good overview of the field is Patrick Finney, ed., *Palgrave Advances in International History* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), although this only touches on diplomatic method in the essay by Thomas Otte, 'Diplomacy and Decision making', 46–7. Also helpful is David Reynolds, 'International History, the Cultural Turn and the Diplomatic Twitch', *Cultural and Social History*, vol. 3 (2006), 75–91.

<sup>26</sup> English medieval practice is especially well served. For example: Pierre Chaplais, *English Diplomatic Practice in the Middle Ages* (London: Hambledon & London, 2003); G. P. Cuttino, *English Diplomatic Administration, 1259–1339* (Oxford University Press, 1971); Joseph Huffman, *The Social Politics of Medieval Diplomacy: Anglo German*

‘the missing dimension’ of what – ironically – used to be called diplomatic history.<sup>27</sup>

However, changes in diplomatic practice have clearly affected the way international relations are conducted, as a brief mention of some key twentieth-century developments will show. In 1900 there were already several international organisations, but they tended to focus on technical issues such as postal services, the telegraph or air navigation. There were multilateral conferences, like those in The Hague concerned with disarmament, but leading ministers seldom attended them. The last great, multilateral, ministerial conference of the European powers had been back in 1878 in Berlin. Even bilateral conferences, where a minister from one country visited another for official discussions, were rare. ‘The almost invariable practice’, wrote Maurice Hankey, long-serving secretary to the British Cabinet, ‘was to deal through intermediaries – skilled, tactful and experienced intermediaries, but not those persons on whom the ultimate responsibility rested.’<sup>28</sup> The main ‘intermediaries’ were the permanent ambassadors posted by the great powers to each other’s capitals. The drawbacks of this system were exposed in the July 1914 crisis, when diplomats were overwhelmed by the pace of events, and during the First World War it proved necessary to hold regular meetings with allied countries at various levels in order to concert policy. The British and French premiers first met in July 1915, and Lloyd George, who became prime minister in December 1916, was a keen advocate of ‘conference diplomacy’. The end of the war, of course, saw the creation of a permanent, global organisation, the League of Nations, whose assemblies were frequently attended by foreign ministers. The League was central to ideas that the balance of power politics of pre-1914 could be replaced by a ‘new diplomacy’ based on collective security.

More frequent summits and more numerous international organisations: these developments in diplomatic practice soon became central to the way international discourse was conducted. It would be difficult to imagine a discussion of Chamberlain’s appeasement policy without the series of summits he attended with Hitler in 1938, culminating at Munich, or a discussion of British imperial decline without reference to the Commonwealth. After the war, Britain was one of five members of

*relations, 1066 1307* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000); and Karsten Ploger, *England and the Avignon Popes: The practice of diplomacy in late medieval Europe* (Oxford: Legenda, 2005), the last an exemplary case study.

<sup>27</sup> The term used to be reserved for the history of intelligence: Christopher Andrew and David Dilks, eds., *The Missing Dimension: Governments and intelligence communities in the twentieth century* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1984).

<sup>28</sup> Lord Hankey, *Diplomacy by Conference* (London: Ernest Benn, 1946), 12.

the United Nations Security Council, a member of NATO and, eventually, a member of the European Community, all of which had a profound effect on its foreign policy. The growth of summitry and multilateral negotiations in turn affected the role of ambassadors, who also found their position threatened by the increasing use of non-professional 'special envoys', and the creation of embassies in 'disguised' form.

## Structure

The current book focuses on such changes as those discussed above in diplomatic practice. It takes a different approach from most existing studies of this subject, one that is narrow in a chronological sense and in its focus on just one country, but broad in the aspects of diplomatic practice that it embraces. Rather than looking at one-off, prominent examples of diplomats, summits or state visits, it adopts a 'bottom-up' approach that tries to give a fuller appreciation of their number, frequency and types. The period surveyed is not long, but neither is it too short to get an idea of changes in diplomatic practice. The book does not claim to be an exhaustive study of British diplomatic practice in the period; it has little to say, for example, on the work of junior diplomats, issues of protocol, the role of the Diplomatic Corps in London or how public diplomacy was conducted. Many areas which it does cover might easily have been expanded into books in their own right. But it does provide an analysis of the most important developments, including the reform of the Diplomatic Service, the use of a growing number of non-professional 'special envoys', the significance of summitry and the impact of multilateral negotiations. It also considers two little-discussed subjects, diplomatic relations and state visits, to show why they deserve attention and how they evolved during the period.

Following the first, introductory, chapter, chapter 2 provides essential background material, including an overview of the international issues facing Britain, an outline of the bureaucratic machine in the overseas arena, an introduction to the key characters involved and a general look at the work of career diplomats. Chapter 3 looks at the debate during the period 1963–76 about the purpose of Britain's overseas services and considers the merger of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Colonial Offices into a single Foreign and Commonwealth Office. After this the focus becomes more specific: chapter 4 investigates the role of resident ambassadors in light of challenges to their traditional functions thanks to improvements in global communication, news reporting and the work of international organisations. It looks at various ambassadors in a range of

posts in the period 1963–76 to gain an understanding of how their role changed, what functions they continued to fulfil and how valuable they continued to be. The next three chapters consider various challenges to the position of the resident ambassador. Chapter 5 investigates the role of ‘special’ envoys, using a broad definition, and includes a discussion of the foreign secretary’s contribution to diplomacy. Chapter 6 begins a discussion of summits, conferences held at the level of heads of government, emphasising just how popular, even mundane, bilateral meetings between leaders had become. Chapter 7, while making general points about multilateral negotiations, focuses on meetings at leaders’ level and draws out an important shift in British experience from an emphasis on Commonwealth summits to those involving the European Community. However, the next chapter serves as a reminder that the head of state continued to have a diplomatic role: in fact, important reforms to state visits were introduced under Wilson and Heath, who recognised the need to ‘compete’ with other countries by using the monarchy to impress high-profile visitors to Britain. Finally, chapter 9 deals with one of the most interesting developments in diplomatic practice in the 1960s, the tendency of states to break off relations for purely symbolic reasons. Britain was central to this phenomenon, because several African states broke off relations with London over the issue of Rhodesia in 1965; but the British government was also among the first to maintain contacts via a kind of ‘disguised embassy’ known as the ‘interests section’, a development that showed the continuing flexibility of diplomatic practice and its innovation in the face of any challenge. The conclusion to the book emphasises this flexibility as well as the continuing significance of diplomatic practice to the study of international history.



## 2 Policy and policy-makers

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Tzu ch'in asked Tzu kung, 'When the Master arrives in a State, he invariably gets to know about its government. Does he seek this information or is it given him?'

Tzu kung replied, 'The Master gets it through being cordial, good, respectful, frugal and deferential. The way the Master seeks it is, perhaps, different from the way other people seek it.'

Confucius, *The Analects*, book 1, number 10<sup>1</sup>

As the above exchange suggests, Confucius had some experience of diplomatic negotiations: as a government official, around 500 BC, he went with Duke Ting of Lu to meet Duke Ching of Ch'i. He evidently absorbed some of the attributes required by an ambassador and these proved valuable when he later travelled around China, visiting several states. The study of government remained important to him as a teacher of philosophy, as did the understanding that, when studying any subject in detail, it was first necessary to grasp the background. Before discussing British diplomatic practice, this chapter provides an overview of international developments in the years 1963–76, a look at the major issues in British foreign policy, a brief survey of the policy-making machine, a character sketch of those who held the posts of prime minister and foreign secretary, and a look at the work of career diplomats.

### **The international scene**

Several significant, broad developments were evident in world affairs in the period 1963–76. One was the effective completion of 'decolonisation' with the end of the European empires that had until recently dominated Asia and Africa. Less developed countries still felt themselves in a subservient relationship to the West, especially economically, but they asserted themselves through the Non-Aligned Movement and regional organisations like the Organisation of African Unity, as well as

<sup>1</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, translated by D. C. Lau (London: Penguin, 1979), 60.

through particular diplomatic campaigns, such as that against apartheid in South Africa. Another major shift was from the depths of the Cold War in East–West relations. Following the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, the US and USSR showed a growing interest in détente and there were advances in controlling the nuclear arms race with the Test Ban Treaty (1963), Non-Proliferation Treaty (1968) and the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (1972). After 1969 the ‘split’ between the USSR and Communist China aided the détente process, since the two Communist giants began courting the United States for support. In 1972 Richard Nixon was able to pull off the remarkable coup of visiting both Beijing and Moscow. Détente reached its height with the Helsinki Accords of 1975, which seemed to recognise the lasting division of post-war Europe. Meanwhile, in Western Europe the key development was the continuing success of the European Community (EC), founded in 1957 by France, West Germany, Italy, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. This created a single trading zone and was enlarged to include Britain, Ireland and Denmark in 1973.

Despite such advances, these were years of increasing uncertainty. For the US, they began with the assassination of John Kennedy, were overshadowed by Vietnam and ended with the Watergate scandal. Accompanying this was a decline in US economic power relative to the EC and Japan. Because of the central role of the US in the world economy, its problems helped bring an end to the years of confidence and growth that had followed the Second World War. In August 1971 Nixon introduced a surcharge on imports and suspended the convertibility of dollars into gold. Throughout the Western world there was a move from healthy growth and full employment in the early 1960s to the stagnant growth rates and high inflation of the mid-1970s. There was also considerable monetary instability with the collapse of the ‘Bretton Woods system’ of fixed exchange rates and the move to a less certain world of ‘floating’ currencies. Such problems were deepened by the steep rise in oil prices in 1973–4 as a result of the 1973 Arab–Israeli War. Within the European Community, it proved difficult to fulfil the aim of economic and monetary union. And, as the West stumbled, so the Soviet Union seemed to match the US in military power, expanding its navy, becoming increasingly involved in the Third World and achieving nuclear parity with its superpower rival. While it is true that détente seemed to stabilise US–Soviet relations, it was always in danger of being undermined by conflict in the Third World, whether over Cuba, the Middle East or Vietnam. Furthermore, NATO faced growing divisions. France was determined to assert its independence of the US under Charles de Gaulle and, in 1966, quit NATO’s integrated military structure. The very success of the EC

led Washington increasingly to see it as a trade rival and transatlantic differences were particularly evident after Washington launched its 'Year of Europe' initiative in April 1973. Rather than helping to restore harmony in the alliance, this only rekindled French suspicions that America was trying to dominate it.<sup>2</sup>

How did the British experience fit into these broader trends? In 1962 the former US secretary of state, Dean Acheson, declared: 'Britain has lost an Empire and has not yet found a role.' The remark upset many at the time, but by the mid-1970s it was commonplace to argue that London ought to have conducted a fundamental reappraisal of its international role after the Second World War. Bound by a pragmatic approach to policy-making and proud of their triumph in the Second World War, British leaders apparently failed to see how far their power was dwarfed by the superpowers or how far Britain would decline relative to major competitors like Germany and Japan. Believing they still had a special position in the world at the centre of what Winston Churchill called the 'three circles' of influence – the Empire–Commonwealth, the US alliance and Europe – they made Britain a nuclear power, maintained a global network of military bases and compromised the health of the domestic economy in order to prop up the pound as a trading currency. Even when they turned to EC membership in 1961, the British saw it as a way to rescue their position as a significant power. The impact of the 1956 Suez fiasco, the independence of most colonies and the under-performance of the economy only slowly created an appreciation that London must accept a role among the 'middle powers'. Against this background, the withdrawal from military bases in Aden and Singapore, the pursuit of EC membership and liquidation of sterling's role as a reserve currency seem logical enough. But prestige can be as difficult to surrender as it is to define. Even in 1976, the government was reluctant to commit itself fully to a European future by embracing a political union, keen to remain a nuclear power and eager to be heard in the White House. Nor were such aspirations of significance entirely wrong-headed, as resurgence in the 1980s under Margaret Thatcher would show.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the international scene see John W. Young and John Kent, *International Relations since 1945: A global history* (Oxford University Press, 2004), parts III and IV.

<sup>3</sup> Among the numerous arguments on this line, see especially: Philip Darby, *British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947–68* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973); Joseph Frankel, 'The Intellectual Framework of British Foreign Policy', in Karl Kaiser and Roger Morgan, eds., *Britain and West Germany: Changing societies and the future of foreign policy* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), 81–103; F. S. Northedge, *Descent from Power: British foreign policy, 1945–73* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1974); and Avi Shlaim, 'Britain's Quest for a World Role', *International Relations*, vol. 5 (1975), 838–56.

In the 1960s and 1970s Britain suffered more than many Western countries from economic instability and was plagued by a sense of decline in world affairs. In the early 1960s, Conservative governments presided over a 'stop-go' economy; attempts to stimulate growth merely triggered higher imports, a trade deficit and a subsequent need to deflate. By 1964, the balance-of-payments deficit was £400 million and the 'three circles' of British influence all had crumbling foundations. Inheriting the premiership after Suez, Harold Macmillan tried to rebuild the US alliance on a basis of 'interdependence'. However, by 1963, despite some success in creating a close personal relationship with John F. Kennedy, the prime minister was forced to concede that Britain was in an inferior position to its transatlantic partner, an inferiority emphasised by the need to buy Polaris missiles to launch Britain's nuclear deterrent.<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, Macmillan acknowledged that most remaining colonies must be given independence. As the Empire shrank he tried, in 1961, to enter the European Community as an alternative source of strength, but this ended with a veto in January 1963 from de Gaulle. By the end of the year the Conservatives had a new leader, Alec Douglas-Home, although he was always likely to prove a stopgap, since an election was due in the next twelve months that the Conservatives looked likely to lose. There were months of crisis over Cyprus, a former British colony, whose ethnic divide threatened to drag Greece and Turkey into war; British troops were involved in a border 'confrontation' between another former colony, Malaysia, and its neighbour Indonesia; and violence was also intensifying in Aden, Britain's only colony in the Arab world.<sup>5</sup>

Despite expectations, the Labour victory in October 1964 was by the narrowest of margins and Harold Wilson had to guide his administration with considerable skill to secure a healthy majority in March 1966. The government stuck to the deal on purchasing Polaris nuclear missiles from the US, despite having criticised it when in opposition. Wilson did enough with his peace attempts on Vietnam in 1965 to satisfy the Labour left, while never abandoning verbal support for Washington's increasing involvement in the war. In the Far East, British military support for Malaysia in the 'confrontation' with Indonesia proved successful: a change of regime in Indonesia in 1965–6 helped end the conflict. There were grave problems when Ian Smith, the leader of the white supremacist government in Rhodesia, made a unilateral declaration of independence

<sup>4</sup> Nigel Ashton, 'Harold Macmillan and the "Golden Days" of Anglo American Relations Revisited', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (2005), 691–723.

<sup>5</sup> There is as yet no detailed study of international issues under Douglas Home, but see D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), 336–40 and 346–53.

in November 1965. Many Black African countries wanted to see Britain use military force to end his rebellion, but Wilson's preference for economic sanctions against Smith proved more popular with the British public. Ironically, it was only after Wilson secured his safe majority that problems began to mount. Within months a sterling crisis led to a major crisis in which the deputy leader, George Brown, urged devaluation, a withdrawal from remaining military positions 'East of Suez' (that is, military and naval bases in the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia) and EC membership as the way out of the country's problems. Wilson himself successfully fought for the alternative of a wide-ranging deflationary package, but over the next eighteen months he effectively conceded all Brown's major points. The 'second try' at Community entry was launched in early 1967, a decision to withdraw from Singapore and the Persian Gulf was taken in July and devaluation was forced on the prime minister in November. Devaluation led to an acceleration of the withdrawal from East of Suez, which was now set for December 1971. It was also used by de Gaulle to justify another veto on EC entry. But the British now seemed better able to match limited resources to their commitments. Under Michael Stewart, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office emphasised the need to base British influence on *non-military* factors like development aid, cultural influence and diplomacy.<sup>6</sup>

Edward Heath, the new Conservative leader, was able to exploit memories of the devaluation crisis to win a working majority in June 1970. In the British tradition, there was a good deal of consistency between his policies and those of Wilson, but there were undoubted differences of emphasis too. Where détente was concerned, for example, Wilson had visited Moscow on three occasions. Heath, however, never visited the USSR and one of his administration's most dramatic acts was the expulsion of more than a hundred Soviet diplomats, working as spies, in September 1971. On the Commonwealth front, Heath upset the organisation by his early decision to revive arms sales, which had been cut back under Labour, to the apartheid regime in South Africa. Heath spoke of reversing the withdrawal from East of Suez, but such talk was soon watered down, Britain's role in the Indian Ocean being largely confined to membership of a five-power defence pact with Australia, Malaysia, Singapore and New Zealand. Heath's successful attempt to enter the EC led to differences with the opposition (although in pursuing this, the central aim of his foreign policy, he actually took up the application made by Labour in 1967). Heath is often accused of

<sup>6</sup> On international issues under Wilson, see especially John W. Young, *The Labour Governments, 1964-1970*, vol. II: *International policy* (Manchester University Press, 2003).

devaluing the American alliance in order to secure a place in the EC, and there were undoubtedly severe strains between London and Washington at certain points, but this seems to have been as much due to US policies, not least the 'Nixon shock' trade restrictions of August 1971 and the launch of the 'Year of Europe', both of which inaugurated difficult months in transatlantic relations. During Heath's first year, however, and again in 1972, British-American relations seem to have been quite smooth as Heath continued Wilson's support for US policy in Vietnam and remained fully behind NATO. However, neither did he find it easy to bolster British power by relying on European co-operation: ambitious aims were set by the EC and its new members in the Paris summit of October 1972, but progress proved slow as economic uncertainties mounted in Western Europe.

A significant factor was that, far from London having to choose between the US and EC, these two often had a mutual interest in working with one another. In the wake of the 'Nixon shock' for example, after a period of transatlantic recrimination, the US and its European allies tried to forge a stable, new currency system. And in late 1973, when the Arab-Israeli War led to a threefold hike in oil prices, all the EC countries but France decided that a joint response with America was needed to the oil crisis. This need to work multilaterally with allied countries was hardly new, but interdependence was becoming ever more complex, reflecting the close ties between international and domestic events. Another sign of this was that in November 1971 EC members, soon joined by Britain, began to hold bi-annual meetings of foreign ministers to discuss co-operation on foreign policy, a process known as 'European Political Co-operation'. In future, London would sometimes have to compromise its own aims to dovetail with those of its partners. The domestic-international nexus was starkly revealed by the precipitate demise of Heath's government, as long-running problems with inflation combined with the oil price increases to weaken the government in the face of a miners' strike. But British helplessness at that point ought also to have driven home the message that, in order to shape its external environment, the country needed to work with others.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> On international questions in 1970-4, see: Thorpe, *Douglas Home*, chapter 16; John Campbell, *Edward Heath: A biography* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1993), chapters 16 and 17; and two essays in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Heath Government, 1970-74* (London: Longman, 1996). John W. Young, 'The Heath Government and British Entry into the European Community', 259-84, and Christopher Hill and Christopher Lord, 'The Foreign Policy of the Heath Government', 285-314.

When Labour returned to office under Wilson in February 1974 there was relief in Washington as well as Moscow. Certainly, Labour took a much fuller role in détente than Heath's Conservatives had done, with Wilson visiting Romania and the Soviet Union in 1975. With the Watergate scandal in full swing, the prime minister was very cautious about dealing with Nixon, scribbling on one telegram that the president was 'bloody barmy'.<sup>8</sup> But the US secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, established a close working relationship with the foreign secretary, Jim Callaghan, and declared, in July 1974, that he had never known Anglo-American relations to be in better shape.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, Wilson should not be seen as 'anti-European' because of his promises to renegotiate Heath's entry terms and hold a referendum on EC membership. While keen to consult Washington on certain issues, the new government was equally determined to respect its EC commitments, even in the period of renegotiation. Wilson and Callaghan took to EC summit meetings with zest, were won over to institutional reform and eagerly embraced the creation of a Regional Development Fund. The need to work multilaterally with other Western economic powers in tackling the trials of 'stagflation' was also highlighted in 1975 by participation in the first summit of what became the Group of Seven. The British almost departed from their new-found preference for diplomacy over military action in the so-called 'Cod War' with Iceland. But Callaghan avoided being drawn into conflict when Turkey invaded Cyprus in 1974 and he made a personal visit to Ugandan dictator Idi Amin in 1975 to secure the release of a British citizen, Dennis Hills. Yet, despite the reliance on diplomacy rather than military means, continued EC membership and the virtual end of imperial commitments, the problems associated with decline went on. At home industrial action was endemic and inflation above 20 per cent. Within months of Wilson's March 1976 retirement, Britain would be forced to appeal to the International Monetary Fund to bail it out of its economic quagmire.<sup>10</sup>

For those shaping British diplomacy in the years 1963–76, then, the background was one of retreat from the world role, a corresponding attempt to escape from colonial conflicts, divisions within the Commonwealth, persistent economic weakness, a declining ability to wield military

<sup>8</sup> UK National Archives, Kew, PREM 16/419, undated handwritten minute on Washington to FCO (15 March 1974).

<sup>9</sup> PREM 16/74, record of Wilson Kissinger conversation (8 July 1974).

<sup>10</sup> On international issues in 1974–6, see especially the two essays in Anthony Seldon and Kevin Hickson, eds., *New Labour, Old Labour: The Wilson and Callaghan governments, 1974–79* (London: Routledge, 2004): John W. Young, 'Europe', 139–53; Anne Lane, 'Foreign and Defence Policy', 154–70.

force, an intensification of the relationship between domestic and international problems, a focus on relationships with other Western powers and growing multilateralism, especially thanks to membership of the EC. But at any point this picture could be confusing and it was not clear how far or how fast Britain would decline in power relative to its main competitors. While the Afro-Asian lobby in the Commonwealth and at the United Nations might join in condemnation of the remnants of imperialism, not all colonies wanted the British to depart as quickly as they actually did. For some, the British presence meant wealth and security, hence, in 1968, the dismay felt among the Gulf sheikhdoms at the withdrawal from East of Suez and the appeals by Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew for a slowing in the pace of Britain's withdrawal. Some colonial commitments, like Rhodesia, were not easily thrown off and, when civil war came to Nigeria in 1967–70, the Federal government looked to Britain for military supplies to put down the attempted secession of 'Biafra'. Particular crises could blow up at any point and throw off all calculations, as seen most dramatically in the Middle East wars of 1967 and 1973, which had such a detrimental impact on Britain's balance of trade. In retrospect, entry to the EC might seem a logical choice for Britain, but until 1969, thanks to de Gaulle, it was not clear if, or when, it might be achieved. Furthermore, once achieved it did not lead to any 'economic miracle' for Britain and the need to dovetail foreign policy aims with the other members was no swift or easy process. The US alliance was still seen as significant but America increasingly dwarfed British power and the 'special relationship' could prove embarrassing in dealings with France. As to the Commonwealth, it often seemed to be falling apart, especially because of southern African issues. Through all these problems it was clear that Britain needed an active diplomacy, but there was clearly plenty of room for debate over its priorities, how it should be organised and the scale of resources it should enjoy.

### **Control of foreign policy**

The responsibility for directing British foreign policy rested primarily with a narrow group within central government. While the United Kingdom was often described as a parliamentary democracy, the House of Commons had limited influence in the international sphere. Members of parliament lacked the time and expertise to run foreign affairs, usually focused their attentions on domestic issues and took only a fitful interest in international problems. There were only a few exceptions to this rule, most obviously the EC in the years 1971–5, when the question of British entry became of central significance to the country's future. Public opinion and the media were even more amorphous, spasmodic in their



focus on foreign affairs and unable to develop a considered alternative to government policy. As to the political parties, they were generally under the control of the party leadership. The indifference, even hostility, of most Conservatives to EC membership did not stop the party leaders pursuing entry. Nor did left-wing discontent over Vietnam, Rhodesia and Biafra seriously call into question Wilson's authority. If any group outside government had a real influence on British diplomacy it lay beyond British shores, in the shape of key allies like the US and Western Europe. In the 1960s the need for US financial support gave Washington influence over British economic strategy, though the relationship always fell well short of the sort of puppet status faced by the Soviet Union's clients. Even offers of large-scale assistance failed to tempt Wilson into sending a token force to Vietnam. By 1976, the European ties had a real impact on British policy, through the process of European Political Co-operation, but this was on the basis of an equal role for Britain alongside the other members.

Within the executive, the Cabinet, made up of leading ministers within the governing party, theoretically took the final decisions and there was always the possibility of it adopting a line the prime minister disliked. In December 1968 Wilson feared that Cabinet discontent over the Nigerian civil war, support for the US in Vietnam and recognition of a military regime in Greece could provoke a crisis. In a dramatic minute, Wilson warned the foreign secretary, Michael Stewart, that if the Cabinet defeated them on Biafra 'we might find that, having once tasted blood, they would subject other issues . . . to the same treatment'.<sup>11</sup> Yet over the following months, on Nigeria as on Vietnam and Greece, established policies were maintained without the crisis Wilson feared. The only serious Cabinet defeat for a prime minister on foreign policy in the years 1963–76 came in May 1967, when ministers stopped Wilson and George Brown sending a naval force to the Red Sea to try to prevent Arab–Israeli conflict.<sup>12</sup> There were many ways the Cabinet could be circumvented. In 1964 Wilson took the decisions to avoid devaluation and to carry on building Polaris submarines in meetings with a select few ministers. In 1967 he managed to secure agreement on the 'second try' by bombarding ministers with huge amounts of detail while avoiding discussion of principles. Many lesser decisions could simply be taken without reference to the Cabinet. Its agenda was generally crowded in any case and most ministers were happy to adhere to their own areas of

<sup>11</sup> PREM 13/2261, Wilson to Stewart (6 December 1968).

<sup>12</sup> The flavour of the meeting comes out best in Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964–70* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 257–8.

concern, rather than interfering with the foreign secretary's. While the Cabinet often had foreign policy on its agenda, this tended to be for the purpose of short 'updates' by the foreign secretary on major developments, not a genuine debate about alternative policies. Under Heath, 'European Community Affairs' regularly appeared on the Cabinet agenda, usually following 'Overseas Affairs', but it too tended to take the form of an update and was used by the prime minister to keep ministers aware of the centrality of EC membership to British policy.

By various means then, the prime minister and foreign secretary could get their way. But this is not to say that the two had firm control of foreign policy all the time. They may have dominated many areas much of the time, and the FO may have had a grip on particular diplomatic relationships, but foreign policy was not a field that could easily be sealed off. A combined discontent among the public, press and back-benchers might place limits on what the executive could do: such a combination of discontent may have prevented Wilson from moving closer to Johnson on Vietnam in 1965. Sometimes, too, a key role in setting international policy was played by other ministers, especially the secretary of defence, the chancellor of the Exchequer and, while the position existed, the Commonwealth secretary. All three were closely involved in the discussions over withdrawal from East of Suez in 1966–8, for example. Various parts of government were relevant to foreign policy and, increasingly, ministries around Whitehall had their own 'mini-foreign offices' to deal with the international dimension.

Foreign ministries have sometimes been analysed in terms of having a 'gatekeeper' role in any given government, that is, they control access by the rest of government to the outside world,<sup>13</sup> but it is doubtful whether the Foreign Office has ever really achieved this in Britain. The Colonial Office, Commonwealth Relations Office (formerly the Dominions and India Offices), the defence ministries and Board of Trade had long had a role in the overseas field. Aside from its importance to international financial negotiations, the Treasury controlled the purse and could limit the size of the Diplomatic Service. The Bank of England might be involved in talks on monetary policy, while the Cabinet Office was important for co-ordinating policy, gathering intelligence and settling inter-departmental disputes.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>13</sup> See the essays by Brian Hocking, 'Redefining the Gatekeeper Role', and David Allen, 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office', in Brian Hocking, ed., *Foreign Ministries: Change and adaptation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999), 1 15 and 207 23.

<sup>14</sup> For works on the policy making machine in the period 1963–76, see footnote 5 to chapter 1, above.

But there was another threat to the primacy of the foreign secretary and prime minister in the field of foreign policy, and that was the danger of tension between them. The tendency of Downing Street to assert itself in foreign policy is far from new: Clement Attlee may have been willing to grant his foreign secretary, Ernest Bevin, a broad degree of independence, but Neville Chamberlain's dominance in the era of appeasement became notorious; it is an old question. In the 1890s William Gladstone complained that his foreign secretary, Lord Rosebery, who had taken an independent line on imperial issues, had a 'total misconception of the relative position of the two offices we respectively held'.<sup>15</sup> Of course, prime ministers and their office staff had limited resources and needed to devote much attention to domestic concerns; they could not have day-to-day control over all areas of foreign policy, usurping the role of the FO entirely. However, they could cherry-pick important issues and they expected to have a say in the broad strategy. The 1960s and 1970s saw some marked shifts in the relationship of the two: sometimes they were bitter rivals; sometimes the prime minister asserted his leadership; at other times the foreign secretary was given a wide degree of independence. It depended, to a large extent, on the personalities involved.

### **Prime ministers and foreign secretaries**

Alec Douglas-Home had served as Commonwealth secretary (1955–9) and foreign secretary (1960–3) before becoming prime minister for twelve months after October 1963. Unassuming and straightforward, the Scottish aristocrat could seem amateurish, but he had a natural intelligence and was highly respected by professional diplomats. Oliver Wright, his private secretary in Downing Street in 1963–4, considered him the 'nearest thing to a Saint in politics as possible', while Anthony Acland, who was his principal private secretary in 1972–4, described him as 'decent and high principled' with 'a real old-fashioned idea of service', who was 'far more professional underneath than he gave the appearance of being'.<sup>16</sup> As premier he had an uneasy relationship with his foreign secretary, 'Rab' Butler; they were courteous enough to one another but had little mutual respect. Observant, witty and good-humoured Butler may have been, but he found little joy in travelling

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Leo McKinty, *Rosebery: statesman in turmoil* (London: John Murray, 2005), 243.

<sup>16</sup> Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), interviews with Oliver Wright, 6 7, and Acland, 7 and 9.

abroad, had a reputation for avoiding decisions and was overshadowed by his loss of the party leadership to Douglas-Home. He also suffered from the fact that Cyprus and Aden, two key international issues in 1963–4, were in the hands of Duncan Sandys, who jointly held the Commonwealth and Colonial Offices.<sup>17</sup>

In his second incarnation as foreign secretary under Edward Heath in 1970–4, Douglas-Home had his critics. Thanks to increasing age, he was prone to gaffes, as when in the Commons he repeatedly referred to Tanzania by the old, colonial-era name, Tanganyika ('He means German East Africa', quipped Michael Stewart).<sup>18</sup> But as a former prime minister, with long international experience, he was impossible to remove from a job that he loved and was as popular as ever in the FCO where he created a 'sort of family atmosphere'.<sup>19</sup> He had already worked closely with Heath in the early 1960s when the latter, as Lord Privy Seal, led the failed talks on entry to the EC. It was a defeat that both men were determined to reverse and while they had their differences of emphasis, Heath being more deeply committed to Europe and less understanding of Commonwealth concerns, they worked well together. Heath had a reputation similar to that of Richard Nixon, whom Heath once described as 'a rather cold man, entirely pre-occupied with politics . . . Yet underneath that stern and sometimes apparently mechanical personal reaction to people and friends, there was a pleasingly human side.' Heath's public image was stuffy and aloof, not helped by his elitist interests in yachting and classical music, but he was highly effective in official meetings. He was eager to play a role on the international stage, was as determinedly 'Atlanticist' as he was suspicious of Communism, and made good use of his contacts with European leaders to get Britain inside the EC.<sup>20</sup>

Turning to the Labour leader Harold Wilson, the two sides of his character are revealed in remarks by fellow prime ministers during the September 1966 Commonwealth meeting: Australia's Harold Holt

<sup>17</sup> On Butler as foreign secretary, see: Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), 251–60; Anthony Howard, *RAB: The life of R. A. Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 324–32; and Nicholas Henderson, *The Private Office Revisited* (London: Profile, 2001), chapters 5 and 6.

<sup>18</sup> Cecil King, *The Cecil King Diary, 1970–1974* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 41.

<sup>19</sup> Alan Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1988), 99. On Douglas Home, see: Thorpe, *Douglas Home*, especially 406–35 on foreign policy in 1970–4, and the short biography by David Dutton, *Douglas Home* (London: Haus, 2006). Kenneth Young, *Sir Alec Douglas Home* (London: Dent, 1970) is now very dated.

<sup>20</sup> The description of Nixon is Heath's own: Edward Heath, *The Course of my Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 471. On Heath, the only substantial study is Campbell, *Heath*.

declared that Wilson's 'reputation for . . . honesty was nil', but Canada's Lester Pearson predicted: 'Wilson will wriggle his way out.'<sup>21</sup> Although widely distrusted as an unprincipled opportunist, Wilson was a skilled debater and political tactician, the eventual winner of four general elections. He came to power in October 1964 with eighteen years in the House of Commons and, almost uniquely among the party leadership, experience in Cabinet – as a youthful president of the Board of Trade in 1948–51. He was determined to play a leading role in foreign policy and some of his gifts were well suited to diplomacy, not least his tact, grasp of details and ingenuity at finding a compromise. But his inconsistency, obsession with tactics and love of showmanship meant that it was difficult to discern in his manoeuvrings any strategy for dealing with Britain's sense of decline.<sup>22</sup> This was not helped by three changes of foreign secretary during the Labour governments of 1964–70. The first incumbent, Patrick Gordon-Walker, a former Commonwealth secretary, survived only three months because he could not win a seat in parliament. His successor, Michael Stewart, was described by one official as 'a perfectly nice man but a non-entity' who 'read his briefs and did what he was told' but did not provide 'any leadership'.<sup>23</sup> Wilson had calculated, perhaps, that such a figure would not interfere with his own primacy in the overseas field. Similarly lacklustre characters were appointed to the Colonial and Commonwealth Offices. But there were some who viewed Stewart in a more positive light: Donald Maitland, at one time his private secretary, described him as 'a dedicated, most conscientious Secretary of State', while Hugh Jones, assistant head of the Western Organisations Department in 1964–6, felt him 'a very able man' who was 'underestimated'.<sup>24</sup> Stewart had honesty and integrity, was an effective orator and understood the need to adjust to a reduced role in the world. But in August 1966 he had to make way for a more formidable character, the Labour deputy leader, George Brown.

Brown was one of the most controversial figures ever to occupy the foreign secretary's post. His case reveals the potential for tension between the foreign secretary and those both below and above him, in

<sup>21</sup> Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Selwyn Lloyd papers, SELO 4/45, note on cocktail party (12 September 1966).

<sup>22</sup> There are three substantial biographies of Wilson: Austen Morgan, *Harold Wilson* (London: Pluto Press, 1992); Ben Pimlott, *Harold Wilson* (London: HarperCollins, 1992); Philip Ziegler, *Wilson: The authorised life* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1993).

<sup>23</sup> BDOHP/Crowe, 13.

<sup>24</sup> BDOHP/Maitland, 13, and /Hugh Jones, 30 1; and see the highly positive comments on Stewart by Nicholas Henderson, *Private Office Revisited*, chapter 9.

what might be called the 'internal diplomacy' of Whitehall. He could be amusing, charming and insightful. As seen above, he also had a clear and coherent strategy for British foreign policy based on devaluation, withdrawal from East of Suez and entry to the EC. But too often he would become drunk and make unreasonable demands on his staff, even ringing them in the early hours to discuss the contents of his red box. His brutish, bullying side extended from ambassadors to the humblest staff: 'He upset the FO lift operators . . . because he insisted on pressing the buttons himself'.<sup>25</sup> On going to the FO, in an interview for the *Observer*, Brown publicly declared his deep suspicion of traditional diplomats in extraordinary terms: 'I've got nothing against men wearing striped pants and black jackets if they want to, and they can wear Anthony Eden hats to their hearts' content. It's the wearing of striped pants in the soul I object to, and having a homburg hat where your heart ought to be.'<sup>26</sup> And his readiness to embarrass officials was not dimmed by working with them: within weeks of his March 1968 resignation he published an article headed 'Why I Shocked the Foreign Office Mandarins'. Here he portrayed himself as someone who had determinedly tackled ingrained practices. Aside from bringing an air of informality to diplomacy, he claimed to have eased out some of the 'misfits', altered the style of FO policy briefing papers, held more meetings where policy differences were thrashed out and replaced the portrait in his office of George III with 'a much more reasonable person', Lord Palmerston.<sup>27</sup> His memoirs continued the criticisms of the FO, leading some retired diplomats to hit back, either in their own memoirs or in letters to *The Times*.<sup>28</sup>

But Brown did not only antagonise those below him. He was also highly distrusted in Downing Street, so much so that, by May 1967, Wilson's private secretary, Michael Palliser, had begun to procure 'pirate' copies of FO documents through what he called 'my own network'. Such 'pirate' copies continued to arrive regularly. In December 1967,

<sup>25</sup> BDOHP/Maitland, 12, and /Crowe, 13. The only biography of Brown is Peter Paterson, *Tired and Emotional: The life of Lord George Brown* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993).

<sup>26</sup> Kenneth Harris, *Conversations* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1967), 88 and 91. Soon after his appointment he told Barbara Castle that his officials were 'a stinking lot . . . Today I went the rounds and you should have seen them: bored or downright rude': Barbara Castle, *Diaries, 1964-70*, 168.

<sup>27</sup> *Sunday Times*, 7 April 1968; George Brown, *In my Way* (London: Gollancz, 1971), 129-34 and 155-66.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example: *The Times*, 30 October and 2 November 1970, but note 3 November for Harold Beeley's defence of Brown; Paul Gore Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect* (London: Constable, 1974), 407-12.

for example, 'on the usual personal and non-attributable basis', Wilson received a submission to Brown that the foreign secretary had not yet seen.<sup>29</sup> Wilson had only appointed Brown to the FO in order to prevent the destruction of the government after the July 1966 economic crisis. It was small wonder that, when he resigned, Wilson brought back Stewart for the job, which he held until the 1970 election.

When Wilson returned to Downing Street in February 1974, he initially took little interest in foreign policy, being preoccupied with planning the next election. He also made a strong character and potential rival, James Callaghan, foreign secretary. Callaghan, who had already been chancellor of the Exchequer (1964–7) and home secretary (1967–70), thereby added another top post to his curriculum vitae. He had been a delegate to the Council of Europe in its early years and was heavily involved in the debates over the withdrawal from East of Suez as chancellor, as well as efforts to maintain the value of the pound. Despite the ultimate failure of that struggle, he remained a key player at the top of the Labour leadership, shrewder and more cunning than his rivals. In the manoeuvres over European policy in the early 1970s he was an early advocate of the referendum, and policy towards the EC dominated his time as foreign secretary, with Wilson giving him considerable independence. At the Commonwealth conference in Jamaica in 1975, Alan Campbell was surprised by Callaghan's readiness to let Wilson steal the limelight: 'This is not always how things turn out in the difficult relationship between the Prime Minister and the Foreign Secretary.' But by then Wilson was increasingly tired and determined upon retirement.<sup>30</sup> Reactions to Callaghan in the FCO were mixed, partly because they suspected him to be 'anti-European', but Acland quickly recognised that his new boss held surprisingly similar views to Douglas-Home on major issues. When listening to Callaghan, Acland would imagine 'Alec Home's voice almost superimposed and saying exactly the same thing . . . about the importance of NATO . . . the importance of being vigilant against the Soviet Union, the importance of the American relationship'. Indeed, by April 1976, when he succeeded Wilson, Callaghan seems to have been viewed with the same affection as his predecessor. Terence Clark, assistant head of the Middle East Department in 1974–6, described his boss as 'a superb performer and everybody loved him'.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> PREM 13/1482, Palliser to Wilson (13 May 1967); PREM 13/1487, Palliser to Wilson (2 December 1967).

<sup>30</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 111. <sup>31</sup> BDOHP/Acland, 25, and /Clark, 17–18.

## Diplomats

Who were these diplomats whose respect Douglas-Home and Callaghan won? In 1968, at the time the FO was merged with the Commonwealth Office, the Diplomatic Service included about 6,400 staff of all grades, with an extra 7,000 staff employed overseas who were engaged locally. But the elite Administrative Class, who formed the backbone of the service, numbered only 1,100, with about two thirds (700) working abroad.<sup>32</sup> Members of this elite were still predominantly male, upper class and Oxbridge educated. They were 'generalists', mostly educated in history or the Classics, rather than experts with any technical knowledge, and in many cases they were also linked by family relationships, attendance at the same schools and membership of the same gentlemen's clubs; these facts drew increasingly adverse comments. The FO was accused of being an elitist, closed, snobbish institution, out of touch with the rest of society. It was hierarchical, relatively small for a Whitehall department and had a professional ethos all of its own that smacked of a kind of freemasonry. It had long been resistant to fitting in with the rest of Whitehall in its appointment and financing policies, and keen to defend the recruitment of the superior products of a public-school education. Members of the FO argued that their system of recruitment had produced excellent staff, the 1966 intake being viewed as a particularly 'good vintage'. But they found it increasingly difficult to fight off the attacks of the press and parliament, who argued that recruits must reflect the make-up of British society more closely.<sup>33</sup>

In March 1960 an MP drew attention to figures on entrants to the Foreign Service in the years 1948–56, which showed 90 per cent were the children of company directors, professionals and managers, 80 per cent had been to a public school and 94 per cent to Oxford or Cambridge Universities. The 1963 Plowden Report also complained about the situation; but changes were slow in coming. Despite the enormous expansion of the university sector, Oxbridge was still supplying two thirds of the FO's entrants in 1968.<sup>34</sup> Even some of its own members felt it to be out of touch with modernity: on joining the Foreign Service in 1963 – the

<sup>32</sup> *CMND 4107: Report of the Review Committee on Overseas Representation, 1968* 9 (London: HMSO, 1969), 21 2.

<sup>33</sup> The comments here focus on the FO rather than the Commonwealth Office, a smaller ministry, less elitist in make up. Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 78 80; John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapmans, 1992), 18 19.

<sup>34</sup> D. C. M. Platt, *The Cinderella Service: British consuls since 1825* (London: Longman, 1971), 233 4.



year Harold Wilson spoke of the ‘white heat’ of technological change – Charles Powell ‘was somewhat daunted by the senior figures in their black jackets and pinstripe trousers, their bowler hats and stiff collars. It seemed a sort of 1930s newsreel world to me.’<sup>35</sup> The Foreign Office’s Main Building in Whitehall, designed by Gilbert Scott in the 1860s, helped foster memories of a bygone age. Veronica Sutherland, on joining the German Department in 1965, found herself in a large, high-ceilinged room that was ‘freezing cold’. There was no central heating and ‘when you ran out of coal, you summoned a messenger who brought . . . the coal scuttle in and stirred the embers to make it marginally less cold than it had been before’.<sup>36</sup> It could not accommodate all the FO staff, so these were scattered around seventeen buildings. But proposals to demolish the edifice and replace it with a single, efficiently designed modern building were opposed by preservation groups.<sup>37</sup>

The ‘newsreel world’ extended to amateurish personnel practices. Mark Pellew, who joined the Diplomatic Service in 1965, was given no training beyond a fortnight’s familiarisation with the FO: ‘One was flung more or less in at the deep end; a man educated at Oxford in Greats could do anything.’ Even essential subjects like diplomatic law had to be ‘picked up along the way’. Richard Tallboys, who joined in 1968 as a late entrant after working for the Australian Trade Commission, was surprised to find no induction course; he was instantly made a desk officer and told to ‘go away and do it’. David Dain similarly recalled that, ‘You were meant to pick diplomacy up. You absorbed it, you didn’t get taught it.’ But signs of change were there. In 1968 he was sent for several months on an economics course, a development he later felt was ‘the beginning of a real change towards what you might call modernisation’.<sup>38</sup> A number of staff, in fact, began to be sent on a course at the Treasury Centre for Administrative Studies in Regents Park in the mid-1960s, to make them familiar with economics and statistics.<sup>39</sup> Substantial training was, of course, given with difficult languages like Russian or Chinese. To learn Arabic – spoken in more than a dozen countries with British embassies – a large number of staff went to the Middle East Centre for Arab Studies (MECAS), near Beirut in

<sup>35</sup> BDOHP/Powell, 1. <sup>36</sup> BDOHP/Sutherland, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Not until the end of the century would the Main Building be completely renovated and most staff concentrated in that and the Old Admiralty Building not far away. On the saga, see: Keith Hamilton, ‘The Foreign Office and the Debate over Whitehall Redevelopment’, in Gaynor Johnson, ed., *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2005), 198–222.

<sup>38</sup> BDOHP/Pellew, 2–3, /Tallboys, 3, and /Dain, 6–7.

<sup>39</sup> For example, BDOHP/Bache, 5, /Carrick, 8–9, and /Weston, 5–6.

Lebanon. This helped, perhaps, to foster the notion that the FO was a 'pro-Arab' institution; it required less extensive training to provide the needs of the embassy in Israel. Also known as a 'spy school', MECAS graduates included a number of future permanent under-secretaries, such as Anthony Acland (1982–6) and John Coles (1994–7). Some languages, however, were treated more casually: when Christopher Meyer was posted to Madrid in 1970, he was given hardly any time to learn Spanish, being reassured that he would 'soon pick it up' since he already knew another Romance language, Italian.<sup>40</sup>

Shifts were certainly in train by then, though, that would revolutionise the make-up of the Diplomatic Service over the next generation. Easier foreign travel, improvements in the teaching of foreign languages, the rise of a less deferential younger generation, the impact of the feminist movement, the expansion of the universities, as well as administrative decisions on late entrants, early retirements and the like: all of these were factors that helped to broaden the social background of the FO, breaking up the idea of a separate caste in control of policy overseas. The change had already begun in the wake of the Plowden Report, in fact: in 1965, 87 per cent of FO entrants had been to Oxbridge and exactly the same percentage to public schools; only three years later, 65 per cent were Oxbridge graduates and 54 per cent the products of public schools. Even at the end of the century there would still remain the sense of being a highly educated elite, intensely loyal to 'the Office', but the sense of separateness from the rest of society was born more from the nature of the diplomatic career – the long periods of service abroad, the proficiency in languages, the need to understand people from other cultures – than from the 'old boy network'.<sup>41</sup> The change can be seen in two striking examples of new male recruits: David Gillmore was a late entrant, having worked as a teacher and journalist before entering the FCO in 1970 at the age of thirty-five; nonetheless, in 1991 he became permanent under-secretary, the top official in the Service. Just as remarkable in its own way, David Burns, who entered the FO on the lowest executive officer grade in 1958, worked his way up to become ambassador to Cambodia, and then Finland, in the 1990s.<sup>42</sup> The change can also be seen in the general experience of female recruits.

<sup>40</sup> BDOHP/Meyer, 4.

<sup>41</sup> See Philip Abrams, 'Social Structure, Social Change and British Foreign Policy', and Anthony Sampson, 'The Institutions of British Foreign Policy', in Kaiser and Morgan, *Britain and West Germany*, 127–50 and 171–89 (statistics from 180). On issues of selection, training and career progression, see also Geoffrey Moorhouse, *The Diplomats: The Foreign Office today* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1977), chapters 3 and 4.

<sup>42</sup> Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 51–2; BDOHP/Burns, 1–2.

Despite the reliance on diplomatic wives to support their husbands, female diplomats had enormous problems in pursuing a diplomatic career in the 1960s: until 1946 they had not been able to join the Service at all, and equal pay was only implemented in 1961. Though heavily outnumbered by the men, a few women had by then joined the 'fast stream' of entrants who could expect rapid promotion. But until 1972 they still faced the problem of being expected (with few exceptions) to resign if they married. In 1964, the Plowden Report 'found no evidence which would suggest that women in the Foreign Service have proved "tender plants";' and it endorsed the view 'that women officers should be employed as widely as possible'. Yet it also accepted the validity of the 'marriage bar'. It was assumed until then that a married woman would put her husband's career before her own and would be unable to combine a diplomatic post with having children. It was also difficult for women diplomats to function in certain countries, such as those in the Middle East, due to religious beliefs and social attitudes.<sup>43</sup> The lack of proper equal opportunities had many adverse repercussions. Veronica Sutherland, who entered the Diplomatic Service in 1965, was prevented from studying a 'hard' language 'because there'd been a woman shortly before me who'd been put on Thai language training and promptly got married, so they were not prepared to risk another woman at that stage'.<sup>44</sup> However, there were compensations: Juliet Campbell, who joined the FO in 1957, felt that 'because there were so few young women around at my sort of level virtually everybody . . . knew exactly who I was'.<sup>45</sup> In 1976, recruitment of women into the administrative grades was still well below the proportion in the home civil service.<sup>46</sup> But the removal of the marriage bar was not the only positive sign in the 1970s: in 1973 Eleanor Emery became the first female head of mission as high commissioner to Botswana, and in 1976 Anne Warburton became Britain's first female with the title ambassador.<sup>47</sup>

Even in the mid-1970s, there were still concerns about the way the FCO was managed. David Owen, who became foreign secretary in 1977, noted the complaint that the 'second rate' could survive in the

<sup>43</sup> CMND 2276: *Report of the Committee on Representational Services Overseas, 1962 3* (London: HMSO, 1964), 32 4. On the position of women, see also Zara Steiner, 'The FCO: Resistance and adaptation to changing times', in Johnson, *Foreign Office*, 25 6.

<sup>44</sup> BDOHP/Sutherland, 5 6 and 11 12.

<sup>45</sup> BDOHP/Campbell, 63 5.

<sup>46</sup> By 1993 about 27 per cent of Diplomatic Service staff were women, but they tended to be at the lower levels, only five of them (3.4 per cent) having reached the top grades 1 3. See: Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 20 4; Ruth Dudley Edwards, *True Brits: Inside the Foreign Office* (London: BBC Books, 1994), 98.

<sup>47</sup> Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office, 1925 68* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 368.

Diplomatic Service until retirement: an 'up-or-out' approach to career progression, as used in private enterprise, would deliver better leadership in the FCO and across its embassies. In fact, some early retirements had already occurred, but the danger was that such reforms could harm the *esprit de corps* of a small, select group who were often expected to serve in uncomfortable posts, far from home.<sup>48</sup> Whatever criticisms were levelled at it, the Diplomatic Service was doing a unique job that could not easily be compared either to those in the private sector or to the work of other public servants in Whitehall. Diplomats spent around half their career abroad, mixed regularly with foreigners and inevitably developed an 'international' outlook that has as its corollary a separation from the rest of the population. The diplomatic career placed particular burdens on family life, since with changes of post occurring roughly once every three years and about half the career being spent abroad, children often had to be sent to boarding school. Moreover, wives were not only expected to follow their husbands abroad but also to support them practically in their work, especially by organising social functions in the home and acting as hostess at these. Finding staff for such a career, keeping their loyalty and maintaining their morale demanded a certain degree of special treatment. And in the 1960s and 1970s, there were many challenges for the Diplomatic Service not only from changing social conventions or the discomforts of diplomatic life, but also the perception that its numbers could be cut as Britain retreated from its world role and economic problems mounted. This perception forms an important backdrop to the next chapter.

<sup>48</sup> See David Owen, *Time to Declare* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), 266.

### 3 The diplomatic machine

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When you disgrac'd me in my embassy,  
Then I degraded you from being King . . .  
Alas, how should you govern any kingdom  
That know not how to use ambassadors . . . ?

William Shakespeare, *Henry VI, Part Three*, Act Four, Scene Three

If a country's diplomatic machine is to be put to good use, how should its purposes be defined, how should it be resourced and what is its most efficient organisation? Reform of the British system was a regular event. In 1919 the Diplomatic Service, made up of staff serving abroad, was merged with the Foreign Office, whose staff had, since its creation in 1782, seldom ventured overseas. The new service was then itself merged in 1943 with the Consular Service and Commercial Diplomatic Service. Ministries, too, were fused as external circumstances changed. Thus, in 1947, when India became independent, the India Office joined the Dominions Office to form the Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO). The 1960s and 1970s proved a particularly significant period for institutional reform and for questions being raised about the purpose of the country's representation abroad. On the institutional side, in 1964 a separate Ministry of Overseas Development (ODM) was established by Wilson; in 1966, with most colonies now independent, the Colonial Office amalgamated with the CRO to form the Commonwealth Office; and only two years later this merged with the Foreign Office to create the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). Regarding the country's overseas representation, three major reports were published: Plowden in 1964, Duncan in 1969 and Berrill in 1977. This chapter looks at the reforms of the period to gain an understanding of what policy-makers themselves understood the aims of British diplomats to be, how they were to be equipped for these tasks and what was achieved through institutional reform.<sup>1</sup> It will be seen that, to some extent, reforms were

<sup>1</sup> Given the subject of the book, the focus in this chapter is on diplomats rather than other overseas services (such as the BBC, British Council and ODM) and on the purposes of

influenced by economic considerations, changes in the international system, such as the end of Empire, and social developments at home. But they were affected too by the evolution of diplomatic practice, as the role of the resident embassy was called into question, multilateral organisations grew in number and the range of tasks taken on by professional diplomats expanded.

### Plowden

The ‘Committee on Representational Services Overseas’, chaired by Edwin Plowden, a former head of the Economic Planning Board, was the first investigation into Britain’s diplomatic machinery for two decades. Established under Macmillan in 1962, its report went before Douglas-Home in December 1963 and was published two months later.<sup>2</sup> As a basis for its analysis, it first discussed the nature of Britain’s role in the world. The changes since the 1943 reforms were certainly profound: the country’s military strength had been dwarfed by the superpowers, its economic resources severely stretched; European empires were disappearing and the Commonwealth was much more diverse; the Cold War was now a global phenomenon; nationalism had taken on new, sometimes violent forms; and international problems, the report said, ‘not only interact with each other but do so with increasing rapidity’ – an early, perceptive recognition of what was later called ‘globalisation’. There were other developments that impacted directly on diplomats’ work: with so many newly independent states, there were British posts in 107 countries, compared to 63 in 1939; multilateral organisations had also proliferated; more people were travelling abroad for business or travel; public opinion had become more important and the television age had dawned, so that the ‘appeal to peoples as opposed to governments has added a new element to diplomacy’; and there was a desire for diplomats themselves to be more reflective of British society, not just the upper classes. Each of these many elements provided challenges. But the significant fact is that, whatever the country’s declining influence in world affairs, Plowden was bullish about the need for active diplomacy: ‘What we can no longer ensure by power alone, we must secure by other means. In this, our “diplomatic” Services have an

diplomacy rather than such issues as recruitment, working conditions and the diplomatic career structure.

<sup>2</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, CAB 21/5612, Caccia to Trend (1 January 1964), set out a plan to put Plowden into effect; CAB 130/196, GEN 832/1st (17 January); CAB 128/38, CC(64)10 (6 February); and CAB 129/116, CP(64)34 (4 February 1964).

indispensable part to play. The strength and quality of their performance must be fully maintained.' Then again, it also declared that 'efficient diplomacy . . . cannot operate effectively on the basis of prolonged economic weakness', so that the 'work of our representatives overseas must be increasingly dedicated to the support of British trade'.<sup>3</sup>

The Plowden Report was remarkably clear in establishing the meaning and scope of diplomatic work. Following the *Oxford English Dictionary*, it defined diplomacy as 'the management of international relations by negotiation; the method by which these relations are adjusted and managed by ambassadors and envoys'. The term 'representational services overseas' was deliberately chosen to differentiate diplomats from colonial administrators and those serving abroad in the armed forces. The report was also determined to assert the significance of diplomatic activity against the popular supposition that it involved 'little more than a round of cocktail parties and attendances at formal gatherings of little practical consequence'. It specifically defined the tasks of diplomats, these being: to provide advice to Whitehall on political and economic developments overseas; to carry out negotiations with other powers; to cultivate friendly relations at all levels of society overseas; to promote British trade and investment; 'to explain, support and gain acceptance for British policies' (in other words, information policy); to protect British persons and interests abroad; and, increasingly, to support overseas aid efforts. While the report wanted to see proper systems of economy and inspection, and while it acknowledged that priorities might change, it felt that 'the present scale of our overseas representational services must broadly be maintained' and did not believe 'that what we require of our overseas services could be got for less' than current expenditure.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, in order to provide 'an adequate reserve of manpower' to compensate for the time staff spent travelling, training or on leave, the committee recommended that a 10 per cent margin in numbers should be created.<sup>5</sup>

Rather than seeking expenditure restraint, Plowden focused its proposed reforms on the merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Services, that is, the staff involved in diplomacy. It did not, however, recommend the fusion of the two offices themselves. The services were fundamentally engaged in the same tasks, increasingly needed to see Britain's international problems as a whole and must learn to communicate with one another smoothly. When the CRO was first created it

<sup>3</sup> CMND 2276: *Report of the Committee on Representational Services Overseas, 1962 3* (London: HMSO, 1964) (hereinafter *Plowden*), 2 6.

<sup>4</sup> *Plowden*, 6 10 and 16. <sup>5</sup> *Plowden*, 24 5.

dealt mainly with the former Indian Empire and the 'white dominions' of Australia, Canada, New Zealand and South Africa. But by 1964 the Commonwealth had become a loose, multiracial organisation of seventeen countries, many of which had differences with Britain. The committee, while at pains to underline the value of the organisation, were struck by the fact that most other Commonwealth governments had a single foreign ministry, that some regions of the world (such as West Africa) were a tangle of Commonwealth and non-Commonwealth states, so that the FO/CRO split fractured British policy-making, and that debates at the UN (where the British ambassador was responsible to the FO, not the CRO) were important to the future of the Commonwealth. In other words, a single service would better suit present-day realities. Merger would also offer wider career prospects to recruits, make more rational use of specialist skills, such as expertise in a particular geographical region, and allow economies through the creation of single systems of communications, administration and inspection.

It seems obvious in retrospect that the arguments for merging the two *services* also applied to the *institutions* for which the staff worked, yet the committee shrank from recommending an immediate amalgamation of the FO and CRO, fearing this would signal a declining British belief in the Commonwealth and demoralise the CRO's staff. This may be seen as a weak point of the Plowden Report. On another reading, it was a wise move to state the case for amalgamating the offices as a logical step in the hope that the creation of a single Diplomatic Service would lead the two departments to 'grow closer together in policy and practice', without forcing the issue too quickly.<sup>6</sup> The bulk of the report was in fact devoted to explaining how a single, new Diplomatic Service could be created, looking at practical issues like departmental organisation, recruitment, training and staff grading. For Foreign Service personnel the changes would be minimal, mainly involving the possibility of a Commonwealth posting; for members of the Commonwealth Service they were more profound. Hitherto, they had been members of the Home Civil Service and could expect to serve in a restricted number of countries, mostly English-speaking; now they could be asked to serve worldwide in a career mainly spent abroad. The report therefore gave them the option of moving elsewhere in the civil service if they did not like this novel challenge.

The Plowden Report also advocated a separate, properly staffed Planning Section in the FO. Hitherto, as one memorandum told

<sup>6</sup> *Plowden*, 11 15; Charles Mott Radclyffe, *Foreign Body in the Eye* (London: Leo Cooper, 1975), 257 61; Joe Garner, *The Commonwealth Office, 1925 68* (London: Heinemann, 1978), 412 17 and 420 1.



Douglas-Home, British efforts in this field had been ‘rudimentary’ compared to the US, where a powerful Planning Staff had existed in the State Department since 1947. The FO’s ‘Western Organisations and Planning Department’ was expected to combine planning with work on other areas.<sup>7</sup> An independent Planning Section was duly set up in January 1964 under Michael Palliser. True, he only had the rank of counsellor and three staff to work for him, evidence perhaps that British pragmatism breeds a distrust of forward thinking (not until 1973 was another member added),<sup>8</sup> but Palliser certainly took planning seriously, secured rooms close to the foreign secretary and won the right to attend all high-level policy meetings.<sup>9</sup> The Section looked at a wide range of subjects, which, in 1965, included the possibility of providing India with safeguards against a Chinese nuclear attack and the idea of giving up Britain’s nuclear deterrent in order to secure a non-proliferation treaty.<sup>10</sup> Less speculative papers considered limiting arms sales to the Middle East, the future of the EEC and the dangers of further escalation in Vietnam. The last predicted that ‘their stubbornness, their belief that the Americans can be defeated . . . and weight of Chinese influence’ would lead North Vietnam to continue the guerrilla war.<sup>11</sup> The Section was also capable of looking at a broad canvas. Early in 1968, in the midst of the decision to withdraw rapidly from East of Suez, the planners drew up a paper, ‘British Foreign Policy for the Next Three Years’, designed to help adjust to the new circumstances.<sup>12</sup>

### Creating the FCO

In line with the Plowden recommendations, a single Diplomatic Service came into being on 1 January 1965. A Diplomatic Service Administration Office ensured equality of treatment on such issues as recruitment, postings and promotions. For the first few months the head of the new service was Harold Caccia, permanent under-secretary of the FO, but he soon retired and the post went to Joe Garner, his opposite number at the CRO. Garner’s appointment probably smoothed the way

<sup>7</sup> CAB 21/5620, RSO(63)3rd (4 February 1963), and Trend to Douglas Home (5 February 1964); *Plowden*, 124.

<sup>8</sup> John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapmans, 1992), 223–4.

<sup>9</sup> BDOHP/Palliser, 11–12.

<sup>10</sup> UKNA, FO 953/2254, Planning Staff memorandum (30 March), and /2255, Gore Booth to Stewart (23 July 1965).

<sup>11</sup> FO 953/2251, SC(65)2 (17 February), /2258, SC(65)28 (30 September), and /2259, SC(65)27 (13 September 1965).

<sup>12</sup> UKNA, PREM 13/2636, Gore Booth to Private Secretary (15 January 1968), with attachments.

to merger, not only because he was well disposed to the idea in principle, but also because he was the head of the smaller department, whose staff felt most vulnerable to change.<sup>13</sup> It was predicted that creating a genuinely integrated service could take as long as twelve years. The problems included a lack of language training among CRO staff, differences in career progression and the difficulties of fusing grades into a single system.<sup>14</sup> Meanwhile, although Plowden had shrunk from recommending an amalgamation of the two offices, it was becoming ever more obvious how the work of the FO and CRO impinged on one another, forcing institutional links. The most obvious example was the 'confrontation' of 1963–6 between Malaysia, which as a former colony fell under the purview of the CRO, and Indonesia, which was the responsibility of the FO. To deal with the crisis the two offices established a common department, jointly staffed and based above the arch opposite 10 Downing Street, where their two buildings met.<sup>15</sup>

But other questions, such as Rhodesia, also deeply involved departments from both offices. Mervyn Brown, who was assistant head of the Western and Central Africa Department of the FO, found that Rhodesia, itself a CRO responsibility, affected not only the rest of Africa, but also relations with the US and the UN. There were 'constant meetings' with the FCO.<sup>16</sup> There was also evidence that foreign governments found the existence of separate Commonwealth and Foreign Offices confusing. In October 1964, America's Averell Harriman complained to Gordon Walker about the difficulties of dealing with the CRO, which seemed to be 'a second Foreign Office in the important parts of the world' but whose officials played only a subsidiary role in the Washington embassy.<sup>17</sup> Another revealing case was Aden, a Crown Colony, responsibility for which logically lay with the Commonwealth Office. But in April 1966 it was decided to hand ministerial responsibility to the FO, because Aden's future presented more foreign-policy problems than administrative ones.<sup>18</sup> Alongside such decisions, a few individuals were given an early taste of what life was like on the other side of the merged service. There had long been some movement of staff between the FO and CRO. Paul Gore-Booth, for example, had been high commissioner in Pakistan before becoming permanent under-secretary of the FO in 1965, a fact that probably aided the process of integration between the two departments. However, after 1965, such

<sup>13</sup> Garner, *Commonwealth Office*, 417–18.    <sup>14</sup> *The Times and Guardian* (6 January 1965).

<sup>15</sup> BDOHP/Amy, 23.    <sup>16</sup> BDOHP/Brown, 22.

<sup>17</sup> Carl Watts, 'The US, Britain and the Problem of Rhodesian Independence, 1964–5', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 30, no. 3 (2006), 466–7.

<sup>18</sup> UKNA, FCO 73/7, *passim*.

moves became a more consistent part of career planning. Richard Faber, who had pursued a career in the Foreign Service since 1950, was one of the first staff to 'cross over' when he became head of the CRO's Rhodesia Political Department in 1967. He was disconcerted to find himself working as 'a new boy' dealing with unfamiliar methods and people: 'Even the filing system was different.'<sup>19</sup>

Yet still the institutional merger of the Foreign and Commonwealth Offices was delayed. Gordon Walker had come to office in 1964 hoping to 'assimilate' the two and Michael Stewart wanted to press forward with the merger in April 1966. But at that time the CRO was too deeply involved in fusing with the Colonial Office (CO).<sup>20</sup> The CRO/CO amalgamation had been suggested since the late 1950s. It made logical sense given that the days of Empire were numbered, but there were practical problems, not least the fact that the CRO was a relatively small ministry, with about 160 diplomats, whereas the CO employed over 4,000 colonial administrators, many of whom had only served in one colony. Under the Conservatives, the CRO and CO had been under the same secretary of state, Duncan Sandys, in 1962–4 and a provisional date for merger had been set for 1 July 1965. Then, in 1964, Wilson's creation of a separate Ministry of Overseas Development further weakened the position of the CO since, without control over development funds, it was left with the roles of winding down British rule and maintaining order in the few remaining colonies. Yet, on coming into office, Wilson decided to appoint separate Commonwealth and colonial secretaries.<sup>21</sup> Not until March 1966 was a timetable settled for creating a single 'Commonwealth Office' in August.<sup>22</sup> That same month Stewart was replaced and his successor as foreign secretary, George Brown, only focused on the merger issue towards the end of his time at the Foreign Office. In February 1968 he met Commonwealth Secretary George Thomson to discuss the better co-ordination of their ministries. But their permanent under-secretaries feared that, until a merger took place, there were bound to be differences of view on policy, especially on questions affecting the future of Britain's dependent territories, such as Hong Kong, Gibraltar and the Falklands. The FO was likely to be concerned about the effect such cases had on other governments,

<sup>19</sup> Richard Faber, *A Chain of Cities* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2000), 130 1.

<sup>20</sup> Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Gordon Walker papers, GNWR 3/4, 'Thoughts on Foreign Policy, August 1964'; FCO 73/103, Maclehorse to Crowe (5 April), and Crowe to Gore Booth and Garner (7 April 1966).

<sup>21</sup> PREM 13/2693, Helsby to Wilson (10 November), and Reid to Anson (18 December 1964); see also Garner, *Commonwealth Office*, 406 12.

<sup>22</sup> PREM 13/2693, Longford to Wilson (1 March 1966).

whereas the Commonwealth Office's responsibility was to safeguard the interests of the local population. In a single ministry such views would have to be thrashed out before they reached the Cabinet. Ironically, a minute to this effect led Brown to request a programme for merger just a few weeks before his dramatic resignation of 15 March 1968.<sup>23</sup>

Despite all the indications of what was looming, the announcement of merger came as a bombshell, when Wilson seized the opportunity of Brown's resignation to 'make it clear that the decisive option . . . has been taken'. Downing Street announced, on 15 March 1968, that the FO and Commonwealth Office were soon to amalgamate. There was immediate media speculation about the name of the new department, with suggestions that it be called something along the lines of the 'Ministry of External Affairs', in line with practice in many other countries. But Wilson himself wanted the 'affectionate' term 'office' to be retained and himself suggested 'Foreign and Commonwealth Office'.<sup>24</sup> Despite the work done on creating a single Diplomatic Service, much remained to be done in creating a single ministry, but decisions now became urgent. Within a week Michael Stewart met Commonwealth Secretary Thomson to set out the general lines of how to proceed: the main divisions inside the new office should remain geographical departments with functional departments alongside; to ensure unity of purpose at the top there should be a single minister in charge; and there should *not* be any specific 'Commonwealth minister' as deputy.<sup>25</sup>

Although a Merger Committee was set up, it was Stewart's assistant private secretary, Derek Day, who drafted a detailed plan for a single office over the next month. The principles he followed were to have sufficient departments to handle foreign and Commonwealth affairs without going beyond what was strictly necessary, to leave undisturbed such joint departments as already existed, and to make sure there were not too many staff in the top echelons. One implication of this was that greater authority would be restored to desk officers and their heads of department. But logical and simple as this seemed, there was plenty of room for difficulty in ensuring departments of the right size, ensuring a smooth flow of information up the hierarchy and securing the proper number of staff at different levels. Donald Maitland, Stewart's principal private secretary, wanted to use the new structure to prepare for the 1970s and 1980s by reflecting the withdrawal from East of Suez and a

<sup>23</sup> FCO 73/103, Maitland to Gore Booth (16 February), reply (20 February), and Maitland to Gore Booth (21 February 1968).

<sup>24</sup> FCO 73/16, Wilson to Stewart (19 March 1968); Garner, *Commonwealth Office*, 420; Paul Gore Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect* (London: Constable, 1974), 387.

<sup>25</sup> FCO 73/16, Maitland to Crowe (21 March 1968).

move towards possible European Community membership, while Gore-Booth hoped channels of submission could be kept as short as possible and that 'middle-term' collective thought could be improved, with ministers involved in 'forward thinking' at an earlier stage. But Day found it difficult to accept all these demands and there seems to have been an element of 'hoping for the best' from the changes. Maitland, for example, while acknowledging that staffing would be top-heavy for a time, told Stewart that 'tolerance and good sense' would help ensure that the 'flow of advice to you should continue to be reasonably well-ordered'.<sup>26</sup> On 26 July, the day after this optimistic minute, Wilson told the Commons that the merger would take place in mid-October.

Looking back, Day, who was head of Personnel Operations in 1969–72, felt merger happened 'remarkably smoothly'. By 1973 the new systems operated well enough. But there were undoubtedly novel challenges to take on board. As the first foreign and Commonwealth secretary, Stewart was responsible for Britain's remaining dependent territories, which only a few years before had been the responsibility of the Colonial Office. He was expected, among other duties, to take the final decision on death sentences. And as those with experience of the old Colonial Service retired, FO staff could find themselves appointed governor of some isolated territory, primarily an administrative role, for which their training was not well suited. The most distasteful aspect of the reforms from Day's viewpoint was that he was responsible for dismissing thirty senior staff before the normal retirement age of sixty. This was because of the large number of people on high grades in both offices who had been in post for several years, 'blocking progress of everyone else'.<sup>27</sup> There was also some resentment between the two sides of the merged office. Those from the FO believed that the CRO had promoted a lot of staff before amalgamation, 'to the detriment of the Foreign Office, who didn't', and the FO also felt that 'we were more professional than they were'.<sup>28</sup> For those in the CRO, the worry was that they were exchanging the informality and intimacy of a small, specialist department, with a deep belief in the Commonwealth, and would be swamped by the elitist, pro-European FO machine, even if there were compensations like improved allowances.<sup>29</sup> Andrew Stuart, who had joined the FO in 1965 after several years in the Colonial Service, reckoned that

<sup>26</sup> FCO 73/16, Maitland to Gore Booth (19 April), Gore Booth minute (15 July), Day to Maitland (15 July), and Maitland to Stewart (25 July 1968); and see FCO 73/104, *passim*.

<sup>27</sup> BDOHP/Day, 7 11. <sup>28</sup> BDOHP/Amy, 25 6.

<sup>29</sup> Garner, *Commonwealth Office*, 417 18.

'tension between ex-CRO and ex-Foreign Office people was visible for ten or fifteen years' after the merger.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the doubts and resentments, most staff adjusted to the changes. Colin Imray, who as a CRO official was 'horrified' by the merger and had even thought of transferring to Australian government service, soon 'found that Foreign Office people might be bright, but that they were also human'.<sup>31</sup> But some genuine problems persisted. John Killick, who became an assistant under-secretary in 1968, felt the sixty-odd departments in the fused office to be 'absolutely unwieldy'. With the heads of department playing a leading role, his own position 'was a bit of a spare wheel'.<sup>32</sup> Alan Campbell also found that the post he took up in 1972, as assistant under-secretary for African and Middle Eastern Affairs, was not what he expected: 'in many respects I felt that I was less involved in important work than when I had been head of the old Western Department' in 1965–6. The cause of the malaise, he believed, was the merger, which had left too many staff in post, making promotion difficult; there should have been more 'golden bowlers', not fewer. Before the merger there had been ten assistant under-secretaries each in the FO and CRO and after the merger the number was fifteen. Their role gradually became more important compared to the heads of department, but it took time for this to develop.<sup>33</sup>

## Duncan

By the time the FCO was created, pressure was already building for another full-scale investigation of the overseas services. This time, however, the driving force behind the inquiry was spending restraint. In response to an enquiry from Downing Street in mid-1965, the FO had acknowledged that the cost of overseas representation had risen from £32.5 million in 1960/1 to an estimated £52.7 million in 1965/6. This was partly because the number of independent countries in which Britain was represented had risen from 95 to 118, a striking statistic that shows one way in which the number of outlets for diplomatic work was growing.<sup>34</sup> Early the following year such costs were criticised in the Cabinet, where, interestingly (especially for any student of diplomatic method), Wilson pointed out that much work was now done through ministerial visits and international organisations. To this, Stewart

<sup>30</sup> BDOHP/Stuart, 13–14.    <sup>31</sup> BDOHP/Imray, 2.    <sup>32</sup> BDOHP/Killick, 19.

<sup>33</sup> Alan Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1988), 95–6; Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 50.

<sup>34</sup> PREM 13/2010, Bridges to Reid (14 July 1965).

retorted that ministerial visits and international organisations themselves placed an increasing burden on the FO.<sup>35</sup> The office was again concerned about the prospect of spending cuts after the July 1966 'squeeze', when the ambassador to Washington, Patrick Dean, took the opportunity presented by Wilson's visit to America to ask him not to cut commercial or consular services in the US. Wilson's sympathetic reaction proves that he realised cost-cutting could run counter to the need to boost British exports.<sup>36</sup> During 1966 the Treasury did carry out an investigation into the costs of overseas diplomatic accommodation but the recommendations for savings were not acted on by the FO. This was remembered in February 1968, however, when devaluation and the accelerated retreat from East of Suez led to renewed calls in Cabinet for reductions in overseas representation.<sup>37</sup>

Foreign Secretary Stewart and Commonwealth Secretary Thomson argued that a review of overseas representation should be deferred, pending the merger of their two departments, which was absorbing so much energy. But the chancellor of the Exchequer, Roy Jenkins, countered that the merger provided an ideal opportunity to study savings as well: the two exercises should be dovetailed. The prime minister supported his new chancellor.<sup>38</sup> The result, in August 1968, was the 'Review Committee on Overseas Representation', chaired by Sir Val Duncan, chief executive of Rio Tinto Zinc. After a tussle with the FO, it was charged with reviewing 'the functions and scale of the British representational effort overseas' in light of the withdrawal from East of Suez and the balance of payments situation, taking into consideration 'the functions and scale of representation by other major Western European countries'. It was also 'to make recommendations . . . on the furtherance of British commercial and economic interests overseas', but the emphasis was very much on economising, 'the importance of obtaining the maximum value' for expenditure and 'providing British overseas representation at lesser cost'. The other members of Duncan's team were Frank Roberts, a recently retired diplomat, and Andrew Shonfield, an economist. They began meeting in mid-September and, like the Plowden Committee, took a range of evidence from inside and outside Whitehall, including that obtained on visits to posts overseas. Duncan's team also made particular comparisons with French and German

<sup>35</sup> PREM 13/2010, Stewart to Wilson (26 January 1966).

<sup>36</sup> PREM 13/1236, Hall to Baldwin (11 August 1966).

<sup>37</sup> PREM 13/2010, Diamond to Stewart (28 April) and reply (4 May 1966), undated report by Diamond, and Trend to Wilson (5 February 1968).

<sup>38</sup> FCO 73/16, Maitland to Crowe (21 March); PREM 13/2010, Jenkins to Wilson (3 May), and Halls to Dowler (6 May 1968).

practice. These were seen as being in a similar position to Britain and for both the cost of overseas representation seemed, on the face of it, to be lower.<sup>39</sup>

The Duncan Report was published on 16 July 1969. Although its focus on spending restraint was rather different from Plowden, they frequently touched on similar themes. Both found it impossible, in looking at 'overseas' representation, to avoid considering work by departments in Whitehall, not least the FCO. Duncan also looked at aid administration and the overseas information efforts of the British Council and the BBC.<sup>40</sup> While it did not seek to define 'diplomacy', Duncan did distinguish 'various kinds of work involved in overseas representation' with a similar list to Plowden: handling inter-governmental relations; providing advice on foreign policy; 'reporting' on particular topics; helping Britons overseas, including export promotion; and public-relations work. The 1969 report added two other functions: self-administration of overseas work and the processing of travellers to Britain. The last point reflected the growing number of immigrants to the UK as the 1960s progressed.<sup>41</sup> Duncan commented favourably on the reform process that had followed the Plowden Report, considering the merged Diplomatic Service to be high quality, with a good team spirit and an efficient use of resources, but it recognised the need for an early retirement package to create a rational career structure in the FCO and it was concerned that the 10 per cent margin in personnel that Plowden had called for had not been created.<sup>42</sup> Duncan emphasised even more strongly 'the clear precedence that belongs to the commercial objective in the day-to-day conduct of Britain's relations with other countries'. But, in a statement that many critics seem later to have overlooked, it also said that whatever 'the towering importance of this aspect of policy', it should not mean sacrificing the political role on every occasion. 'It would be foolish, for instance, to suggest that in the midst of a crisis in Berlin which happened to coincide with a British Week in Germany that the latter ought to be the chief preoccupation of the Ambassador and his staff.'<sup>43</sup>

Overall, Duncan aimed to achieve economies of 5–10 per cent in overseas representation. These included general reductions brought about through improvements in the inspection system, simpler administration and more use of officials who were based in London and travelled out to posts when needed. On the last point, the committee

<sup>39</sup> *Duncan*, 5–6 and see 16–17.

<sup>40</sup> It generally found these satisfactory: *Duncan*, 90–114; Frances Donaldson, *The British Council* (London: Cape, 1984), 239–46.

<sup>41</sup> *Duncan*, 18–19 and 46. <sup>42</sup> *Duncan*, 22–9. <sup>43</sup> *Duncan*, 10.



discovered that a diplomat of the rank of counsellor could make twenty-seven one-week visits to the Washington embassy before costing as much as someone of the same rank who was permanently living there, and it argued that 'The visitor may often make up for his lack of continuous local experience by the extent to which he is in touch with the latest thinking at home.' But the report was careful to add that, in adopting such practices, diplomats must not 'lack recent experience' of foreign governments or their key personalities, an argument for keeping many staff abroad.<sup>44</sup> It was reckoned that expenditure on information services could be halved, mainly by shifting the effort in embassies towards export promotion and including it in commercial sections of embassies. Public diplomacy could be handled more from London, using the FCO News Department.<sup>45</sup> Consular services should also be geared more towards export promotion, with passport work being made to pay for itself and seasonal tourist demands being met by an increased number of honorary consuls. The number of attachés from outside the FCO was to be reduced by about a third: on the civilian side, especially in fields like labour and agriculture, their tasks could be absorbed by the 'generalists'; and on the defence side the withdrawal from East of Suez would reduce the need for reporting and the large British Defence Staff in Washington could be cut by a quarter.<sup>46</sup> Economies could also be achieved by housing the FCO in a more modern building and through creating an Overseas Diplomatic Estate Board to manage property on a commercial basis.<sup>47</sup>

However, the report also pointed out that the savings would take time to achieve, that a programme of early retirements from the FCO would increase short-term costs and that in other areas expenditure was growing. These other areas included better export promotion, increasing immigration work, providing up-to-date technology, better training and the creation of the 10 per cent margin in staff levels.<sup>48</sup> On the all-important commercial side, the report wanted to see diplomats becoming better informed, with more officers 'experienced in handling economic concepts', a larger 'cadre of officers with a special knowledge of European economic affairs', training in such fields as market research and a greater emphasis on active 'export promotion' as opposed to the negotiation with other governments on trade issues. Apart from changes on the diplomatic side, it called for improvements in the Board of Trade

<sup>44</sup> *Duncan*, 38 9.   <sup>45</sup> *Duncan*, 98 102.

<sup>46</sup> There were 76 civilian attachés and 159 attachés from the defence services (excluding Washington). In Washington, the British Defence Staff was already in the process of being reduced from 211 staff to 198. *Duncan*, 125 47.

<sup>47</sup> *Duncan*, 148 59.   <sup>48</sup> The recommendations are summarised in *Duncan*, 19 20.

and in the co-operation between government and private industry. The committee looked at examples abroad, such as Japan and Germany, where export promotion was pursued by bodies separate from the diplomatic service, before deciding that a major reform on such lines would take too much time and involve changes in the whole outlook of government and industry. But it did emphasise the need for diplomats to work through international organisations and alongside non-diplomats in promoting British exports.<sup>49</sup>

Unfortunately for Duncan and his team, their report drew immediate and forceful criticisms for one particular aspect, its attempt to divide the world into two categories. The first was an 'Area of Concentration', including Western Europe, North America and Japan, defined as the 'advanced industrial countries with which we are likely to be increasingly involved to the point where none of us will be able to conduct our domestic policies effectively without constant reference to each other'. This was a succinct statement of the growing interdependence of the 'Western' world, which the report called 'intermeshing' and which it said would intensify if Britain joined the EC. Significantly, one justification for identifying such 'intermeshing' was that multilateral links between the countries involved were evolving towards 'a new kind of diplomacy which is both more wide-ranging and more intensive', especially in the economic and social fields, which could even lead to the members of the EC and NATO adopting 'common external policies'. The second category, or 'outer area', was the rest of the world, a broad category including the Soviet bloc and less developed countries, bound together by the fact that 'none of them is likely to impinge on the day-to-day conduct of British government business in quite the way that we expect the first group to do', although the report did say that there could be movement between the two categories (if, for example, Moscow loosened its grip on Eastern Europe) and that some issues beyond the Area of Concentration would continue to matter very much to Britain, not least where they involved the Commonwealth.<sup>50</sup> The main implication of this was that posts abroad should in future be sub-divided into 'Comprehensive Missions', mainly in the Area of Concentration but also in the Soviet bloc and certain key states like China, and 'Selective Missions', with a 'basic strength' of only three officers, providing a minimal service but with a focus on commercial work.<sup>51</sup>

In putting the report before the prime minister in June, Stewart's tone was positive. Duncan signified 'a qualitative as well as a quantitative

<sup>49</sup> *Duncan*, 59 89, quotes from 66 7.    <sup>50</sup> *Duncan*, 12 15.    <sup>51</sup> *Duncan*, 46 58 and 88.

change in our overseas representation', implying a major reorganisation of posts, a reduction in certain efforts like information work, but also additional expenditure in the short term on travel, training and early retirements. An inter-departmental group was set up, under Denis Greenhill, the FCO permanent under-secretary, to put the report into effect and publication was approved by the Cabinet in July.<sup>52</sup> Subsequently, however, criticism of its recommendations mounted from the press and among diplomats themselves, particular targets being the emphasis on trade promotion and the division of the world into 'areas'. Several ex-ambassadors wrote to *The Times* complaining not only about the 'Area of Concentration' but also the way the political side of diplomacy was being undervalued in favour of commercial considerations. This barrage drew a lengthy response from Duncan himself, in a letter that was approved by both Michael Stewart and his Conservative 'shadow', Douglas-Home.<sup>53</sup> The report went to the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee on 12 November 1969, for a progress report from Greenhill's inter-departmental Steering Committee. Here, Stewart conceded that the division between 'areas' was 'perhaps too rigid' but he endorsed the idea that some countries needed a larger diplomatic effort than others. He also felt that critics had exaggerated the report's focus on trade promotion: in fact it had underlined the significance of political reporting. In discussion it was agreed that 'the achievement of economies should be a policy objective in its own right', as Jenkins urged. Significantly, it was again argued that staff numbers in bilateral embassies could be reduced thanks to increased visits by ministers, and diplomats being appointed to international organisations.<sup>54</sup>

### Putting Duncan into action

It is easy to fault the way Duncan was followed through. The FCO carried out its own inspection of posts to see where economies could be made and it strongly objected to the insistence by the Civil Service Department that the report should lead to a reduction of expenditure on personnel of at least 5 per cent by 1975, which implied a loss of

<sup>52</sup> PREM 13/3135, Stewart to Wilson (10 and 20 June 1969); CAB 128/44, CC32(69) (10 July); CAB 129/142, C(69)73 (4 July 1969).

<sup>53</sup> *The Times*, 23, 26, 28, 29 and 30 July and 1 August 1969; Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Frank Roberts papers, ROBT box 6, Duncan to Shonfield (29 July 1969); and see Andrew Shonfield, 'The Duncan Report and its Critics', *International Affairs*, vol. 46, no. 2 (April 1970), 247-68.

<sup>54</sup> CAB 148/91, OPD(69)21st (12 November); Tony Benn, *Office without Power: Diaries, 1968-72* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), 210.

about 720 posts. The FCO pointed out that its work was by nature labour-intensive, that the cost of the Diplomatic Service financial vote, about £50 million in 1969–70, was a tiny proportion of the £21 billion total public expenditure, and that such a reduction must mean the closure of whole missions, with a detrimental effect on trade promotion and political influence. It also pointed out that new management techniques were already being introduced. The last included ‘country assessment sheets’ to measure British interests on a continuing basis, regular performance appraisals for individual staff and the greater use of computers for information retrieval. While being ready to carry out ‘a rigorous programme of inspections’ and ‘reduce the extravagant use of high intellectual and practical ability which at present exists’, Oliver Wright, the chief clerk at the FCO, wanted ‘to be released from the obligation to secure economies as a major object of policy in themselves’, arguing that the Diplomatic Service ‘performs an essentially qualitative function’ to which quantitative techniques drawn from manufacturing industry could not be applied. The 5 per cent reduction should be a target, not a commitment.<sup>55</sup>

Yet, contrary to some claims, the Conservatives did not ‘shelve’ the report.<sup>56</sup> When Heath arrived in office in June 1970, he was informed that progress was being made on economising in the Diplomatic Service and on giving greater emphasis to commercial issues, even if the division of the world into core and peripheral areas had not been accepted, at least not ‘in the somewhat stark terms that it was stated in the report’. The emphasis was on a ‘rigorous programme of inspection’ rather than reductions in the number of embassies and, as Wright had said, there was a desire to ‘get away from the concept of economy for economy’s sake’. But the FCO conceded that it was still overstuffed and that, with too few top jobs available ‘for the talent available’, a continuing (and properly funded) programme of early retirements was necessary. The new prime minister took an immediate interest in the question and certainly did not undermine the work Labour had done. Rather, he insisted on being kept up to date about progress on the Duncan Report and particularly urged a reduction in the size of diplomatic establishments in the US.<sup>57</sup> At the FCO, Douglas-Home was especially concerned to deal with structural problems that had originated with the recruitment of a large number of staff immediately after the Second

<sup>55</sup> PREM 15/304, Wright to Douglas Home (25 June 1970).

<sup>56</sup> Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 65.

<sup>57</sup> PREM 15/304, Moon to Heath (22 June and 30 June) and other correspondence to 1 July 1970.

World War, had grown with the mergers of the FO, CRO and CO and, alongside the Duncan recommendations, left a situation where 'the congestion in the upper ranks of the Diplomatic Service had become intolerable'. The difficulty was that the terms on which early retirement was being offered were 'widely resented in the Service as not only ungenerous but inequitable'. In order to pave the way for a proper 'streamlining' and create a more rational career flow, Douglas-Home was keen to offer a much improved deal.<sup>58</sup>

Decisions under Heath were influenced by an FCO study, *Priorities for British Interests Overseas*, completed in March 1970. Designed to help the Diplomatic Service 'get its shape and size right', and rather more sophisticated than the Duncan Report's 'areas', this included 'a sort of league table of . . . countries in order of their importance for British interests' based on the criteria of their politico-security interests, economic involvement and gross domestic product. Despite the attempt at a novel, quantitative analysis, the results were quite predictable. Thus, the US and USSR were in a league of their own in importance, while 'at the top of League Division Two' were China, large Western European states (Germany, France, Italy) and key Commonwealth countries (Australia and Canada). Helped by regional assessments from its Planning Staff, the FCO used this to try to link the scale of diplomatic involvement to the weight of national interests, and it helped bring about economies in personnel overseas in 1970–1. Whereas there had been 6,770 staff in the Diplomatic Service in 1968, by mid-1970 there were 6,536, with plans to reduce this to 6,213 by 1975. But the nature of diplomatic work was forever shifting and it proved difficult to make cuts in the FCO itself, even as it absorbed nearly half the Diplomatic Service. As Wright informed Downing Street in September 1970, there was 'every sign that the content of international affairs is increasing with the advent of new subjects like the seabed, outer space and all points in between including the environment'. Also, the FCO itself did not answer for all civil servants working abroad. Many other Whitehall departments had staff overseas so that, at the extreme, in Washington only 21 per cent of British officials were from the Diplomatic Service, many of the rest being MOD appointments. Wright's hope was that, through further economies and with a fair policy on early retirement, 'we can produce an equally efficient Service for Ministers . . . a less expensive Service for the taxpayer and a more rewarding Service for our own members'. But he was also aware that 'after being Plowdenised and

<sup>58</sup> PREM 15/304, Graham to Moon (29 June 1970).

Duncanised' the FCO wanted to be left to get on with its job 'and be judged by the results'.<sup>59</sup>

Heath, Douglas-Home and others met in mid-October 1970 to discuss the future shape of the Diplomatic Service and it was agreed to press ahead with improved compensation for premature retirement, to continue trimming numbers where possible, to follow up the Duncan recommendations on a new system for managing overseas accommodation, and to look at cuts in the overseas 'public presentation' of Britain, including the BBC. But it was also acknowledged that many cuts had already been made, especially in the number of attachés appointed to embassies from home departments. Labour attachés, for example, had been roughly halved since 1968. It was not felt possible to trim the British Council further and, while a number of consulates had been closed, it was not desirable to cut whole embassies because of the likely loss of prestige and influence.<sup>60</sup> Nor can the resistance to Duncan be blamed entirely on the FCO. In early 1971, an inter-departmental study group concluded, largely due to Treasury doubts, that it was pointless to set up an Overseas Diplomatic Estate Board because this would be expensive to run and could not be made to operate on commercial lines. Surprisingly, it was Douglas-Home who wanted officials to 'think again' and Anthony Barber, the chancellor of the Exchequer, who was content with changes to the existing system.<sup>61</sup>

Further disappointment came with the report on staffing posts in the US. A small saving in consular staff was possible, but even a process of integrating the work of attachés with that of general staff could save only a few posts in Washington, largely because so many Whitehall departments insisted on retaining officials in the American capital. As to the substantial British Defence Staff, which currently numbered 174, it was not felt possible to cut this to less than about 166. The defence secretary, Lord Carrington, insisted that any further reduction would be detrimental to their work, a position that Heath accepted, though he restated his wish that all staffing levels be 'constantly reviewed'. This was not as disappointing as it seemed: a few years earlier the British Defence Staff had numbered 213.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, a report of April 1971 showed that since the Duncan Report the Diplomatic Service had lost 354 people

<sup>59</sup> PREM 15/304, Wright to Moon (17 September 1970), and see supporting papers in the file, including 'Priorities for British Interests' (March 1970).

<sup>60</sup> PREM 15/304, Moon to Graham (14 October 1970).

<sup>61</sup> PREM 15/304, Douglas Home to Barber (14 January), reply (26 January), Macmillan to Douglas Home (10 May), and Moon to Heath (3 August 1971).

<sup>62</sup> PREM 15/304, Jellicoe to Heath (25 October), Carrington to Heath (1 November), and Moon to Gilmore (15 November 1971).

and seventeen consulates.<sup>63</sup> Heath insisted on being told of the closure of any post during his premiership, giving each his personal approval.<sup>64</sup> Duncan may not have been followed through comprehensively then, but there were real cuts.

## Berrill

Nevertheless, when Labour returned to office, the possibility was mooted of yet another investigation into representation overseas, to be carried out by the Central Policy Review Staff (CPRS). Better known as 'the think tank', this had been set up by Heath to advise the government on major policy decisions. With a staff drawn from business, academia and the civil service, it produced a string of reports on such questions as the nationalised industries, energy policy and race relations. Kenneth Berrill, formerly chief economic adviser to the Treasury, became its head in July 1974 and about a year later members of his staff pressed him on the idea of looking at overseas representation. Two diplomats were seconded to the CPRS at the time: John Guinness had been there since 1972 and Marrack Goulding joined in January 1975. Their belief that British embassies could function efficiently with fewer staff and support services was echoed by a number of newspaper reports about FCO wastefulness and keenly supported by Tessa Blackstone, a lecturer from the London School of Economics who joined the CPRS in September 1975. Against the background of high inflation and stagnant growth, there was a revived interest in cutting government expenditure, and the incoming permanent under-secretary of the FCO, Michael Palliser, was felt to be open to the idea of a leaner, more efficient Diplomatic Service.<sup>65</sup>

The reaction from the FCO was hardly enthusiastic. Richard Faber, head of the Planning Department, felt that coming on top of the Plowden and Duncan reports 'this further enquiry was bound to be a waste of time . . . especially since it was apparently concerned to impress opinion at home rather than to consider effects abroad'.<sup>66</sup> But late in 1975, the foreign secretary, Callaghan, not only agreed to a review of overseas representation, he also wanted it to cover 'all aspects' of this, 'including political, economic, commercial, consular and immigration work, defence matters, overseas aid and cultural and information activities'. This would involve looking at the work of all relevant departments

<sup>63</sup> PREM 15/304, Moon to Heath (2 April 1971). <sup>64</sup> PREM 15/1387, *passim*.

<sup>65</sup> Tessa Blackstone and William Plowden, *Inside the Think Tank: Advising the Cabinet, 1971-1983* (London: William Heinemann, 1988), 155-8.

<sup>66</sup> Faber, *Chain*, 175.

in the foreign field, from the FCO and Ministry of Defence through the British Council and the BBC to areas of the Home Civil Service, making the review far more comprehensive than Plowden or Duncan. The CPRS would carry out this review and 'make recommendations on the most suitable, effective and economic means of representing and promoting' British interests.<sup>67</sup>

Callaghan announced the review to the Commons on 14 January 1976, only a few months before becoming prime minister. A report was not published until August 1977 and became more celebrated for the doubts it raised about the purpose and wisdom of the 'think tank' than for its impact on the Diplomatic Service. Berrill himself led the work, while the FCO set up its own group – soon known to the media as the 'Anti-Tank Unit' – under Andrew Stark, recalled from his ambassadorship in Copenhagen for the purpose.<sup>68</sup> From the start the process was surrounded by leaks to the press, sometimes with exaggerated claims depicting the CPRS as left-wing extremists who might even close down the FCO. The ambassador to Paris, Nicholas Henderson, became a determined opponent of the process following a visit by the review team in October 1976, when questions were raised about the diplomatic lifestyle. He set out to mobilise the FCO's staff associations and MPs against the report.<sup>69</sup> All along, the breadth of the task that Callaghan had set was probably too great for any review to handle, but Berrill's team did not help themselves when they produced an indigestible report of 442 pages and almost 300 recommendations. It took twenty pages just to list them.<sup>70</sup> It listed no less than eleven main functions of overseas representation, just about doubling the list that Duncan had relied on. Berrill treated foreign policy efforts ('connected with international political situations') separately from political work (defined as 'bilateral work and the political analysis of overseas countries') and also listed 'economic, social and environmental work', export services, defence, consular, immigration, educational/cultural and information functions, external broadcasting, administration of overseas aid and three 'secondary' functions: communications, diplomatic entertainment and accommodation/administration.

From the outset the report struck a provocative tone, asserting in one crucial sentence that, 'Inevitably . . . the UK's ability to influence events

<sup>67</sup> *Review of Overseas Representation: Report by the Central Policy Review Staff* (London: HMSO, 1977) (hereinafter *Berrill*), v.

<sup>68</sup> BDOHP/Unwin, 26 7.

<sup>69</sup> Nicholas Henderson, *Mandarin: The diaries of Nicholas Henderson* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 126 9.

<sup>70</sup> *Berrill*, 381 400.



in the world has declined and there is very little that diplomatic activity and international public relations can do to disguise the fact.' Rubbing salt in the wound, it went on to note that, since the confrontation with Indonesia in 1963–6, 'efforts . . . to help solve international problems by diplomatic means – Rhodesia, Cyprus, the Middle East, South Arabia, Vietnam . . . – have not been conspicuously successful'. In a striking contrast to Duncan, the Berrill Report argued that more effort was needed in maintaining relations with the developing world and the Soviet bloc than with developed countries. Yet it fully accepted the importance of the relationships with the US and European Community, being critical of Britain's role as a permanent member of the United Nations and seeing no need for extensive efforts to maintain the Commonwealth link. Although the report denied it, it seemed to focus on cost-cutting, seeing scope for savings in most areas: diplomatic entertainment, though it cost only £5.6 million per year, was a particular target; information work could be cut further; the aid programme needed to be more selective; more work could be done by London-based staff; and too much work 'was being done to an unjustifiably high standard'.<sup>71</sup> The report followed Plowden and Duncan in emphasising the significance of trade and economic work.<sup>72</sup> It recommended, among numerous other points, the closure of fifty-five more posts, mainly consulates, a general reduction in overseas posts and greater specialisation of staff in their work. Radical options, none of which was adopted, included the amalgamation of the Diplomatic and Home Civil Services, the closure of the British Council and the creation of a 'minister for exports' in the Department of Trade, to take over all existing efforts in the area.<sup>73</sup>

The press reaction to Berrill was largely critical, feeling that it exaggerated the scale of British decline and underestimated the value of overseas work. Academic experts were also caustic. Donald Watt argued that the report 'lost sight of the need for early and accurate information set in its national context, without which diplomacy today cannot function' and without which the government would become 'Cyclops robbed of his eye'.<sup>74</sup> In the House of Lords, too, a series of speakers rose to criticise Berrill: Lord Ballantrae, a former chair of the British Council, led off by complaining of the 'defeatist motif which runs through the whole thing'; Lord Home, the former foreign secretary, declared that 'to compel ambassadors to offer hospitality below the standard offered by their diplomatic neighbours is a false economy'; and Lord Gladwyn, a

<sup>71</sup> Berrill, ix xvi and 10. <sup>72</sup> Berrill, 57. <sup>73</sup> Berrill, 333.

<sup>74</sup> Donald Cameron Watt, 'Foreign Secretaries as Diplomats', in Roger Bullen, ed., *The Foreign Office, 1782–1982* (New York: University Publications of America, 1984), 126.

veteran diplomat, argued that if Britain wanted 'good relations' with leaders around the world this 'can, as often as not, be arrived at by social, even cultural contacts'.<sup>75</sup> In March 1978, a House of Commons Select Committee declared themselves 'unhappy . . . with the qualifications of the Review team', questioned the need for such a report so soon after Duncan and criticised the 'prescription of a lower level of diplomatic representation designed to reflect their own perception of Britain's reduced status in the world. We have . . . made clear our belief that . . . Britain should seek to maximise its influence by every means available . . .'<sup>76</sup> Even a White Paper issued by the government, supposedly on the basis of Berrill, rejected the idea of radical change in favour of minor reforms.<sup>77</sup>

Nevertheless, the Berrill Report was undoubtedly based on thorough research, being laced with tables, statistics and comparisons to analogous countries such as France, Germany and Italy. Some of its ideas, though rejected, were imaginative solutions to real problems. For example, fusing the Diplomatic and Home Civil Services, and creating a 'Foreign Service Group' within the new system, was designed to facilitate movement between the two services. This would ensure that officials overseas were better aware of how their work related to policies at home; it would also ensure that relevant experts, from a broad range of ministries, were available for service abroad. It was impossible to deny Berrill's argument that 'Membership of the European Community has given an overseas dimension to a wide range of policies which previously were largely domestic in nature.'<sup>78</sup> But the Plowden Report, too, had been aware of the need to exchange staff between the Diplomatic Service and home departments such as the Board of Trade, Treasury and Ministry of Defence. In contrast to Berrill, however, it hoped to secure this through the practice of secondments.<sup>79</sup> The Duncan Report also favoured a system of secondments. In fact, many points in Berrill had been raised in the earlier reports but it tended to take more radical approaches to addressing them. The idea that diplomatic staff should become more specialist in certain fields had, for example, been touched on by Duncan, which argued that 'professional generalists' were just what the FCO required: this was not 'a cult of the amateur', it was a reflection of the fact that the job had a diversity and a need for several skills, including languages, simultaneously. Then again, as the

<sup>75</sup> Hansard, *House of Lords Debates*, fifth series, vol. 387, cols. 853, 877 and 888.

<sup>76</sup> *House of Commons, Expenditure Committee, 4th Report, Defence and External Affairs Sub Committee, 1977 8* (London: HMSO, 1978), cxxiii cxxv.

<sup>77</sup> CMND 7308: *The United Kingdom's Overseas Representation* (London: HMSO, 1978).

<sup>78</sup> Berrill, 11.      <sup>79</sup> Plowden, 18 19.

challenges grew, Duncan acknowledged the impossibility of providing every diplomat with 'a bit of everything' and hoped for more 'selectivity' in career planning, so that individuals' skills were used to the best advantage.<sup>80</sup>

Duncan also considered the issue of the separation between the Diplomatic Service and the Home Civil Service, noting that a range of Whitehall departments were increasingly involved in overseas policy, not least in the 'Area of Concentration'. This was a widely recognised problem by the mid-1960s. Paul Gore-Booth had told Michael Stewart in 1965 that independent contacts with the US by the Treasury, Ministry of Defence and other Whitehall departments meant that 'views are exchanged and even decisions taken which have an important bearing on foreign policy without the Foreign Office being consulted or even informed'.<sup>81</sup> But it was doubtful if home civil servants would be active on a large scale beyond Washington and the EC, or that their careers would be so integrally involved in service overseas; besides, diplomats faced distinct pressures, being 'just as much on duty at home as they are in the office', so Duncan had no doubt the two Services should remain separate.<sup>82</sup>

The continuing closure of consulates, the creation of 'mini-missions' with as few as two staff (even smaller than the Duncan Report's 'selective missions'), establishing certain ambassadorial posts at the comparatively low level of principal, better training and improved co-ordination between Whitehall departments – all of these were developments that might have been pursued in any case thanks to financial pressures. Nevertheless, by stating them, Berrill may have encouraged such changes.<sup>83</sup> The approach taken by David Owen, as foreign secretary in 1976–9, was to introduce such developments gradually, minimising any references to the report.<sup>84</sup> For a balanced word on Berrill, one might note Ivor Lucas' judgement that 'many of its recommendations . . . commanded respect. But it ruined its case by exaggeration and by adopting the perverse doctrine that because Britain was not the power it had been the need for diplomacy on the scale we practised it was no longer necessary. The truth was precisely the contrary . . .' There would be no more reviews of this type. Yet when Margaret Thatcher set out to

<sup>80</sup> *Duncan*, 29–32.

<sup>81</sup> FO 953/2261/5, Gore Booth to Stewart (10 August 1965); and see Donald Cameron Watt, 'The Home Civil Service and the New Diplomacy', *Political Quarterly*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1967), 283–9.

<sup>82</sup> *Duncan*, 34.

<sup>83</sup> On the fate of the report, see: Blackstone and Plowden, *Think Tank*, 164–78; Peter Hennessy, *Whitehall* (New York: The Free Press, 1989), 266–73. Both have informed the points made above.

<sup>84</sup> David Owen, *Time to Declare* (London: Michael Joseph, 1991), 264.

recover Britain's position in the world a few years later, life was hardly any easier for the FCO. Instead it was a case of 'more diplomacy but fewer resources'.<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the creation of the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee in 1979 introduced a new and ever present source of investigation, while staffing policy fell under the watchful eye of the National Audit Office.<sup>86</sup>

### Conclusion

The main institutional changes to the diplomatic machine in the 1960s and 1970s were rational enough and, in retrospect, hard to fault. The main parties differed over where best to place the ODM: the Conservatives merged it into the FCO in 1970 only for Labour to separate it again four years later. However, this reflected the difficulty of treating a technical and administrative issue like development aid as part of diplomatic work. Nevertheless, by the late 1970s Britain had, in the words of one senior diplomat, 'a Foreign and Commonwealth Office under one senior Minister of Cabinet rank, the Foreign Secretary, housed for the most part in one building and acting as head office for a unified service'.<sup>87</sup> There was devil in the detail, with too many staff competing for the top posts, resentment between former FO and CRO staff, and the lack of a modern FCO building. But with the end of Empire and given the diverse nature of the Commonwealth, the merger of the CO, CRO and FO into a single ministry made perfect sense and the country's diplomats could soon feel part of a single team.

It is not possible to be so sanguine about the various reports on the FCO. It has been said that 'No other department in Whitehall has been subjected to so much scrutiny'<sup>88</sup> and in the 1960s and 1970s the quality of such scrutiny seems to have declined over time. Plowden was sympathetic to diplomats, took time to consider their purpose and roles, did not recommend spending cuts and was narrow in the focus of its reform proposals, most of which were put into effect. It might be faulted for failing to recommend a merger of the FO and CRO, but that came within five years anyway, partly because the report had made it look such a logical step. Duncan aroused unnecessary controversy with its talk of a world divided into two areas, but did its main job of suggesting suitable areas for cuts and was carried out at least in part. Berrill was sprawling in scale, negative in tone, unsympathetic to the diplomatic lifestyle and an

<sup>85</sup> Ivor Lucas, *A Road to Damascus* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1997), 234 5.

<sup>86</sup> Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 67 70.      <sup>87</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 5.

<sup>88</sup> Dickie, *Foreign Office*, 62.

embarrassment to those who launched it, even if it did point to some future advances.

If the three reports had a common theme it was in stressing trade promotion as a priority for British overseas representation, but this too has often been criticised, partly because it was felt to downgrade the diplomats' political role. Of course, diplomats were not expected to sell products themselves, but they were expected to provide support to exporters in the form of advice, expertise and the organisation of trade fairs. Ivor Lucas complained that Plowden, Duncan and Berrill 'brain-washed the Diplomatic Service into believing that trade promotion was the be-all and end-all of the modern diplomat's existence',<sup>89</sup> while William Wallace, in an academic analysis of the Berrill Report, wrote that in a globalised economy, 'Governments which successfully cultivate good relations, through ministerial visits, assiduous diplomacy, and even through cultural activities and the reputation of their news media, will stand to gain advantages . . .'.<sup>90</sup> Another academic, Michael Donelan, argued that the role of the Diplomatic Service was to negotiate with other governments about the regulation of trade, not to engage in the business itself.<sup>91</sup> A key example of where the obsession with trade could lead was Iran in 1978–9, when the fall of the shah ruined British investments and triggered decades of recurrent crises in the Persian Gulf. Certainly, Anthony Parsons, as ambassador to Tehran in 1974–9, by his own admission reorganised his embassy 'as an agency for the promotion of British exports and for the general commercial, financial and economic interests of Britain'. Yet Parsons rejected the argument that he focused on economics to the detriment of political analysis. He argued that the problem was not a lack of awareness of the shah's problems or the growing opposition to the regime. These were actually obvious. Rather, there was a failure to understand that the shah was out of touch with domestic realities and could not retain power through relying on the armed forces and secret police.<sup>92</sup>

In fact, a greater focus on commercial aims was hardly new. A Commercial Department had been created in the FO as far back as 1866 and in 1929, shortly before leaving the Diplomatic Service, Harold Nicolson feared that 'in a few years Embassies will be composed of trade

<sup>89</sup> Lucas, *Damascus*, 182.

<sup>90</sup> William Wallace, 'After Berrill: Whitehall and the management of British diplomacy', *International Affairs*, vol. 54, no. 2 (April 1978), 233.

<sup>91</sup> Michael Donelan, 'The Trade of Diplomacy', *International Affairs*, vol. 45, no. 4 (October 1969), 605–16.

<sup>92</sup> Anthony Parsons, *The Pride and the Fall: Iran 1974–1979* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1984), 37–40 and 133–43, quote from 40.

experts and labour experts . . . all drawn from places like the Treasury and Board of Trade and that the regular diplomatic staff will degenerate into mere clerks'.<sup>93</sup> The 1943 reforms had been intended to merge the diplomatic, consular and commercial roles in overseas work but were resisted by those who saw political reporting as the primary concern of the Diplomatic Service. But it would be a mistake to assume all diplomats disliked commercial work. Alan Munro, for example, felt that trade promotion carried prestige in the wake of the Duncan Report; he volunteered to work in the area, found it 'interesting, rewarding and congenial', and felt that in the 1970s it fitted the prime objective of foreign policy, maximising 'our trading position in the world rather than playing politics as we had in the past'.<sup>94</sup>

Even if one accepts that too much emphasis came to be placed on economics and trade in the 1970s, it is wrong to see Plowden, Duncan, even Berrill in too negative a light. At a time when Britain was pre-occupied with economic decline relative to its main competitors, it is not surprising that the diplomatic machine had to adjust to the twin pressures of spending restraint and improving the country's commercial performance with a reduction of posts, early retirements and a more managerial approach to diplomatic administration. But what is striking is that, alongside talk of decline and the importance of exports, all the reports were characterised by positive themes of the value of the Diplomatic Service in compensating for military retreat, the desirability of an interchange between the Diplomatic Service and home departments, and the need for diplomats to engage in more varied forms of activity, not just export promotion but working through multilateral organisations, protecting tourists, dealing with immigration, carrying out public diplomacy and the like. In doing this, the reports pointed out the many ways in which the environment for diplomats was changing, highlighting directions in which they must evolve, while recognising their continuing relevance. The end of Empire spelt the end for the Colonial Service but, as colonies became independent states, the Diplomatic Service found it had more posts to fill in their capitals. The retreat from East of Suez may have implied a military rundown but not necessarily a diplomatic one. Consulates bore the brunt of the reduction in posts following the Duncan Report yet, ironically, the rising volume of work with tourists and immigrants fell heavily on consular staff.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>93</sup> Norman Rose, *Harold Nicolson* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 161, quoting letter of 6 January 1929.

<sup>94</sup> BDOHP/Munro, 20 1.

<sup>95</sup> On this point, see John Dickie, *The British Consul* (London: Hurst, 2007), 115 23.

If the reports did have a basic problem it was one shared by many ministers, who had asked for the investigations to be launched in the first place. This was that so much energy was devoted to such a limited area within government with the intention, when it came to Duncan and Berrill, of achieving spending cuts. In fact, large amounts of money were automatically saved from adjusting to the realities of British imperial decline, simply through the military withdrawal from East of Suez in 1968–71. It might have been better to have accepted that and to have looked to minor changes, such as a reinvigorated process of inspection, to keep FCO costs under control. The Duncan Report acknowledged that ‘Overseas representation absorbs a tiny proportion of British government expenditure, almost exactly one per cent of the total . . .’ True, around 1969, it did account for about 10 per cent of the government’s foreign exchange expenditure, at £50 million, but foreign governments and international organisations were reckoned to spend an equivalent amount on their own representation in London, and total public expenditure was about £21 billion.<sup>96</sup> Indeed, it might be argued that, with colonies gone, naval and military forces withdrawn from East of Suez and the economy in tatters, it made sense to *invest* in the Diplomatic Service as the one means to preserve the security and wellbeing of Britain, a country more dependent on foreign trade than any other and therefore also more interested in maintaining a stable, peaceful world in which states co-operated with one another. Some senior figures were deeply aware of this. In October 1963 Patrick Dean, as ambassador to the UN, had written to Lord Plowden about ‘the need to maintain our political influence and economic standards not so much by the threat of military strength as by technical skill, persuasion and negotiation’.<sup>97</sup>

This was in fact a consistent theme of diplomats themselves. Michael Palliser told the 1977–8 Commons Select Committee that, in a world where interdependence was growing, one where Britain was ‘a good deal more dependent than in the past . . . on decisions taken in a much greater number of decision-making centres than before, we have to use all the influence and all the assets we have to further our objectives’. The Berrill Report itself had listed 126 international organisations of which Britain was a member and the Select Committee emphasised that Britain must project its influence through these as well as through bilateral relationships. Even if the Empire was no more, ‘there are still many parts of the world in which . . . political influence is required in order to protect Britain’s trade and investments, to say nothing of the

<sup>96</sup> *Duncan*, 9 11; PREM 15/304, Wright to Douglas Home (25 June 1970).

<sup>97</sup> FO 800/950, Dean to Plowden (29 May 1963).

persons of its businessmen and tourists'. The Select Committee came down on the side of the FCO, arguing that the future required 'the application of even greater effort and skill in the task of maximising British interests by non-economic and non-military means'. It considered the FCO had adapted to changed circumstances well in recent years, even in the face of a reduction in staff of 15 per cent since the Plowden Report, at a time when most Whitehall departments had expanded.<sup>98</sup> In contrast to such timeless arguments, Duncan and Berrill were too much prisoners of their own time. Peter Unwin pointed out that the future was not accurately predicted either by the Duncan Committee, with its desire to focus on relationships in the developed world, or Berrill, with its emphasis on the inevitability of British decline and its castigation of governments for failing to recognise this. Instead, by the late 1980s, Britain was resurgent and involved globally, with the 'Pacific Rim' the new region of opportunities for trade. The emphasis of the 1960s and 1970s on the need for Whitehall to promote overseas trade was, it soon transpired, part of an obsession with state intervention in economic life whose days were numbered.<sup>99</sup> The 1980s would see a refocusing on free market values, when diplomats would again have to adapt themselves to a new environment while carrying out their basic task of defending the country's interests abroad through representation, reporting and negotiation. Central to this work was the role of the ambassador, which is the focus of the [next chapter](#).

<sup>98</sup> *Expenditure Committee, Defence and External Affairs Sub Committee 1977* 8, xxv xxvii.

<sup>99</sup> BDOHP/Unwin, 28 9.



## 4 Resident ambassadors

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Above all things an Ambassador must endeavour to acquire great consideration, which is obtained by acting on every occasion like a good and just man; to have the reputation of being generous and sincere . . . and not to be regarded as a man who believes one thing and says another.

Niccolò Machiavelli

Machiavelli's advice, given to Raffaello Girolami on the latter's departure to become ambassador at the court of Charles V in Spain in October 1522, may seem odd in light of the Italian's reputation as an exponent of realpolitik, and it stands in sharp contrast to Henry Wotton's infamous description of an ambassador as 'an honest man sent to lie abroad for the good of his country';<sup>1</sup> but it is easily forgotten that the author of *The Prince*, like other great literary figures such as Geoffrey Chaucer and Philippe de Commynes, spent part of his career as a diplomat and knew that envoys could not build success on the back of dishonesty. Humphrey Trevelyan, one of Britain's most successful post-war ambassadors, emphasised to junior staff the need for honesty in dealings with both their own government and those to which they were accredited; any diplomat who tried to fool others would soon forfeit their respect and lose their confidence.<sup>2</sup> Truth was also the first of the seven qualities Harold Nicolson wanted to see in his 'ideal diplomatist', the others being accuracy, calm, patience, good temper, modesty and loyalty. Even Paul Gore-Booth, who rose to be permanent under-secretary, felt it difficult to live up to such a demanding list.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, this list did not even touch on some of the more practical pressures on those with ambassadorial ambitions: the need to master foreign languages, spend

<sup>1</sup> Machiavelli quoted in G. R. Berridge, *Diplomatic Classics: Selected texts from Commynes to Vattel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 41; Wotton in Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 44.

<sup>2</sup> British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Wood interview, 5.

<sup>3</sup> Nicolson, *Diplomacy*, 126; Paul Gore Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect* (London: Constable, 1974), 400.

half one's career abroad, cope with inhospitable climates, understand alien cultures or deal with dictatorial regimes. But in the twentieth century, ambassadors faced far more challenges than living up to Nicolson's ideal – the very institution was called into question.

### **An endangered species?**

There was a lively debate in the 1970s and 1980s about the purpose of permanent embassies, given the many changes in the way diplomacy was conducted. In the past, an ambassador could find himself weeks away from contact with his capital, caught up in a crisis in which he (and invariably it was a 'he'), as the 'man on the spot', could effectively commit the country to war. The foremost example was Stratford de Redcliffe, three times British ambassador to Constantinople (Istanbul), who was there at the outbreak of the Crimean War.<sup>4</sup> In 1914, high-level diplomatic contacts still focused on what Nicolson called the 'professional freemasonry' of ambassadors, who, while representing rival nations, 'possessed complete confidence in each other's probity and discretion'.<sup>5</sup> Half a century later the situation was very different. True, the 'diplomatic corps' was still alive and well, with diplomats from different embassies feeling part of a unique profession, conducting business with each other on a daily basis and mixing socially at ceremonies and dinner parties, but its position as the key institution of modern diplomacy was seriously challenged. The prime minister and foreign secretary now met regularly with their opposite numbers or talked to them on the telephone. As the Duncan Report highlighted, it might be more economic for home-based diplomats to travel abroad for meetings. The government could discover vast amounts about world affairs from newspapers and television, no longer needing to rely as much on embassies for news of everyday events. They might also iron out problems with many other countries simultaneously, through international organisations. Sometimes embassies became a dangerous liability, as was brought home to Americans with the seizure of their Tehran embassy in 1979. The British experienced similar humiliations. In the mid-1960s embassies in Cambodia, Indonesia and Beijing were attacked by rioters. In 1970 the trade commissioner in Montreal, Jasper Cross, was kidnapped by Quebec separatists and only three months later the

<sup>4</sup> G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (first edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 27–8.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Nicolson, *The Evolution of Diplomatic Method* (University of Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1998, reproducing the 1954 edition), 74–5.

ambassador to Montevideo, Geoffrey Jackson, was seized by guerrillas. Worse, in 1976 Christopher Ewart-Biggs, the ambassador to Dublin, was assassinated by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

The existence of the ambassador was called into question by some leading figures in the world of diplomacy. In 1970 Zbigniew Brzezinski, later to become Jimmy Carter's national security adviser, wrote an article under the blunt title 'The Diplomat is an Anachronism',<sup>6</sup> while George Ball, under-secretary of state to Kennedy and Johnson, wrote in 1982 that 'jet planes and telephones . . . now largely restricted ambassadors to ritual and public relations'.<sup>7</sup> Such claims were not as novel as they appeared. Even in the mid-nineteenth century, as the telegraph provided a means of rapid communication between London and the world's periphery, questions were raised about the need for embassies. Early in the twentieth century, one British diplomat complained that 'In Downing Street one can at least pull the wires whereas an Ambassador is only a d. . . d marionette'.<sup>8</sup> But the dangers to the survival of the ambassador as a species had become more obvious. When Henry Kissinger visited London in May 1973, he caused bemusement among British officials by asking them not to give to either the US embassy or the State Department details of what he said. For Kissinger, diplomatic strategy was best kept away from the professionals.<sup>9</sup> Neither was the ambassador likely to find much sympathy from the general public, the prevailing image being of an elitist, upper-class male, in a secure, well-paid job, given to wearing ornate outfits, attending an endless round of receptions and being over-sympathetic to foreigners.

So how did the resident ambassador survive the challenges of the twentieth century? Why, especially in times of economic retrenchment and military-imperial decline, did Britain still invest in a global network of embassies? In part the persistence of the permanent embassy may be linked to the role of diplomacy in the international system. Those who take a 'constructivist' approach argue that states 'construct' their identity from interacting with one another. The ambassador symbolises the way in which states recognise one another's existence and, as states have grown in number since 1945, so the number of embassies has grown for

<sup>6</sup> *Washington Post* (5 July 1970). I am grateful to Geoffrey Berridge for pointing out this source. See also G.R. Berridge, 'The Resident Ambassador: A death postponed', *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, no. 1 (University of Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1994), 1–3.

<sup>7</sup> George Ball, *The Past Has Another Pattern* (New York: Norton, 1982), 452.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Bertie in a letter of 1904, quoted in Peter Neville, 'Neville Henderson and Basil Newton', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 10, nos. 2–3 (1999), 271.

<sup>9</sup> Cecil King, *The Cecil King Diary, 1970–1974* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), 287, quoting a senior civil servant.

all countries. Also, with increasing multilateral links and the interplay of international and domestic politics, 'diplomats are called upon to mediate some of the complex processes that make up modern life'.<sup>10</sup> Thus, as well as their symbolic role in representing the existence of the state as an international player, embassies and ambassadors have a functional purpose; that is, they serve a practical and useful role. Against the words of Brzezinski and Ball, one might note the argument of veteran US diplomat Philip Habib that rather than becoming redundant, the role of the ambassador has changed, but it is still significant: 'in this modern world, it isn't sufficient to say that the diplomat is the representative of the sovereign to another sovereign . . . In many ways you represent the interests of your nation as well as the policies of the government that you may be serving . . .', so the embassy has numerous sections that deal with trade, economics, public information and cultural promotion, as well as political reporting and such mundane consular duties as issuing visas and protecting individual citizens.<sup>11</sup> The sections may change as new factors – the environment, terrorism, drugs – assume greater importance, but the point is that embassies continue to be the means for dealing with the challenge, because they fulfil some basic functions.

These basic functions were summarised in Article 3 of the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations: representing one state in another state; 'protecting in the receiving state the interests of the sending State and of its nationals'; negotiating agreements; reporting on 'conditions and developments' in the receiving state; and 'promoting friendly relations' between states.<sup>12</sup> The promotion of 'friendly relations' may seem an idealistic view of the intentions of officials employed to protect their country's interests. But, like Machiavelli's recommendation that ambassadors should be truthful, the promotion of friendliness can be the most effective way to achieve general ends. Geoffrey Berridge has explained the survival of the permanent embassy by looking at the functional criteria set out in the Vienna Convention and illustrating how they cannot properly be fulfilled by other means. In terms of representation, it may be that prime ministers wish to attend some important ceremony, as when Douglas-Home went to Kennedy's funeral in 1963, but this leaves plenty of other occasions for

<sup>10</sup> Robert Wolfe, 'Still Lying Abroad? On the institution of the resident ambassador', *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, no. 33 (University of Leicester: Centre for the Study of Diplomacy, 1998), 9–10 and 27–8.

<sup>11</sup> Habib interview (14 May 1982), *Conversations with History Series* (Berkeley: Institute of International Studies, University of California, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> The convention is reproduced in Berridge and James, *Dictionary*, 257–68.

ambassadors to attend. Such roles as the protection of individual citizens, the provision of consular services and the promotion of 'friendly relations' would all be very difficult without an embassy. Negotiations, even if carried out by a special envoy, require preparation and follow-up, which is best done at local level. Reporting may be done, to an extent, by the media, but journalists are only interested in certain types of story, their concern with most items is transitory and they do not have access to the high quality of information about the top level of foreign governments that professional diplomats have. To these roles, Berridge adds that embassies are also useful in clarifying the intentions of other governments, providing policy advice on the basis of local knowledge and pursuing public diplomacy, even if much of the last role is handled, in the British case, by the BBC and the British Council. Above all, the resident embassy is a flexible institution, able to take on new roles even as it loses others.<sup>13</sup>

As seen in the [previous chapter](#), negotiation, reporting and other functions of embassies are important aims of a country's overseas representation effort. The Plowden, Duncan and Berrill reports, while sometimes critical of established practice, certainly did not see the permanent ambassador as redundant. They saw that the role was evolving and that the shape of embassies had to alter to meet new challenges, such as the management of foreign aid, tourism and immigration. At times they even made a general case 'for' the existence of resident ambassadors. One section of the 1964 Plowden Report is worth quoting at length:

although the frequency with which Ministers now travel abroad may take away some of the prestige of the role of an Ambassador, there are many posts throughout the world which Ministers have to visit only rarely. In any case, these visits do not reduce the need for an Ambassador or the burden and importance of his work. The necessity for him to be in touch with local personalities and sources of informed opinion is all the greater because reliable advice is required from him much more quickly and on a vastly increased range of subjects. An Ambassador may still have to make rapid decisions without instructions. The tempo of foreign affairs has quickened as the sphere of governmental activity has widened.<sup>14</sup>

This, of course, is an answer to the point that embassies have been made less significant by more frequent ministerial visits, and it is possible to

<sup>13</sup> Berridge, 'Resident Ambassador', 3 20. See also, Kishan Rana, *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador: Plenipotentiary to chief executive* (Malta: DiploFoundation, 2004), 76 95.

<sup>14</sup> CMND 2276: *Report of the Committee on Representational Services Overseas, 1962 3* (London: HMSO, 1964), 6.

expand upon the argument. Not only are flying visits from ministers no substitute for ambassadors, ministerial visits *need* embassies in order to work well. The two institutions should not be seen simply as competitors, one evolving to the other's detriment, but as being in a fruitful relationship. As Peter Hall, a retired diplomat, has argued, ministers would not be able to arrange meetings, understand the local political and economic situation or get advanced information on personalities, opportunities and dangers, unless an embassy were there to help. This is not to say that ministerial visits lack value or that ministers cannot prove able negotiators,<sup>15</sup> but they cannot master all the minutiae of the many problems and personalities that foreign affairs throw up, often involving different languages and cultures. The argument that one-off visits (or special missions) and permanent embassies have evolved fruitfully together over the last century will be developed in the next chapter.

A similar point can be made about multilateral organisations. Looking at Britain and its key European neighbours, like France, Germany and Italy, many discussions and agreements were able to be carried out in the mid-1970s through multilateral structures like the EC, NATO and the UN. There can be no doubt that this impacted on permanent embassies, reducing their significance in some ways. Ivor Lucas, who served in Copenhagen in 1972–5, felt that once Britain and Denmark joined the EC, 'the Embassy tended to be on the sidelines'; while Martin Morland, posted to Italy, found that 'It was all done in Brussels, more and more. So Rome [was] a little bit of a backwater'.<sup>16</sup> But three points may be noted illustrating that, while the workload may have been reduced in some areas, especially political work in the member capitals, EC entry increased it in others. First, while high-level political work had declined, it was still essential to retain the embassy, and not just for bilateral work. Oliver Wright, in Bonn in the mid-1970s, found that London now wanted reports about the German position on any issue being discussed by the EC so that, when it came to multilateral talks, 'work in the capitals, although it is only a small segment, is absolutely crucial'. Second, it was not just within the Europe theatre that entry to the EC impacted on embassy work. Donald Maitland, as ambassador to the UN in 1973–4, found himself working closely with other EC representatives, especially his French counterpart on the Security Council, so that they could find a common stance.<sup>17</sup> Finally, EC entry created one significant

<sup>15</sup> BDOHP/Hall, 24 and 39–40.

<sup>16</sup> BDOHP/Lucas, 29 and /Morland, 16; and see Nicholas Henderson, *Mandarin: The diaries of Nicholas Henderson* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 243–4.

<sup>17</sup> BDOHP/Wright, 20–1 and /Maitland, 22–3.

new post, the permanent representative's office, which will be discussed more fully below. So, while the pattern of work was changing, the volume was not necessarily decreasing overall. Instead, new opportunities were being created for diplomats.

Of course, not all diplomatic posts fulfil the same functions. There is no 'typical' embassy. Embassies in the important capitals like Paris or Washington will have multiple roles, carried out in a relatively comfortable and secure environment. Small posts in the less developed world are a world away from such privileges. In South America and Africa, embassy staff may be in an isolated, even vulnerable position, cross-cultural understanding is more difficult and the job may concentrate on consular services and trade promotion. Work in closed societies, where staff are followed by the secret police, and restricted in where they can go and where premises are 'bugged', creates different stresses from allied democracies, where there is an endless round of social commitments, visitors to greet and journeys to make.<sup>18</sup> As ambassador to Moscow in the mid-sixties, Humphrey Trevelyan found the Soviets to be time-wasting, propagandistic and deliberately misleading in their dealings, which made it difficult to deduce what their underlying intentions were.<sup>19</sup> Sometimes the pressures proved too much: in August 1968 Trevelyan's successor, Geoffrey Harrison, was caught in a KGB 'honey trap', becoming involved with a Russian chambermaid and forced to resign.<sup>20</sup> Yet, even behind the Iron Curtain, diplomats felt they were fulfilling a useful role. John Colvin, sent to be ambassador to Mongolia in 1971, hoped to provide a 'visible witness . . . of a different civilisation', to challenge Soviet misrepresentations of British policy, to observe Sino-Soviet tensions and (in line with the Plowden and Duncan reports) to develop British trade.<sup>21</sup> This chapter will now look at a selection of six ambassadors in the period 1963–76 as case studies, demonstrating both the significance and the diversity of their role and showing what functions they fulfilled. The selection includes embassies in Europe and the developing world, both professional and political appointees, some in bilateral relationships and some posted to multilateral organisations.

<sup>18</sup> On the problems of operating behind the 'Iron Curtain' see, for example: Humphrey Trevelyan, *Worlds Apart: China, 1953–5; Soviet Union, 1962–5* (London: Macmillan, 1971) on his ambassadorship in Moscow; Cecil Parrott, *The Serpent and the Nightingale* (London: Faber and Faber, 1977) on Czechoslovakia; and John Colvin, *Twice around the World* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991) on North Vietnam and Mongolia.

<sup>19</sup> Humphrey Trevelyan, *Diplomatic Channels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 80 and 91–7.

<sup>20</sup> Christopher Meyer, *DC Confidential* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 46–7.

<sup>21</sup> Colvin, *Twice*, 162.

Two of the selection served in a single embassy, Paris, but had radically different experiences there.

### **‘Man on the spot’: David Hunt in Nigeria, 1967–1969**

It has already been noted that in the nineteenth century the ambassador, as the ‘man on the spot’, had a striking degree of independence from London. Yet the contrast with more recent decades is not necessarily as stark as it seems. On one hand, the number of ambassadors, like Stratford de Redcliffe, who could start a major war was always small. On the other, even in the 1960s it was possible, in certain circumstances, for diplomats to find themselves with the power to commit British military forces. As acting high commissioner to Tanzania in January 1964, for example, Stephen Miles became caught up in an army mutiny that threatened to turn into a coup. Discovering President Julius Nyerere in his beach hut, Miles was able to point out the proximity of a British carrier group on exercises in the Indian Ocean. On reflection Nyerere, though no lover of the Empire, agreed to call on the Royal Navy’s help and the mutiny was quickly put down. Miles could reflect that he had, perhaps, prevented a bloodbath.<sup>22</sup> Aside from issues of war and peace, at the fag end of Empire it was also still possible for British diplomats to run another country’s foreign and defence policy, as Anthony Parsons experienced when he was posted as political agent<sup>23</sup> to Bahrain, one of Britain’s protectorates in the Persian Gulf.<sup>24</sup> True, such positions were becoming rarer, but there was always the possibility, in any post, that a high-ranking diplomat could be called upon to make rapid decisions and that the line he took could commit London to a policy other individuals may not have chosen. The key example in these years was David Hunt, high commissioner<sup>25</sup> to Nigeria in 1967–9, the time when civil war broke out over ‘Biafran’ secession.

<sup>22</sup> BDOHP/Miles, 14–15.

<sup>23</sup> A political agent was appointed by the British to handle relations with local rulers, who retained an element of autonomy under the Empire. These rulers included the sheikhs of the Persian Gulf protectorates, such as Bahrain. When these sheikhdoms became independent, the political agency became an embassy.

<sup>24</sup> BDOHP/Parsons, 8–9.

<sup>25</sup> The post of high commissioner is effectively the same as ambassador, the key difference being that the former is appointed to, or by, Commonwealth countries. However, high commissioners may be treated differently from ambassadors on certain occasions. For example, when the Queen holds diplomatic receptions during state visits, she receives high commissioners first. They have preferential seating arrangements at other royal events and receive more invitations to events like Buckingham Palace garden parties. High commissioners from the Queen’s realms receive even more privileged treatment, including an informal audience with her soon after their arrival. See Lorna Lloyd,



Nigeria, one of the largest African countries, gained its independence from Britain in 1960 as a federal state, but contained deep ethnic, religious and geographical divisions. Half the population was in the Muslim north, the south-west included the then-capital, Lagos, while the south-east (which became 'Biafra') was tropical jungle, dominated by the Igbo people and rich in oil. In January 1966, after months of anti-Igbo violence in the north, the government was overthrown in a bloody coup led by mainly Igbo, middle-ranking officers. But in July 1966 another coup brought Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon, the army chief of staff, to power. Although a northerner, he was a Christian from a minority group, who hoped to hold the country together through constitutional reform. In September, however, there was further violence in the north. Thousands of Igbos were killed and the military governor of the eastern region, Lieutenant Colonel Chukwuemeka Ojukwu, emerged as the potential leader of a breakaway Igbo state.

This was obviously a delicate situation, with no clear rights and wrongs. Hunt's predecessor as high commissioner, Francis Cumming-Bruce, had fully understood the Igbo fears about military coercion. Especially after the 'northern massacres', he was keen that a compromise should be struck with Ojukwu, criticising Gowon as 'a decent and straight chap . . . not up to his responsibilities'.<sup>26</sup> But, arriving at a pivotal point in February 1967, Hunt quickly adopted a pro-Federal stance and seemed determined to keep policy in his own hands as far as possible. Having previously served in Nigeria as deputy high commissioner in 1960–2, with two successful high commissionerships behind him, in Uganda and Cyprus, Hunt was confident in his own abilities and in his reading of the situation. He actually arrived with instructions to urge negotiations on Gowon and avoid firm promises of British support. But in his first meeting with Ojukwu, in mid-March, Hunt made clear his opposition to secession.<sup>27</sup> He argued against any peace mission by Britain or the Commonwealth since this could only be seen as implying concessions to Ojukwu. As the situation neared civil war, Hunt even opposed any appeal from London to Gowon to refrain from using force. This would be tantamount to allowing secession, the high commissioner

*Diplomacy with a Difference: The Commonwealth office of high commissioner* (Leiden: Brill, 2007).

<sup>26</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, PREM 13/1041, Cumming Bruce to James (1 October 1966).

<sup>27</sup> David Hunt, *On the Spot: An ambassador remembers* (London: Peter Davies, 1975), 168, 172 3, 177 9; PREM 13/1661, Ojukwu to Wilson (16 March 1967). For an alternative account by Hunt of his high commissionership, see: 'Diplomatic Aspects of the Nigerian Civil War', in *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 3, no. 1 (1992), 5 22.

argued, blaming the crisis on Ojukwu's personal ambition rather than any genuine Igbo desire for independence.<sup>28</sup> Then, after war broke out in July 1967, despite the feeling in the Commonwealth Relations Office that Britain should play a neutral role, Hunt consistently urged London to supply the Federal forces with arms.<sup>29</sup>

Despite Biafra being reduced within months to an isolated enclave, the war dragged on and by mid-1968 serious public concern was growing in Britain, not least because of stories of mass starvation in Biafra; but Hunt was opposed to any compromise. When, in December, the idea was raised of a British minister visiting the enclave to talk to Ojukwu, Hunt warned that such a step would upset most African countries, few of which wanted secession to succeed for fear of the precedent it would set.<sup>30</sup> By then the situation was more dangerous for Hunt's policy than he knew. Not only were the British planning to talk to the rebel leader, but Wilson himself, worried about rising Cabinet opposition to his support for a united Nigeria, was thinking of acting as the emissary to Ojukwu. In conversation with Stewart, the prime minister now blamed Hunt for having provided one-sided advice. Others felt the same. The defence secretary, Denis Healey, complained to the Cabinet in March 1969 that 'the Joint Intelligence Committee's assessment of the military situation had been very different from that of our High Commissioner in Lagos which had been consistently optimistic'.<sup>31</sup> That month, the permanent under-secretary of the FCO, Denis Greenhill, went to Nigeria to persuade Gowon of the need for Wilson to visit Lagos.<sup>32</sup> But Biafran intransigence helped Hunt triumph. When Wilson made clear his desire to meet Ojukwu, a reluctant Gowon agreed, but the Biafrans, perhaps suspecting a trap, refused. So the prime ministerial visit to Nigeria merely served to highlight British links to the Federal government. Wilson and Gowon got on unexpectedly well and, in retrospect, Hunt 'felt that this very successful visit set the seal on our endeavours of the past two years . . .'<sup>33</sup> When he left Lagos a few

<sup>28</sup> CAB 128/42, CC(67)33, 35 and 37, 30 May, 1 and 8 June; PREM 13/1661, Lagos to CRO (11 April, 12 June 1967).

<sup>29</sup> PREM 13/1662, Lagos to CRO (14 July 1967); PREM 13/2260, Lagos to FCO (28 October 1968).

<sup>30</sup> PREM 13/2261, Lagos to FCO (4 December), and see /2817, Lagos to FCO (26 December 1968).

<sup>31</sup> PREM 13/2261, 'Possible Peace Initiative' (8 December), and Palliser to Maitland (9 December 1968); Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-70* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 617.

<sup>32</sup> PREM 13/2817, FCO to Lagos (8 March), and Lagos to FO (10 March 1969).

<sup>33</sup> Hunt, *Spot*, 199 (including quote); CAB 128/44, CC15(69), 3 April; PREM 13/2820, Hunt to Tebbit (5 April), and Hunt to Stewart (10 April 1969).

months later, British policy remained on the course he had set. Without Hunt's dogged support the Federal forces, who finally overran Biafra in January 1970, might have found British support more lukewarm in the early stages, less willing to play the role of Nigeria's chief arms supplier and more likely to urge a negotiated settlement.

### **Adjusting to realities: John Freeman in India, 1965–1968**

John Freeman was another high commissioner who coped with armed conflict, though he deserves to be remembered more for steering British policy towards a 'normal' relationship with one of its most important former imperial possessions, India. Freeman was a political appointee, a close ally of the prime minister who had made his name as editor of the *New Statesman*. In some ways he followed the policy of his predecessor, Paul Gore-Booth, who left New Delhi in early 1965 to become permanent under-secretary of the FO. As high commissioner since 1960, Gore-Booth had already sought to develop a relaxed relationship with India,<sup>34</sup> but this was not easy to achieve. While Labour was proud of having given India independence and believed it had special ties to the sub-continent, Indian leaders had a very different perspective. Although India received a substantial amount of British aid and was a key member of the Commonwealth, it was a country determined to distance itself from anything that smacked of colonialism and had adopted a non-aligned foreign policy. But these were not the only reasons why Freeman's first year in India proved a troubled one. He had hardly arrived before border skirmishes broke out with Pakistan in the disputed salt marshes called the Rann of Kutch. In April 1965 Harold Wilson put forward a scheme for a ceasefire, to be followed by talks, which Freeman pressed on the Indians. But the depth of suspicion was highlighted by Indian premier Lal Shastri's denial that the border was even in dispute. Freeman was careful to work closely with the high commissioner to Pakistan, Morrice James, in putting further pressure on both sides. Although it proved impossible to get a formal ceasefire, by late May the CRO judged that the immediate danger was passed, simply because the wet season had arrived, flooding the marshland.<sup>35</sup> 'We have succeeded, thanks to your patient negotiations,' Freeman was told, 'in removing the immediate danger.'<sup>36</sup> The Commonwealth leaders' meeting in London in June provided Wilson with the opportunity to see

<sup>34</sup> Gore Booth, *Great Truth*, 262–321. <sup>35</sup> PREM 13/391, *passim*.

<sup>36</sup> PREM 13/392, CRO to New Delhi (22 May 1965).

both Shastri and Pakistan's Ayub Khan, leading to talks on a permanent settlement.<sup>37</sup>

However, as one problem was removed, another, worse conflict broke out. The Rann of Kutch dispute had stirred up Indo-Pakistani tensions in Kashmir, where armed clashes occurred in August. This time, in contrast to Wilson's success at the Commonwealth meeting, an intervention from Downing Street provoked major difficulties that would overshadow Freeman's whole time in New Delhi. Both Freeman and Morrice James agreed that there would be no quick solution to the war since both sides were determined to demonstrate their strength.<sup>38</sup> But on 6 September, Wilson issued a statement calling for a ceasefire, in which he accused the Indians of crossing an internationally recognised part of the frontier. Freeman felt 'obliged' to warn that an appeal for a ceasefire at this point would 'be useless and might even serve to weaken any influence we might be able to exert a little later'.<sup>39</sup> But the statement was already public and Freeman soon warned that 'our relations with India have reached a point of crisis'; New Delhi would look to the US and USSR, rather than Britain, to settle the current dispute. He proved correct. On 21 September, the day that a ceasefire took effect, the Indians made clear they wanted the Soviets to mediate a settlement.<sup>40</sup> This led to an agreement in Tashkent in January 1966 on a return to the pre-war status quo. Freeman, still pursuing his moderate course, argued it was important for Britain to express public satisfaction over the result.<sup>41</sup>

With the war over, Freeman could focus on removing past resentments and building a post-imperial relationship with New Delhi. But the unwelcome developments that had troubled him since his arrival were not yet over. At the end of the Tashkent conference, Shastri died suddenly. His successor was Indira Gandhi, daughter of one of the champions of Indian independence, Jawaharlal Nehru. Freeman found that 'before one can really get through to her, one has not only, as it were, to squeeze her hand, but also to dress up in her political clothes. Since her most deep-seated neuroses . . . concern Britain, this is not always a course which can be commended to H[er] M[ajesty's] High

<sup>37</sup> PREM 13/392, *passim* (15 June to 3 July 1965).

<sup>38</sup> PREM 13/393, Rawalpindi to CRO (4 September), and New Delhi to CRO (5 September 1965).

<sup>39</sup> PREM 13/393, Downing Street statement, Hughes to Wilson, and New Delhi to CRO (all 6 September 1965).

<sup>40</sup> PREM 13/394, Shastri to Wilson (10 September), and New Delhi to CRO (16 and 17 September 1965).

<sup>41</sup> PREM 13/972, New Delhi to CRO (12 January 1966).

Commissioner.<sup>42</sup> Freeman feared that anti-colonialist feeling, linked to declining Indian loyalty to the Commonwealth, opened the danger of them leaving the Commonwealth if they were not handled properly.<sup>43</sup> In April 1966 the logic of his approach became clear when Wilson, who had a weakness for despatching special envoys in dramatic fashion, offered to send Jennie Lee, a minister and old friend of Indira Gandhi, to New Delhi to improve relations. But Freeman scotched the idea. Future ties with India, he warned, would be pragmatic not nostalgic; it was important to be realistic about this.<sup>44</sup> The following year saw no marked improvement in bilateral relations, but perhaps this was inevitable given the patient, pragmatic course Freeman set. In May 1967 he was forced to wait weeks for half an hour's unfruitful meeting with Gandhi. She agreed that bilateral relations had recovered somewhat since September 1965, but complained that Britain still seemed to want to build up Pakistan as a balance to India. Freeman denied this: British policy was aimed at improving Indo-Pakistani relations. For his part, the high commissioner also complained about the vitriolic tone with which India portrayed British colonial policy, at which Gandhi candidly remarked: 'I suppose the truth is that we think of everything in a different way to you. We just don't see eye to eye.'<sup>45</sup>

Meanwhile, Wilson too showed signs of accepting realities about the British-Indian relationship. In mid-1966 he was forced to cancel a planned visit to the sub-continent because of a financial crisis in the UK. Pressure from Freeman, backed by Commonwealth Secretary Bert Bowden, to revive the idea of a visit in May 1967 raised the prime minister's comment that he was 'allergic to going'. He never did go to India as premier.<sup>46</sup> However disappointing this seemed, it may have helped Freeman's balanced approach, which emerged most clearly in his valedictory telegram of June 1968. This pointed out the decline in bilateral links as Britain withdrew from the Indian Ocean, the British community in India shrank and visible trade between the two declined, but it also noted the scale of British investments in India, its future potential as a market and the interest in maintaining it as a stable, non-communist state. He advocated a policy of 'detached friendliness' in which Britain acknowledged its reduced capacity to influence Indian affairs, pursued its own national interest there, distanced itself from Indo-Pakistani differences and made only muted reference to

<sup>42</sup> PREM 13/1574, Freeman to Garner (14 July 1967).

<sup>43</sup> PREM 13/2160, Freeman to Garner (30 August 1966). <sup>44</sup> PREM 13/967, *passim*.

<sup>45</sup> PREM 13/1574, Freeman to Bowden (25 May 1967).

<sup>46</sup> PREM 13/2306, *passim*, quote from Wilson's handwritten minute on Palliser to Wilson (20 May 1967).

Commonwealth ties, while continuing to recognise that it did have a stake in the future of the country, with an active programme of arms sales and development aid. Freeman's achievement in India may seem limited – he certainly could not claim to have held his post in a time of peace, close friendship or even smooth relations – but he had coped calmly with a number of challenges, he went on to fill an even more eminent post, as ambassador to Washington in 1968–71, and colleagues had no doubt that his high commissionership was a success. Peter Hall, a second secretary in New Delhi, saw that 'the remarkable thing about John Freeman was that he recognised . . . and I think got London to understand . . . that although we had colossal ties with India . . . it was literally a foreign country'.<sup>47</sup>

### Patrick Reilly as ambassador to Paris, 1965–1968

Whatever problems he faced, Freeman had his policy accepted in London. An example of what can happen when ministers ignore the advice of ambassadors is provided by Patrick Reilly, who fell foul of George Brown during the 'second try' to enter the European Community. Brown was a convinced 'pro-marketeer', confident he could circumvent President de Gaulle and carry Britain into the European Community. Paris was always of central importance to his strategy, but Brown never seemed to trust Reilly, despite the latter's impeccable credentials. He had served in Paris on two earlier occasions and had already held one top ambassadorial post, Moscow, in 1957–60. Offended by the late arrival of his official car when he visited Paris in 1966, the explosive foreign secretary revealed his own view of the purpose of an ambassador: 'Your job is simply to see that my car is available when I want it. I do everything that is important here.'<sup>48</sup> Later he told Lady Reilly, during a formal dinner, that she was not fit to be an ambassadress, an insult that soon found its way into the press.<sup>49</sup> Brown was a volatile character and at times he revealed his better side, praising Reilly fulsomely for his entertainment and advice.<sup>50</sup> But the insults were not easily forgotten and, more importantly, the two persistently differed over diplomatic tactics.

<sup>47</sup> PREM 13/2158, Freeman to Stewart (21 June 1968); BDOHP/Hall, 12 13.

<sup>48</sup> Helen Parr, *Britain's Policy towards the European Community: Harold Wilson and Britain's world role, 1964 1967* (London: Routledge, 2005), 109.

<sup>49</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford, Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6874, Reilly to Gore Booth (20 December 1966).

<sup>50</sup> Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6873, Brown to Reilly (17 December 1966 and 25 January 1967).

Throughout the second try, in the face of Brown's optimism, Reilly urged caution. When Brown met de Gaulle in December 1966, the general argued that Britain was too Atlanticist, a global trading power, likely to alter the Community's character if it became a member. Reilly saw this as confirmation that de Gaulle was deeply sceptical about a British application and hoped to discourage one,<sup>51</sup> but Brown returned with Wilson in January 1967 still pressing for a way forward. De Gaulle avoided any mention of a veto at this point, but Reilly still concluded that he wanted to keep the British out.<sup>52</sup> It was not that Reilly was entirely negative about British entry to Europe, far from it; in contrast to many analysts, Reilly did *not* believe that de Gaulle would exclude Britain from the Community forever. The ambassador had told Michael Stewart in June 1966 that the general probably felt her membership was inevitable in the long term, though he was in no hurry to see it.<sup>53</sup> That was a key element in Reilly's analysis. In September 1967, after Britain tabled a second application for entry, he told Brown that time was on Britain's side; with support for enlargement growing around Europe, all that was needed was patience. But Brown was not a patient man: he not only said that he wanted to be inside the Community within two years, he also instructed the ambassador not to be negative about prospects for entry in his telegrams. This request placed the ambassador in a difficult position, effectively asking him not to tell the truth as he saw it.<sup>54</sup> Yet Reilly now sensed 'increasing evidence that we may be subjected to an outright veto in the near future' and although he was uncertain when the veto would come,<sup>55</sup> his basic judgement was sound. In November the second try finally ran into the wall; not that this helped Reilly: in March 1969 it was abruptly announced that Christopher Soames would be taking over.<sup>56</sup>

Reilly could not help believing that his ambassadorship had ended in disappointment.<sup>57</sup> However, Lord Chalfont, the minister for Europe, wrote to him, regretting the way he had been treated, praising his

<sup>51</sup> PREM 13/1475, record of meeting (16 December), and Reilly to Brown (22 December 1966).

<sup>52</sup> PREM 13/1476, records of meetings (24–5 January), and Paris to FO (26 January 1967).

<sup>53</sup> PREM 13/1509, Reilly to Stewart (22 June 1966). On Reilly's position, see also: PREM 13/910, Paris to FO (14 November 1966); /1475, Reilly to Brown (22 December 1966 and 4 January 1967); and /1506, Paris to FO (5 October 1967).

<sup>54</sup> Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6925, 'The Paris Embassy' (unpublished memoir), 207–8.

<sup>55</sup> PREM 13/1486, Reilly to Brown (26 October 1967).

<sup>56</sup> Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6874, Gore Booth to Reilly (22 December 1967), and reply (4 January 1968).

<sup>57</sup> Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6875, Reilly to Gore Booth (26 February and 3 May 1968), and see 6925, 'Paris Embassy', 24–5.

patience and admiring the soundness of his advice, which was usually right.<sup>58</sup> Some historians have argued that the second British application proved a 'successful failure' in that, despite the veto, it became clear that London would continue pressing for entry and that membership was only a matter of time.<sup>59</sup> In fact the idea that Britain would get what it wanted by sheer persistence was mooted well before the veto and Reilly's tactics were simply a variation on the theme. He wanted London to accept that de Gaulle had doubts in the short term but to work on changing the general's perceptions, making it clear that Britain would keep on pressing for membership.<sup>60</sup> The main point was not to force him into a corner. 'I fear', Reilly wrote in June 1967, 'that if a decision were forced on him in, say, the next six months, it is virtually certain to be one to prevent or end the negotiations.'<sup>61</sup> Alan Campbell, the head of chancery in Paris in 1967, considered Reilly to be 'an exceptionally clever and experienced observer of the French scene' and argued that Wilson and Brown should have listened to the ambassador's argument, accepting that, while de Gaulle was in office, it was best to maintain Britain's interest in Community membership while not making a formal application.<sup>62</sup> That way, Britain would have gained the advantage of making entry seem inevitable without the humiliation of the second veto.

### **Christopher Soames as ambassador to Paris, 1968–1972**

Alongside John Freeman, Harold Wilson's second high-profile 'political' appointment to a top embassy was Christopher Soames. But in contrast to Freeman, with his left-wing credentials, Soames was a former Conservative MP, married to one of Churchill's daughters. As minister of agriculture he had played an important role in Macmillan's bid to enter the EC and had maintained good links with the French leadership since. For George Brown, who felt that the Paris embassy under Reilly was 'totally out of touch with what was really going on' in French politics, Soames was also attractive because, in order to re-establish itself as a

<sup>58</sup> Reilly papers, Ms. Eng. c. 6873, Chalfont to Reilly (20 March 1968).

<sup>59</sup> This is the thesis of: Parr, *Britain's Policy*; and Piers Ludlow, 'A Short term Defeat: The Community institutions and the second British application', in Oliver Daddow, ed., *Harold Wilson and European Integration: Britain's second application to join the EEC* (London: Cass, 2003).

<sup>60</sup> PREM 13/1473, Paris to FO (26 April), /1479, Reilly to Mulley (20 April), and /1486, Reilly to Gore Booth (19 October 1967).

<sup>61</sup> PREM 13/1483, Reilly to Gore Booth (28 June 1967).

<sup>62</sup> Alan Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1988), 69 and see 75.



social centre, the embassy needed 'a man with some money'.<sup>63</sup> Soames agreed to take up the post in January 1968, after Wilson and Brown made clear that they would not be deflected from seeking EC membership.<sup>64</sup> He took up his post in September 1968, arriving with his family and a good supply of wine. 'It was clear', recalled one official, that he 'intended to make a considerable splash on the social scene'.<sup>65</sup>

The mission hardly began with promise: in November the new ambassador was diagnosed with heart trouble;<sup>66</sup> then came the 'Soames Affair'. On 4 February 1969, de Gaulle met the ambassador and suddenly suggested that France and Britain might look bilaterally at the future of Europe, the hint being that there could be some alternative to the EC. But in London this stirred deep suspicion. It would clearly be embarrassing if the other five members of the EC, all of whom were sympathetic to British entry, discovered that London and Paris were engaged in secret talks about the Community's future. On 10 February Wilson and Stewart decided to tell German chancellor Kurt Kiesinger what was afoot. He and Wilson were due to meet a few days later and, again, it would be embarrassing if de Gaulle's proposal was not mentioned but the chancellor subsequently learnt of it. Soames asked if he could warn the French foreign minister about this, but Stewart feared the French would object to Kiesinger's being told, so Paris was only notified of the approach to Kiesinger on the day of his summit with Wilson.<sup>67</sup> Then the whole story began to leak to the media; de Gaulle was livid. The 'Soames Affair' made Franco-British relations worse than they had ever been under Reilly and, just as bad from the ambassador's viewpoint, undermined that essential ingredient of trust between him and the French government. But, in a remarkable twist of fortune, the situation changed when, on 28 April 1969, de Gaulle suddenly resigned. It was unclear at first what attitude his successor, Georges Pompidou, would take towards EC enlargement but a hopeful sign was his appointment of Maurice Schumann as foreign minister. Soames was keen to build close relations with him, not only because of his position, but also because he was 'a genuine Anglophile in a country where the species is relatively rare'.<sup>68</sup> In early October the European Commission

<sup>63</sup> George Brown, *In my Way* (London: Gollancz, 1971), 132 3.

<sup>64</sup> PREM 13/2641, Soames to Brown and Wilson (21 February 1968); Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Soames papers, SOAM 49/2, note on appointment (28 March 1968). I am grateful to Lady Soames for permission to consult these papers.

<sup>65</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 71 2 and 75; and see BDOHP/Derek Thomas, 25 7.

<sup>66</sup> PREM 13/2641, Gore Booth to Private Secretary (25 November 1968).

<sup>67</sup> The key documents are in PREM 13/2628 and /2629.

<sup>68</sup> PREM 13/3208, Soames to Stewart (21 January 1970).

recommended that enlargement talks begin and on 1–2 December an EC summit in The Hague agreed on this. By the time negotiations opened on 30 June 1970, the Conservatives were back in office.

Thereafter, the ‘crucial relationship’ for Soames in Paris proved to be not Schumann, but Pompidou’s trusted *chef de cabinet*, Michel Jobert. They created a ‘back-channel’ between the Elysée Palace and Downing Street that often kept their respective foreign ministries in the dark. Derek Thomas, made financial counsellor to Paris in 1971, recalled that Soames ‘would go along to the Elysee, often once or twice a day, and he would be constantly on the telephone to Jobert, maintaining confidence, discussing a whole range of issues that were important to the negotiations’.<sup>69</sup> The issues which Soames dealt with during the entry negotiations were often highly technical, including the market for sugar, the future position of sterling, animal health and fisheries.<sup>70</sup> Most important, perhaps, he did much to set up the all-important Paris summit between Heath and Pompidou. In early 1971, he reported to London on how popular this idea seemed to be with French officials, he began to discuss the possibility in talks with Jobert in February and, in early March, after seeing Heath, secured a general understanding that such a meeting would occur. After that, he continued to make detailed arrangements with Jobert.<sup>71</sup> Despite proving a breakthrough, the summit of 20–21 May did not remove every problem. In particular, there was deep concern over French criticism of the role of sterling as a ‘reserve’ currency. Soames was forced to hold a series of meetings with Jobert in late May and early June, before the French effectively accepted the British position, that sterling was not a problem, at a meeting in Brussels on 7 June.<sup>72</sup> Soames discussed other problems on a bilateral level, including a deal on New Zealand dairy produce and community financing.<sup>73</sup> London turned to him again in early December 1971 after a meeting in Brussels about fishing limits went very badly, sparking fears that France was bent on obstructing a deal. The ambassador took a leading role in discussions with French officials until a deal was hammered out.<sup>74</sup>

In writing his encyclopaedic report on the EC entry negotiations, Con O’Neill wrote of ‘the major part played’ by Soames who, ‘because the position of France was so central to the outcome . . . play[ed] a very much bigger part than any other ambassador’. The fact that the formal entry negotiations took place in Brussels did not put the Paris embassy in

<sup>69</sup> BDOHP/Derek Thomas, 26.

<sup>70</sup> See, for example, Con O’Neill, *Britain’s Entry into the European Community: Report on the negotiations of 1970–1972* (London: Cass, 2000), 123, 125, 217.

<sup>71</sup> O’Neill, *Report*, 333 6. <sup>72</sup> O’Neill, *Report*, 135 8. <sup>73</sup> O’Neill, *Report*, 162, 217.

<sup>74</sup> O’Neill, *Report*, 275 7.

the cold. Helped by his easy access to ministers, Soames ‘played an indispensable part’, not only in setting up the May 1971 summit, ‘but in the settlements we reached on each one of the major issues . . .’ In November 1972, when Soames left Paris to become one of Britain’s first EC commissioners, his deputy, Christopher Ewart-Biggs, made a farewell speech in which he underlined links between different forms of diplomatic activity. Referring to an EC summit in Paris a few weeks before, he remarked: ‘We have been up to the Summit. Our man Mr. Heath stuck his axe in up there with the best of them . . . But one doesn’t reach the Summit without a base camp. The base camp was this Embassy.’<sup>75</sup>

### Lord Caradon at the UN, 1964–1970

A striking feature of diplomatic life after 1945 was the creation of many new posts. This was largely a by-product of ‘decolonisation’ and the growing number of independent states, but there were other reasons. One was the relaxation of the Cold War in the 1970s; in 1974, for example, Curtis Keeble was sent to establish an embassy in East Germany, whose existence had only now been recognised by the Western powers.<sup>76</sup> Another factor was the appointment of ambassadors to international organisations, including the UN.<sup>77</sup> During the 1964 election Labour emphasised the need to take the UN more seriously, and one of Wilson’s innovations was to give ministerial rank to Hugh Foot, the new ambassador to the UN. He was also translated to the House of Lords, taking the title Lord Caradon. He seemed an ideal choice for a post that was always likely to be preoccupied with the problems of post-colonialism and which demanded an understanding of other cultures. The brother of the left-wing Labour MP and future party leader Michael Foot, Hugh had long been in the Colonial Service, but as a liberal who wanted to smooth the way of colonies to independence. He had twice served as a governor and had handled difficult situations in Palestine and Cyprus. Despite appearing as a ‘political’ appointee, therefore, he brought professional experience to the job. Those who worked with him also found him ‘a delightful man . . . with a nice wit’ who was ‘greatly liked and respected’ by fellow delegates.<sup>78</sup> Emotional

<sup>75</sup> O’Neill, *Report*, 331; Jane Ewart Biggs, *Pay, Pack and Follow* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 161.

<sup>76</sup> BDOHP, memoir by Curtis Keeble, 54 7; and see James Reeve, *Cocktails, Crises and Cockroaches* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1999), 202 24 on the creation of the embassy.

<sup>77</sup> In general, on the ‘multilateral ambassador’ see Rana, *Ambassador*, chapter 4.

<sup>78</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 61 2.

and idiosyncratic he may have been, and 'not always wholly practical', but he was 'fun to work with' and an accomplished orator, the last a valuable asset in New York.<sup>79</sup>

Whatever his personal beliefs, Caradon could not escape the fact that he represented a country that had recently possessed the world's largest empire and which, even as it divested its colonies, was regularly put 'in the dock' in New York by the Soviet bloc and the rising number of Third World members. The UN might embody hopes of a liberal world order, but in the 1960s it was anything but a united body. The Security Council was crippled by Cold War divisions, the General Assembly frequently reduced to a talk-shop. Alan Campbell, counsellor at the British Mission in 1961–5, later recalled that ex-imperial European powers 'took turns at being the most unpopular boy in class'; it was 'no use having representatives there who cared about personal popularity'. Caradon had expected to carry real weight in New York, maybe even to act as a guiding light for newly independent states, and it was disappointing to find that they were determined above all to avoid such a patronising relationship.<sup>80</sup> According to one of his staff, he was particularly disillusioned at first by the double standards of the Afro-Asian bloc over a US–Belgian mission to free hostages in the Congo. Britain allowed its air base on Ascension Island to be used for the rescue, seeing this as a 'humanitarian' act, only to be caught up in criticism of 'imperialist' behaviour.<sup>81</sup> When Caradon arrived in New York, he also suffered because he had expected, given his ministerial rank, to be granted a level of independence that the FO would not concede. In fact, his job was no different from that of his predecessors and he was expected to follow instructions from the foreign secretary.<sup>82</sup> The result was a series of frustrations, as Caradon felt that his own policy preferences were ignored. The blame should fall on Wilson, who had been happy to raise the UN post's standing, with ministerial rank and a seat in the Lords, but had not been prepared to let the incumbent have real independence. Indeed, given the sensitivity of issues before the UN and their truly global profile, London was especially careful to set limits on what Caradon could do.

It did not help that, finding himself unable to press Britain's case on the Afro-Asian nations, he often turned to urging their policy preferences on Britain. This was clearest on Rhodesia, perhaps the most difficult issue he had to face. 'He . . . feared all the time that the government, including Wilson, was going to sell out to Smith', recalled

<sup>79</sup> BDOHP/Acland, 14 15.

<sup>80</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 51 and 62.

<sup>81</sup> BDOHP/Acland, 15 16.

<sup>82</sup> Campbell, *Colleagues*, 61 2.

one of Caradon's officials; 'he got very agitated about this, because he felt Smith had to be faced down'.<sup>83</sup> In December 1965 Caradon wrote a personal letter to Michael Stewart arguing that British policy in southern Africa could break up the Commonwealth, and in June 1966 he wrote to Wilson, in even more lurid terms, arguing that recognition of the Smith regime would bring 'a division of the world on racial issues with all the Africans and . . . Asians and the Russians (and the Communist Chinese too) on one side and the Western powers on the other, with a break-up of the multiracial Commonwealth'.<sup>84</sup> Later, he became agitated over British policy in the Middle East, feeling it lacking in urgency and too closely aligned with Israel. Just a few months before Labour lost office, he threatened to resign over this.<sup>85</sup> Caradon's unhappy experience suggested that, in New York at least, it might be better to have a professional diplomat in place, someone who would not be so bruised by the attacks of the Africans and Asians. But, leaving the point of personalities to one side, there is no doubt that this was an important post in which it was essential to have an able, resilient individual to defend the British position on such vexed questions as colonialism, racial tension and economic development, and who was there when any crisis came before the Security Council, such as the June 1967 Arab–Israeli war, which paved the way for Caradon's most effective diplomacy.

In the immediate aftermath of the Israeli victory, Caradon was pessimistic, fearing 'there is no hope of using the United Nations as a forum . . . for constructive negotiations'. The Soviet and American ambassadors were not even talking to one another. But the FO still saw the UN as a vital forum for contacts;<sup>86</sup> Indeed, given the Arab refusal to recognise Israel, it was the obvious place for all sides to become involved. At an early stage, Caradon recognised that it was essential to secure a clear Israeli commitment to withdraw from the territories it had occupied, but believed it possible to compromise on questions of timing and method.<sup>87</sup> The foreign secretary, George Brown, arrived to speak at a special session of the General Assembly. After his visit, the focus was on securing a resolution that could provide the basis for a settlement. At first, the British favoured a Latin American draft that called on Israel to withdraw from all the conquered territories in return for an end to

<sup>83</sup> BDOHP/Acland, 14.

<sup>84</sup> UKNA, FCO 73/9, Caradon to Stewart (23 December 1965); Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Stewart papers, STWT 9/5/4, Caradon to Wilson (3 June 1966).

<sup>85</sup> FCO 73/5, Luard to Stewart (3 February 1970); and see /26, Caradon to Stewart (28 October 1969).

<sup>86</sup> PREM 13/1621, New York to FO and reply (11–12 June 1967).

<sup>87</sup> PREM 13/1621, New York to FO (12 June 1967).

belligerency in the region (thus guaranteeing that Israel could live in peace), but this became bogged down. Meanwhile, London was deeply concerned about the closure of the Suez Canal, which threatened Britain's overseas trade.<sup>88</sup>

By late July, it seemed that Britain itself would have to make the running to achieve a resolution, though Caradon was instructed to proceed through private talks at first.<sup>89</sup> Over the following two months the ambassador steered a difficult course, keeping in close contact with his US and Soviet counterparts and discussing a possible draft, but progress was painfully slow and any British attempt to force the issue risked upsetting Israel. Another mission by Brown in late September failed to break through the morass. But in mid-November Caradon finally tabled his own draft, securing its passage on the 16th as Resolution 242, with both Israel and Egypt expressing themselves content.<sup>90</sup> The key to its success, apart from considerable efforts behind the scenes and Caradon's ability to work with all sides, was its compromise on the crucial point of withdrawal. While calling for the Israelis to withdraw, it set neither a timetable nor even a precise territorial definition of what should be given back. In Cabinet, Brown praised Caradon's achievement, pointing out that this was Britain's first effective diplomatic initiative on a major international conflict for some time.<sup>91</sup> Whatever his weaknesses as ambassador, he had scored a major success and it is to his credit that, despite considerable personal frustrations, he held onto his post until Labour was defeated in 1970.

### Michael Palliser at the EC, 1973–1975

One result of the move to EC membership was the creation of new and, for the British, unusual diplomatic appointments. One was that of 'political director' in the FCO, who supervised those FCO departments working on Community questions and met monthly with the political directors of other members.<sup>92</sup> Another, of great significance for any discussion of the role of ambassadors, was the UK permanent representative (UKRep) in Brussels, whose role was similar to that of the ambassador to the UN, acting as a lynchpin between Whitehall and a key international organisation.<sup>93</sup> In January 1972, when the Treaty of

<sup>88</sup> PREM 13/1622, *passim*. <sup>89</sup> PREM 13/1622, FO to Washington (28 July 1967).

<sup>90</sup> PREM 13/1623 and 1624, *passim*.

<sup>91</sup> UKNA, CAB 128/42, CC(67)68 (24 November 1967).

<sup>92</sup> See Campbell, *Colleagues*, 112–18 for an account by the post holder in 1975–6.

<sup>93</sup> Alasdair Blair, 'Permanent Representations to the European Union', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2001), 139–58.

Accession was signed, Heath wrote that the ‘choice of people to serve in our Permanent Delegation and in the Commission . . . is one of the most important tasks for this year . . . [If] we get it right, that will do more than anything else could to ensure that we make a success of going in to Europe’. It was essential to avoid the twin dangers that ambitious civil servants would see Brussels as some kind of backwater or that permanent secretaries would see it as a dumping ground for difficult colleagues.<sup>94</sup> Having struggled so long to bring Britain into the EC, and being so determined to make a success of membership, Heath wanted the delegation to include the best minds Whitehall could provide.

As the first British permanent representative, Michael Palliser had to develop ways of operating effectively within the EC, weld together a diverse range of civil servants and set the stage for later representatives to follow. His credentials for the post could hardly have been stronger, even if he had not been the son-in-law of the Belgian statesman Paul-Henri Spaak, one of the ‘fathers of Europe’. Not only had Palliser served as private secretary to Harold Wilson (1966–9) and deputy to Christopher Soames in Paris (1969–71), he had then become ambassador to the EC, supporting the British team that negotiated entry. In January 1972 he found that he ‘was to all intents and purposes already a Permanent Representative’, even if that title was only formally bestowed twelve months later, when membership formally took effect. In particular, he was able to attend meetings of the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) of member states.<sup>95</sup> Despite, or perhaps because of, its low public profile, this body had become one of the most influential in the EC, discussing issues before they went up to the Council of Ministers. In the maze of bodies that made up the Community, almost all important questions came before COREPER. It was the place where many technical and political problems were resolved, so that the Council of Ministers was not overwhelmed by business. Given the central importance of this role, permanent representatives had to be well informed about developments in Brussels, adept at working with their fellow representatives and closely involved in the evolution of their own country’s policies. They had somehow to combine a pursuit of national interests with a *communautaire* outlook and, since no votes were taken in COREPER, an approach to decision-making based on consensus.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>94</sup> PREM 15/876, Heath to Armstrong (31 January 1972).

<sup>95</sup> Michael Palliser, contribution to Anand Menon, ed., ‘Britain and European Integration: The view from within’, *Political Quarterly*, vol. 75, no. 3 (2004), 288–9.

<sup>96</sup> See especially J. W. de Zwann, *The Permanent Representatives Committee* (Amsterdam: Elsevier, 1975), and the essays by H. Kassim in H. Kassim *et al.*, *The National Co-ordination of EU Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Given the range of issues involved, the diversity of cultures and languages within the EC, and the 'equal' strength of such members as France, Germany or Italy, it was an enormous challenge, even for experienced diplomats, to make the system work. The difficulties were more complex than in other multilateral organisations of which Britain was part: NATO dealt with a much narrower range of issues relating to defence; the Commonwealth lacked any body equivalent to COREPER; and neither these two organisations nor the UN had the supranational element that characterised the EC. But Palliser found something occurring that was similar to the emergence of the 'diplomatic corps' in any capital city, though perhaps more intense. Through working together closely and regularly, with such an essential role in decision-making, the permanent representatives came to feel an affinity with one another: 'There was a shared ambition to achieve agreement, if that was possible, in recognition of a shared interest in doing so. There was a remarkable lack of any animosity and a readiness to help . . . a colleague who had difficult instructions to carry out.' This sense of shared purpose contrasted with the political arguments that sometimes blew up in the Council of Ministers.<sup>97</sup>

Rodric Braithwaite, who went to UKRep as head of chancery in 1975, noted that a considerable burden fell on the permanent representative himself in dealings with London, the Commission and other missions in Brussels. It was vital, too, that Palliser could win the loyalty of all his staff, whichever Whitehall department had sent them, so that they functioned as a single unit vis-à-vis the EC.<sup>98</sup> The 'Office of the UK Representative' immediately proved to be very different from other embassies. Almost half its staff came from departments outside the FCO, including senior staff, and they were from a broad range of ministries in Whitehall. Among its high-fliers, Palliser's team included a number of future permanent secretaries from different departments. Problems were caused by different Whitehall departments sending separate instructions to their 'own' staff in Brussels but these could generally be reconciled via a co-ordinating meeting held every Friday in the Cabinet Office, which Palliser attended.<sup>99</sup> The permanent representative's role demanded a team of able officials. The EC dealt with such a range of issues that no individual could master them all and the pressure of work on COREPER was such that many minor disagreements had to be resolved without reaching the permanent representatives. It was important, then, that the highly able Palliser 'ran a very friendly but a very effective mission' even if

<sup>97</sup> Palliser in Menon, 'European Integration', 290.

<sup>98</sup> BDOHP/Braithwaite, 9 10. <sup>99</sup> Palliser in Menon, 'European Integration', 289 90.



he took the lead in debates with the representatives, injecting a degree of theatre into his arguments that those schooled in public argument, as continental bureaucrats usually were, readily appreciated.<sup>100</sup> It was partly because of such diverse challenges that the post was best suited to a career diplomat, rather than a political appointee. Palliser's staff considered themselves, in the words of one of them, to be 'the shock troops' of Britain's diplomatic presence in the Community, making sure that decisions were taken in line with UK interests, acclimatising the rest of Whitehall to dealing with Brussels and mastering the process of creating EC legislation.<sup>101</sup>

Potentially grave problems were created in 1974 when Labour returned to power and insisted on 'renegotiating' Heath's membership terms, but Palliser himself won the full confidence of the new government. Bernard Donoughue, senior policy adviser at Number 10, was very impressed by Palliser's performance: he had 'carried the burden of renegotiations in Brussels more than anybody else . . . Not an intellectual genius, but impressively powerful, well-balanced and sensible . . . His capacity for work is staggering.'<sup>102</sup> It was little surprise in 1975 that Callaghan brought Palliser, 'all energy, drive and enthusiasm', to London to become permanent under-secretary, making his new office central to policy-making in the FCO and holding it until 1982.<sup>103</sup> He was succeeded in Brussels by another leading professional diplomat, Donald Maitland, who had been private secretary to the foreign secretary and press secretary to the prime minister.<sup>104</sup> All subsequent permanent representatives to the EU have been of similar calibre, generally with considerable prior experience of European affairs.<sup>105</sup>

## Conclusion

It might be objected that the above are six exceptional cases in which ambassadors only had a major role because they were political figures or their postings happened to coincide with particularly significant developments. Certainly, in contrast to the US Foreign Service, political appointments to British ambassadorships are rare, tending to be in the top posts where political weight and close connections to the prime minister are most valuable. The FCO controls most appointments and

<sup>100</sup> BDOHP/Hall, 21.      <sup>101</sup> BDOHP/Weston, 20 1.

<sup>102</sup> Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 399.

<sup>103</sup> BDOHP/Kerr, 11.

<sup>104</sup> On his period, see Donald Maitland, *Diverse Times, Sundry Places* (Brighton: Alpha Press, 1996), chapter 17.

<sup>105</sup> See Menon, 'European Integration', 309 15.

the British diplomat's career could be planned through a progression of posts up to ambassadorial level. So Freeman, Soames and Caradon were rare animals in a sense. It also has to be conceded that Hunt and Freeman were unusual in having to deal with wars and that a survey of all embassies in this period would uncover some which faced far fewer challenges. One diplomat, working in Kuwait in the mid-1970s, recalled that 'nothing much happened really. Just . . . managing this really quite nice relationship.'<sup>106</sup> Situations where 'nothing much happened' included certain multilateral negotiations, supposedly one of the threats to the position of the traditional ambassador. One diplomat, posted to Geneva for the Non-Proliferation Treaty negotiations in the mid-1960s, found 'a fair amount of enforced idleness . . .'; the ambassador and his staff therefore had plenty of time for tennis.<sup>107</sup> But the important point is that the *potential* for problems was always there. Kuwait was a major holder of sterling and a major oil exporter, at the centre of a volatile region – as events in the 1990s would show – and talks on the Non-Proliferation Treaty did pick up, leading to agreement in 1968. In neither case would it have been wise to close the mission, and the FCO Inspectorate was there to ensure that, over the long term, posts were of an appropriate size for the work involved. Ivor Lucas, posted to South Yemen after its independence from Britain in 1968, discovered 'there was not really enough to do', but this was because a planned British aid programme fell through; staff numbers were subsequently reduced.<sup>108</sup>

In any case, it would easily be possible to expand on examples of embassies facing real challenges, given sufficient space. In the early 1970s the high commission in Uganda had to deal with the violent and irrational Idi Amin, coping in August–September 1972 with his expulsion of 24,000 Asians holding British passports. Forty extra staff had to be flown in to help. This was followed by the expulsion of the high commissioner and the imprisonment of numerous British citizens during a reign of terror.<sup>109</sup> Even apparently humble posts could sometimes generate excitement and significance. In 1974, Harry Brind was posted to the Indian Ocean state of Mauritius, a sparsely populated archipelago. Two years later it hosted a summit of the Organisation of African Unity, where its prime minister, Seewoosagur Ramgoolam, was elected chair of the organisation and Brind was able to talk to the UN secretary-general, Kurt Waldheim, about a crisis that suddenly blew up over British

<sup>106</sup> BDOHP/Lamb, 24.   <sup>107</sup> BDOHP/Morland, 9.

<sup>108</sup> Ivor Lucas, *A Road to Damascus* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1997), 93.

<sup>109</sup> Harry Brind, *Lying Abroad* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1999), chapter 4.

mercenaries captured in Angola.<sup>110</sup> Then there was the Washington embassy, the largest British diplomatic post in the world, central not only to the 'special relationship' on a political level, but also to intelligence and defence co-operation. In contrast to the mini-missions that Berrill helped encourage, Washington was a vast empire. Unsurprisingly, it had a high proportion of political appointees, including Lord Harlech (1961–5), who became a close friend of John Kennedy, John Freeman (1969–71), who established close relations with Kissinger, and a former governor of the Bank of England, Lord Cromer (1971–3).<sup>111</sup>

Nevertheless, the main point about the case studies here is that they demonstrate the continuing relevance of ambassadors in a range of situations, in crises and conflicts, conducting bilateral relations, making policy recommendations, dealing with foreign opinion, setting up new posts or handling complicated negotiations. Their experience confirms that, with British interests so widespread and complex, in numerous countries and through a broad range of international organisations, it was essential to have an efficient, permanent and large diplomatic service. They also confirm the diversity of the ambassador's job and, in the case of Paris, how this could change even in the same post within a few years. The examples have not been chosen to reflect particular successes: Caradon gave thought to resignation, while Reilly always believed he had failed in his last post; but no-one suggested that an embassy to the UN or Paris was an irrelevance. It is also clear that, despite all the changes going on in the world of diplomacy, and despite the principle that the ambassador is there to execute policy rather than to decide it, Hunt, Freeman, Soames and Palliser were more than 'damned marionettes'. They had a real impact on the efficiency of policy-making and sometimes in setting it. Nor can they be accused of having little to do; Soames and Palliser in particular became involved in long-lasting and ever challenging negotiations. Anthony Parsons once argued that the main result of improved technology during his career was an increase in paperwork, not less of it. Technology could not replace the need for professionals 'on the spot', reporting on foreign regimes, their stability and friendliness to Britain, even if those professionals were sometimes ignored.<sup>112</sup> Swifter communications, ministerial visits, the growth of

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*, 140 1.

<sup>111</sup> The careers of these will be discussed in Michael F. Hopkins, Saul Kelly and John W. Young, eds., *The Washington Embassy, 1939–77* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, forthcoming).

<sup>112</sup> BDOHP/Parsons, 26. For another defence of the continuing relevance of ambassadors, see William Hayter, *A Double Life* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1974), 166–79.

international organisations and the need to deal with public opinion did not make ambassadors irrelevant; instead, they presented the resident embassy with new challenges. Over the following chapters the argument will be developed that, in fact, these newer elements were thriving, not as competitors for the traditional embassy but as mutual beneficiaries in a general expansion of diplomatic activity.

## 5 Special missions

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Sent to the Lands of Dawn on an envoy's duty  
To weave, for the sake of all, a tranquil work of peace

Maximianus

Maximianus wrote his poem around the year 500 AD, not in celebration of his diplomatic efforts, but in regret over a love affair while in the imperial capital, Constantinople. His example nonetheless serves as a warning of the dangers that might face envoys: at that time they lost their divinely protected status if they committed adultery.<sup>1</sup> In the ancient and medieval periods permanent embassies to another country were unknown, unless one counts the long stays of papal representatives in Constantinople. One-off, special missions were the norm, the envoys often travelling great distances through dangerous territory, sometimes taking months to report back, all of which made diplomatic exchanges a slow business. Only in the wake of Italian innovations during the fifteenth century did the 'resident embassy' become an essential feature of diplomacy. It brought certain advantages over special missions. Permanent ambassadors could collect much fuller information on countries in which they were based, mastering the local language and customs, familiarising themselves with the workings of government and building relationships with key individuals. Resident ambassadors were also better placed to react to sudden changes of circumstance (such as war, the death of a leader or a change of regime), to represent their own government at ceremonies, to propagandise and, of course, to provide consular services or support for merchants, all factors which, as seen in the [previous chapter](#), have allowed embassies to thrive down to the twenty-first century. Much of the literature on diplomatic representation in the modern period has therefore focused on the institution of the resident embassy, generally treated as the 'normal' way of conducting diplomatic business. When the use of special envoys revived in the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Andrew Gillett, *Envoys and Political Communication in the Late Antique West* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), 27 and see 244.

twentieth century, one British ambassador could even dismiss them as 'a bad American habit'.<sup>2</sup>

In fact, however, the special mission has never disappeared from the scene. Even in Europe around 1700, when resident embassies had become widespread, 'Ceremonial embassies might still occur . . . and special, one-purpose missions to make peace remained common.'<sup>3</sup> In 1969 the UN drew up a 'Convention on Special Missions'. This took a similar approach to the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, being based on the belief that diplomatic privileges are best justified 'because they permit the effective execution of diplomatic functions' like communication, negotiation, reporting and protecting national interests. Thus the Convention, which came into force in 1985, allowed special missions to continue even when diplomatic and consular relations were broken; indeed they could be sent at any time, by mutual consent, whether diplomatic relations existed or not. The special mission was defined as 'a temporary mission, representing the State, which is sent by one State to another State with the consent of the latter for the purpose of dealing with it on specific questions or of performing in relation to it a specific task'. It could be sent to more than one state, could include diplomatic and support staff as well as a head of mission, and the head could be a head of state or government, a foreign minister or any other individual. The Convention was particularly flexible about the functions of a special mission, which should simply 'be determined by the mutual consent of the sending and receiving State'.<sup>4</sup> Most obviously, special missions are a necessity for diplomatic exchanges where states do not have permanent representatives in each other's capital. While the US, Britain and a few other privileged states may be able to afford a global array of diplomatic posts, some less developed countries have to survive with a handful of embassies. But even where permanent ambassadors exist, it can still make sense to send special missions, led by high-status figures.

The use of special envoys has been described as 'a distinctive feature of American style' going back to Woodrow Wilson's employment of Colonel Edward House during the First World War.<sup>5</sup> By then, modern communications meant that such individuals could travel widely,

<sup>2</sup> Humphrey Trevelyan, *Diplomatic Channels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 71.

<sup>3</sup> Keith Hamilton and Richard Langhorne, *The Practice of Diplomacy: Its evolution, theory and administration* (London: Routledge, 1995), 63 4.

<sup>4</sup> United Nations, *Treaty Series*, vol. 1400, Convention on Special Missions, 8 December 1969, Article 1a. See also G. R. Berridge and Alan James, *A Dictionary of Diplomacy* (first edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 98 and 225.

<sup>5</sup> R. P. Barston, *Modern Diplomacy* (third edition, London: Longman, 2006), 71.

quickly and safely, in ways that those in Maximianus' time could not. A generation later, Franklin Roosevelt, with his deep distrust of the State Department, was well known for sending special envoys, such as Harry Hopkins and Averell Harriman, to deal with Churchill and Stalin. For the US, the attraction of a special envoy is that they can circumvent the bureaucracy, emphasise the president's own role in foreign policy and be specifically selected for a particular mission. Their employment is extremely flexible: they can be sent at any time, anywhere in the world, on short missions or ones lasting years, to specific destinations or on roving commissions; they may be private citizens, members of Congress or from the administration, even including the vice-president; they can travel openly or in secret, with detailed instructions or a general brief. Simply because they are known to come directly from the president, and may sometimes be close acquaintances of his, they can carry greater weight with recipients, be trusted with secret messages and take a different perspective from career diplomats. But for these same reasons they are likely to be resented by professional diplomats, who feel undermined and undervalued in the process.

As Henry Wriston, one of the few academics to study them, has noted: 'The special envoy is not an American institution but a universal practice.'<sup>6</sup> The British, too, often made use of it in the twentieth century. Sometimes the local embassy, however large it may be, is unable to cope with the scale of a particular task or the expertise required: thus the British sent Lord Keynes to head a team that negotiated a large loan from Washington after the Second World War. Special envoys may also be useful in mediation attempts, as when Lord Runciman travelled to Czechoslovakia in 1938 to try to settle the Sudeten German problem. Yet, while accounts exist of such individual missions, there has been no full systematic study of the survival of the special envoy as a diplomatic institution or of its use in British practice. In this chapter the phenomenon of the special mission will be treated in a broad sense, that is, any kind of temporary or one-off mission; the contrast will be principally with permanent embassies. Of course, using this broad definition, prime ministerial visits are part of the equation, but the 'summit' meetings in which prime ministers engage have been so important to diplomacy since 1919 that they are dealt with separately.

<sup>6</sup> Henry Wriston, 'The Special Envoy', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 38, no. 2 (1959-60), 219-37, quote from 219. Unfortunately, his essay is now dated and there are few other studies, although see Michael Fullilove, 'Special Faith and Confidence: Franklin D. Roosevelt's personal envoys and the war in Europe, 1939-41' (DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2004).

### Foreign secretaries

The involvement of foreign ministers in the everyday tasks of diplomacy – representing their country, receiving representations from foreign diplomats, corresponding and negotiating with other governments – is far from a recent phenomenon. Lord Castlereagh's participation in a series of congresses after 1815 is evidence enough of that. Such activity is not, nowadays, seen as impinging on the position of the career diplomat, but it is an example of the use of special missions to achieve diplomatic ends and its present-day intensity is more novel than the Castlereagh example suggests. Even at the height of Empire, foreign secretaries could expect face-to-face dealings with foreign representatives mainly to involve ambassadors based in London. There were few overseas visits. Edward Grey was foreign secretary for several years before even venturing over to Paris in 1913; and this was to visit a friendly power on Britain's doorstep. The First World War and the creation of the League of Nations made journeys abroad more regular. The July 1914 crisis had shown that diplomacy was too serious a business to leave to unelected professionals. The First World War bred the need for frequent cross-Channel consultations, while the subsequent creation of the League of Nations forced inter-war foreign secretaries to make regular visits to the organisation's headquarters in Geneva, and the dawn of air transport made it possible to travel longer distances more rapidly.

The professionals were quick to point out flaws in the 'new' diplomacy. In 1935, when the Hoare–Laval Pact was concocted in Paris, it drew widespread condemnation. Harold Nicolson argued: 'It is a terrible mistake to conduct negotiations between Foreign Ministers . . . I should like it to be a rule of the Constitution of this land that the Foreign Secretary . . . cannot leave this country without a vote of both Houses of Parliament. Diplomacy is not the art of conversation. It is the art of the exchange of documents in a considered and precise form . . .' Nicolson accepted that it might sometimes be necessary for the foreign secretary or prime minister to attend conferences, but in his view repeated visits were a menace:

The time at the disposal of these visitors is not always sufficient to allow for patience and calm deliberation. The honours which are paid to a minister in a foreign capital may tire his physique, excite his vanity, or bewilder his judgment. His desire not to offend his host may lead him, with lamentable results, to avoid raising unpalatable questions or to be imprecise regarding acute points of controversy. Nor is he always able on his return to obtain the approval of his Cabinet colleagues to his statements and actions.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, fifth series, vol. 307, col. 2080; Harold Nicolson, *Diplomacy* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1939), 100 1.



These criticisms were similar to those raised against summit meetings (as will become clear in the [next chapter](#)) and, in fact, many of the points made for and against summits can be applied to other examples of 'personal diplomacy' between government ministers and their counterparts abroad. For one thing, the reasons why summits became easier were the same as those that made foreign ministers' meetings an unstoppable phenomenon. The outbreak of another, genuinely 'world' war, the post-war mushrooming of international organisations and the coming of the jet age allowed foreign ministers to become directly involved in diplomacy in foreign capitals even more constantly and intensively than during the 1930s, taking their private offices with them. By the mid-1960s the 120-odd foreign ministers in the world could be described as a 'political elite' in global politics who, in contrast to the Victorian era, 'interacted a great deal, knew each other, and even developed some friendships' and for whom 'attendance at large international meetings . . . [was] part of the ordinary work routine'. While heads of government might carry more weight in some contexts, they could not focus on international questions as often as foreign ministers could. While career diplomats might possess permanency and greater expertise in diplomacy, the foreign minister (who could in any case draw on the expertise of his officials) carried greater political weight and had a more flexible, mobile role.<sup>8</sup> Visits abroad were so frequent that few chose to comment on them, let alone question the practice. Nicolson's complaints could be looked back on as the quaint protests of a bygone age since even the career diplomats now treated a visit by the foreign secretary as normal behaviour.

Whether individual foreign secretaries were well prepared for their position, with its daunting multiplicity of roles as shaper of policy, negotiator, head of department and representative of Britain in an array of organisations, ceremonies and negotiations, is another matter. They were rarely specialists in international relations, although Douglas-Home had formidable experience in the field, and were sometimes, as with Rab Butler or George Brown, chosen mainly to balance the Cabinet, or to play second fiddle to Downing Street, as in Michael Stewart's case. They might only be in the post for a short time, as proved Gordon Walker's fate. And all foreign secretaries, while trying to master foreign policy and run the FCO, must also keep one eye on their political career, their relationship with their party, electorate, parliament and Cabinet colleagues, not least the prime minister. The dangers of such

<sup>8</sup> George Modelski, 'The World's Foreign Ministers: A political elite', *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, vol. 14, no. 2 (1970), 135-75, quotes from 172-3.

individuals having one eye on the domestic scene and being tempted by 'quickfix' solutions are clear.

Donald Watt has distinguished a number of roles for the foreign secretary as a diplomat, all of which were evident in the 1960s<sup>9</sup> (most of which also applied to the Commonwealth secretary while this post existed). The first, representing Britain in international organisations, like the UN, NATO or the EC, was now a duty that could not be escaped. Despite an increasing tendency for multilateral conferences to be held at summit level, the need for meetings among foreign ministers also increased, most obviously in the European context, with regular gatherings of both the European Community's Council of Ministers and the system of European Political Co-operation. By 1976 the British foreign secretary, through these EC meetings, as well as NATO, the UN and other bodies, was able to see other Western European foreign ministers at least as frequently, and probably more frequently, than he was able to meet their ambassadors to London, which was one reason why questions were raised over the value of ambassadors to other EC member states. The second role, representing Britain on special occasions like state visits and funerals, was rarer, partly because the prime minister would now attend some of the more important funerals. However, the foreign secretary was expected to act as 'minister-in-waiting' to the Queen on state visits abroad and there were still some funerals of leading characters which the prime minister decided to avoid. In the case of President Nasser of Egypt in 1970 this was probably just as well: amid chaotic scenes, Douglas-Home at one point accidentally shook hands with the Palestinian leader Yasser Arafat, who at that time was treated by the West as a pariah.<sup>10</sup>

The third role, carrying out actual negotiations, as in the EC entry talks, or over Vietnam, nuclear disarmament and European security, was highly important, but the foreign secretary could rely on junior ministers and specially appointed teams to carry much of the burden here. The 'ministers for Europe', so important for EC entry, were the most obvious example of a ministerial position being created under the foreign secretary to handle a complex negotiation. Lord Chalfont took a leading role on disarmament in the mid-1960s and, as seen in the [previous chapter](#), the ambassador to the UN had a vital role in Middle East peace talks. Foreign secretaries could be called in at key points, as when Brown

<sup>9</sup> See Donald Cameron Watt, 'Foreign Secretaries as Diplomats', in Roger Bullen, ed., *The Foreign Office, 1782-1982* (New York: University Publications of America, 1984), 109-28.

<sup>10</sup> D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), 412-13.

twice went to New York in 1967 to edge forward agreement on what became Resolution 242.<sup>11</sup>

Another role for the foreign secretary was to review and clarify issues in bilateral meetings with other foreign ministers, both in London and abroad. This was especially important and frequent with close allies in Europe, North America and the Commonwealth. Negotiation during international crises by the foreign secretary was surprisingly infrequent, but Stewart met Indonesian foreign minister Yakub Malik in 1966, to help end the 'confrontation',<sup>12</sup> and Callaghan went to Uganda in July 1975, to secure the release of a British citizen, Dennis Hills, whom Idi Amin had threatened to execute.<sup>13</sup> A rare event was the use of a visit by the foreign secretary to signal a new or much improved relationship. The Stewart–Malik meeting was one example of this; better known is Douglas-Home's visit to China in late 1972. Watt's final role was reporting about activities to the FCO, the prime minister and Cabinet. This was a routine occurrence with, for example, a report about foreign policy on almost all Cabinet agendas.

The cumulative effect of these roles was to make the foreign secretary a prominent part of the 'jet set'. Rab Butler was not fond of foreign travel but his year in office included trips to: the Netherlands, France and West Germany in late 1963; Denmark in January 1964; North America the following month; a long visit to Washington, Tokyo and Manila in May; and Moscow in July.<sup>14</sup> After Butler visited Manila in 1964, his host, S. P. Lopez, told the British ambassador that the visit 'had greatly increased the understanding and confidence which the Philippine government felt for [Britain] and had marked a turning point in relations between the two countries'.<sup>15</sup> Michael Stewart felt the strain of long overseas visits 'exacting' in his first term as foreign secretary and asked the FO to minimise them during his second.<sup>16</sup> But his commitments could still be frantic: at a meeting of the Western European Union, in Luxembourg in February 1969, he had individual conversations with his opposite numbers from Germany, Italy, Belgium, Holland and Luxembourg, and there were further WEU gatherings in June and July, as well as a trip to Brussels, where he met the Belgian and Irish foreign ministers and the

<sup>11</sup> See 79–80 above.

<sup>12</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, PREM 13/1454, record of meeting (1 July 1966).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Morgan, *Callaghan: A life* (Oxford University Press, 1997), 456–67.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Howard, *RAB: The life of R. A. Butler* (London: Macmillan, 1987), 327–9 and 332.

<sup>15</sup> PREM 11/4789, Addis to Henderson (3 June 1964).

<sup>16</sup> UKNA FCO 73/31, Maitland to Dean (21 March 1968).

president of the European Commission.<sup>17</sup> Neither could a diplomatic role be avoided by staying in London, when this lay at the hub of global air communications. Special missions were not only outward from, but inward to, London. Looking at just one month, May 1968, Michael Stewart, while in London, had bilateral meetings with ministers from Saudi Arabia, France, Portugal and the Lebanon, as well as King Hussein of Jordan, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and King Constantine II of Greece.<sup>18</sup> It should also be noted that meetings with foreign ministers did not mean that dealings between the foreign secretary and ambassadors was a rarity: on 4 April 1968 Stewart saw six foreign ambassadors in succession; this also happened on the 8th and again two days later.<sup>19</sup>

One way around the problem of pressure on the foreign (or Commonwealth) secretary's time was to make more use of junior ministers from the FCO in diplomatic roles. There were plenty of other occasions, not just during complex, time-consuming negotiations such as at the EC, when a junior might be sent to handle a problem. Lord Beswick, parliamentary under-secretary at the CRO, went to Aden in November 1965 to report on an increasingly depressing political situation, and again three months later to inform Federal ministers about the latest British defence review.<sup>20</sup> Goronwy Roberts, minister of state at the FO, made two famous trips to the Persian Gulf in 1967–8: the first, in November 1967, was to assure local rulers that Britain would remain their military protector for the foreseeable future; the second, two months later, was to tell the same audience about Britain's decision to quit the area by the end of 1971, a rather abrupt turnabout in policy.<sup>21</sup> In the era of the Plowden and Duncan reports, junior ministers could also be used to promote trade: in March–April 1969, the minister of state, Fred Mulley, made a three-week tour of Brazil (where he attended a British industrial exhibition), Paraguay (which was also currently a member of the Security Council), Bolivia ('with which we have a large adverse trade balance'), Peru (where the ambassador believed 'judiciously spaced visits' could boost exports) and Colombia.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> FCO 73/22 5, *passim*.

<sup>18</sup> FCO 73/18, includes records of his meetings (March–June 1968).

<sup>19</sup> John W. Young, 'The Diary of Michael Stewart as British Foreign Secretary, April–May 1968', *Contemporary British History*, vol. 19, no. 4 (December 2005), 481–510.

<sup>20</sup> PREM 13/704, Beswick report (23 November 1965), and Aden to CO (16–17 February 1966).

<sup>21</sup> Anthony Parsons, *They Say the Lion: Britain's Legacy to the Arabs: A personal memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 132–5.

<sup>22</sup> FCO 73/112, Brightly to Andrews (19 February), and Muirhead to Stewart (8 April 1969).

However, there were limits to how far junior ministers might take the strain off the foreign secretary. On arriving at the FO in August 1966, Brown had said he was 'determined to cut down on travel abroad, unless to discuss something when it needs to be discussed'.<sup>23</sup> But 'need' proved a difficult concept to interpret. In early April 1967, despite a busy schedule, Brown had to go to the WEU meeting in Rome because Downing Street felt this would 'help to maintain the momentum' on EC entry in a way that attendance by a junior minister could not. A fortnight later Brown was off to the annual meeting of the South East Asia Treaty Organisation. He had hoped to send a junior minister but, after talking to Denis Healey, the defence secretary, decided that the Washington meeting 'would afford the best and most unobtrusive occasion for broaching . . . the conclusions of our defence expenditure studies' (which pointed to a withdrawal from East of Suez) with the US, Australian and New Zealand governments; this was simply too important for a junior minister.<sup>24</sup>

On returning to office in 1970, Douglas-Home was quite happy to accept realities and make frequent long-distance visits, as can be seen from his destinations in just one twelve-month period: in November 1971 he went to Rhodesia; in March 1972 he visited Iran, Pakistan and Israel; in June–July he made a Far Eastern tour, taking in Bangladesh, Afghanistan, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand; and in November 1972 he was in Communist China.<sup>25</sup> Miles Hudson, his political secretary, found the frequent journeys with Douglas-Home to be fascinating events in which their RAF VC-10 'virtually became our home', the foreign secretary's wife, Elizabeth, often accompanying him. 'On our journey to Rhodesia one of the red boxes was full of the family's socks to be darned', Hudson recalled, 'I always wonder what would have happened if some spy had stolen it thinking it contained State secrets.'<sup>26</sup> (And the pressure to travel continued to intensify: in January 1990 Douglas Hurd flew more than 20,000 miles.) Whatever the advantages of face-to-face meetings with other foreign ministers, such statistics led to complaints that too much time was being spent abroad, giving the foreign secretary no time to think strategically or get to the heart of issues faced by the FCO: 'It is ludicrous that anyone in charge of foreign

<sup>23</sup> UKNA, FO 800/972, Maclehorse to Roberts (15 August 1966).

<sup>24</sup> FO 800/975, Maclehorse to Brown (10 and 15 March 1967), and /974, Maclehorse to Palliser (4 April 1967).

<sup>25</sup> UKNA, CAB 128/49, CM(71)59th (25 November); CAB 128/50, CM(71)18th (23 March), 36th (13 July) and 50th (7 November).

<sup>26</sup> Charles and Miles Hudson, *Two Lives* (York: Wilton 65, 1992), 246.

policy should be logging the mileage of a commercial traveller . . . His main responsibility is making policies, not selling them.<sup>27</sup>

### Ministers and civil servants

By the 1960s 'personal diplomacy' actually involved a wide range of other government departments. For some, the role was well established. Since at least the First World War, chancellors of the Exchequer were frequently involved in overseas visits, many of them multilateral gatherings, to discuss such issues as loans, currency stability and ways to boost growth. Coming to the Treasury in 1974, Denis Healey found numerous commitments abroad. In particular, 'at the end of September', he wrote, every year 'my time was always pre-empted by a series of international meetings – the European Council of Finance Ministers, the Commonwealth Finance Ministers, the G-5, the G-10, the Interim Committee and finally the annual meeting of the IMF itself' in Washington.<sup>28</sup> Sometimes, as with the foreign secretary, it was appropriate to hand detailed, lengthy talks to a junior minister, as in 1965 when John Diamond, first secretary at the Treasury, handled talks with Germany about 'offsetting' the foreign exchange costs of the British Army of the Rhine.<sup>29</sup> The involvement of presidents of the Board of Trade in commercial negotiations, or the secretary of state for defence in meetings of military organisations like NATO, was also well established. On taking over defence in 1970, one of Lord Carrington's first duties was a Far Eastern tour to negotiate a five-power pact with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.<sup>30</sup>

Visits also included some less likely ministers, however. Tony Crosland, for example, when he was minister of education, went to Moscow in November 1966 for ten days to discuss secondary and higher education. Despite the length of the visit, he found it difficult to get any information from his Soviet counterpart, not only because of the secrecy of the political system and their sensitivity to criticism, but also because of the inordinate amount of time taken up by refreshments, ceremonies and toasts.<sup>31</sup> Some posts could carry ministers abroad quite

<sup>27</sup> John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapman, 1992), 315.

<sup>28</sup> The G 5 ('Group of Five') included the finance ministers of Britain, France, Germany, Japan and the US; the G 10 brought in the next five industrial economies; and the Interim Committee was the executive committee of the IMF (International Monetary Fund). Denis Healey, *The Time of my Life* (London: Michael Joseph, 1989), 417.

<sup>29</sup> PREM 13/329, Diamond to Callaghan (12 March 1965).

<sup>30</sup> Lord Carrington, *Reflect on Things Past* (London: Collins, 1988), 219–20.

<sup>31</sup> British Library of Political and Economic Science, Crosland papers, 8/4, final report on visit of 15–25 November.

frequently: in just one six-month period in 1967 Tony Benn, the minister of technology, whose remit included boosting the status of British technology and building international co-operation in the field, made visits to West Germany, the USSR, Canada (for Expo 67), the US and France (for the Paris air show).<sup>32</sup> As secretary of state for social services in 1974–6, Barbara Castle made official visits to France, Germany and the US, as well as making a tour of Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Iran on a ten-day export promotions effort in January 1976; she also attended an EC ministerial meeting in Luxembourg.<sup>33</sup> Entry to the Community, of course, gave a stronger international role to a wide range of Whitehall departments.

Ministers were supposed to report all their foreign visits in advance to the FO, and to seek permission from Downing Street to be out of the country, but not all did so, a point that highlights just how difficult it was to co-ordinate British policy overseas by the late twentieth century. In 1964–6, before becoming foreign secretary himself, George Brown was notorious for travelling abroad without warning, but the FO decided he was a *sui generis* character, whom it would be ‘ill advised’ to rebuke. In any case, officials usually found out about such visits, if only because Brown, like other ministers, needed some FO advice and the support of British embassies while travelling.<sup>34</sup> Some embassies found it a real strain to support the demands of ministerial visitors. This was especially the case in Washington, which, as the centre of world affairs, was a magnet for ambitious politicians. In 1965 Ambassador Patrick Dean used a visit by William Rodgers, a junior minister at the Department of Economic Affairs, to complain about the ‘large number of ministerial visits, particularly of lower rank, without any clearly defined objectives’. Rodgers had come expecting to discuss regional planning, which made little sense in a US context. The following year, Dean sent a fuller complaint about the frequency of ministerial visits: these could be beneficial but ‘their impact is inevitably reduced . . . if they come . . . too closely together’; they required a briefing, accommodation and entertainment, all of which demanded embassy time; and ministers often had vain expectations that they could meet busy US officials and appear on television.<sup>35</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries, 1963–67* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 486, 492–5 and 499–502.

<sup>33</sup> Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1974–76* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 622–4.

<sup>34</sup> FCO 73/10, Macle hose to Gore Booth (21 July 1966).

<sup>35</sup> FCO 73/4, Dean to Stewart (16 December 1965); FCO 73/10, Dean to Macle hose (22 June 1966).

Until 1969 the foreign secretary's private office tried to bring order to the FO's ministerial visits. With the creation of the FCO the task became too large to be treated in this way and, as one official reminded the permanent under-secretary (PUS), in light of the withdrawal from East of Suez, 'Ministerial visits will be increasingly important in years ahead as part of our "non-military means" strategy . . .' A Ministerial Visits Committee was therefore set up, chaired by the PUS himself. It met roughly monthly, from February 1969. But handling the commitments of FCO ministers was difficult enough and the committee did not feel able to organise the programme of overseas ministerial visits for the whole of Whitehall; these presented a daunting challenge in terms of frequency, destination and purpose. Here the FCO simply kept up the old practice of expecting other ministries to consult it about such visits.<sup>36</sup> From Washington, Dean's successor, John Freeman, continued to complain about 'the stream of visitors to Washington . . . who demand favours from the US administration and services from the Embassy', sometimes for visits that served no real purpose. But in the last analysis, the FCO and Downing Street felt that they had to accept the word of the ministries concerned that visits were necessary, with only rare interventions to prevent them.<sup>37</sup>

So long as ministers' visits focused on fact-finding and exchanges of view, this pragmatic approach does not seem to have presented problems. Any important commitments did have to be brought back to London, making it possible for the prime minister and foreign secretary to keep overall control. Then again, at its meetings, the Ministerial Visits Committee seems to have done little more than look at a list of forthcoming visits and update them, though it did sometimes consider broader issues. A meeting in January 1976 decided both to look into the costs of ministerial visits and to ask the Planning Staff to consider how the pattern of visits fitted British aims overseas.<sup>38</sup> There was concern by then that the number of visits was harming the work of government at home, not least because important meetings were being missed. The slim Labour majority in parliament also meant that ministers were needed in London to ensure business could be pushed through the Commons. Steps were therefore taken to ensure that visits only took place in parliamentary recesses or at weekends, with exceptions being made for 'compelling reasons of government business'. It was understood that

<sup>36</sup> FCO 73/38, especially Maitland to Stewart (21 January), Johnston to Greenhill (23 January), and Williams to Baker (13 May 1969).

<sup>37</sup> FCO 73/40, Freeman to Graham (28 October), and reply (11 November 1969).

<sup>38</sup> PREM 16/1074, minutes of meeting (13 January 1976).



some ministers, like the foreign, trade and defence secretaries, must spend some time abroad and that EC commitments also made absences from London inevitable.<sup>39</sup>

Among all the ministerial visits, some from outside the FCO became involved in high-profile diplomatic missions. Three in particular deserve mention from the mid-1960s, when Wilson liked to employ colleagues as 'trouble-shooters'. One was Patrick Gordon Walker, who had briefly been foreign secretary in 1964–5. Having regained his Leyton seat in the 1966 election, he returned to government in January 1967 as minister without portfolio, a position which the prime minister used for clearing up an array of problems. In Gordon Walker's case it meant handling complicated negotiations with the Maltese government over the proposed rundown of the Royal Navy base. Despite British promises to alleviate the economic impact of this decision, the Maltese government was not at all happy about the situation. In late January, premier Borg Olivier claimed Britain was in breach of its agreement to defend the island and declared British rights on the island immediately forfeit. This step seemed designed to secure talks rather than actually drive the British out. But Olivier, who was being hard-pressed by the Labour opposition under Dom Mintoff, did not show much inclination to talk until mid-February, when Gordon Walker was sent to bring him round.<sup>40</sup> The talks switched to London in March, when the British were forced to concede a delay in running down the base and an acceptable financial deal was reached, its details to be settled by a Joint Economic Mission (led not by Gordon Walker but by the chairman of the National Coal Board, Lord Robens).<sup>41</sup>

Another example was Lord Shackleton, son of the polar explorer. He had already been sent as a trouble-shooter to Aden in May 1967, making controversial recommendations about its future.<sup>42</sup> In March 1968, when he was Lord Privy Seal, he went to Malta to negotiate an agreement on the vexed issue of who would own the dockyards after British withdrawal. This was another delicate exercise that meant dealing with Borg Olivier, the CRO (as the responsible department) and the Treasury (which was reluctant to provide much in the way of compensation for the closure). With pension rights and potential legal claims from investors to resolve it was also highly complex, but Shackleton succeeded in the task.<sup>43</sup>

<sup>39</sup> PREM 16/1009, Stowe to Hunt (7 November 1975), reply (18 November), and Brearley to Stuart (1 December 1975).

<sup>40</sup> PREM 13/1604, *passim*. <sup>41</sup> PREM 13/1605, CRO to Valletta (7 March 1967).

<sup>42</sup> Spencer Mawby, *British Policy in Aden and the Protectorates 1955–67: Last outpost of a Middle East empire* (London: Routledge, 2005), 155–7.

<sup>43</sup> CAB 128/43, CC16, 24 and 25(67) (29 February, 28 March and 2 April).

Probably the most unusual example of a government minister as special envoy was that of Harold Davies to North Vietnam. In early 1965 Wilson faced contrary pressures on the conflict: Lyndon Johnson hoped for British troops to be sent to fight alongside the Americans; the Labour Left wanted the government to condemn US involvement in Vietnam; and the Commonwealth included countries that sent contingents to fight there – Australia and New Zealand – as well as critics of US policy like Tanzania and Ghana. When Commonwealth leaders met in June, Wilson proposed that the Commonwealth should despatch its own four-man peace mission to resolve the conflict, but North Vietnam refused to accept the mission. In an attempt to persuade Hanoi to change its mind, Wilson hit on the novel idea of sending Davies to see Ho Chi Minh. On the surface it was an odd choice: Davies was a lowly parliamentary secretary in the Ministry of Pensions and National Insurance, with little weight in the Labour Party and limited experience of diplomacy. The FO was sceptical about the whole idea. But Davies was a close ally of Wilson, later becoming his parliamentary private secretary; what is more, the affable Welshman had met Ho Chi Minh in Hanoi in 1957, while leading a group of MPs on a tour of the region that also took in Saigon and Beijing. And for a time, his mission seemed hopeful. Travelling via Laos, he was able to reach Hanoi aboard an aircraft run by the International Control Commission, the body set up to monitor the 1954 Geneva agreement. But a press leak led the North Vietnamese to back off from a meeting with Ho. Instead, Davies had to content himself with seeing officials who insisted he was only on a ‘private’ visit as a guest of the Fatherland Front. Wilson’s critics wrote the mission off as one of his many gimmicks, but he remained obsessed by its failure, still trying to discover who was responsible for the press leak years afterwards. Partly because of its unusual nature, the Davies visit stands out as an example of just how flexible governments can be in whom they send on special missions.<sup>44</sup>

As well as ministers, British governments often used civil servants as leaders of special missions. Obviously, it was often necessary to send Foreign Office officials on one-off missions to deal with particular problems. Some of these proved highly important, as when Harold Beeley was sent to Egypt in December 1967 to pave the way for a restoration of diplomatic relations.<sup>45</sup> Frequently, when technical issues like taxation, currency or scientific co-operation were being discussed, it

<sup>44</sup> John W. Young, ‘The Wilson Government and the Davies Peace Mission to North Vietnam’, *Review of International Studies*, vol. 24 (1998), 545–62.

<sup>45</sup> See below, 210.

was also necessary to send a mission abroad from another relevant ministry in Whitehall. In October 1964, after rejecting the idea of devaluation, the new Labour government sent Eric Roll, permanent under-secretary of the Department of Economic Affairs, to Washington to explain their thinking.<sup>46</sup> Another leading official whose position and expertise were ideally suited to such missions was the prime minister's private secretary for foreign affairs. Under Wilson, for example, Michael Palliser was sent to Washington in December 1968 to establish a personal link with the incoming Nixon administration, meeting the national security adviser designate, Henry Kissinger, who was an old acquaintance.<sup>47</sup> Under Heath, Robert Armstrong was sent to Paris in September 1973 to talk to the French foreign minister Michel Jobert, at a time when the French seemed reluctant to trust the British ambassador, Edward Tomkins, with confidential messages.<sup>48</sup>

The use of officials went right to the top, with Labour and Conservative governments both exploiting the services of the Cabinet secretary. Burke Trend was regularly used as a link to Washington. The FO Steering Committee considered one of his visits, in 1965, 'an excellent example of one of the most effective ways of maintaining the "special relationship",' which thrived on regular high-level exchanges.<sup>49</sup> One attraction of civil servants, apart from the fact that they were likely to be familiar with a problem, was that even senior figures were not well known to the press and could carry out the most delicate mission without drawing attention. In January 1974 Heath sent Cabinet Secretary John Hunt to Washington to discuss the energy crisis, followed a short time later by the permanent secretary of the Department of Energy, Jack Rempton. The Americans were asked to keep these visits strictly confidential, not least because Downing Street did not want its EC partners to know it was working with Washington on a joint policy. The visits helped keep Britain and the US together during the conference of oil-importing countries that Nixon had called in Washington in February, leaving France on the sidelines. It was an odd end to a premiership that had emphasised European co-operation and partnership with France over the 'special relationship'.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> PREM 13/109, Wilson to Johnson (23 October), and Roll to DEA (25 October 1964).

<sup>47</sup> PREM 13/2097, *passim*.

<sup>48</sup> FCO 73/135, Tomkins to Greenhill (20 September 1973).

<sup>49</sup> FO 953/2261/5, Gore Booth to Stewart (10 August 1965).

<sup>50</sup> PREM 15/2178, Heath to Nixon (25 January), and Bridges to Alexander (4 February 1974); PREM 13/2235, Nixon to Heath, and reply (both 18 February 1974).

### Malcolm MacDonald, roving ambassador

The 'roving ambassador', or 'ambassador-at-large', has been described as a 'special envoy with the task of visiting a number of countries, usually although not necessarily in the same region'.<sup>51</sup> They are common enough in American practice, rarer in the British case, though one example stands out in the 1960s. Malcolm MacDonald was a veteran of diplomacy; son of the first Labour prime minister, Ramsay MacDonald, he had served in inter-war cabinets, including spells as colonial secretary and dominions secretary. He was high commissioner to Canada during the Second World War, the first of a number of posts as governor or high commissioner that also took him to Malaya, India and Kenya. He had experience as a 'special envoy' going back to contacts with the Indian nationalist leader Mahatma Gandhi in 1931, held a 'roving' commission in Southeast Asia in 1948–55 and was co-chair of the Geneva conference on Laos in 1961–2.<sup>52</sup> He was also a practitioner of 'shuttle diplomacy' before that term was popularised by Henry Kissinger's endeavours following the 1973 Arab–Israeli war. Even in 1966, Commonwealth Office staff talked of a 'Malcolm MacDonald act, in and out of aeroplanes'.<sup>53</sup> Although he turned 65 that year, MacDonald was remarkably energetic and, rather like Lord Caradon in New York, his support for decolonisation, belief in the Commonwealth and benevolent attitude towards Afro-Asian problems made him an ideal front-man for Wilson's dealings with the less developed world. MacDonald had his weaknesses, however. An individualist, reluctant to consult others before reaching an opinion, he could be inconsiderate with juniors but was deferential to political leaders even if they were dictators. But his modesty, humour and optimism helped him deal with a range of diplomatic challenges. As Douglas-Home said, 'He always had immense patience. He was very skilful as a diplomat and negotiator . . .'<sup>54</sup> Paul Martin, Canadian foreign minister and high commissioner to London, considered MacDonald 'among Britain's best ambassadors'.<sup>55</sup>

Despite his usual practice of retiring ministers at 60, Harold Wilson asked MacDonald in March 1966 to become 'special representative' to East and Central Africa, with a base in Nairobi. In that capacity his focus was the recently independent Commonwealth states of Kenya, Uganda,

<sup>51</sup> Berridge and James, *Dictionary*, 209.

<sup>52</sup> Clyde Sanger, *Malcolm MacDonald: Bringing an end to Empire* (Liverpool University Press, 1995), xvii–xxi, provides a chronology of MacDonald's career.

<sup>53</sup> UKNA, DO 213/115, Dawson to Scott (31 May 1966).

<sup>54</sup> Sanger, *MacDonald*, 444, citing interview with Home, and see 439–46.

<sup>55</sup> Paul Martin, *The London Diaries, 1975–1979* (Ottawa University Press, 1988), 13.

Tanzania, Zambia and Malawi. But in 1967 his commission was extended to Africa as a whole, a role he retained until finally retiring in July 1969. From December 1966 to February 1967 he had a break from 'official' duties, but only to act in a personal capacity as an intermediary between the Nigerian leader, Yakubu Gowon, and the Biafran leader, Chukwuemeka Ojukwu. Engaging in his trademark shuttle diplomacy, MacDonald spent several weeks in Nigeria, meeting both Gowon and Ojukwu, to prepare the way for the Aburi talks, with Wilson minuting that it had been 'another good job of work by Malcolm';<sup>56</sup> but he seems to have misread Ojukwu's intentions and could not prevent the two sides differing over what had been agreed. Thereafter, David Hunt, the incoming high commissioner to Lagos, pursued a determinedly anti-Biafran policy that had little place for the roving ambassador.<sup>57</sup> A rather different mission came up in February 1968, when the Cabinet sent MacDonald to Kenya to try to curb the flow of Asian immigrants into Britain.<sup>58</sup> That year he also helped to negotiate the restoration of diplomatic relations with Sudan, Somalia and Tanzania.<sup>59</sup>

Notwithstanding these diverse missions, MacDonald's main concern as special representative was to try to persuade Africans that Britain wanted to resolve the Rhodesian problem in an acceptable way. Thus, in April 1966 he was sent around Africa to try to placate Commonwealth leaders following the announcement of 'informal' talks between British and Rhodesian officials.<sup>60</sup> It did not help that, like Lord Caradon in New York, he was frequently critical of Wilson's tactics on Rhodesia. Nor was he very good at hiding his doubts: on one occasion, after talking to MacDonald about Rhodesia, Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda remarked: 'He's a lovely man, but he doesn't believe a word he's saying.'<sup>61</sup> The roving ambassador repeatedly questioned existing policy, writing to the Commonwealth Office in June 1966, for example, that if 'a compromise agreement is reached with Smith which . . . betrays the principle of democratic racial equality, then Britain's (and perhaps also the West's) reputation could be crippled for a long time to come. China and Russia would then exploit the situation to increase their sinister influences . . .'<sup>62</sup> But his concerns were generally ignored by Wilson.

<sup>56</sup> PREM 13/1661, Lagos to CRO (27 9 December 1966, 2 and 6 January 1967; Wilson handwritten minute on last).

<sup>57</sup> Sanger, *MacDonald*, 413 16. <sup>58</sup> CAB 128/43, CC13(68) (15 February).

<sup>59</sup> See below, 211 12. <sup>60</sup> PREM 13/1120, record of meeting (28 April 1966).

<sup>61</sup> Sanger, *MacDonald*, 406.

<sup>62</sup> Stephen Ashton and William Roger Louis, eds., *British Documents on the End of Empire*, series A, vol. 5: *East of Suez and the Commonwealth, 1964 71* (London: The Stationery Office, 2004), document 215.

Most notoriously, the prime minister did not consult his roving ambassador when arrangements were made to meet Ian Smith on HMS *Tiger* in December 1966: MacDonald was left to find out about that from the newspapers. Yet despite such cavalier treatment and his predictable opposition to the *Tiger* terms, he rejected the idea of resignation in favour of continuing to argue his case from within government. Even after retiring he tried, during 1969–70, to press his own scheme for a ten-year transition to majority rule in Rhodesia. It came to nothing. So did his warning to the Heath administration in 1970 that the resumption of arms sales to South Africa would gravely damage the Commonwealth. The last, however, was evidence that, whatever his flaws, MacDonald often predicted African reactions correctly.<sup>63</sup>

### Beyond government

Like US presidents, the British looked beyond government to appoint appropriate special envoys for certain missions. One obvious expertise to exploit was that of former ministers. After his three-month spell as foreign secretary in 1964–5, it made obvious sense to employ Patrick Gordon Walker as a diplomat while he waited to return to the Commons. Soon after resigning office he was sent by Wilson as an emissary to those countries most interested in the gathering Southeast Asia crisis.<sup>64</sup> Gordon Walker went in an official capacity as ‘special representative of the foreign secretary’ on what was described as a ‘fact-finding mission’ to explore the possibility of a peaceful settlement in Britain’s capacity as co-chair of the Geneva conference.<sup>65</sup> The mission lasted three weeks in April–May and took in pro-Western capitals, but China and North Vietnam refused to receive him. Hanoi declared the mission unacceptable because he was travelling without a partner from the USSR, the other co-chair. Perhaps because of this, his final report to Wilson was one-sided, its logic confused. On one hand it insisted that the US ‘military effort is the only possible policy. An American defeat would be disastrous’; on the other, it admitted that ‘a victory in the normal sense is unattainable’ and that, even on an optimistic forecast, ‘we have a long slog ahead of us’.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>63</sup> Sanger, *MacDonald*, 408–11; Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez*, document 387.

<sup>64</sup> PREM 13/694, Gordon Walker report (7 May 1965); Rolf Steininger, ‘The Americans are in a Hopeless Position: Great Britain and the war in Vietnam, 1964–65’, *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 8, no. 3 (1997), 267–74.

<sup>65</sup> PREM 13/304, FO to Washington (26 March), and Washington to FO (28 March 1965).

<sup>66</sup> PREM 13/694, report on mission (7 May), and /304, Hanoi to FO (7 April 1965).

Wilson did not just look to his own party to provide politically experienced envoys, however. It was possible for opposition politicians to travel where government ministers could not, at least not without embarrassment. When Selwyn Lloyd, the shadow Commonwealth secretary and a former foreign secretary (1955–60), went to Rhodesia in February 1966, he was the first senior British politician to visit since its unilateral declaration of independence (UDI). His ‘fact-finding’ mission was criticised by Labour in public, but he privately reported back to ministers on what he had found.<sup>67</sup> There was a similar case in 1969 when Lord Carrington, soon to become Heath’s defence secretary, visited Biafra, another rebellious province that London refused to recognise, and reported back to Michael Stewart on the situation he found there.<sup>68</sup> In July 1967, in the wake of the Six Day War, the government actually asked the opposition if Lloyd’s successor as shadow Commonwealth secretary, Reginald Maudling, might visit moderate Arab regimes in the Middle East, in order to offset the idea that Britain was pro-Israeli. Maudling was another former minister with plenty of diplomatic experience, having been ‘Mr Europe’ in the late 1950s, when he had negotiated the creation of the European Free Trade Association.<sup>69</sup>

Another obvious group to look to for special envoys was retired civil servants, one of whom proved of central importance to Britain’s withdrawal from the Persian Gulf in 1970–1, where a number of small sheikhdoms had hitherto relied on its protection. Their traditional way of life was threatened by Arab nationalism, the impact of the oil industry and potential threats from larger neighbours, including Iranian territorial claims. Other problems surrounded the British desire, backed by Saudi Arabia, to set up a federation of its protectorates in the southern Gulf, what became the United Arab Emirates (UAE).<sup>70</sup> Given the time pressures on FCO staff and the complexity of these issues, Anthony Acland, head of the Arabian Department, became concerned that the job could not be done on time. He suggested to the permanent under-secretary, Denis Greenhill, that a trouble-shooter be appointed who could iron out the problems. Acland also knew the ideal candidate. William Luce, a former governor of Aden (1956–60), had also been political resident – the senior British representative in the Gulf protectorates – in 1961–6, was fluent in Arabic and familiar with the

<sup>67</sup> D. R. Thorpe, *Selwyn Lloyd* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1989), 399–402.

<sup>68</sup> PREM 13/3374, record of meeting (19 December 1969).

<sup>69</sup> Lewis Baston, *Reggie: The life of Reginald Maudling* (Stroud: Sutton, 2004), 291–3.

<sup>70</sup> See Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez*, Part I, lix–lxiii.

problems, though he had now retired.<sup>71</sup> He had also argued as far back as November 1964 that the vulnerability of the individual Gulf sheikhdoms made a federation desirable.<sup>72</sup> Appointed as Douglas-Home's 'representative' in the region, Luce made a number of visits to the region after August 1970. He became involved in difficult, often frustrating talks about the constitution and in ultimately fruitless discussions with Iran about its claim on islands in the Gulf. But his flexibility, his ability to talk to all those involved and his realism about what could be achieved, helped achieve a settlement which, despite some problems, was no disaster. The UAE was proclaimed on 1 December 1971, the same day that Britain's treaties of protection in the Gulf came to an end. In contrast to earlier hopes it only included six sheikhdoms, with a seventh joining in 1972: two of the larger sheikhdoms, Bahrain and Qatar, opted for independence. The event was marred by Iran's seizure of the disputed Gulf islands on 30 November, but the federation proved to be the success that Luce had long hoped for, helped by substantial oil deposits.<sup>73</sup>

The business world was another potential recruiting ground for eminent individuals accustomed to delicate negotiation and with valuable international connections. One dictator who needed delicate handling was Idi Amin, after he seized power in Uganda in 1971. Amin's actions on the international stage ranged from his expulsion of Uganda's Asian community to a proposal that he should marry Princess Anne. He caused particular difficulties for Britain, as the ex-colonial power which had traditionally provided economic and military assistance. Uganda's dire financial position and an appeal from Amin for a rescheduling of debts led Heath, on Douglas-Home's advice, to send a special envoy there in early 1972. The appointment on this occasion again highlighted just how flexible the choice of envoy could be. It also revealed that career diplomats might sometimes press for an envoy from outside government: 'Diplomacy by emissary is a technique which the Africans understand and employ', the FCO explained, 'and in this case it would have the particular advantage that an emissary could talk more freely to Amin than our High Commissioner, who has to live with him.' This was an interesting admission by the professionals that in some circumstances, especially where something unpleasant might have to be said, it might be in the interests of a resident ambassador for a special envoy to

<sup>71</sup> British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), Churchill Archive Centre, Cambridge, Acland interview, 19 21.

<sup>72</sup> Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez*, document 117.

<sup>73</sup> Ashton and Louis, *East of Suez*, documents 133 7.



be sent out from home. The FCO suggested that the banker Lord Aldington would make a suitable go-between. Not only did his National and Grindlays Bank have a substantial stake in Uganda, but Aldington knew the Ugandan president personally and a visit by him 'should not attract undue attention'. He was accompanied by an FCO official during their meetings in March 1972, which included pressure on Amin to control his ambitious plans for defence spending but also led to recommendations on British assistance, partly to avoid the danger of him turning to Colonel Gaddafi of Libya for military supplies.<sup>74</sup>

In fact, the list of possible special envoys is endless. A member of the royal family, Lord Mountbatten, who had recently retired as chair of the Chiefs of Staff and who had previously been the last viceroy to India, led a mission around Commonwealth countries to report on the rising challenge of Commonwealth immigration to Britain.<sup>75</sup> John Hunt, leader of the first successful ascent of Everest in 1953, carried out two missions to Nigeria to sort out relief aid, in July 1968 and January 1970.<sup>76</sup> A war hero, Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery, the victor of El Alamein, met Egypt's President Nasser in May 1967, when relations between London and Cairo were broken, and reported back to George Brown.<sup>77</sup> Another way of maintaining diplomatic contacts was via intelligence services. It is difficult to uncover evidence on this clandestine area, but it is clear that Ken Flower, the Cornish-born head of the Rhodesian Central Intelligence Organisation, set himself up as a contact with Britain, which he visited under the cover of seeing relatives. In contacting him the British often used retired intelligence officers as intermediaries. His activities were publicly exposed in July 1976.<sup>78</sup>

### Rhodesia: a case study

If any single episode illustrates the range of possible 'special envoys' that were employed during these years, it is Rhodesia. Between 1966 and 1971 in particular there were numerous attempts at a diplomatic settlement. Shortly after UDI, although Britain categorically ruled out recognition of the minority regime, Wilson passed a message to premier

<sup>74</sup> PREM 15/1257, Amin to Heath (10 January), Grattan to Bridges (6 March, including quotes), and Aldington report to Heath (5 April 1972).

<sup>75</sup> PREM 13/1572, especially Mountbatten's report (13 June 1965).

<sup>76</sup> Lord Hunt, *Life is Meeting* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1978), chapter 15.

<sup>77</sup> FCO 39/266, record of meeting (18 May 1967). Another war hero who was used as a special envoy was Leonard Cheshire VC, who acted as a link to Biafra in 1969: Richard Morris, *Cheshire* (London: Penguin, 2001), 379–80.

<sup>78</sup> Ken Flower, *Serving Secretly* (London: John Murray, 1987), 80, 1, 91, 4 and 98, 9.

Ian Smith via the governor of Rhodesia, Humphrey Gibbs, saying that diplomatic contacts could be conducted via the governor's office. Smith saw the value in using Gibbs as an intermediary and the governor, though isolated in Government House, agreed to remain in his post.<sup>79</sup> The first special envoy to exploit the legal anomaly of the governor's position was Lord Alport, in January 1966. As a junior minister at the CRO in 1959–61 and high commissioner to the old Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in 1961–3, he knew the local situation well, while as a Conservative peer his appointment could blunt any criticism from that quarter. But he could see no chance of a settlement at this point.<sup>80</sup> This impression was confirmed by 'Tiny' Rowland, the chairman of Lonrho, which had investments in southern Africa; he went to Salisbury in January in a private capacity to meet Smith, but kept the British government informed through meetings with the Cabinet secretary, Burke Trend.<sup>81</sup>

In March 1966, Labour's clear election victory forced Smith to accept that he must deal with Wilson. But, at the same time, it was clear that economic sanctions were having little impact and, with military action ruled out, Wilson was thrown back on more intense diplomatic efforts. This time, however, British officials were involved. Duncan Watson, an assistant under-secretary at the CRO, secretly visited Salisbury, not only seeing the governor, but holding unofficial meetings with Rhodesian officials.<sup>82</sup> With signs that Smith was open to talks, Wilson then sent a more eminent figure, his private secretary, Oliver Wright, to Rhodesia, where he met the 'rebel' premier on 24 April. News of this soon leaked, forcing Wilson to make a Commons statement, in which he announced that 'informal talks' would now be held between the two sides, 'directed only to see whether a basis for negotiation genuinely exists'. He went on to insist: 'these are not negotiations. Her Majesty's Government are not negotiating with the illegal regime.'<sup>83</sup> The 'informal talks' began in London in early May, with Wright continuing to play a leading role. Their painfully slow progress led Wilson to send Wright to talk to Smith

<sup>79</sup> PREM 13/1114, Wilson to Gibbs (24 December 1965); Alan Megahey, *Humphrey Gibbs, Beleaguered Governor* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1998), 111 14.

<sup>80</sup> PREM 13/1115, record of Alport meetings with Wilson and Bowden (8 and 21 January 1966).

<sup>81</sup> PREM 13/1114 and /1116, record of Trend Rowland meetings (7 and 25 January 1966).

<sup>82</sup> PREM 13/1117, Watson's report on his mission (undated), and note on contacts with the regime (30 March 1966).

<sup>83</sup> PREM 13/1119, *passim*; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, vol. 727, cols. 708 12; Megahey, *Gibbs*, 122 4.

again in late June, but it was clear this type of contact would achieve no major breakthrough.<sup>84</sup>

With pressures growing to achieve a settlement following the Commonwealth conference, the British moved diplomatic contacts to a higher level. In late September and again in November the Commonwealth secretary, Bert Bowden, went to Salisbury. On the second occasion he did so with great reluctance, even considering resignation before Wilson persuaded him to go. The prime minister also sent Morrice James, permanent under-secretary at the CRO, to follow up Bowden's talks. In the Commons the prime minister insisted that he would only meet Smith 'when Rhodesia has returned to constitutional rule'.<sup>85</sup> Nevertheless, within days it was decided to move to the highest level of contact, with Wilson and Smith themselves meeting at Gibraltar aboard HMS *Tiger* in the presence of the governor on 2–4 December. The summit showed that any sort of contact was possible with Smith, whatever his regime's 'illegal' nature.<sup>86</sup>

Following the failure of the *Tiger* talks to reach a settlement, diplomatic efforts largely dried up for eighteen months. Lord Alport saw Smith again in June–July 1967 but found little hope for negotiations.<sup>87</sup> The new Commonwealth secretary, George Thomson, also stopped off in Salisbury in November 1967, but he too returned empty-handed.<sup>88</sup> In mid-1968, however, it seemed Smith might be sobered by the threat of sanctions and Wilson decided to try a more clandestine mode of contact, employing a most unusual special envoy, his legal adviser and friend Arnold Goodman. The senior partner of a firm of City solicitors, Goodman, who had family links and business interests in South Africa, had been made a life peer by Wilson in 1965. The most bizarre of all Wilson's special missions was that of August 1968, when Goodman travelled out secretly and joined Max Aitken, chair of the right-wing Express newspaper group. As an emissary, Aitken had the advantages of a suitable cover story (a business trip to South Africa), links to the opposition (like Alport, he was a former Conservative MP) and

<sup>84</sup> See especially PREM 13/1123, Salisbury to CRO (21 June 1966); Megahey, *Gibbs*, 124 5.

<sup>85</sup> PREM 13/1127 and /1132, *passim*; Hansard, *Commons Debates*, vol. 736, cols. 1401 3; Megahey, *Gibbs*, 125 8; Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964 1970: A personal record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 303 9.

<sup>86</sup> Megahey, *Gibbs*, 128 31; Wilson, *Government*, 307 21; Ian Smith, *Bitter Harvest: The great betrayal* (London: Blake, 2001), 127 33.

<sup>87</sup> PREM 13/1739, record of meetings (27 June, 4 and 12 July), and /1740, Wilson Alport meeting (17 July 1967); Megahey, *Gibbs*, 141 2.

<sup>88</sup> PREM 13/1741, Palliser to Williams (13 September), and /2319, Salisbury to CRO (9 November 1967); Megahey, *Gibbs*, 143.

familiarity with Smith (whose commander he had been in the wartime RAF). But Aitken needed Goodman along to advise him on the legal intricacies of the Rhodesia problem and, it seems, to make sure that nothing was said beyond Wilson's instructions, which aimed at reviving talks on the *Tiger* terms. So, while Aitken travelled out openly and paved the way for fuller talks in an initial meeting with Smith, Goodman went incognito, telling his firm that he was off 'to count the penguins in Iceland'. As Ian Smith himself recognised, Wilson's legal adviser made a poor choice for a secret mission 'because he was a large man, in height and mass, with prominent features and large, husky, black eyebrows', whose appearance was well known to the press. Yet, astonishingly, the pair of envoys met Smith in Salisbury without the news leaking. There, they discussed how progress might be revived.<sup>89</sup>

In order to report back to Wilson about the talks, a preposterous code was invented. Aitken – son of Lord Beaverbrook – was 'Beaver', while 'Monkey' could only have referred to Smith and Alec Douglas-Home, with his love of shooting, became 'Grouse'; Rhodesia itself was known as 'Ruritania' and the *Tiger* talks, with barely any imagination, as 'Leopard'. In such company, Goodman could feel honoured to be known as 'Retriever'. 'In this telegram', Wilson told George Thomson, the Commonwealth secretary, when reporting on the mission, 'for security reasons the personalities involved are described by pseudonym and my office will supply yours with a code so that you can identify them.' Then, without any indication that this was at all tongue-in-cheek, Wilson continued: 'You will remember I mentioned to you that Beaver was intending to visit Ruritania as part of a business trip . . . I had a couple of discussions with him to make sure that any discussions he might have with Monkey made quite clear to the latter where we stood . . .' So it went on. Wilson even wrote: 'I imagine Monkey will realise that they were not purely the product of a private enterprise operation', as if Smith could possibly have failed to see that 'Beaver' and 'Retriever' had been briefed by Downing Street beforehand.<sup>90</sup> The mission in turn led to another 'secret' visit by a senior CRO official, James Bottomley. But he was less lucky than Goodman, being spotted by the press at the airport, so that word leaked. This did not prevent two meetings with Smith, which paved the way for another summit.<sup>91</sup> Wilson and Smith met on HMS *Fearless*, with Gibbs again present to

<sup>89</sup> PREM 13/2323 and 2324, *passim*; Brian Brivati, *Lord Goodman* (London: Richard Cohen, 1999), 194 7; Arnold Goodman, *Tell Them I'm on my Way* (London: Chapmans, 1993), 219 20; Wilson, *Government*, 565 7; Smith, *Bitter Harvest*, 141.

<sup>90</sup> PREM 13/2324, Wilson to Thomson (19 August 1968). <sup>91</sup> PREM 13/2325, *passim*.

keep up legal appearances, but again no settlement proved possible. That was almost the end of diplomatic contacts under Wilson. Commonwealth Secretary Thomson made another trip to Salisbury in November, a vain attempt to save the *Fearless* deal.<sup>92</sup> But in June 1969 Rhodesia's white voters approved the creation of a republic. Governor Gibbs finally decided to resign, while the Labour government said it could not negotiate under the new Rhodesian constitution.

In June 1970 the Conservatives took office and soon decided on a new bid to settle with Smith, exposing the fact that talking 'under the aegis of the Governor' had been little more than a sham. Goodman was again chosen to lead a small group to Salisbury in April 1971, travelling secretly by different routes and carrying a minimum amount of paperwork. The British agreed to meet in Salisbury, partly because it was felt impossible to keep the talks secret elsewhere, and Goodman was given the freedom to 'adapt your tactics as you see fit'.<sup>93</sup> He returned, after three days of talks in which secrecy was successfully maintained, believing that Smith now wanted a settlement because of the economic pressures, deteriorating security situation and alienation from the West.<sup>94</sup> Heath and Douglas-Home were encouraged enough to send Goodman back to Salisbury in early June, although on this occasion news leaked and, while the talks were continued intermittently into July, even Goodman felt that 'too much of substance [was] still unclear' for Douglas-Home to risk direct talks with Smith.<sup>95</sup> He was in Salisbury again in mid-September, however, a visit that led to Douglas-Home himself visiting Rhodesia on 15 November, with Goodman among his party. Whatever doubts Goodman had about the deal that was concocted – one which threatened to maintain white rule well into the future – he hid them in public and was branded 'Lord Badman' by those favouring a quick move to majority rule. It hardly helped that Smith had described him as the only British emissary he trusted. As his biographer has argued, Goodman's negotiating skills, perseverance and good humour had helped secure a deal of sorts, but it was a pragmatic compromise, designed to offload a long-running problem for Britain, rather than a resolution of a moral conflict.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>92</sup> PREM 13/2330, *passim*; Wilson, *Government*, 568–70 and 575–7; Smith, *Bitter Harvest*, 143–7; Megahey, *Gibbs*, 157–9.

<sup>93</sup> PREM 15/621, Graham to Mansfield (19 March), Home to Smith (20 March), and Home to Goodman (31 March 1971).

<sup>94</sup> PREM 15/621, Moon to Graham (8 April 1971).

<sup>95</sup> PREM 15/622, Moon to Graham (3 May), Cape Town to FCO (5 June), and Home to Heath (11 July 1971).

<sup>96</sup> Brivati, *Goodman*, 198–200 and 202–5; and see Goodman, *Way*, 220–9.

While Douglas-Home praised Goodman for his 'tireless energy and unmatched ingenuity',<sup>97</sup> he was seen as being too involved in the earlier negotiations to chair the commission that would explore the acceptability of the proposed settlement. That choice instead fell on an eminent British judge, Lord Pearce, whose commission reported in 1972 that the proposed settlement was not acceptable to most Rhodesians.<sup>98</sup> With the failure of this latest effort, Smith and his opponents became focused on a military trial of strength and diplomatic efforts only seriously revived later in the decade. In early 1976, however, in his last foray on the Rhodesia front, Wilson sent Lord Greenhill, the former permanent under-secretary of the FO, to assess Smith's attitude to a settlement, following indications that he would welcome British mediation. There were echoes in this mission of the situation a decade before: Wilson insisted these were 'talks' to 'explore' the situation rather than 'negotiations'; Smith himself was as ambiguous as ever in what he said; and in Cabinet, left-wing ministers were critical of the whole initiative. There had even been a suggestion of sending Goodman rather than Greenhill to lead the mission, perhaps in the company of Aitken.<sup>99</sup>

### Conclusion

The Rhodesia case, then, provides examples of special missions being led by Commonwealth secretaries, the foreign secretary, civil servants up to the rank of permanent under-secretary and including the prime minister's private secretary, a retired civil servant and businessmen. Add to that the examples mentioned above of an opposition figure (Selwyn Lloyd) and an intelligence chief (Flowers), while bearing in mind that summits, such as those on *Tiger* and *Fearless*, are also a form of special mission, and it is a formidable array. Some envoys combined roles and expertise: Alport was a Conservative, a former minister and an expert on Rhodesia; Goodman was a lawyer, a member of the House of Lords and a personal friend of Wilson. But Rhodesia did not exhaust the possible list of envoys: in other circumstances such unusual figures as the conqueror of Everest, the victor of El Alamein or even a member of the royal family could be drawn in to the fray. And, of course, aside from

<sup>97</sup> Thorpe, *Douglas Home*, 425; Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), 252.

<sup>98</sup> PREM 15/1171, 1172 and 1173, *passim*; and in general see Thorpe, *Douglas Home*, 420–9.

<sup>99</sup> PREM 16/1090, Ferguson to Wright (13 February), and /1091, Greenhill to Callaghan (28 February 1976); Castle, *Diaries, 1974–76*, 663–4 and 670–1.

the range of *figures* involved, Rhodesia represented only one *kind* of challenge, dealing with an illegal regime.

There were certainly sufficient examples of British special missions in the 1960s and 1970s to confirm Henry Wriston's conclusion about US experience down to 1960, namely that the 'use of special envoys has increased so much that a definitive classification of the occasions that call for their employment is impossible'. He listed some of the 'characteristic situations' in which they were used,<sup>100</sup> and all have parallels with British experience: ceremonial occasions (such as Douglas-Home's attendance at Nasser's funeral), roving missions to a particular region (MacDonald), envoys to negotiations that straddled the responsibility of several government departments (the ministers for Europe on EC entry), representatives at international conferences (such as Healey at the IMF), dealing with states where there were no diplomatic relations (the Rhodesia case), handling matters that were technically complex (such as Luce in the Persian Gulf) and trouble-shooting (Gordon Walker or Shackleton on Malta). To these one might add a number of others: cases where the workload had to be removed from the senior minister, as when Diamond handled the offset talks; some where close secrecy had to be maintained at the top, as with Robert Armstrong's missions to Paris; and those when trade was being promoted, especially through ministerial visits. Missions varied from the highly specialised, like Davies' mission to Hanoi, where his personal knowledge of Ho was the key, to almost routine work in maintaining bilateral relationships, in which any number of ministers and officials were involved.

One-off missions were becoming so frequent that it is not surprising some professional diplomats sensed a threat from what seemed a novel, American invention. But, aside from the argument that special missions are actually older than resident ambassadors, there are a number of reasons why the two could safely be conducted together. Whatever the mission, the permanent embassy could still find a role alongside it. When Davies arrived in Hanoi, the British consul general was there to provide support. In fact, the complaints from the Washington embassy about the demands made by frequent visitors show that special missions very much added to the workload of ambassadors and their staff. The ambassador could smooth the way for the envoy, providing experience in diplomacy, intelligence on the other side's position, familiarity with the personalities involved, knowledge of their institutions and first-hand experience of their negotiating technique.<sup>101</sup> Hence, there was a relationship between permanent and special missions that was not merely

<sup>100</sup> Wriston, 'Special Envoy', 234 7.   <sup>101</sup> See Trevelyan, *Channels*, 72 4.

one of tension and rivalry. Furthermore, career diplomats could be used as special envoys very easily. In some cases, where diplomatic relations do not exist, or where no permanent embassy exists (a frequent situation for some poorer states), the use of special missions is inevitable, but a decision can still be made to use a professional diplomat, like Beeley's December 1967 mission to Egypt.

One clear conclusion to be drawn from this chapter is that, looking at evidence from the 1960s and 1970s, the special mission was thriving as much as the permanent embassy. The two were not so much competitors as mutual winners in the expansion of diplomatic activity in the twentieth century, each with their own place in maximising the country's diplomatic influence. In certain circumstances, as when an unpleasant message had to be delivered, resident ambassadors might even welcome the arrival of a special mission. And the British proved as eager as anyone to exploit the flexibility that the special mission could bring.



## 6 Bilateral summits

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Great princes should never see each other if they want to remain friends  
Philippe de Commines<sup>1</sup>

The word ‘summit’ was first used to describe a gathering of world leaders in a speech by Winston Churchill in 1950. He probably meant only to designate a conference of the most powerful figures, at that time the US president, Soviet leader and British prime minister. But those studying international relations now use it to refer to a meeting of one or more heads of state and government; in this sense it clearly refers to an ancient practice. Even Commines, writing towards the end of the fifteenth century, had seen too many occasions when princes fell out to recommend face-to-face encounters. Negotiations, he believed, were best left in the hands of experienced diplomats like himself.<sup>2</sup> Yet, while they became rare events in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, summits never quite died out and they underwent a resurgence after 1914, fostered by the democratisation of diplomacy and the belief that issues of war and peace were too important to be left to professionals.<sup>3</sup> The practice mushroomed after the Second World War as jet transport became possible and the world became more interdependent. In eight years as president, 1945–53, Harry Truman made only four overseas journeys and two of those were to neighbouring countries, Mexico and Canada, but in less than six years, 1969–74, Richard Nixon made forty-two visits abroad, often as part of wide tours that took in several capitals.<sup>4</sup> Some of the most high-profile summits were between adversaries

<sup>1</sup> Philippe de Commines, *Memoirs: The reign of Louis XI*, translated by Michael Jones (London: Penguin, 1972), 145.

<sup>2</sup> For a selection of Commines’ arguments, see G.R. Berridge, ed., *Diplomatic Classics: Selected texts from Commines to Vassel* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 20–34.

<sup>3</sup> For a discussion, see David Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The evolution of international summitry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 5–13.

<sup>4</sup> [www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/trvl/pres/](http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ho/trvl/pres/) lists US presidents’ overseas visits. On the US experience, see Elmer Plischke, *Diplomat in Chief: The president at the summit* (New York: Praeger, 1986).

in the Cold War but most were between friendly states. This growth in summitry occurred even as the value of the resident embassy, generally seen as the central institution of modern diplomacy, was called into question. The two phenomena have been seen as closely linked: Abba Eban, the Israeli foreign minister, once said that the ‘most serious defect of summitry is its negative influence on the status and dignity of embassies’.<sup>5</sup> This chapter will focus on bilateral summits, leaving multilateral diplomacy to the one following.<sup>6</sup>

### Classifying summits

David Dunn has defined ‘summits’ as face-to-face meetings between leaders ‘at the highest possible level’, that is, among individuals who, ‘by virtue of their position . . . are not able to be contradicted by any other individual’. Usually this definition implies heads of state and government, but it can also include heads of international organisations and factions in civil wars.<sup>7</sup> Dunn adds the caveat that summits are not necessarily more significant than other forms of communication; the definition is there for analytical purposes. Thus, Heath’s meeting with the French president, Georges Pompidou, in May 1971, which helped pave the way for EC membership, shares the title with the talk, ‘mainly of a social nature’, between Heath and President Haammar de Roburt of the Pacific ‘microstate’ of Nauru three months later.<sup>8</sup> Dunn’s definition of summitry will be used here. It has the value of allowing certain meetings to be discounted as summits even at prime ministerial level, for example Wilson’s meetings with Terence O’Neill of Northern Ireland in 1966–9 or Heath’s with Robert Bourassa of Quebec in April 1971, since neither O’Neill nor Bourassa held the ‘highest’ authority in the United Kingdom or Canada.<sup>9</sup> For the same reason, meetings with the prime ministers of France or the USSR – as opposed to meetings with the French president or Leonid Brezhnev, general secretary of the Soviet Communist Party, who held the ‘highest’ authority – should not be considered proper summits, although their importance cannot be doubted. Indeed, the most significant British–Soviet meeting in the

<sup>5</sup> Abba Eban, *Diplomacy for the Next Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 91.

<sup>6</sup> Bilateral summits that take place during state visits are covered in chapter 8.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of a summit with the leader of one side in a civil war, see Heath’s meeting with Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman, the leader of ‘Bangladesh’: UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, PREM 15/751, record of meeting (8 January 1972).

<sup>8</sup> Dunn, *Highest Level*, 14–19; PREM 15/281, ‘AJCS’ to Grattan (26 August 1971).

<sup>9</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964–1970: A personal record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 670–5; PREM 15/250, unsigned note to McCluney (14 April 1971).

years covered by this study was probably that in London in February 1967 between premiers Wilson and Kosygin, where they tried to broker a peace deal between the US and North Vietnam,<sup>10</sup> while one of the most significant Franco-British meetings of the 1960s was Georges Pompidou's visit to London as prime minister, when the British tried in vain to make progress on the possibility of EEC entry.<sup>11</sup>

The arguments for and against summits may be briefly summarised; as noted in the previous chapter, they sometimes echo the arguments for and against special missions in general. On the one hand, it may be contended that political leaders are powerful but vain individuals, generally lacking in diplomatic experience or linguistic skills, ignorant of technicalities, unable to escape media attention, oversensitive in dealing with their opposite numbers and faced, at least during conferences abroad, with gruelling schedules and, perhaps, the debilitating effects of jet lag. As a result, they may trample on diplomatic niceties, misinterpret what is said, be satisfied with illusory 'breakthroughs' and treat summits as occasions for publicity-seeking. If one leader develops a personal dislike of the other, makes a major gaffe or fails to treat an issue seriously then their meeting may worsen, rather than improve, relations. Each side is under pressure to produce a 'result' in order to avoid the impression of failure, but an unwise agreement, if concluded at the highest level, is almost impossible to escape from. 'When a chief of state . . . makes a fumble', Dean Acheson, the former US secretary of state, wrote, 'the goal line is open behind him.'<sup>12</sup> In a study of summitry from the 1919 Paris peace conference to the Cold War, Keith Eubank found no evidence that such meetings were better than, say, foreign ministers' talks at reaching sane, lasting agreements. Some proved disastrous. Summits such as Munich and Yalta had become bywords for betrayal. Similarly, Jeffrey Giauque, after analysing Western European and transatlantic summitry in 1956–63, saw the process negatively. Cases where summits settled disputes or reached significant agreements were few. More often they were publicity exercises, masking fundamental disagreements. Harold Macmillan may have got on well with Kennedy, but the prime minister and Germany's Chancellor Adenauer did not learn to love each other through personal meetings, nor could de Gaulle be won over by Macmillan to enlarging the EC.

<sup>10</sup> John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, 'British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966–1967: Marigolds, sunflowers, and "Kosygin Week"', *Diplomatic History*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 2003), 113–49.

<sup>11</sup> PREM 13/1509, records of meetings (6–7 July 1966).

<sup>12</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation* (New York: Norton, 1969), 480.

On the other hand, because summits are carried out 'at the highest level' they do carry particular weight if some genuine breakthrough is achieved or agreement reached. A successful summit can be good publicity, not only for the leaders involved, but for the alliances of which they may be members and the treaties they have signed. They were symbols during the Cold War that conflict was not inevitable, they show electorates that their leaders are trying to shape the world in a positive way and they may solemnise a country's commitment to a particular agreement, topic or relationship. For the leaders themselves they may help to create a personal understanding with their opposite numbers, which in turn creates greater trust in dealings between their countries. Reputations may particularly benefit from being present at some high-level gathering or through visiting a particularly powerful country, hence the popularity of Washington as a destination. Furthermore, the dangers of failure can be reduced by various means. A summit can more easily be made a success if the occasion itself is well prepared by officials, expertly choreographed and used mainly to sign agreements that have been completed in advance, even if this leaves the leaders themselves with little freedom to take the initiative. Expectations of a spectacular result can be lowered if summits are advertised as a mere 'exchange of views', leaders' meetings held during major funerals can be kept discreet, while 'institutionalised' summits, held between certain countries at regular intervals, can help to blunt the interest of the media and expectations of dramatic change.<sup>13</sup> Then again, even the most careful preparations have not prevented some high-profile failures.<sup>14</sup>

Geoffrey Berridge has classified summits by type in order to clarify their value. First, 'serial' (or 'institutionalised') summits are often multilateral and linked to international organisations, but may play an important role in certain bilateral relationships, such as that between Britain and the US. In such a case there is already a mutual interest in a successful relationship between the states involved. Since they are regular they encourage leaders to educate themselves about ongoing issues and allow them to get to know their opposite numbers. Such summits help maintain diplomatic momentum on issues over a period of

<sup>13</sup> The above arguments for and against summitry are based on: G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice* (third edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 175–80 and 188–90; Dunn, *Highest Level*, 247–65; Keith Eubank, *The Summit Conferences 1919–60* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1966); Jeffrey Giauque, 'Bilateral Summit Diplomacy in Western European and Transatlantic Relations, 1956–63', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 31, no. 3 (2001), 427–45.

<sup>14</sup> See Jan Melissen, 'Summit Diplomacy Coming of Age', in Christer Jonsson and Richard Langhorne, eds., *Diplomacy: Volume 3* (London: Sage, 2004), 185–202.

time, allow a range of issues to be linked in ‘package deals’ and act as a final ‘court of appeal’ in disputes. They may also last longer than ad hoc summits and are therefore better suited to serious negotiation in themselves. Ad hoc summits, Berridge’s second type, are surrounded by greater publicity and serve more as symbolic events than opportunities for negotiation. Since they are one-off occasions, however, they can force issues to be addressed and may encourage agreements to be negotiated in advance of the meeting itself. Finally, ‘exchange of view’ summits are short meetings, often of only a few hours’ duration, which typically take place on much longer overseas visits by leaders, perhaps to several countries in one week. They may have value in getting to know other leaders, building friendships and promoting trade, but such occasions provide little opportunity for negotiation, ceremony or even – notwithstanding their name – clarifying intentions.<sup>15</sup> This threefold classification will be used below to order the analysis, but it will also be seen that not all summits fit easily into these categories.

### General British practice

It should be noted at the outset that the prime minister often met foreign political figures other than heads of state and government. US visitors were particularly welcome. In 1964–5, during his first seven months of office, Harold Wilson met Under-Secretary of State George Ball twice, Ambassador-at-Large Averell Harriman twice and Ambassador David Bruce for four formal meetings.<sup>16</sup> Indeed, bilateral meetings in London in 1965 show that Wilson hosted only six summits, compared to twenty-four meetings with other representatives of foreign governments. But these figures are distorted by the fact that many leaders attended two major multilateral gatherings in London that year: Winston Churchill’s funeral in January and the Commonwealth meeting in June.<sup>17</sup> Certainly, summits were the most numerous meetings Heath had with visiting political figures during his premiership. Looking at bilateral meetings on British soil, as traced in the Prime Minister’s Office files, in 1971 he hosted thirty-one summits and was visited by twenty-eight other

<sup>15</sup> Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 181–8.

<sup>16</sup> PREM 13/2450, records of meetings with Ball (30 November 1964, 5 May 1965); PREM 13/2451, records of meetings with Harriman (7 January and 24 March 1965); PREM 13/3021, records of meetings with Bruce (27 November 1964, 16–17 February and 12 March 1965).

<sup>17</sup> The figures are an estimate based on descriptors of Prime Minister’s Office files (PREM 13) for 1965. It is difficult to produce figures for a typical year in the mid 1960s due to the change of premier in 1963 and the elections of 1964 and 1966.

overseas politicians, while in 1972 the figures were thirty-five summits and twenty-one meetings with other political figures. The frequency of bilateral summits by this time can be gauged from the fact that, during less than four years as premier, Heath hosted almost 110 of them.<sup>18</sup>

The prime minister's time was precious and meetings with visitors below leaders' level needed special justification. Heath's timetable included not only political commitments in government, parliament and the Conservative Party, but also yacht-racing commitments.<sup>19</sup> However, a few visitors below leaders' level met the prime minister regularly. Heath's numerous meetings with Jean Monnet, secretary-general of the Action Committee for the United States of Europe, reflected the prime minister's determination to get into the EC.<sup>20</sup> Wilson and Heath also generally saw Henry Kissinger whenever the latter was in London as US national security adviser or secretary of state.<sup>21</sup> Even when summits did occur, the most meaningful talks were often not with the prime minister himself but when foreign ministers got involved and the discussion turned to specifics. Thus, when Uganda's Idi Amin visited London at short notice in July 1971, on his first foreign visit as president, his dinner with Heath passed uneventfully. It was in an ensuing talk with Douglas-Home that Amin revealed his irrational side – asking the British for help against an expected Chinese invasion!<sup>22</sup>

In common with most other countries, the British used summits to build certain relationships, not least those with leading European and Commonwealth states. The main purpose of inviting the Italian premier, Aldo Moro, to meet Douglas-Home in April 1964 was to 'increase the impact' of Moro's rather uninspiring personality on Italian politics and so strengthen the support for his government.<sup>23</sup> Within weeks of becoming prime minister in 1964, Wilson was advised to meet India's

<sup>18</sup> They are listed in John W. Young, 'A Case Study in Summitry: The experience of Britain's Edward Heath, 1970–74', *Hague Journal of Diplomacy*, vol. 1, no. 3 (2006), 288–93. The figures on Heath's meetings in 1971–2 are based on PREM files and contain an element of subjectivity as to what constitutes a 'political' figure, but the statistics include government ministers, members of parliament and opposition figures.

<sup>19</sup> See, for example, PREM 15/1148, especially record of meeting (25 June 1970) and notes of 1 and 8 March 1972 (with list of 'dates blocked out' for March–December).

<sup>20</sup> Records of their meetings are in PREM 15/359 and /1312.

<sup>21</sup> PREM 15/1272 (lunch on 24 June 1971); PREM 15/1273 (dinner at Chequers, 14 September 1972); PREM 15/1984, Washington to FCO (4 May), and Trend to Heath (11 May 1973); PREM 16/290, records of meetings (28 March and 8 July 1974), and /727, record of meeting (7 March 1975).

<sup>22</sup> Edward Heath, *The Course of my Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 483; PREM 15/707, McCluney to Moon (16 July 1971).

<sup>23</sup> Ilaria Favretto, 'The Wilson Governments and the Italian Centre Left Coalitions: Between 'Socialist' diplomacy and realpolitik, 1964–70', *European History Quarterly*, vol. 36, no. 3 (2006), 425–6.

new premier, Lal Shastri, not only 'to get on close personal terms with him' but also because a summit would be 'a most useful antidote' to his enthusiasm for the non-aligned movement.<sup>24</sup> But some unlikely looking candidates were also given special treatment. Heath met Dr Kofi Busia of Ghana three times in less than twelve months, mainly because London wanted to boost the position of this friendly, Commonwealth leader, who had been elected in 1969 following a period of military rule.<sup>25</sup> The British knew the symbolic importance of such meetings. In November 1973, when Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia passed through London on his way back from America, Heath was asked to meet him because 'the Yugoslavs attach great importance' to an 'element of high-level personal contact'; the 'ceremonial aspects of the visit will . . . be as important as the actual talks'.<sup>26</sup>

Given this emphasis on symbolism, all possible was done to minimise controversy at summit level, even over such questions as the food to serve. When Busia visited, Downing Street consulted both the Ghanaian government and the Treasury medical advisers about the appropriate meals to serve, because he was diabetic.<sup>27</sup> At summits abroad it was still possible to impress other leaders by, for example, bringing the Royal Navy into play. Wilson's best-remembered summits were with Rhodesia's Ian Smith, on HMS *Tiger* and HMS *Fearless*, while, at Bermuda in December 1971, Heath gave Nixon dinner on board HMS *Glamorgan*, which had sailed all the way from Mombasa.<sup>28</sup> Yet, despite the attempts to make the best impression, a few meetings were held in an ill-tempered atmosphere. There were several such meetings with Maltese premiers who objected to British plans for military withdrawal from the island.<sup>29</sup> Others occurred during war crises, though these were rare. Both Heath, in 1973, and Wilson, in 1976, had gruelling meetings with their Icelandic opposite numbers during the 'Cod War' over fishing limits<sup>30</sup> and in July 1974 Wilson tried in vain to dissuade Turkish premier Bülent Ecevit from invading Cyprus.<sup>31</sup>

<sup>24</sup> PREM 13/397, Gore Booth to Wilson (4 November), and covering note to record of meetings (3–6 December 1964).

<sup>25</sup> PREM 15/400, records of meetings (16 October 1970, 28 April 1971), and Moon to Grattan (25 August 1971).

<sup>26</sup> PREM 15/2001, steering brief (undated).

<sup>27</sup> PREM 15/400, Wilson to Moon (19 August 1971). <sup>28</sup> Heath, *Course*, 485.

<sup>29</sup> PREM 16/1604, record of meeting (4 March 1967); PREM 15/524, record of meetings (17–18 September 1971); and PREM 15/1074, record of meeting (6 March 1972). Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew also visited London in January 1968 to secure a delay in the pace of British withdrawal: PREM 13/2945, record of meetings (14 January 1968).

<sup>30</sup> Heath, *Course*, 490–1; Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour government, 1974–1976* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 216–19.

<sup>31</sup> James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: Collins, 1987), 339–40; Wilson, *Term*, 62.

One significant feature of Britain's position was that, whatever its reduced position since 1945, it remained an important destination for foreign leaders. British premiers made quite regular visits abroad, but the vast majority of their summits took place in London. Nevertheless, with major partners like Germany and Italy there was an expectation that heads of government would alternate in visiting each other's country and it was an indication of the rising economic power of Japan that, in September 1972, Heath became the first British prime minister to visit Tokyo.<sup>32</sup> There was also the need to balance the pace of summits with certain countries, particularly in Western Europe. In December 1964 the Paris embassy warned that, in light of Wilson's plans to visit West Germany soon, it would be wise to offer a meeting to de Gaulle too.<sup>33</sup> America's power and central importance to the Western alliance meant that British leaders visited the US much more frequently than US presidents came to London. One foreign leader who certainly expected leaders to journey to him was the Pope, though his position as head of the Roman Catholic Church was unique.<sup>34</sup> But Britain's power relative to many less developed countries, as well as its importance as an aid donor, trading nation and arms exporter, undoubtedly helped to make it a port of call for Third World leaders. It also continued to gain from its imperial heritage: slightly more than a third of the summits hosted by Heath were with Commonwealth leaders. None of these seem to have expected the British prime minister to visit them on their own soil; instead, the premiers of Mauritius, Jamaica or Ghana were happy to visit Heath several times, without him reciprocating.

### **'Exchanges of view' and 'courtesy' summits**

An important reason why Britain became a frequent destination for foreign leaders was its position in global communications. If the growth of summitry itself was closely linked to improved transport, it is not surprising that Heathrow airport's position as the world's largest international airport regularly brought presidents and prime ministers there.<sup>35</sup> The Burmese leader, Ne Win, came on an almost annual basis

<sup>32</sup> PREM 15/1052, especially Warner to Douglas Home (28 September 1972).

<sup>33</sup> PREM 13/98, Paris to FO (9 December 1964).

<sup>34</sup> Wilson and Heath both combined visits to Italy with meeting the Pope: PREM 13/687, record of meeting (28 April 1965); PREM 15/1047, record of meeting (4 October 1972).

<sup>35</sup> It was also possible for British ministers to go to Heathrow to see foreign leaders. In September 1965 Stewart went to Heathrow to meet the UN secretary general, U Thant, and discuss the Indo Pakistani war. UKNA, FO 371/180963/178, FO to New York (16 September 1965).



in the early 1960s and again in the early 1970s. He usually met the prime minister of the day briefly, though seldom with anything significant to discuss.<sup>36</sup> Another regular visitor was Souvanna Phouma of Laos, who took annual holidays in France, the former colonial power in Laos, and linked these to a visit to London, largely because of Britain's role as co-chair of the Geneva Conference on Indochina.<sup>37</sup> Foreign leaders often combined visits to London with other European capitals, as in July 1965, when Chilean President Frei met Wilson during a tour that also took in France, Germany and Italy.<sup>38</sup> The prime minister's country house at Chequers was even more convenient for Heathrow than was Downing Street, but most summits took place at the latter, partly because this was easier to fit into the British premier's daily timetable and partly because visiting leaders often stayed overnight at their embassy in London. While Chequers offered more pleasant surroundings and was often used for visitors at the weekend, or for those who were holding discussions over more than one day, a meeting there did not necessarily indicate that it was more significant than a conference in Downing Street. This was not the equivalent to, say, an invitation by the US president to Camp David. In 1971, for example, Heath met the Jamaican premier, Hugh Shearer, for a lunch at Chequers that was mainly devoted to problems in the island's sugar industry.<sup>39</sup>

London's position as a frequent 'port of call' also benefited from the reputation of Britain's medical care and education systems. The fact that Seewoosagur Ramgoolam of Mauritius had children being educated in Dublin helps explain why he was a frequent visitor to London.<sup>40</sup> An example of a summit that coincided with medical treatment was that between Heath and Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman of Bangladesh, who came to London for a gall-bladder operation in 1972. Downing Street felt it only right to arrange a meeting with him, as a Commonwealth leader, but this proved difficult because Sheikh Mujib's doctors did not think him physically able to cope even with a journey across London; so Heath went to see him at Claridge's Hotel, where he was recuperating after his operation.<sup>41</sup> Sheikh Mujib could feel himself honoured: in December 1975 Patrick Wright, Wilson's private secretary, was adamant that his

<sup>36</sup> PREM 11/4650, includes records of meetings with Macmillan in 1960, 1961 and 1962, and Douglas Home in October 1964; and PREM 15/760, includes records of meetings with Heath.

<sup>37</sup> PREM 15/1054, Grattan to Forrester (23 October 1972).

<sup>38</sup> PREM 13/160, *passim*. <sup>39</sup> PREM 15/503, Moon to Grattan (23 August 1971).

<sup>40</sup> PREM 15/1084, *passim*.

<sup>41</sup> PREM 15/2010, Simcock to Heath (14 August), and record of meeting (18 August 1972).

chief must meet Israeli foreign minister Yigal Allon in Downing Street because 'it really is too humiliating for our Prime Minister to go off visiting people in their hotels'.<sup>42</sup> There were numerous occasions that, in fact, could be exploited for summits. Heath agreed to host a dinner for President Senghor of Senegal when the latter attended a conference on the ancient Mali Empire in London in 1972, and saw him again when he came to collect an honorary degree from Oxford University the following year. In 1974 Australia's Gough Whitlam met Wilson during a family Christmas in London.<sup>43</sup> It was often difficult to deny a meeting if leaders pressed for one. When the Gabonese President Bongo arrived in 1970, mainly to attract British firms to invest in his country, it hardly seemed worth Heath's time to meet him – the president carried little weight in African affairs – but Bongo wanted a meeting and Downing Street neatly solved the dilemma by having Heath drop into two receptions that had been arranged for the president.<sup>44</sup>

Such meetings fall within Berridge's category of 'exchanges of view', though, given the main British motive for holding them, they might better be termed 'courtesy' summits. They were not entirely one-way, either. When Douglas-Home attended the Kennedy funeral at short notice in November 1963, he realised Lyndon Johnson might only be able to hold a short meeting but was determined to press for one, feeling 'that it might look odd if he came to Washington and did not have any time with the President at all'.<sup>45</sup> There were also a few examples of British premiers combining summits with other commitments when abroad. Heath met both Germany's Willy Brandt and Ireland's Jack Lynch during the 1972 Munich Olympics, and in December 1973, when he went to Brussels to help inaugurate the Spaak Foundation, he saw the Belgian and Luxembourg prime ministers. The last meetings were valuable, since the leaders were able to discuss an upcoming European Community summit.<sup>46</sup> But frequently, especially during Commonwealth leaders' visits to London, little of substance transpired; often it was not intended that they should. In 1971, when Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore came to receive honorary degrees from Liverpool and Sheffield Universities, the FCO had 'no specific business to do', but Heath gave him a dinner.<sup>47</sup> Such meetings were often

<sup>42</sup> Bernard Donoghue, *Downing Street Diary* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 591.

<sup>43</sup> PREM 15/1208 and 1923, *passim* (on Senghor); PREM 16/418, Bridges to Wilson (undated, October 1974).

<sup>44</sup> PREM 15/68, biographical note (October), and notes by Graham (29 and 30 October 1970).

<sup>45</sup> PREM 11/4790, FO to Washington (25 November 1963).

<sup>46</sup> PREM 15/914, records of meetings with Lynch (4 September) and Brandt (5 September 1972); PREM 15/1312, records of meetings (3 December 1973).

<sup>47</sup> PREM 15/655, Grattan to Moon (5 November 1971).

officially described as ‘calls’, which suggests that those involved felt them to be less significant than full, official summits.<sup>48</sup>

Yet, for a number of reasons, it would be wrong to exclude ‘courtesy calls’ from any list of summits. After all, they fit Dunn’s definition of a meeting ‘at the highest level’ and, as said above, the definition is there for analytical purposes, not because all meetings at the highest level were necessarily substantial in content. It is also clear from what has been said so far that, in British eyes, by agreeing to meet Tito, Lee and others, it was the encounter itself that was felt to be valuable, not what was discussed. They had an importance, even if it was a symbolic one. Furthermore, while ‘courtesy’ summits were often insignificant and avoided any media interest, there were occasions when they proved significant. The most striking example was Wilson’s interview with Rhodesia’s Ian Smith during the Churchill funeral in 1965. This was officially described by both sides as a ‘courtesy call’, partly to play down its importance as the first occasion they had met, yet it went on for ninety minutes and Smith was so worried about the potential press coverage that he insisted on leaving Number 10 by the back door.<sup>49</sup>

### Ad hoc summits

Perhaps because of the large number of ‘exchange of view’ summits, as well as the ‘institutionalised’ variety, which will be discussed below, ad hoc meetings were becoming rarer. Yet they were still significant and often drew the greatest attention from the press and public. The crisis summits with Icelandic or Maltese premiers, mentioned above, fall into this category, since they were organised as one-off meetings at short notice to discuss points of substance. So, too, do the Wilson–Smith summits on *Tiger*, in December 1966, and *Fearless*, two years later, which exposed many of the classic failings of summitry. They drew intense media interest, put both leaders under pressure to make concessions, but failed to achieve any breakthrough and were criticised even by Wilson’s colleagues in the Cabinet.<sup>50</sup> Yet it was Wilson’s earlier visit to Rhodesia in October 1965 which had most parallels to that most notorious of all summits, Munich. Wilson intended not to negotiate any detailed settlement, but to try, somehow, to avert the danger of a unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) by Rhodesia, which then

<sup>48</sup> For example, when Nigeria’s President Gowon made a half hour ‘call’ on Wilson in 1975, when in the UK to collect an honorary degree: PREM 16/584.

<sup>49</sup> PREM 13/534, note of meeting (30 January 1965).

<sup>50</sup> See above, 109–11.

seemed imminent. He also played what he called ‘the ace of spades’ of a summit meeting in order to impress the Commonwealth and public. Such hasty action, sprung on the Cabinet with one eye on popular opinion, was uncomfortably close to Neville Chamberlain’s behaviour in 1938. And, while in the short term Wilson did convince the world that he had done all possible to prevent a crisis, he made one mistake during the summit which would return to haunt him: at one point he told Smith that, in the event of UDI, Britain would rely on economic sanctions not military action.<sup>51</sup>

Another African conflict that drew Wilson into a potentially dangerous, one-off summit was the Nigerian civil war. He went to Lagos in March 1969 partly to open the way for a meeting with the rebel leader of Biafra, Colonel Ojukwu. Again he had one eye on the domestic scene, with rising criticism of his support for the Nigerian government, and again he risked being drawn into unwise concessions if a meeting took place. This was also a telling example of how trips abroad took the leader’s eye off events at home since, as Wilson left for Nigeria, differences were mounting in his Cabinet over trade union reform. James Callaghan, at that time the home secretary, chose the day of Wilson’s departure to vote against such legislation in Labour’s National Executive Committee. It was fortunate for Wilson that the Biafrans rejected his peace efforts, and he was able to improve relations with the Nigerian government before jetting home to quell Callaghan’s revolt.<sup>52</sup>

One significant relationship where ad hoc summits remained the norm was that with the USSR. Soon after becoming prime minister in 1964, Wilson pressed for a meeting with Soviet leaders, but the Kremlin was in an uncertain state following the fall of Khrushchev and in 1965 Moscow became critical of British support for America in Vietnam.<sup>53</sup> Wilson eventually went to Moscow in February 1966 and hoped that, with the Soviets not talking to the US at a high level, ‘they may be ready to keep [a dialogue] going through us’, an echo of Churchillian hopes that Britain could act as an honest broker between Washington and Moscow.<sup>54</sup> Wilson then used a British industrial exhibition in Moscow in July 1966 to justify another visit and, while he did not see Brezhnev, returned confident that he was building a relationship with premier Kosygin.<sup>55</sup> A third visit took place in January 1968, by which time they

<sup>51</sup> PREM 13/542, CRO to Salisbury (20 October), and /543, record of meeting (29 October 1965).

<sup>52</sup> For an insightful analysis, see P.J. Deveney, ‘The Political Rehabilitation of James Callaghan’ (PhD thesis, London School of Economics, 2006), chapter 2.

<sup>53</sup> PREM 13/598, *passim*. <sup>54</sup> PREM 13/1216, Wilson to Johnson (26 February 1966).

<sup>55</sup> PREM 13/1218, Wilson to Johnson (19 July 1966).

seemed to be assuming an 'institutionalised' basis. But Denis Greenhill, deputy under-secretary at the FCO, while noting a 'striking improvement in the atmosphere and mechanics of Anglo-Soviet relations', also wrote, 'I cannot see that we are closer on fundamentals' like Vietnam, European security or Middle East peace.<sup>56</sup> Sure enough, later that year the Soviet-led invasion of Czechoslovakia set back détente. Wilson began to consider another visit to the USSR before losing office in 1970, but Heath, who showed little interest in détente, dropped these plans. A major spy scandal in 1971 led to some of the bleakest years in post-war Anglo-Soviet relations, and in 1972 visits to Eastern Europe were ruled out of his timetable.<sup>57</sup>

In 1974 Labour returned, hoping to 're-establish personal contact at the highest level as a normal ingredient of Anglo-Soviet relations', and Wilson made a four-day visit to Moscow and Leningrad in February 1975, seeing Brezhnev on no less than four occasions and signing agreements on health, industrial and technological co-operation, as if trying to expunge the knowledge that this was the first such summit for seven years.<sup>58</sup> Eastern European governments also became priority targets, with Wilson going to Romania in September 1975, the first visit by a British premier to a Soviet bloc country other than the USSR since 1945. But it proved a dreary affair: 'Apparently they all hated it', noted one official when Wilson returned to Number 10: 'Smelled of a police state . . .'<sup>59</sup> The fact is that, by then, Britain was trailing other powers in the détente stakes: Nixon had been to Romania several years before and held three summits with Brezhnev in 1972-4, with no need for any British go-between.

### **Institutionalised summits: Europe**

Perhaps the most famous bilateral summit involving Britain in this period, and one that was undoubtedly successful, was Heath's meeting with French president Georges Pompidou in May 1971. It has long been appreciated that this was of central importance to Heath's success in getting Britain into the EC, an aim that was itself essential to his whole

<sup>56</sup> PREM 13/2402, especially Greenhill to Gore Booth (29 January 1968).

<sup>57</sup> PREM 15/1148, especially record of meeting (25 June 1970) and notes of 1 and 8 March 1972 (with list of 'dates blocked out' for March-December). See also PREM 15/1154, *passim*, on the impossibility of timetabling a visit to Australia and New Zealand.

<sup>58</sup> UKNA, CAB 128, CM(75)9th (20 February); PREM 16/282, Hunt to Wilson (20 December 1974, including quote); PREM 16/688, records of meetings (13-17 February 1975); Wilson, *Term*, 154-60.

<sup>59</sup> PREM 16/635, especially Brearley to PS (7 August), and FCO outward (25 September 1975); Donoghue, *Diary*, 501.

foreign policy.<sup>60</sup> Long before entering the EC, the British tried to use meetings with member governments to encourage supporters (the Dutch, Belgians and Italians), keep in step with other applicants (Ireland, Denmark and Norway) and win over the French (as Macmillan had tried and failed to do with de Gaulle in 1961–2). The ‘second try’ was preceded by visits of both Wilson and his foreign secretary to the capitals of the EC, for bilateral summits with each member, in the so-called ‘probe’ of January–March 1967.<sup>61</sup> Summits between the British and the leading Western European countries had taken on a ‘serialised’ nature, meetings with the German and Italian leaders being roughly annual by the mid-1960s, but the record of summits as aids to British policy on the European front was hardly good. Despite all the time and effort put into them, they had not secured what London wanted. De Gaulle issued his vetoes, West Germany would not compromise its relationship with France in order to force the pace of British entry, and the other EC members lacked the necessary weight to help London. Summits did no more than confirm existing positions and in some cases probably harmed personal relations, as when Wilson met German chancellor Kurt Kiesinger in October 1967, just before the ‘second try’ came to its abrupt end, and expressed annoyance that his visitor would not back the application more actively.<sup>62</sup> Yet, by early 1971, with entry talks having been revived, a Heath–Pompidou meeting was being discussed as the key element for breaking down French doubts. This was partly because Pompidou himself liked to use summits to assert the importance of his own position, both as France’s chief diplomat and as the key figure in the Community. With the French, it should be noted, ‘institutionalised’ summits were not yet the norm. This would be the first meeting between a prime minister and president since June 1967 and should thus be treated as an ad hoc event.

In retrospect, it is clear that Pompidou had decided to back enlargement even before the summit. The meeting proved successful simply because, as so often in such cases, its outcome was decided in advance, but this was not clear at the time, Pompidou being better than most at obscuring his intentions. Planning the meeting proved a delicate matter. Geoffrey Rippon, the minister for Europe, believed such a meeting was vital for convincing the president ‘that Britain and France

<sup>60</sup> See, for example, Uwe Kitzinger, *Diplomacy and Persuasion: How Britain joined the Common Market* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), chapter 4; Con O’Neill, *Britain’s Entry into the European Community: Report on the negotiations of 1970–1972* (London: Cass, 2000), chapter 33; and Heath, *Course*, 365–72.

<sup>61</sup> PREM 13/1478 has the master records of probe visits.

<sup>62</sup> PREM 13/1486, record of meeting (23 October 1967).

could work together in Europe. Putting over this conviction would be more important than anything else.' But if Pompidou refused to meet, or if the summit ended in failure, it could prove cataclysmic for the latest entry bid.<sup>63</sup> Even when, in late March, Pompidou agreed to a summit, the British continued to worry. The date suggested – 21 May – was many weeks away and it was feared that, in the interim, the talks on entry in Brussels would be slowed down, perhaps creating an atmosphere of crisis. Also, since the summit could hardly be kept secret, it might upset the other member states, who would be resentful of decisions being taken from their hands. Then again, once Pompidou had suggested a meeting it was almost impossible not to go ahead.<sup>64</sup> To dampen the sense of expectation, when the dates were formally announced, the British tried to play down its significance by pointing out that Heath had just seen Brandt and would soon be meeting Italy's Emilio Colombo.<sup>65</sup> But everyone knew it was Paris that mattered most.

Douglas Hurd, Heath's political secretary, has left a vivid description of the prime minister's careful preparations for Paris, sitting in the garden behind Downing Street, 'under a tree, dunking biscuits in tea' while experts on all manner of subject joined him; 'each had their session under the tree, while ducks from the park waddled amorously across the lawn ...'<sup>66</sup> Christopher Soames, the ambassador to Paris, considered that one of the chief reasons why the summit was so successful, apart from the lofty sense of 'history being made', was that, on a more mundane level, both principals had 'done their homework'. Con O'Neill noted that although Heath took along all the senior members of the British delegation in Brussels, they were 'scarcely wanted at all, he knew it all backwards'. In the face-to-face meetings the only officials present were a pair of interpreters.<sup>67</sup> (Such careful preparations were not always the case: in December 1965 Wilson said he would not read the briefs for a summit with Lyndon Johnson until he was on the aircraft bound for Washington.)<sup>68</sup> Pompidou emerged from the talks convinced of Heath's commitment and the entry talks now moved forward rapidly. Their

<sup>63</sup> PREM 15/369, especially Rippon to Heath (26 March 1971).

<sup>64</sup> PREM 15/370, Tickell to Barrington (27 March), Rippon to Heath (31 March), and FCO memorandum attached to Barrington to Armstrong (21 April 1971); PREM 15/371, record of meeting of 23 April.

<sup>65</sup> PREM 15/371, FCO outward telegram (8 May 1971).

<sup>66</sup> Douglas Hurd, *An End to Promises: Sketch of a government, 1970-74* (London: Collins, 1979), 62.

<sup>67</sup> British Library of Political and Economic Science (BLPES), London, 'Seventies Archive' (Brook Publications), interviews with Soames and O'Neill.

<sup>68</sup> BLPES, Hetherington papers, 11/7, record of meeting with Wilson (13 December 1965).

importance can be gauged by the fact that, uniquely for a summit in these years, they were the only item on the Cabinet agenda for 24 May.<sup>69</sup>

Even after the main hurdle was crossed, and despite the *multilateral* nature of the Community, *bilateral* summits remained significant for keeping Britain and its new partners together. Pompidou visited London in March 1972 for discussions, which covered everything from East–West détente to the reform of the European Parliament, and were designed to establish a unity of views rather than to make decisions.<sup>70</sup> Heath was furious when the careful preparations almost went awry through a ludicrous bureaucratic mix-up, between the FCO and the Home Office, which led to the whole of the French delegation – including Pompidou – being asked to complete immigration forms!<sup>71</sup> Heath laid great emphasis on the relationship with Pompidou and continued to plan meetings with him through direct contacts between Downing Street and the Elysée.<sup>72</sup> In his report on the next Anglo–French summit, in May 1973, when the two leaders met alone for more than nine hours, the ambassador to Paris, Edward Tomkins, emphasised the importance of such bilateral encounters: ‘multilateral processes do not preclude the need for a web of confidences woven bilaterally among the leaders, and more particularly with the country which is at the same time the most difficult and the nearest and the most necessary of our partners’. Each of the Heath–Pompidou summits, going back to 1971, had come after a difficult phase in relations, but the president usually softened his line after a face-to-face meeting, where his own significance was underlined.<sup>73</sup> In fact, on this occasion, Tomkins’ hope that EC co-operation would be revived was not borne out, but Heath stuck to the view that personal meetings were essential to his relationship with Pompidou, not least because this demonstrated to him how important France was, now, to British policy.<sup>74</sup>

France, of course, was not the only target of bilateral meetings to smooth multilateral business in the EC. In November 1973, when the German and Dutch leaders both visited London, preparations for the Community summit in Copenhagen were high on the agenda.<sup>75</sup> In fact,

<sup>69</sup> PREM 15/372, Heath to Pompidou (24 May 1971); CAB 128/49, CM(71)27th (24 May); Heath, *Course*, 365–72; and Soames’ report in O’Neill, *Britain’s Entry*, 402–8.

<sup>70</sup> PREM 15/903 and 904, *passim*.

<sup>71</sup> PREM 15/906, Armstrong to Alexander (9 February 1972).

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, PREM 15/1507, FCO to Paris (28 March), and Armstrong’s notes on meetings with Jobert (17 September 1973).

<sup>73</sup> PREM 15/1554, Tomkins to Douglas Home (1 June); and see /1555, records of meetings (21–2 May 1973).

<sup>74</sup> PREM 15/1556, FCO to Paris (3 November 1973).

<sup>75</sup> PREM 15/1565, records of meetings (12 November 1973).



in November–December 1973, in the build-up to Copenhagen, Heath saw all the other eight leaders of the Community in bilateral meetings. One of the other new members was Ireland and this might have helped smooth a difficult relationship. British–Irish summits were already a regular affair but they were beset, after 1969, by violence in Northern Ireland. Heath started to develop the idea of an ‘Irish dimension’ in settling the ‘troubles’ when he first saw Jack Lynch, in September 1971, a meeting where the British leader broke the ice by offering the *taoiseach* a glass of whisky. Heath saw it as significant that both Britain and Ireland were about to join the EC, a multilateral forum which allowed their leaders to meet more frequently in behind-the-scenes talks at bilateral level, and the first year of an enlarged Community saw rising hopes of an Irish settlement. Heath met the new *taoiseach*, Liam Cosgrave, alongside Northern Irish politicians at Sunningdale, Berkshire, in December 1973 and it was agreed to set up a power-sharing executive in the province.<sup>76</sup> But any hopes that co-operation in Europe could help to end deep-seated animosities in Ulster proved illusory. Protestants rejected power-sharing and summits merely charted its demise. When Wilson held his first summit with Liam Cosgrave in April 1974 the Irish found that the ‘British participants had clearly not got their act together’ and Wilson tried, ‘not with complete success, to appear . . . in command’. At the next summit, in September, Wilson was preoccupied with the upcoming general election and by the time of the last Wilson–Cosgrave summit in March 1975 Sunningdale was dead.<sup>77</sup>

There was more success for bilateral summitry on the EC front. Two significant meetings occurred late in 1974 that were vital for keeping Britain in the Community following Labour’s promise to renegotiate Heath’s entry terms. With the second election of the year out of the way, Helmut Schmidt came to address the Labour Party conference, where he chose to speak in favour of continued EC membership for Britain. He and Wilson met at Chequers and Schmidt left convinced that the prime minister wanted to stay in the Community but that he needed a few face-saving concessions. Returning to Bonn on 1 December, the chancellor engaged in some telephone diplomacy with the new French president Valéry Giscard d’Estaing and then Wilson, arranging ‘a private talk’

<sup>76</sup> Heath, *Course*, 430 2, 441 5 and, on the EC, 423; Paul Arthur, ‘The Heath Government and Northern Ireland’, in Stuart Ball and Anthony Seldon, eds., *The Heath Government, 1970–74* (London: Longman, 1996), especially 250 6; Garret Fitzgerald, *All in a Life: Garret Fitzgerald, an autobiography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991), chapter 8.

<sup>77</sup> Fitzgerald, *Life*, 232 3, 250 1 and 277; PREM 16/156, Wilson–Cosgrave (11 September 1974).

between the pair of them in Paris just two days later. Here, Wilson undertook publicly to support renegotiated terms if they were acceptable, while Giscard said he wanted Britain to remain a member.<sup>78</sup> As with the Heath–de Gaulle summit of May 1971, it was this bilateral encounter that paved the way to successful multilateral talks, with new entry terms being renegotiated within months. True, Britain might have remained in the EC without these summits, but they do seem to have made a real difference in terms of the speed and smoothness of the process. By 1975, it should be noted, Franco-British summits had become ‘institutionalised’ in nature, occurring about once per year on a reciprocal basis.<sup>79</sup> Also known as ‘official, working summits’ they fulfilled Berridge’s description of them as regular meetings that encouraged leaders to educate themselves about problems, maintained momentum on policies and allowed issues to be linked in ‘package deals’. They were planned well in advance and usually took up several hours of talks, sometimes over more than one day.

### **Institutionalised summits: the ‘special relationship’**

Another important example of serial, or ‘official, working’ summits was in the US–British relationship, although these were interspersed with some briefer, ‘exchange of view’ summits and, increasingly, by bilateral meetings in the context of multilateral conferences. The record of US–British summits confirms that such meetings, while sometimes successful, do not guarantee a smooth working relationship, even if held frequently. It also shows that, despite underlying tensions in the relationship, there was a tendency to play down any differences when a summit took place so as to portray a successful partnership. The years 1963–76 are generally seen as arid ones for the ‘special relationship’, especially at the highest level. Lyndon Johnson treated British leaders much as he did any others, with an indifference that sometimes spilled over into rudeness. Personal relations may have been better under Nixon, but by then the devaluation of the pound and the withdrawal from East of Suez made Britain less significant as an ally while Heath focused on EC entry.<sup>80</sup>

<sup>78</sup> PREM 16/100, undated ‘UK objectives’ brief for Schmidt meeting, and /101, records of plenaries (30 November and 1 December); PREM 16/84, note for the record (1 December), FCO to Paris (2 December), and record of Wilson Giscard meeting (3 December 1974).

<sup>79</sup> See, for example, PREM 16/427, Barrett to Wright (30 June 1975).

<sup>80</sup> See, for example: C. J. Bartlett, *The Special Relationship: A political history of Anglo American relations since 1945* (London: Longman, 1992), 107–36; Alan Dobson,

Douglas-Home's only official summit with Johnson, in February 1964, exposed problems in dealing with Johnson. According to one British official, during the conference the president 'invariably looked bored until some secretary came in to tell him that a member of Congress was anxious to see him, upon which his spirits rose visibly and, apologizing with little conviction, he left the meeting'.<sup>81</sup> Douglas-Home and Johnson held three formal meetings over two days, including one where they were alone, but the only issue that seemed to animate the president was a British decision to sell buses to Cuba, of which he was highly critical. Yet the British still considered the meeting a success, in that Johnson had stressed the need for close co-operation.<sup>82</sup>

It is easy to portray Johnson's relationship with Harold Wilson as indifferent, even hostile. Wilson himself later declared, 'I had some terrible rows with the President' about Britain's refusal to send troops to Vietnam.<sup>83</sup> Johnson is reputed to have said, on one occasion when Wilson proposed a meeting, 'We got enough pollution around here already without Harold coming over with his fly open and his pecker hanging out and peeing all over me.'<sup>84</sup> But it should be remembered that the president was reluctant to meet foreign leaders in general, preferring to focus on domestic politics and Vietnam. It is not that he singled out Wilson for ill-treatment and the evidence is that, when the pair met, they got on well enough. Despite warnings that Johnson might prove difficult, at their first summit in December 1964 Wilson returned delighted with his reception, which had included a one-to-one talk with the president.<sup>85</sup> A year later Johnson 'was irritated by the request made . . . by the PM for them to meet'; but after their private session on 16 December 1965, 'the President considered his conversation with Wilson today the most satisfactory he had ever had with a foreign President or Prime Minister . . .'.<sup>86</sup> The pattern was repeated with Wilson's July 1966 visit: when this was first mooted the president sent a cool message pointing out that they were both busy, but that he should come 'if you feel a

*Anglo American Relations in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 1995), chapter 6; and John Dumbrell, *A Special Relationship: Anglo American relations in the Cold War and after* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 60–82.

<sup>81</sup> Nicholas Henderson, *The Private Office Revisited* (London: Profile, 2001), 81.

<sup>82</sup> PREM 11/4794, records of meetings (12–13 February), and Wright to Douglas Home (17 February 1964); D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), 347–9.

<sup>83</sup> BLPES, 'Seventies Archive', Wilson interview, 9. <sup>84</sup> BDOHP/Killick, 14.

<sup>85</sup> See also BLPES, Hetherington papers, 8/15, record of meeting with Wilson (18 December 1964).

<sup>86</sup> Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, David Bruce diary, 17 November, 16–17 December 1965.

talk . . . is essential'; yet afterwards the British ambassador, Patrick Dean, considered 'the visit was highly successful, certainly more so than most people had expected'. One White House aide reported the president as saying: 'I really do like that man.'<sup>87</sup> The next summit, in June 1967, was dominated by the outbreak of the Six Day War, a good example of how summits could be hijacked by chance events: this one had been intended to focus on Britain's withdrawal from Malaysia–Singapore.<sup>88</sup> But when Wilson held his last summit with Johnson in February 1968, the president was prepared to set aside a remarkable amount of time for his guest and did not even challenge him over the recent decision to withdraw from East of Suez.<sup>89</sup>

When Nixon won the 1968 election the British immediately began to think of an early summit with him, but this was pre-empted by the president's decision to make a European tour in February 1969.<sup>90</sup> Nixon, far readier to venture abroad than Johnson, again visited Britain in August, when there was a short 'exchange of views' at Mildenhall air base.<sup>91</sup> Wilson finally got to Washington for a full, working summit in January 1970, which, he told the Cabinet, was the most successful he had made to Washington.<sup>92</sup> Another brief presidential visit to Britain in October 1970 got the Heath–Nixon years off on a sound footing.<sup>93</sup> At their first full, working summit in December 1970 – a two-day affair, with meetings at the White House and Camp David – Heath tried to play down the 'special' links between the two countries, preferring to speak of a 'natural relationship', but the talks were friendly enough and Nixon was grateful for Heath's support on the Vietnam War.<sup>94</sup> These meetings go against the impression given in Kissinger's memoirs that the Nixon–Heath relationship 'never flourished'. Heath, while he put membership of the EC at the centre of his foreign policy, was determined not to let this undermine relations with America.<sup>95</sup> It should also

<sup>87</sup> FCO 73/8, Johnson to Wilson (14 June), Dean to Palliser (22 June), and Dean to Maclehoise (3 August 1966).

<sup>88</sup> PREM 13/1906, *passim*. <sup>89</sup> PREM 13/2454, Washington to FO (12 February 1968).

<sup>90</sup> PREM 13/2874, Wilson to Nixon (29 November 1968); and for a lively account of the February visit, see Henry Kissinger, *The White House Years* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 89–96.

<sup>91</sup> PREM 13/3009, record of meeting (3 August 1969).

<sup>92</sup> Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. III: *Secretary of State for Social Services, 1968–1970* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1977), 807.

<sup>93</sup> PREM 15/714, record of meeting (3 October), and see Freeman to Armstrong (8 October 1970); TNA, CAB 128/47, CM(70)26th (25 October).

<sup>94</sup> PREM 15/161, records of meetings (17–18 December 1970); PREM 15/711, Freeman to Home (8 January 1971).

<sup>95</sup> PREM 15/712, memorandum attached to Graham to Moon (5 November 1971); Heath, *Course*, 471–3; Kissinger, *White House*, 933, bears careful reading.

be noted that, by this time, there had been five bilateral summits with Nixon in two years, a remarkable rate. It was not, however, one that could be maintained.

During 1971, strains in transatlantic relations became apparent. The FCO felt it 'a bad year for our relations with the United States' thanks to 'the shocks of the [US] monetary measures and of the sudden switch in the US Chinese policy . . .' on neither of which the White House had consulted its allies.<sup>96</sup> In October Nixon suggested a *multilateral* Western summit be held to address economic issues, but Heath and Douglas-Home raised two of the difficulties surrounding any high-profile multilateral summit: who should be invited?; would the public not be disappointed if it proved impossible to agree on a solution to the monetary crisis?<sup>97</sup> The upshot was a decision to hold a series of bilateral summits between Nixon and the key Western European leaders, Brandt, Heath and Pompidou. To the end, it seemed that, rather than getting their relationship back on line, the British–American summit would see further acrimony. One official even recommended that Heath should give Nixon the impression of 'a rather cool relationship about which you yourself feel quite relaxed'. But the FCO, while it placed the blame for recent problems mainly on the White House, argued that it made no sense to let relations worsen still further.<sup>98</sup> And the summit, held in the British territory of Bermuda, passed off well enough, helped by an easing of the currency instability that had helped bring it about.<sup>99</sup> There is no doubt that the rate of summits had slowed down, but the relationship seemed back on track in February 1973, when Heath became the first head of government to visit Nixon during his second term. 'Nixon went out of his way to mark the Prime Minister's visit as something different from the ordinary run of such affairs', setting aside considerable time and even coming to the British embassy for lunch. The embassy felt it 'an outstanding success' that 'clearly consolidated' personal relations at the top.<sup>100</sup>

However, more buffeting of the relationship came later that year, with Kissinger's self-proclaimed 'Year of Europe' and transatlantic differences over the October 1973 Arab–Israeli War. In this period there were no summits to help lift the gloom; and, since Heath left office before he

<sup>96</sup> FCO 73/133, Graham to Greenhill (9 September), and Greenhill minute (15 September 1971).

<sup>97</sup> PREM 15/712, Washington to FCO and reply (11–12 October 1971).

<sup>98</sup> PREM 15/712, Steering Brief (25 November draft); PREM 15/713, Maitland to Heath (27 November 1971).

<sup>99</sup> PREM 15/1271, records of meetings (20–1 December 1971); Heath, *Course*, 484–6; Kissinger, *White House*, 964–5.

<sup>100</sup> PREM 15/1977, Sykes to Douglas Home (5 February), and /1978, records of meetings (1–2 February 1973).

was able to see Nixon again, this may explain why the whole Heath years were unjustly remembered as ones of difficulty for the British alliance with America. When Wilson returned to office, only six months before Nixon's resignation, they met twice. But significantly, both were in the context of *multilateral* gatherings, at the funeral of Georges Pompidou in April 1974 and at a NATO summit in June. Wilson took an early opportunity to 'establish a good personal understanding with President Ford' in January 1975 and returned feeling he had known the president 'all my life', though the business side of the summit amounted to no more than a review of current events.<sup>101</sup> Wilson called into Washington again in May, on his way back from a Commonwealth meeting in Jamaica, but this proved another case of bad timing. The collapse of South Vietnam made it a critical point for US foreign policy and Ford could only spare time for one meeting.<sup>102</sup> That was, perhaps, confirmation that Britain was only one US ally among many, unable to help the Americans in Southeast Asia. It may be said that, whatever difficulties may have blown up between the British-American summits, the events themselves proved friendly and uncontroversial. But perhaps, ironically, this made them rather like the summits held with the USSR: that is, exercises in atmospherics rather than substance. The real differences between London and Washington were hammered out elsewhere. In late 1971, for example, monetary problems were addressed at a lower level, among officials of the 'Group of Ten' (G-10), the leading industrialised economies, meeting in New York.

Incidentally, one beneficiary of the frequent prime ministerial visits to Washington in the mid-1960s was the Anglo-Canadian relationship, since Ottawa was almost always a stopping-off point to, or from, the US. This was a unique example of British prime ministers visiting a country more frequently than they were visited by its leader, but it was simply a matter of convenience; the meetings were usually no more than a rendezvous at the airport.<sup>103</sup> There was disappointment in June 1967 when, thanks to the Six Day War, Wilson made only a short stop in Canada, which was then celebrating its centenary, and after another brief stop by Wilson in 1970 to meet Pierre Trudeau, it was noted that 'some Canadians were a little bit hurt'.<sup>104</sup> Heath established his relationship

<sup>101</sup> PREM 16/726, Hunt to Wilson (18 December 1975), and /728, records of meetings (30 1 January 1975); CAB 128/56, CM(75)7th (6 February); Donoughue, *Diary*, 301, for quote; and see Wilson, *Term*, 152 4.

<sup>102</sup> PREM 16/730, Steering Brief (undated), and record of meeting (7 May 1975).

<sup>103</sup> For example, PREM 13/754, record of meeting (29 July 1966).

<sup>104</sup> Lester Pearson, *Mike: Memoirs*, vol. III: 1957 68 (London: Gollancz, 1975), 307 8; PREM 13/3546, Youde to Moon (23 February 1970).

with Trudeau during a stopover in Ottawa in December 1970, but the British noted the relationship was now 'based more on practical realities than on family sentiment',<sup>105</sup> and after that the pattern of summits with Canada became more like those with European allies. When Wilson met Trudeau in January 1975 it was the first bilateral British–Canadian summit held in Canada since December 1971.<sup>106</sup> The only visit by Trudeau to London under Heath was in December 1972, but it was a summit of substance, spread over three days. Trudeau was back again in March 1975 for almost a week as part of an effort to strike a trade deal with the EC.<sup>107</sup> British membership of the Community was perhaps the greatest indication of the move away from the old relationship of 'dominion and mother country' to one of equals.

### Telephone summits?

Before ending the discussion of bilateral summits, it should be noted that not everyone accepts David Dunn's definition of summits on which the analysis has, so far, been based. In particular, Elmer Plischke has emphasised 'executive agency' in defining summitry and extended it to include personal communications by heads of state and government through their agents, letters and telephone conversations. Dunn argues against such a broad definition, pointing out that even junior diplomats can be said to act as 'agents' of leaders, that most communications are drafted by officials and that a telephone call does not carry the commitment of time, energy and political capital that an actual meeting does.<sup>108</sup> Leaving aside the issue of agency, which does indeed seem to dilute the notion of leader-to-leader contact, and written communications, which are often drafted by officials, it is worth asking whether telephone calls do not act as a form of 'summit'. It can hardly be denied that they involve leaders communicating directly and they do require some time to be set aside. Wilson, however, learnt the dangers of telephone diplomacy early on, when he made a hasty call to Lyndon Johnson in February 1965. As the conflict in Vietnam began to escalate, the prime minister suggested he should fly over to Washington

<sup>105</sup> PREM 15/161, record of meeting (16 December); quote from PREM 15/711, Hayman to Home (30 December 1970).

<sup>106</sup> Although Heath had attended the 1973 Commonwealth Conference in Canada: PREM 16/310, *passim*.

<sup>107</sup> PREM 15/765, *passim* (on 1972); PREM 16/312, *passim* (on 1975); Paul Martin, *The London Diaries, 1975–1979* (Ottawa University Press, 1988), 23–6.

<sup>108</sup> Elmer Plischke, *Modern Diplomacy: The art and the artisans* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute, 1979), 170–1; and for counter arguments, Dunn, *Highest Level*, 14–19.

to discuss the situation but Johnson became enraged; referring to the 'confrontation' between Indonesia and Malaysia, in which British troops were deployed, he bluntly declared: 'I won't tell you how to run Malaysia and you don't tell us how to run Vietnam.'<sup>109</sup>

After Johnson's departure, Wilson's faith in the telephone seems to have revived somewhat. He rang Richard Nixon in July 1969 to congratulate him on the moon landing and they had two long conversations in January 1970 over aid relief to Nigeria following the collapse of the Biafran rebellion;<sup>110</sup> but most messages were sent to the White House over a teleprinter link. Heath seems to have found it easy to talk over the phone with Willy Brandt,<sup>111</sup> but this was exceptional; it is noteworthy that in 1971, when Pierre Trudeau of Canada was forced to cancel a visit to London, he and Heath talked on the telephone, but only briefly, and their main topic of conversation was when they could meet face to face.<sup>112</sup> Other examples reinforce the point. When Heath rang Nixon to congratulate him on his re-election as president in November 1972, it was another short, if good-humoured, call, in which they both expressed hopes of an early face-to-face meeting.<sup>113</sup> Alan Campbell, who observed the progress first-hand, has cautioned that ministers would be wise to use the telephone only when they know the person they are ringing, get on with them and are well briefed.<sup>114</sup> Wilson and Heath seem to have understood that point and did not make regular use of the telephone to discuss high-level issues in a substantive way. Case studies of other leaders may add weight to Plischke's argument and it is certainly possible to envisage a leader using lengthy, regular telephone calls to achieve the same aims as summits. But British experience in 1963–76 is at best ambiguous on the point.

## Conclusion

Analysis of a particular government's experience can only provide a limited picture of the nature of summitry. Not only will one country's experience differ from others, but also any specific time frame will tend

<sup>109</sup> PREM 13/692, verbatim record of call (11 February 1965).

<sup>110</sup> PREM 13/3011, record of telephone call (21 July 1969); PREM 13/3375, record of calls (11 and 12 January 1970).

<sup>111</sup> See records of their calls in PREM 15/914 (23 August 1972), /893 (9 September 1972), and /2041 (13 December 1973).

<sup>112</sup> PREM 15/249, telephone call (5 November 1971).

<sup>113</sup> PREM 15/1269, telephone call (8 November 1972).

<sup>114</sup> Alan Campbell, 'Changes in Methods in the Foreign Office, 1950–2000', in Gaynor Johnson, ed., *The Foreign Office and British Diplomacy in the Twentieth Century* (London: Routledge, 2005), 171.



to define the types of summit held. A few decades earlier, the British prime minister would have attended far fewer summits but would have been at the 'top table' alongside the US and USSR. More case studies of other countries' experiences must be done before the British experience of summitry can be properly placed in context. Nonetheless, the evidence explored here allows a number of points to be made. First, looking at the 'pros and cons' of summitry, it tends to confirm the arguments of the few previous studies that summits do not work miracles in international relations and carry considerable potential danger. Summits could not prevent Rhodesian UDI, the 'Cod Wars' with Iceland or the Turkish invasion of Cyprus. They could not carry Britain into Europe during the 'second try' or heal the wounds of Northern Ireland. True, the Heath-Pompidou summit of May 1971 appeared to be a major breakthrough on the EC, but its success was probably guaranteed in advance. There seems to have been a tendency, most strikingly in the US-British relationship, to paper over differences during summits, which did not prevent real differences becoming apparent at other times. Yet there are many points to be made of a more positive kind. There were few embarrassing failures at summit level, even if a few high-profile examples, like the Wilson-Smith meetings of 1965-8, drew widespread ridicule. There were even some noteworthy successes, such as the meetings with Schmidt and Giscard in late 1974, which suggest summits can sometimes make a real difference to political processes. For the most part, however, leaders had learnt how to play down expectations, not least by holding serial summits and describing others as 'courtesy calls'. But they also recognised that, in the jet age, it was difficult to avoid a summit if another leader asked to meet; the very fact that summits had become so easy to hold made it insulting to deny one. Many of them might have been symbolic and lacking in substance, but symbolism was an important element in world affairs.

Turning to issues of definition, the British experience shows the difficulty in differentiating between certain types of summit, especially 'exchange of view' and official, working meetings. Many visitors to London only met the prime minister for short, one-off meetings, but these could range from courtesy calls to wide-ranging discussions, as when Nixon came to Chequers in October 1970. When Heath visited several countries en route to the Commonwealth Conference in Singapore in January 1971, he was able to 'exchange views' with a number of leaders, on the Cyprus problem with President Makarios for example, and on the likely outcome of Singapore with premier Trudeau of Canada, who happened to be in New Delhi. But he also improved relations with India, by making the first visit of a British prime minister

there for thirteen years, while his trip to Pakistan included two days of talks with President Yahya Khan. The British high commissioners in both countries were delighted with the impact of these meetings, a point that shows how ambassadors had come to recognise the significance of summits for reinforcing their own work rather than undermining it.<sup>115</sup> It is certainly easier to categorise summits that involved more than one meeting, and which often lasted more than one day, as ‘official working’ meetings. But ironically, many of these seem to have been more useful as ‘exchanges of view’ than anything else. Emilio Colombo’s two-day visit to London in June 1971, for example, included long conversations about NATO, détente and the EC application, but everyone knew it was the Heath–Pompidou summit the previous month that really mattered.<sup>116</sup> It must be noted that working summits that occurred over two days did not make them much less of a rush than ‘exchanges of view’, especially since they tended to include more formal meals and ceremonies. Barbara Castle, attending a reception for Brandt in March 1970, noted: ‘One had thirty seconds with the guest of honour (poor devil) and then moved away to talk to one’s friends.’<sup>117</sup>

What stands out most starkly about the British experience, however, is a mundane point: the sheer frequency with which leaders met. Sometimes they were so frequent that they clashed with one another: in November 1973 Heath had to leave the Sunningdale conference midway to meet the Italian premier in London, while a tired Wilson returned from the EC’s Dublin summit in March 1975 for talks with Pierre Trudeau.<sup>118</sup> The British experience was probably unusual. As a wealthy, Western, former colonial power, with a major international airport as well as leading medical and educational facilities, it became a ‘net importer’ of summits. The vast majority of bilateral summits for British premiers were on their own soil because the world was, in a sense, happy to come to London. The corollary was that British premiers made far fewer overseas visits and most of these were to North America and Western Europe, where leaders expected mutual exchanges. But many summits proved perfunctory, drawing little or no public attention and raising few expectations in advance. In contrast to the impression one

<sup>115</sup> PREM 15/606, full records of meetings (6 13 January); PREM 15/449, Morrice James to Douglas Home (22 January); and PREM 15/566, Pickard to Douglas Home (18 January 1971). On the success in India, see also Donald Maitland, *Diverse Times, Sundry Places* (Brighton: Alpha Press, 1996), 187–8.

<sup>116</sup> PREM 15/500, records of meetings (26 7 June 1971).

<sup>117</sup> Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964–70* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 767.

<sup>118</sup> Fitzgerald, *Life*, 211–12; Donoghue, *Diary*, 332.

might gain from concentrating on high-profile conferences like Munich and Yalta, late twentieth-century summits were an everyday affair, at least for Britain. In July 1966 Wilson did not write a proper account of a three-hour private meeting with Australia's Harold Holt and, in view of the prime minister's busy schedule, his Private Office did not feel they could press him for one.<sup>119</sup> On that occasion the omission was understandable in that Wilson was in the midst of a major economic crisis, but there were other examples without such an excuse. When Indira Gandhi saw Heath privately for forty-five minutes in July 1973, the prime minister again did not make a record. 'You told me afterwards', an official reminded Heath, 'that she had been tired and . . . the conversation hadn't interested you very much.'<sup>120</sup> It will be interesting to see if other leaders found summits to be as tedious as the British did by this time. Far from being a chance to take the limelight, they had sometimes become a thankless chore. Again, when Gough Whitlam came to London in December 1974, the Australians 'were very boring' over dinner and Wilson found the formal talks both tedious and tiring.<sup>121</sup> Such was the price of personal diplomacy in a world where it had become merely commonplace.

<sup>119</sup> PREM 13/729, Palliser to Forster (14 July 1966).

<sup>120</sup> PREM 15/1642, Bridges to Heath (24 July 1973).

<sup>121</sup> Donoghue, *Diary*, 267–8.

## 7 Multilateral diplomacy

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A conference which includes more than four or five people . . . can achieve nothing worthwhile. Paul Cambon<sup>1</sup>

Cambon, the French ambassador to London during the First World War, was the product of a diplomatic world dominated by resident embassies, foreign ministries and bilateral conversations. Multilateral talks, between representatives of several leaders at once, can be traced back to the ancient world; but under the 'French system' of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, large-scale multilateral conferences took place only spasmodically, and international organisations tended to be of a practical, regulatory variety, for example to ensure safety at sea or allow postal services to function across borders. Cambon's criticism of large multilateral meetings as likely to degenerate into talk-shops has been echoed many times. But by the time he retired in 1920, the Great War had given birth to multilateral diplomacy at a regular, high level, often involving heads of state and government, not least at the Paris peace conference. What is more, a permanent global security organisation was created in the League of Nations. The British were well placed to take a lead in the League, not only because they were one of its most powerful members, but also because they had experience in administering multilateral negotiations thanks to the system of imperial conferences that had begun before the Great War between Britain and the dominions. The first secretary-general of the League was a British official, Eric Drummond. After 1945, multinational conferences became more widespread: the war itself had seen the leaders of the 'Big Three' – the US, USSR and Britain – meet at Tehran, Yalta and Potsdam, and there were further one-off East–West summits at Geneva in 1955 and Paris in 1960. Where several states had significant common interests and problems were of a long-term nature, needing constant attention, multilateral links led to permanent organisations, like the

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Jules Francois Blondel, *Entente Cordiale* (London: Caduceus Press, 1971), 40.

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), European Economic Community (EEC) or the United Nations (UN).

### **Britain and multilateral organisations**

By 1977 the Berrill Report listed 126 international organisations to which Britain subscribed, ranging from NATO and UN bodies, through the Red Cross and Universal Postal Union, to the Olive Oil Council and the International Municipal Parking Congress.<sup>2</sup> Multilateral conferences and organisations had multiplied for a number of reasons, some of them similar to the rise of bilateral summitry: easier communications, the democratisation of foreign policy and the need to address common challenges like the arms race and economic wellbeing. The outbreak of the First World War had also shown that international stability could not be guaranteed by a system of state sovereignty and balance-of-power politics; it needed to be managed by governments acting together, hence the creation of the League. Multilateral talks were 'a valuable device for advancing negotiations between numerous parties simultaneously' and, because of the number of countries involved, they 'hold out the prospect of making agreements stick' by legitimatising joint action. They encouraged states to look to co-operative solutions rather than pursue an isolated path and the UN was used, not always successfully, to encourage certain norms of behaviour, such as democracy and respect for human rights. As time passed, individual organisations tended to expand their range of interests and evolve complex sub-structures discussing various technical issues. The UN included, among its many bodies, annual assemblies of the World Health Organisation (WHO), International Labour Organisation (ILO) and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), as well as committees on such topics as development, minorities and human rights.

Every international organisation required statutes to lay out the rules, secretariats to run them and funding arrangements, while individual meetings needed translation arrangements, rooms and documentation. Organisations often employed civil servants of their own, headed by a secretary-general. The drawn-out nature of many negotiations, such as those that led to the Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1968, was easy to criticise. Echoing Cambon, one can easily make the case that large conferences were inefficient, expensive, given to verbiage, unable to

<sup>2</sup> The figures do not even include membership of the European Community, which was funded by means other than subscription. *Review of Overseas Representation: Report by the Central Policy Review Staff* (London: HMSO, 1977), 408-10.

deliver meaningful results and at the mercy of their member states: governments could simply opt out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and agreement was especially difficult to achieve in UN agencies, where decisions were taken by consensus rather than votes. But methods had been developed to push even large meetings forward, such as effective preparation, the use of informal consultations, experienced chairmanship, deadlines and 'package deals', a complex array of compromises from which everyone wins some concession.<sup>3</sup> Between 1962 and 1967, despite periodic crises, a deal was achieved under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) on freer trade, in the so-called 'Kennedy Round'. The British were able to make their own contribution to this, but it was becoming clearer that the major forces in global commercial diplomacy were the US and the European Community.<sup>4</sup>

Most of the UN meetings required British delegations to be set up, giving the country's New York mission an endless round of tasks. Sometimes professional diplomats sat on committees, sometimes it was civil servants from elsewhere in Whitehall, members of parliament or even representatives from outside government; or it could be a mixture of them all. To take just a few examples from 1972: a solicitor from the Department of Trade and Industry led the delegation to talks on hijacking in the International Civil Aviation Organisation; it took great efforts to keep a British delegation to a conference on the environment down to forty-five, drawn from various sources; and the secretary-general of the British Trawlers' Federation was included in discussions on the Law of the Sea.<sup>5</sup> In NATO there were two meetings per year of the Council, made up of foreign ministers, weekly meetings of permanent representatives and an array of sub-groups: 'there were 143 working groups in the Defence Support sector alone – dealing with equipment specifications, research and development, and . . . joint procurement'. Small wonder, then, that the British mission to NATO required forty-three London-based staff, drawn roughly equally from the

<sup>3</sup> These issues are explored in G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice* (third edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), chapters 2–5 and 9 (quotes from 154). See also: Johan Kaufmann, *Conference Diplomacy: An introductory analysis* (Leyden: Sijthoff, 1968); William Zartmann, ed., *International Multilateral Negotiation* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 1974); and Ronald Walker, *Multilateral Conferences* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). A historical review is David Armstrong, Lorna Lloyd and John Redmond, *From Versailles to Maastricht: International organization in the twentieth century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996).

<sup>4</sup> See Donna Lee, *Middle Powers and Commercial Diplomacy: British influence at the Kennedy Trade Round* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> William Wallace, *The Foreign Policy Process in Britain* (London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1975), 261–7.

FCO and Ministry of Defence.<sup>6</sup> Clearly, as the Plowden and Duncan reports recognised, multilateral diplomacy was a significant dimension of foreign policy.

As well as the burden on some overseas missions, the need to cope with the pressures of multilateral meetings had a major impact on administrative structures at home. The FO had created a Western Organisations Department, for example, to deal with NATO, the Western European Union (WEU) and Council of Europe. The work of the Treasury and the Board of Trade was affected by such economic institutions as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), World Bank and GATT, as well as the Organisation of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). But sometimes it was not easy to see where the main responsibility for issues lay. For example, there were three international organisations that regularly discussed education: UNESCO, the OECD and the Council of Europe. And three ministries claimed responsibility for negotiations in the area: Education, the Treasury and the FCO. Such overlap generated problems of co-ordination, with the formation of new inter-departmental committees, under the overview of the Cabinet Office. The most important ministerial body by 1963 was the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee, but there was a plethora of other committees on a range of subjects, some of them existing for only short periods to tackle particular challenges.<sup>7</sup>

Multilateral talks also impacted on the life of ministers. NATO Councils and the annual UN General Assembly were fixed points in the foreign secretary's calendar, but there were many other commitments. When Rab Butler became foreign secretary in October 1963, his first foreign visit was to a meeting of the WEU in The Hague, where he caught out de Gaulle's foreign minister, Maurice Couve de Murville, by speaking to him in French.<sup>8</sup> The extent of multilateral meetings involving Britain by the mid-1960s can be seen from a memorandum to Wilson in March 1967 designed to help with planning the EC entry bid. It listed the main international conferences over the following months, including:

4–5 April: WEU Ministerial Meeting (Rome)

24 April: Committee of Ministers, Council of Europe (Strasbourg);  
Board of the International Monetary Fund (New York)

<sup>6</sup> Wallace, *Process*, 239–43.

<sup>7</sup> See Max Beloff, *New Dimensions in Foreign Policy* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1961), quote from 7.

<sup>8</sup> Lord Butler, *The Art of the Possible* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1971), 252–3.

- 24–8 April: Consultative Assembly, Council of Europe (Strasbourg)  
 9 May: NATO defence ministers (Paris)  
 13–14 June: NATO Council of Ministers (Luxembourg)  
 13–16 June: WEU Assembly (Paris)  
 Continuing: Kennedy Round talks under the GATT (Geneva)

Alongside the programme of bilateral meetings at this point, including the prime minister's visit to Washington in early June, this meant a restricted timetable for any special initiatives on EC entry.<sup>9</sup> But it is significant that all the British multilateral meetings in this list were handled by ministers *other* than the prime minister; none was at summit level. True, Wilson attended the opening meetings of the NATO and SEATO Councils in May 1965, but that was only because Britain was the host and he was expected to say some words of welcome.<sup>10</sup> Over the next decade that image would be transformed. There was an important shift in the British experience from a world in which the most important regular summits were at Commonwealth level to one where the European Community was at the centre. The British also experienced a growing volume of multilateral summits in this period, for example with the Helsinki conference on European security as well as the first meeting of the 'Group of Six' (now the G-8) in 1975.

The focus of the remainder of this chapter will be on multilateral talks at summit level. Not only will this help contain a potentially vast subject, it will also concentrate attention on the major 'growth area' of multilateral diplomacy in the period. However, first some general points need to be made about multilateral negotiations and summitry. Although multilateral summits have grown in number as part of the general explosion of meetings 'at the highest level', they have their own dynamic, and in some ways their advantages are greater than those of bilateral summits. Meetings at the highest level often prove the most effective means of securing a 'package deal' between several states on a particular subject, and once such an accommodation has been reached leaders can best drive it through at home. Then again, dynamics of a meeting between several countries are markedly more complex than those between two. The agenda, timetable and accompanying ceremonies will all be more difficult to arrange at multilateral conferences, the danger of 'leaks' will be higher, issues of language translation will be more complex and the draft communiqué will be more prone to dispute.

<sup>9</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, PREM 13/1478, Trend to Wilson (18 March 1967).

<sup>10</sup> PREM 13/314 and /452, *passim*.



There are other problems with multilateral conferences from an analytical viewpoint. The number of representatives who might be present, anything from three to more than a hundred, clearly makes this rather an amorphous 'type'. The cross-current of national interests and outlook between four states will clearly be less complex than those among forty. Indeed, it seems essential to sub-divide them and to acknowledge that multilateral meetings differ greatly, in both the kind of items discussed and the familiarity of the representatives with one another. One way is to differentiate, as in the chapter on bilateral summits, between institutionalised (or serial) meetings, where delegations get to know one another, become more familiar with issues over time and expectations of rapid progress can be played down, and ad hoc gatherings, where the pressures to agree and the media interest may be greater. Another obvious difference is that between 'regional' meetings, like the European Community, and 'global' ones, like the Commonwealth and the UN. Regional organisations and conferences will have a greater sense of common identity and a better-defined agenda for discussion than global bodies, so that agreement may be easier to reach. Global ones will be more unwieldy and may well have particular groups of countries acting as lobbies within them, as with the Soviet bloc or the non-aligned movement acting together within the UN. A third difference lies in the way organisations take decisions. Most operate by consensus between governments, making it slow and difficult to reach decisions, but a few, including the EC, use votes that allow policies to be pushed forward more easily.

Two other general points about British experience in the 1960s and 1970s deserve note. First, there was sometimes a choice between holding multilateral or bilateral meetings. In April 1974 Peter Ramsbotham, the ambassador to Washington, suggested that one way to avoid a bilateral meeting with Richard Nixon, then deeply embroiled in the Watergate scandal, was to arrange a multilateral summit of the Atlantic alliance. In this way the odium surrounding the disgraced president could be dissipated.<sup>11</sup> Yet in 1970 Heath had rejected the idea of multilateral talks with Commonwealth representatives about arms sales to South Africa, in preference for bilateral discussions of this controversial topic. This was because Britain would be outnumbered and 'put in the dock' at a multilateral gathering, whereas it could get its view across more easily, and be treated as an equal, in bilateral talks.<sup>12</sup> Second, on a multilateral

<sup>11</sup> PREM 16/291, Ramsbotham to Killick (16 April 1974).

<sup>12</sup> PREM 15/275, record of Smith Heath meeting (8 September), Smith to Heath (5 October), and reply (12 October 1970).

level, the difference between summits and non-summits could become blurred because whereas some governments might send their head of government to lead a delegation, others would be represented at a lower level. Thus, many multilateral summits are in fact only part-summits. At the April 1971 five-power meeting in London, to discuss the future defence of Malaysia–Singapore, Britain, Malaysia and New Zealand were represented by their prime ministers, but in the case of the latter pair this was partly because the premiers served simultaneously as their countries' foreign ministers; Australia and Singapore were represented by their defence ministers. While in London, all the delegation leaders made courtesy calls on Heath, but it is noteworthy that, initially, Downing Street only planned to allow the two prime ministers to do this; the others had to press their case to see him.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Commonwealth**

The main multilateral summit that involved British leaders in the mid-1960s was the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), which, until that time, always met in London. The problems of holding such a large conference can be seen from the arrangements for the June 1965 meeting. These focused on the need to keep costs down and ensure fruitful discussions took place now that the Commonwealth had expanded to twenty members (three more than the last conference in 1964). Thus, it was decided to reduce from five to four the number of delegates who could sit for each country at plenary meetings, the head of the delegation sitting at the conference table itself with the three others behind them. This would help preserve a sense of intimacy. While the British were adamant that they did not intend to set any strict limits on the total number in any delegation, it was also agreed to limit hospitality at the main functions – the prime minister's dinner on 17 June, the first day of the conference, the Queen's cocktail party on 21 June and the Queen's dinner the following day – to four people. It was presumed that this would be the head of state or government, their spouse, private secretary and another government minister, though again the British did not want to dictate any rules. Clearly, with such limits in force at key events, it made no sense to bring a large delegation. Even so, the technical details in arranging the conference were vast, ranging from great ceremonials – on this occasion delegates were also invited to Westminster Hall to celebrate the 700th anniversary of

<sup>13</sup> PREM 15/297, record of 'Ministerial Meeting' (15–16 April 1971); PREM 15/559, AJCS to McCluney (15 April).

parliament on 22 June – through the provision of a conference secretariat and publicity arrangements, to such detailed security provisions as the disposal of confidential waste. In order to hammer out details on the agenda, draft the communiqué and deal with other potential problems, officials from all the member states began their ‘pre-meeting’ on 10 June, a week before the opening of the conference proper.<sup>14</sup>

The need for careful preparations was emphasised by the fact that, when it came to substantive discussions, the Commonwealth was increasingly beset by arguments over Rhodesia in the mid-1960s. Douglas-Home had expected problems at the July 1964 CHOGM, but kept Rhodesia’s Ian Smith in the margins of the conference (helped by the fact that he was not the leader of a fully independent state) and focused on organisational issues, notably the decision to form a permanent secretariat.<sup>15</sup> This came into being in 1965 under a full-time secretary-general, a former Canadian diplomat, Arnold Smith.<sup>16</sup> Labour made much of the Commonwealth in its 1964 election manifesto, and the next CHOGM, in June 1965, did not quite crush the sense of hope about the organisation. As Wilson told Lyndon Johnson, the conference discussed ‘a great many contentious issues . . . but always remained friendly’. Wilson, ever the master tactician, was able to divert differences over Vietnam into his stillborn proposal for a Commonwealth peace mission.<sup>17</sup> But the unilateral declaration of independence by Rhodesia in November led to an outburst of indignation from African countries, who blamed Wilson for the failure to crush the rebellion. African representatives walked out of the UN General Assembly in mid-December when he came to address it, and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) called on its members to break off relations with London. Rhodesia dominated the next two Commonwealth conferences.

The Commonwealth meeting of January 1966 was something of an accident. It originated in an attempt by Nigeria’s Abubakar Tafawa Balewa to discuss Rhodesia with other African Commonwealth leaders. But the British high commissioner misinterpreted the ambiguous phrase ‘a Meeting of Commonwealth Heads of Government in Africa’ to mean a gathering of *all* Commonwealth leaders, to be held in Lagos. The Commonwealth Relations Office hoped the meeting would give Britain

<sup>14</sup> PREM 13/186, CRO outward telegram (9 April 1965); PREM 13/187, ‘Preparations and Procedures’ (undated).

<sup>15</sup> PREM 11/4633, *passim*; D. R. Thorpe, *Alec Douglas Home* (London: Sinclair Stevenson, 1996), 351–3.

<sup>16</sup> David W. McIntyre, ‘Britain and the Creation of the Commonwealth Secretariat’, *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2000), 135–58.

<sup>17</sup> PREM 13/188, Wilson to Johnson (6 July 1965).

a breathing space for economic sanctions to work against Smith, and the dangers of Britain being 'put in the dock' were lessened when a number of Britain's more vocal critics refused to attend, including Ghana's Kwame Nkrumah and Tanzania's Julius Nyerere.<sup>18</sup> The meeting still proved difficult but, helped by Wilson's promise that sanctions would bring Smith down in 'weeks not months', a breakdown was avoided.<sup>19</sup> The next regular CHOGM was in September 1966; again, some leaders stayed away, but enough were present to put Wilson 'in the dock' and demand the use of force against Rhodesia, sanctions having failed to end the Smith regime. Amid press speculation that the Commonwealth's days were numbered, even the normally ebullient Wilson 'doubted whether it could survive a similar traumatic conference'.<sup>20</sup> The Cabinet even had a report done on whether the Commonwealth was of any value to Britain<sup>21</sup> and the next CHOGM was not held until 1969, when the Rhodesia situation was at an impasse. The British hoped 'to reawaken confidence in the value of the Commonwealth', and the meeting proved much better humoured than those of 1966;<sup>22</sup> but no great problems were resolved and divisions soon revived.

On taking office in June 1970, Heath was 'rather gloomy about finding something useful to talk about' at the next CHOGM, which was planned for Singapore in January 1971.<sup>23</sup> This would be the first full CHOGM held outside London, Lagos in 1966 having been an ad hoc arrangement, and it would be followed by other meetings every two years. It therefore marked a significant departure. CHOGMs would now be regular and would be held on a genuinely egalitarian basis, without Britain being seen as the chief member. Coming after the creation of the permanent secretariat, it showed that the organisation was continuing to evolve, despite the problems over Rhodesia. But a subject soon appeared that was to dominate Singapore and it was not one to Heath's taste; it concerned the Conservatives' decision to renew arms sales to South Africa.<sup>24</sup> What to the new British government seemed a prudent step to match growing Soviet involvement in the Indian Ocean seemed to many

<sup>18</sup> PREM 13/776, *passim*.

<sup>19</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964 1970: A personal record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 194 8.

<sup>20</sup> PREM 13/779, note for the record (9 May), and /782, Palliser minute (4 September 1966); Wilson, *Government*, 276 87.

<sup>21</sup> UKNA, CAB 129/129, C(67)59 (24 April 1967).

<sup>22</sup> PREM 13/2538, record of meeting (6 January), and see FCO telegram (15 January 1969); Wilson, *Government*, 592 603.

<sup>23</sup> PREM 15/275, minute to Moon (26 June 1970).

<sup>24</sup> CAB 128/47, CM(70)5th and 6th (16 and 20 July), and CAB 129/50, CP(70)12 (15 July) on the Cabinet decision and early protests.

Commonwealth countries an unnecessary decision that would bolster apartheid. Once again a southern African problem threatened to derail the Commonwealth. By December, with the decision widely condemned, British officials recognised that it was impossible to escape being 'put in the dock' at Singapore.<sup>25</sup> The conference proved as unpleasant as Heath had feared. He described it to the Cabinet as 'a trying and, at times, unpleasant experience. But we had made some progress towards . . . establishing Commonwealth relations on a more mature and less irresponsible basis.'<sup>26</sup>

The Singapore experience sparked an intense discussion about the organisation of future Commonwealth gatherings, which is revealing of approaches to multilateral summits. Heath wrote to Canada's Pierre Trudeau soon afterwards, acknowledging the 'obvious strength of feeling' that the Commonwealth should continue, but complaining that it had been 'a shock to me to find to what extent numbers of our colleagues seemed to have abandoned altogether any practice of holding informal private discussions'. The reliance on large, formal gatherings had only helped amplify the danger of bitter arguments. As far as Heath could see, restricted sessions were the only place where real progress was possible.<sup>27</sup> It had been agreed, at Singapore itself, to ask the Commonwealth secretary-general, Arnold Smith, to look into this problem and, at the FCO, Denis Greenhill was quick off the mark in drawing up possible reforms. In order to 'encourage the . . . cut and thrust of "Cabinet" discussion' and get away from what he called "'international organization" habits', Greenhill wanted more restricted sessions, some confined simply to heads of government, more committee work, a focus on uncontroversial subjects at plenary sessions, an end to lengthy set speeches, a short time limit on spoken contributions and, to minimise arguments over its content, a short and factual communiqué. Greenhill also homed in on some of the issues of space that had been addressed in the 1965 preparations. To overcome the problems created by the Commonwealth's size, meetings should be held in a room 'just big enough to allow easy circulation behind the seating', around an oval or round table 'as small as will give elbow room' to each leader, with their support staff sitting behind. This would avoid the extremes of Marlborough House in 1969, when it was felt that plenary meetings were too crowded, or at Singapore, where there was a loss of intimacy.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> PREM 15/276, PMM(1) (71) (1) (December 1970).

<sup>26</sup> CAB 128/49, CM(71)4th (26 January).

<sup>27</sup> PREM 15/780, Heath to Trudeau (26 January 1971).

<sup>28</sup> PREM 15/780, Greenhill to Trend (3 March 1971).

With the next CHOGM not due until 1973 there was plenty of time to discuss options. A meeting of senior officials to discuss future procedure took place in Ottawa in October 1972 and its ensuing report was close to Greenhill's line. It recommended that future conferences should still last a week or so, but with a shorter agenda, a focus on 'executive sessions' of heads of government, the use of restricted sessions on delicate issues, attention to the size and shape of tables and careful press arrangements. Burke Trend, who represented Britain, was content with the report though he noted that it was really up to heads of government whether any system worked well.<sup>29</sup> The prime minister, however, was less happy. He wanted 'to place firmly on record' his view that summits should only be held 'for a specific purpose, agreed beforehand'; planning them months in advance for 'a general chat' was 'meaningless' and put them at the mercy of chance events. It was 'nonsensical in modern times to expect Heads of Government to spend eight working days, plus a weekend, plus travelling time . . . at such Conferences'. He drew an unflattering comparison between Commonwealth practice and the recent Paris summit of the enlarged EEC: 'If nine Heads of Government can settle the course of the European Community for the rest of this decade in two days, there is no excuse at all for this old-fashioned type of prolonged jamboree.' He particularly attacked the Commonwealth's traditional general discussion as 'useless' and argued that the debate on co-operation was simply an occasion when 'everyone scratches madly around trying to think of some gimmick'. By meeting for specific reasons, planning policy initiatives in advance and removing unnecessary paraphernalia, Heath believed Commonwealth conferences could be cut to a few days.<sup>30</sup> But he soon found himself at odds even with close allies. Trudeau was convinced that, however busy leaders were, there were important questions to discuss and:

a curtailed conference would, by its very brevity, expose us all to an atmosphere of crisis, with little time left for all the informality and relaxed atmosphere needed for the exchange of views on practical matters . . . The mid conference weekend has in the past been very useful as a quiet spell for digestion and reconciliation of points of view at both the Prime Ministerial and official level.<sup>31</sup>

The next conference, in Ottawa in May 1973, proved much more successful, partly because even if nothing substantial was achieved, neither did any embarrassing argument blow up over southern Africa.

<sup>29</sup> PREM 15/780, Trend to Heath (24 October 1972), covering CCSM(72)11.

<sup>30</sup> PREM 15/1348, Armstrong to Trend (17 October), and Heath to Armstrong (29 October 1972).

<sup>31</sup> PREM 15/765, Trudeau to Heath (26 November 1972).

At the close, Heath, in conversation with Jamaica's Michael Manley, agreed that it had restored confidence in the CHOGM, even if he thought more could still be done beforehand to ensure meaningful discussion.<sup>32</sup> Minimising expectations and being realistic over what could be achieved seemed to mark the way forward. With Wilson back in office for the next Commonwealth conference, in Jamaica, the secretary of the Cabinet, John Hunt, reminded him that the 'diverse . . . interests represented within the Commonwealth make it impracticable to use these meetings for the formulation and promotion of specific common policies'. Instead the CHOGM was better aimed at promoting 'greater understanding' and at reducing any 'extremist influences'. Kingston, with thirty-three countries represented, passed off as unremarkably as did Ottawa, the high point for Wilson being his proposal for a commodities agreement that would give less developed countries a better economic deal.<sup>33</sup> The low profile of the Ottawa and Kingston meetings helped restore the Commonwealth after the traumas of 1965–71, a process helped by the creation of the permanent secretariat and the careful consideration given to the way conferences were organised. The Commonwealth may have been a diverse group but it learnt how to use constitutional and institutional means to offset its centrifugal tendencies, preserving something of a family atmosphere of intimacy and openness even as the idea of Britain as a 'mother country' faded into the past.

## Europe

Long before entering the EC, the British were deeply involved in multilateral negotiation in Europe. After the war, as well as NATO, a number of international organisations were founded in Western Europe of which Britain was a member, such as the Council of Europe, Western European Union (WEU) and European Free Trade Association (EFTA). These had different purposes, the first encouraging respect for democracy, the second a military alliance, the third an economic arrangement. But one common factor was that they worked by consensus rather than the supranationalism of the EC. The British only came to accept the idea of a 'pooling of sovereignty' around 1960–1, when the decision was taken to seek EC entry. An example of the potential overlap between international organisations was seen at the WEU council of July 1967,

<sup>32</sup> PREM 15/1862, record of meeting (8 August 1973); Edward Heath, *The Course of my Life* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998), 495–6.

<sup>33</sup> Harold Wilson, *Final Term: The Labour government, 1974–1976* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1979), 160–5; PREM 16/316, Hunt to Wilson (21 March), and /317, records of meetings (2–5 April 1975).

when George Brown famously put forward the second British application to the Community members, catching the French by surprise. This was possible because all the EC states were also members of the WEU.<sup>34</sup> However, only rarely in the 1960s did European organisations meet at summit level, as at the EFTA council in Vienna, in May 1965, when institutional links to the EC were discussed.<sup>35</sup> NATO held its first summit in December 1957 but a second only followed in 1974. It was hastily called at the behest of Richard Nixon to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty and was partly designed to prop up his public standing in the face of the Watergate scandal. The formal meeting in Brussels on 26 June lasted a mere ninety minutes but, like so many multilateral conferences, it provided a chance for separate *bilateral* talks.<sup>36</sup> Another NATO summit quickly followed in 1975, again for partly cosmetic reasons, the US being keen to prop up its position after the fall of South Vietnam, and thereafter such meetings became quite regular.<sup>37</sup>

This was part of an upsurge of multilateral summits in the mid-1970s, another example being the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) of 30 July – 1 August 1975 in Helsinki. This gathering of thirty-five states included the US, Canada and every European country except Andorra and Albania, almost all represented at leaders' level. It marked the culmination of several years of talks on continental security and was most significant for recognising, on the one hand, that borders should not be changed by force and, on the other, that human rights should be respected. The success of the conference was guaranteed by the Final Act being negotiated beforehand. But with so many leaders present, Wilson later recalled that it 'was as significant for the many bilateral meetings "on the fringe" as for the official proceedings in Finlandia Hall'. There was also a lunch with all the other EC leaders, providing a multilateral talk within the context of a broader conference. In some ways this was quite fitting, because the EC member states had been an important caucus throughout the negotiations of the Final Act. Meeting under the system of European Political Co-operation they had sometimes taken the lead over NATO in defining Western negotiating

<sup>34</sup> PREM 13/1483, Trend to Wilson (1 July 1967).

<sup>35</sup> PREM 13/307, Vienna to FO (25 and 26 May), and /308, records of meetings (24–5 May 1965).

<sup>36</sup> Wilson had bilateral meetings with Nixon and the premiers of Belgium, Denmark, Luxembourg and Portugal, as well as talks on Britain's EC renegotiation with French premier Jacques Chirac (France and Canada being represented at less than summit level): PREM 16/11, *passim*.

<sup>37</sup> Bill Park, 'NATO Summits', in David Dunn, ed., *Diplomacy at the Highest Level: The evolution of international summitry* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), chapter 6.



positions – another interesting example of the way multilateral organisations interact and overlap.<sup>38</sup>

More significant than the NATO and CSCE developments in terms of creating a powerful, permanent system of summits was what happened in the mid-1970s in the EC. Although the Community was created in 1957 with supranational elements, including an executive Commission based in Brussels, it always had an important inter-governmental dimension, most importantly the Council of Ministers, in which foreign ministers gathered regularly and took the key decisions on Community policy. The first two summits occurred in 1961, discussing political union; they were followed by another in 1967, a ceremonial gathering on the tenth anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, and by the more practical meeting in The Hague in 1969, which paved the way for enlargement to Britain, Denmark and Ireland. But, while The Hague summit could be considered a success, in general such ad hoc meetings were poorly prepared, with an inadequate follow-up and little consistency of organisation. These problems were to persist in the early 1970s and lead to the institutionalisation of summits on a regular basis.<sup>39</sup>

In July 1971, with the negotiations on entry proceeding apace, Heath hoped that a summit of current and new members could be held to set the 'broad lines along which we propose to tackle the problems which face us all'. He also talked of 'continuing consultation' at summit level being necessary.<sup>40</sup> Heath was pushing at an open door, however. France's Georges Pompidou and Germany's Willy Brandt had already discussed the possibility of a summit of the enlarged Community, to be held in Paris. It was preceded by considerable preparations at national level via bilateral contacts and the work of EEC institutions.<sup>41</sup> One of the most significant documents that British officials produced in preparation for this, their first experience of an EC summit, was entitled 'Elements of the Negotiation'. It showed an awareness of the need to approach multilateral negotiations with sophisticated tactics, including the creation of 'package deals'. The memorandum not only set out the likely approach of each delegation to the issues in Paris, it also

<sup>38</sup> Wilson, *Final Term*, 165–76; *Documents on British Policy Overseas*, series III, vol. II: *The Conference on Security and Co operation in Europe, 1972–75* (London: The Stationery Office, 1997), especially documents 136 and 139.

<sup>39</sup> On the development of EC summits, see: Jan Werts, *The European Council* (Amsterdam: North Holland, 1992), chapter 1; Martin Westlake, *The Council of the European Union* (London: Cartermill, 1995), 18–23; and John Redmond, 'From European Community Summit to European Council', in Dunn, *Highest Level*, chapter 4.

<sup>40</sup> PREM 15/880, Armstrong to Graham (27 July), and Heath to Brandt (5 October 1971).

<sup>41</sup> PREM 15/894 and 895, *passim*.

pinpointed where the others agreed or disagreed with the British position and suggested where deals might be made. Thus, officials felt able to align with the French in pushing for institutional reform and economic union, but not on further strengthening of the Common Agricultural Policy, while the Irish were identified as allies on the creation of a regional development fund.<sup>42</sup>

Over two days in Paris in October 1972, 'the Nine' set an ambitious programme for the future based on the creation of a 'European Union' by the end of the decade, including a regional development fund and monetary union. It was a vision to which Heath was deeply committed.<sup>43</sup> But the following months saw the enthusiasm dissipate. Inflation, currency instability and the energy crisis made it difficult to focus on institutional reform. A sense of progress only returned in September 1973 when Jean Monnet, the so-called 'father of Europe', put a memorandum to Heath, Pompidou and Brandt urging the creation of a 'Provisional European Government or Supreme Council'. Monnet felt the current system of summits to be 'too infrequent and spasmodic . . . weighed down with too many experts and made ineffective by too much formality'. He was disturbed by the lack of progress on the Paris decisions, the bureaucratic inertia in Brussels and the tendency of the Council of Ministers to divide on national lines; perhaps regular summits could rescue the Community from the mire and push EC strategy forward.<sup>44</sup> He met Heath and Brandt, who both responded enthusiastically. Pompidou was more elusive, but did talk, at a press conference late in the month, of *les hauts responsables* pushing political co-operation forward.<sup>45</sup> In a letter to the other leaders, he also suggested that the first meeting of the new Council should occur before the year's end and the Danish government (currently holding the EC presidency) offered to host a summit.<sup>46</sup> Bilateral meetings in London with Brandt and Pompidou suggested that they were close in their approach. In other bilateral summits, with the smaller Community members, Heath tried to dispel the suspicion that regular summits would be dominated by France, West Germany and Britain.<sup>47</sup>

<sup>42</sup> PREM 15/895, 'Elements of the Negotiation' (undated).

<sup>43</sup> PREM 15/895 and /896, *passim*; CAB 128/50, CM(72)46th (25 October).

<sup>44</sup> Jean Monnet, *Memoirs* (London: Collins, 1978), 497–8 and 502–7.

<sup>45</sup> PREM 15/1523, Armstrong's note for the record (21 September), and Armstrong to Alexander (27 September 1973); and see Willy Brandt, *My Life in Politics* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1992), 422–3.

<sup>46</sup> PREM 15/1385, Brandt to Heath (25 October), and Pompidou to Heath (31 October 1973).

<sup>47</sup> PREM 15/1385, record of Heath Brandt meeting (12 November); PREM 15/1312, FCO brief (undated) for visit to Brussels; and see PREM 15/1385, Alexander to Bridges (16 November 1973), on the concerns of smaller powers.

During late 1973, however, a grave threat loomed over the Community. The tripling of oil prices after the 1973 Arab–Israeli War threatened to divide the EC as each country tried to protect its own position. Ironically, given Heath’s earlier praise for the Paris summit, the one in Copenhagen on 14–15 December proved a disaster and rather than putting the Community back on track, it was dominated by the energy crisis. Ministers arrived from oil-producing countries at short notice to discuss the problem, using up considerable time. The financial impact of the oil-price increase meant that Brandt, leader of the biggest contributor to the Community budget, wanted no progress towards a regional development fund, which was one of Heath’s key aims. Anker Jørgensen, the Danish premier, could not focus on proceedings because he was desperately trying to form a new coalition government. In Cabinet, Heath put the most positive gloss he could on events: there had been progress towards a more regular system of summits, with a proposal for two each year. His memoirs were more frank: ‘It was the worst summit that I ever experienced.’<sup>48</sup> And, since his government was defeated in a hastily called election two months later, the creation of the European Council was left to others.

Labour returned to office determined to renegotiate Heath’s terms of entry. But it was also clear that renegotiation could not begin in earnest until Wilson had secured his hold on power in a second election. In any case, the death of Pompidou in April led to a hiatus in French policy, while Brandt’s sudden fall from power, and the succession of Helmut Schmidt as chancellor, also disrupted progress. During the first summit between Wilson and Pompidou’s successor, Valéry Giscard d’Estaing, in July, both sides simply set out their positions on the principle of renegotiation. Even at this point, however, it was clear that the issue was likely to be resolved via summitry, since Giscard was deeply committed to the idea of regular leaders’ meetings and talked about hosting a multilateral summit later in the year.<sup>49</sup> In September, after meeting Schmidt, Giscard telephoned Wilson and suggested that a preliminary ‘exchange of views’ on the future shape of the Community should occur before the upcoming British election, with the leaders meeting alone, without any foreign ministers and without issuing a communiqué. The idea of paving the way for a full working summit in this way appealed to Wilson and the upshot was the ‘dinner summit’ hosted by Giscard on

<sup>48</sup> CAB 128/53, CM(72)63rd (20 December); Heath, *Course*, 393; and see PREM 15/2041, Heath to Nixon (30 December 1973).

<sup>49</sup> PREM 16/74, record of Wilson–Giscard meeting (19 July), and see /97, Alexander to Bridges (12 June 1974), on the thinking behind the summit.

the 14th. Lasting more than six hours, it deliberately avoided any substantive discussion of British renegotiation but allowed each leader to set out their view on the Community's future. Wilson's statement included praise for the 'dinner summit' as an 'imaginative idea' in which leaders could be frank and less tempted to 'play to the gallery' of public opinion. He backed the idea of similar small and informal meetings in future, which should be 'routine, working summits' with dates set in advance to 'prevent the Press saying it was being called to deal with some particular emergency'. There was general agreement on this point, with Giscard suggesting three or four summits a year to review progress and give instructions on future work within the Community. But it was also felt that each leader needed an interpreter at hand and that foreign ministers would sometimes have to attend.<sup>50</sup> After the 'dinner summit' Wilson wrote the traditional letter of thanks to Giscard, noting on this occasion that 'the relaxed and informal atmosphere . . . enabled us to state our views in a frank and straightforward way' and that this helped clarify understanding of the 'interconnected problems of our time'.<sup>51</sup>

The friendship of Schmidt and Giscard is rightly seen as central to creating the European Council,<sup>52</sup> but Wilson seems to have taken little persuasion to back the proposal, which may have been because London needed support in Paris if the renegotiation were to succeed. An emphasis on inter-governmental, as opposed to supranational, integration also suited Wilson's outlook. Besides, as the months went by, the prime minister also seems to have recovered his old desire to play a part on the world stage. Roy Jenkins, the home secretary, noted that the summits of late 1974 – including those with Schmidt and Giscard in November that clinched a deal on the renegotiation – 'seemed to arouse Wilson's interest in the grand league of foreign policy involvement in a way that had not been so since his relationship with Lyndon Johnson'. But, Jenkins noted, Wilson 'could play a more or less equal hand with Schmidt and Giscard, whereas he had been very much a junior partner of Johnson's'.<sup>53</sup> The proposal for a regular summit, or 'European Council', went before another ad hoc summit, in Paris in December. Here the leaders compromised on three meetings a year, but with a provision for extra meetings if necessary. Wilson had actually advocated

<sup>50</sup> PREM 16/78, Giscard Wilson telephone call (3 September), and two Wilson notes on summit (16 September 1974).

<sup>51</sup> PREM 16/78, Wilson to Giscard (16 September 1974).

<sup>52</sup> For example, Henri Ménudier, 'Les relations franco allemandes, 1974 81', in Samy Cohen and Marie Claude Smouts, eds., *La Politique Extérieure de Valéry Giscard d'Estaing* (Paris: Fondation Nationale des Sciences Politiques, 1985), 67–71.

<sup>53</sup> Roy Jenkins, *A Life at the Center* (New York: Random House, 1991), 377–8.

four; the Belgians, Dutch, Irish and Danes, still fearing domination by the big powers, only wanted two. To please the smaller members, foreign ministers would attend the summits and existing EC institutions would be strengthened. Agreement was also reached on establishing a European regional development fund. Giscard closed the summit on 10 December 1974 by saying: 'The summit is dead. Long live the European Council.' But, just as important, this successful meeting established a positive atmosphere for British renegotiation. To be a success, Wilson's steering brief had told him, the Paris summit needed to produce 'a package of results which will satisfy all the member governments'. And, on this occasion, the British probably emerged happier than most. In particular, they had obtained more than expected on a new budget deal, a success that was felt to be linked to Giscard's position as host: 'To have held out against us on the budget in isolation would have spoiled his Summit.'<sup>54</sup>

The deal on British renegotiation was finalised at the first of the new European Councils, in Dublin in March 1975, another highly successful nine-power summit. Here, Wilson said Britain would commit itself seriously to continued membership and the others gave him a satisfactory deal on both the budget mechanism and New Zealand dairy produce. 'The happy outcome was clearly pre-ordained', noted the Irish foreign minister, Garret Fitzgerald, even if there was a 'show' of serious negotiation. Their very ability to work smoothly with other leaders, in a collegial atmosphere, seems to have confirmed Wilson and Callaghan in favour of continued Community membership.<sup>55</sup> A few months later that position was approved in a popular referendum by a margin of two to one. Wilson and Callaghan also found the second European Council, in Brussels in July, to be 'the kind of "Summit" they wanted to attend'. They enjoyed the informality and seemed content to accept Giscard's concept of the Council as a way to take stock and explore common positions away from the Community's central institutions. But some senior officials were concerned that informality could be taken too far. In particular, it was argued, for such important meetings the agenda needed careful preparation and the prime minister must always be fully

<sup>54</sup> CAB 128/55, CM(74)51st (12 December); PREM 16/382, especially steering brief (undated) and Tomkins to Callaghan (20 December 1974, including quote); Wilson, *Final Term*, 92 7; James Callaghan, *Time and Chance* (London: Collins, 1987), 310 11 and 314; Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1974 76* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), 247 50.

<sup>55</sup> PREM 16/383, records of meetings (10 11 March 1975); Garret Fitzgerald, *All in a Life: Garret Fitzgerald, an autobiography* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1991), 154 5; Callaghan, *Time*, 321 4; Wilson, *Final Term*, 101 3.

briefed. Alan Campbell, the FCO's political director, impressed though he was by Callaghan's minute-taking of the summit, expressed concern about the complete exclusion of officials bar interpreters, at the way Giscard and Schmidt appeared to dominate discussions and at some misunderstandings that were generated during the meetings but not properly ironed out. However, Michael Palliser, Britain's permanent representative in Brussels, readily acknowledged some of the advantages of summitry: 'the fact of the matter is that only Prime Ministers can when necessary over-ride the particular interests of specialist ministries' and deal with tough issues of domestic politics.<sup>56</sup>

The third Council meeting, in Rome in December 1975, proved less to Wilson's taste. He later dismissed it as 'an acrimonious waste of time'. Here, he and Callaghan conceded direct elections to the European Parliament and a common passport, developments that stirred up some opposition in Cabinet. They were also isolated over the question of representation at an upcoming meeting of oil-producing and -consuming nations. Whereas the other member states were happy to be represented by Giscard as a single spokesman, the British wanted a separate voice as a major oil producer. One prime ministerial aide wrote that Wilson and Callaghan 'seem to have come home from Rome with their tails between their legs' after being forced to retreat.<sup>57</sup> And by the time of his last European Council, in Luxembourg on 1 April 1976, within days of leaving office, Wilson felt such meetings were becoming 'unproductive'. Certainly, little was agreed, there being nothing of substance to discuss, and Schmidt complained that, in contrast to the original hopes of an informal atmosphere, the Council now seemed to meet in large conference rooms, with a bank of interpreters to provide simultaneous translations.<sup>58</sup> But the Council was only in its early stages and, even if some sessions did disappoint, it had already effectively become the final political authority in the Community, where the Council of Ministers and Commission and Parliament had failed to provide momentum. The solution that leaders had reached in 1973–5 was one that emphasised inter-governmental co-operation over supranationalism, but the creation of the European Council confirmed the interdependence of the EC member states, who could not tackle 'stagflation' on their own, and it proved a vehicle for deeper integration, as seen in the moves towards an

<sup>56</sup> Alan Campbell, *Colleagues and Friends* (Salisbury: Michael Russell, 1988), 115 16; PREM 16/393, Nairne to Palliser (29 July), and reply (16 September 1975).

<sup>57</sup> CAB 128/57, CM(75)52nd (4 December); PREM 16/399, records of Council sessions (1 2 December 1975); Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 594 (including quote); and see Wilson, *Final Term*, 200 3.

<sup>58</sup> Wilson, *Final Term*, 203 and 237 8.

elected parliament. It represented a particularly strong form of summit with serial meetings, a proactive ethos, a sense of common identity (whatever the differences on particular issues) and the ability to take meaningful decisions in running what was arguably the world's most successful regional organisation.<sup>59</sup>

### The Group of Six

Like the European Council, the idea of a multilateral gathering of the principal Western leaders was partly the product of the economic problems of the 1970s, especially the energy crisis. It was first floated by Giscard in a press interview on 9 July 1975. Aside from the energy crisis, it might discuss monetary instability, inflation and stagnating growth, all of which created a bleak prospect for Western governments. Giscard was evidently inspired to think of this by his experience as French finance minister in the early 1970s when he met his opposite numbers from the US, Japan, Germany and Britain in the so-called 'Library Group'. Gathering in the White House library, they spoke off the record, without officials present.<sup>60</sup> Giscard hoped for similar informal meetings of executive heads, away from other ministers, bureaucrats and the media, away too from the established international organisations, focusing on major issues and allowing imaginative policies to be discussed that might help the West out of the economic doldrums. During the CSCE's Helsinki summit, Giscard used a lunchtime gathering with Wilson, Schmidt and President Ford to press for an economic summit of the leading powers. It was agreed there that Paris should host such a conference, that it should not be over-ambitious in its aim and that each government would appoint a representative to prepare for it. The summit would be open, informal and restricted in conferees.<sup>61</sup> Japan and, after some discussion, Italy were invited to join the other four but, to their dismay, Canada and the other EC member states were omitted.

The conference took place on 15–17 November at Rambouillet. Giscard chose this chateau partly to help create an informal, rural atmosphere, but it proved a cramped location. The British delegation was reduced to working in a bathroom, albeit one built for Napoleon. A key reason for the overcrowding was that, even with the lowest possible number of representatives, each country needed three ministers

<sup>59</sup> Redmond, 'European Council', 58–9; and see Werts, *Council*, 61–2 and 75–6.

<sup>60</sup> Westlake, *Council*, 21.

<sup>61</sup> PREM 16/838, Callaghan to Henderson (12 February 1976), gives a summary history of events.

present – the foreign minister and finance minister joining their leader – making a total of eighteen. Other ministers and officials were helicoptered in from Paris as required. Nonetheless, Callaghan found it a successful, relaxed occasion, in which even Franco-American tensions were reduced. It helped that all the leaders except Italy's Aldo Moro could speak English and that the press were left to gather their stories in Paris. 'It could not be claimed that much was decided at Rambouillet', recalled Callaghan. There were differences over how to tackle monetary instability, oil prices and how best to help less developed countries, 'but we left the meetings more fully informed of the . . . factors which governed each other's policies' and the public were given the impression of solidarity between the Western leaders.<sup>62</sup>

The Rambouillet meeting was not intended to lead to other such gatherings but Ford, who had initially been sceptical of the whole idea, hosted a second summit of the leading Western economies in Puerto Rico in 1976, this time with Canada in attendance, and thereafter the so-called G-7 meetings became an annual event, reflecting a belief that even the most powerful countries could not tackle economic problems in isolation. No permanent organisation was set up; the process was one of dialogue rather than policy-making. But the discussions did influence the policy pursued by the G-7 countries through other international institutions. As with the EC experience, problems soon emerged with this vision. There were constitutional differences between the member states, with some leaders unable to force policies through in the way a French president could, while elections and changes of government impacted on the ability of the group to act confidently. The precise problems to be addressed shifted dramatically over the years, agreements on practical action were a rarity and administrative practicalities forced the G-7 to become a more rigid formal structure. Yet the Group proved long-lasting and fostered a joint approach to global problems.<sup>63</sup>

### **Working funerals and other ceremonial summits**

A distinct type of multilateral summit is the 'working funeral', which sometimes follows the death of a major political leader. The 1960s was a fruitful period for these, beginning in November 1963 with that of John Kennedy, followed by those of Churchill, Adenauer, Eisenhower and de

<sup>62</sup> PREM 16/838, notes of meetings (15–17 November), and Tomkins to Callaghan (25 November 1975); Callaghan, *Time*, 479–81; see also Wilson, *Final Term*, 184–8.

<sup>63</sup> David Armstrong, 'The Group of Seven Summits', in Dunn, *Highest Level*, 42–5.



Gaulle. Working funerals, like ad hoc summits, are irregular events but have a well-established procedure involving a ceremony, a meeting with representatives of the host government and an opportunity for discussions with other leaders who have attended. These tend to take the form of a series of bilateral conversations rather than a single multilateral discussion. They can be difficult to plan, given that they occur at short notice. The list of leaders who attend one funeral is likely to differ from that of another, and some countries may send representatives from below the head of government level. Compared to other summits, they allow little time for formal talks and are simply not designed to fulfil political purposes, such as developing diplomatic momentum on issues or negotiating agreements. But they can provide an opportunity for a discreet discussion of any number of issues, without building up public expectation in the way other summits do; they are a valuable way for leaders, not least the leader of the host country, to meet fellow heads of government; and they also allow a kind of 'truce' between those attending, which may help break down enmities.<sup>64</sup>

Douglas-Home's official biographer considered the Kennedy funeral well timed, coming as it did only a month after the premiership began: 'A tragic occasion had . . . done much to establish Home in American eyes as the new British Prime Minister.' Douglas-Home met the new president, Lyndon Johnson, at a State Department reception for visiting leaders. The prime minister then stayed behind to see Johnson separately for half an hour. There were also bilateral conversations with other leaders.<sup>65</sup> Fourteen months later it was Britain's turn to host a major funeral summit and Harold Wilson was keen to exploit the possibilities for diplomacy. Even before Churchill died, Burke Trend, the Cabinet secretary, sent a memorandum round the permanent secretaries of Whitehall asking for briefing notes on important topics. The reception at Buckingham Palace after the state funeral was, according to Wilson, 'the greatest assembly of the world's leaders, and recent leaders, ever gathered together', but substantial discussions were again reserved for bilateral talks. Thus, the 'confrontation' with Indonesia was the focus of Wilson's talks with Australia's Robert Menzies and New Zealand's Keith Holyoake, while Rhodesia dominated discussions with Ian Smith, the colony's prime minister, Canada's Lester Pearson and Zambia's

<sup>64</sup> Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 180 1; and see Berridge, 'Funeral Summits', in Dunn, *Highest Level*, 106 17.

<sup>65</sup> PREM 11/4790, records of meetings (25 6 November 1963); Thorpe, *Douglas Home*, 339; Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), 197 8 and see 198 9 on Douglas Home's attendance at the funeral of Jawaharlal Nehru a few months later.

Kenneth Kaunda. Among other meetings the funeral also provided the opportunity for an early exchange of views with Charles de Gaulle and German chancellor Ludwig Erhard. Neither was Wilson the only minister to exploit the benefits of having the world come to London. Michael Stewart noted the convenience of having his appointment to the FO coincide with Churchill's funeral: 'The occasion was not suited to the transaction of business, but I was able to meet briefly many statesmen whom I should later come to know well.'<sup>66</sup>

Wilson's cynicism over 'working funerals' reached its height with the death of the former German chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, in April 1967. In fact it was at this point that the term 'working funeral' seems to have been invented, perhaps by Wilson himself.<sup>67</sup> Writing to thank ambassador Frank Roberts for his hospitality in Bonn, Wilson declared: 'I doubt whether I have ever managed to fit in so many talks with so many foreign statesmen in such a short period . . . As I said to [foreign minister Gerhard] Schroeder, I think the old Chancellor himself would have been satisfied with the timing of his death.' The talks were especially useful for the 'second try' at entering the EC, with Wilson meeting de Gaulle and Chancellor Kiesinger, among others.<sup>68</sup> There was also a difficult exchange with Johnson, who said Britain was 'going crazy' in contemplating withdrawal from the Far East and remarked that all British financial worries would be over if they sent two brigades to Vietnam.<sup>69</sup> Eight months later a memorial service, rather than a funeral, took place for Harold Holt of Australia, who had mysteriously disappeared while swimming. Among others, Wilson again met Johnson and discussed Vietnam.<sup>70</sup>

In 1969 Wilson missed the funeral of Dwight Eisenhower because this coincided with a prime ministerial visit to Nigeria, but in November 1970, when de Gaulle died, Britain sent an impressive array of mourners to the memorial service in Notre Dame, including Heath, the Prince of Wales and three former prime ministers – Eden, Macmillan and Wilson. The occasion provided Heath an opportune meeting with President Pompidou. Given the pressures on the host, the meeting lasted barely ten minutes but was enough to suggest a positive outlook

<sup>66</sup> PREM 13/317, Trend minute (20 January 1965); PREM 13/174, records of meetings (28 January – 1 February 1965); Wilson, *Government*, 73–5; Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), 140. For medical reasons President Johnson was not among the visitors.

<sup>67</sup> Harold Wilson, *The Governance of Britain* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1976), 87.

<sup>68</sup> PREM 13/1713, Wilson to Roberts (27 April 1967); PREM 13/1528, records of meetings (25–6 April 1967).

<sup>69</sup> PREM 13/1528, Palliser to Macle hose (28 April 1967).

<sup>70</sup> PREM 13/2459, record of meeting (22 December 1967).

for British entry to the EC.<sup>71</sup> But the de Gaulle service brought to an end the series of well-attended 'working funerals' since 1963. At the funerals of Harry Truman and Lyndon Johnson, both in January 1973, Britain was represented by Cabinet ministers, and Heath was the only foreign leader to attend Lester Pearson's funeral in December 1973.<sup>72</sup> The next major 'working funeral' was of de Gaulle's successor, Georges Pompidou, in April 1974, when Harold Wilson held bilateral sessions with French premier Pierre Messmer, Willy Brandt, Japan's Kakuei Tanaka, President Podgorny of the USSR and Richard Nixon. The last avoided all reference to the Watergate scandal but made 'nostalgic references' about his past relationship with the British leader. He also insisted on accompanying the prime minister to the door of the British embassy, 'with perhaps more regard for his internal position than mine', noted Wilson, who expected to face an election within months and did not want to be seen with the increasingly beleaguered president.<sup>73</sup>

The working funeral was not the only type of summit linked to a ceremony. Multilateral meetings might also occur at treaty signatures or on anniversaries of organisations. Like funeral summits, the precise make-up of such summits will vary according to circumstances: they will include ceremonies and opportunities to meet other leaders, but they will not be ideal occasions for such purposes as negotiation. However, since their dates will be known in advance, this may allow for some planning for particular purposes. A summit marked the signature of the Treaty of Accession to the EEC, in Brussels in January 1972, when Heath held a number of bilateral meetings with other leaders,<sup>74</sup> and it has already been noted that the 1974 NATO summit was designed to mark the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Atlantic Pact. A similar example was the meeting to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of the UN in October 1970. This drew dozens of leaders to New York for several days and allowed Heath to see twelve other heads of government for substantial meetings, as well as the UN secretary-general, U Thant. A bonus was an invitation to Heath and others to attend a state banquet in the

<sup>71</sup> PREM 15/32, AJCS to Armstrong (11 November), and Heath to Douglas Home (12 November 1970).

<sup>72</sup> PREM 15/1354, 1355 and 1861, *passim*.

<sup>73</sup> CAB 128/54, CM(74)9th (9 April); PREM 16/95, especially Wilson note on Nixon meeting (6 April 1974). Wilson also went to the funeral of Irish president Erskine Childers seven months later, but, while a number of other leaders were present, his only recorded meeting was with Ireland's Liam Cosgrave: PREM 16/325, record of meeting (21 November 1974).

<sup>74</sup> PREM 15/881, records of meetings (23 January 1972).

White House to round off the celebrations, though this was an occasion at which to be seen rather than transact business.<sup>75</sup>

### Conclusion

Whereas the Commonwealth meeting was the only recurrent multilateral summit attended by British leaders in the 1960s, by the 1980s it was only one of several. As prime minister between 1979 and 1990, Margaret Thatcher attended thirty-three European Councils and ten G-7 summits, but only six Commonwealth conferences;<sup>76</sup> in addition she attended six NATO summits. These meetings had also become more frantic: where Commonwealth conferences lasted a week and included a leisurely weekend in the middle, some meetings of the European Councils might last only a day, with a crowded schedule. It was not that multilateral summits were unknown outside the Commonwealth in the 1960s, the EC, EFTA and NATO all held them, but they were intermittent, rare events. The real turning point towards a series of frequent leaders' meetings came in 1974–5 with two NATO summits, the foundation of the European Council, the Helsinki conference and the origins of the Group of Seven. Alongside anniversary summits, working funerals and the bilateral meetings discussed in the last chapter, there were clearly plenty of opportunities for leaders to see one another.<sup>77</sup> Wilson and Nixon did not hold a bilateral summit when they overlapped in office during 1974, but they were both at the Pompidou funeral and that year's NATO summit, during both of which they had a one-to-one meeting. All these commitments added to the time pressures on leaders. Bernard Donoughue noted that Wilson often seemed to feel ill ahead of an EC summit during his final term, and that he seemed in a low mood during the 1975 NATO summit.<sup>78</sup> But this may have reflected a general

<sup>75</sup> PREM 15/710, record of meetings (20–4 October 1970). There was also a *bilateral* summit between Heath and Portuguese premier Marcello Caetano in 1973 to celebrate the 600th anniversary of their alliance: PREM 15/1826, *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapman's, 1992), 275.

<sup>77</sup> One unusual occasion for summits that has not been discussed was through the Socialist International, founded in 1951 as a forum for social democratic party leaders. For those party leaders who were in office, the meetings served as a summit. At a meeting of socialist leaders in April 1965, Wilson discussed EFTA with the Swedish and Danish premiers, while the International's meeting in Eastbourne in 1969 included a bilateral meeting with Israel's Golda Meir: FO 371/182345/32, FO to Paris (28 April 1965); PREM 13/2736, record of meeting (17 June 1969). The Socialist International of 1974 was held at Chequers and of the twenty six leaders represented, six were premiers. Because this was a party event rather than a government one, there was limited Downing Street involvement in the arrangements: PREM 16/876, *passim*.

<sup>78</sup> Donoughue, *Diary*, 658, 394 and 584.

fatigue as he approached his resignation. In contrast, his successor Callaghan had already become a keen supporter of personal diplomacy and wrote about it enthusiastically in his memoirs: face-to-face meetings need not 'mean seduction or appeasement, nor will they always lead to agreement, but though . . . information can be transmitted around the globe in seconds, we have developed no substitute for the personal meeting. To meet is to acquire a broader frame of reference, a better understanding of one another's perceptions, a sharper focus.'<sup>79</sup>

In 1975 William Wallace noted that, while Britain had become 'accustomed . . . to conducting important aspects of its foreign relations through multilateral channels', it also used 'bilateral relations as a necessary means of preparing for and supplementing institutionalised multilateral negotiations'.<sup>80</sup> Ties between multilateral and bilateral meetings operated in a number of ways. First, as noted in the [last chapter](#), bilateral summits were frequently used to prepare for multilateral meetings of the Commonwealth and EC. This did not guarantee success, as the examples of Singapore and Copenhagen amply reveal. But it seems to have been one reason why the frequency of summits gathered ever more pace, with bilateral summits being held as camps on the climb to a still higher level. Wilson's bilateral summits with Schmidt and Giscard in late 1974 were clearly important precursors to the multilateral Paris summit of 9 December.<sup>81</sup> Then again, when leaders gathered at multilateral summits they became, in part, a series of *bilateral* summits in which leaders could discuss any number of issues with their opposite numbers. In a sense, every multilateral leaders' gathering should also be seen as a series of bilateral summits. For example, Wilson saw two of his most persistent Rhodesia critics, Nyerere and Kaunda, for long bilateral meetings at the start of the 1969 Commonwealth conference,<sup>82</sup> and at the EC summit in Paris in October 1972, Heath had a series of bilateral meetings with his fellow leaders.<sup>83</sup> But not all the bilateral conversations were pre-planned and properly minuted. In the wake of the Rambouillet summit, Callaghan recalled the 'informal exchanges over meals and in the corridors that are so often such a crucial component of Summit discussions'.<sup>84</sup> Inevitably, many such conversations went unrecorded.

Another way in which bilateral and multilateral meetings operated together was when an international organisation operated as a single

<sup>79</sup> Callaghan, *Time*, 367 8. <sup>80</sup> Wallace, *Process*, 218.

<sup>81</sup> See especially Callaghan, *Time*, 311 14, and Wilson, *Final Term*, 88 90.

<sup>82</sup> PREM 13/2886, records of meetings (7 8 January 1969).

<sup>83</sup> PREM 15/895 and /896 include records of bilateral meetings (18 21 October 1972).

<sup>84</sup> PREM 16/838, Callaghan to Henderson (12 February 1976).

team in talks with outsiders. When negotiating with the Six during the first application, the British discovered that developments took place on two levels: there were bilateral contacts with each of the member states individually; and there were the formal negotiations in Brussels with the EEC as a single organisation. The fact that the Six had to achieve a common position for the Brussels negotiations made it more difficult for the British to strike deals with them, because the Community position was itself a carefully crafted compromise. This was one reason why the negotiating aims in 1970–1 were simplified, with the British focusing on a few key concessions.<sup>85</sup>

An important question is why the mid-1970s saw a shift towards regular multilateral summits. Multilateral conferences, whether ad hoc or linked to permanent organisations, were hardly a novel departure by then, as seen in the number of organisations of which Britain was a member. Jet travel was already a convenient way to travel in 1963, as seen with the Kennedy funeral, and there were plenty of issues to be discussed. NATO, for example, might have held a summit to discuss France's withdrawal from the military structure in 1966 or the decision to pursue a European security conference. In part, it might be a question of chance factors to do with personalities and coincidences: Nixon, troubled by Watergate, called a NATO summit in 1974 to prop up his own position; Helsinki happened to occur in 1975 but it had long been intended to mark the Final Act with a multilateral summit; and Giscard, who was convinced of the value of small, informal conferences, came to power. But deeper factors can also be identified. In the EC, even before Giscard became president, regular summits were seen as a way of breaking the institutional deadlock in a nine-power community and a similar situation probably existed in NATO where détente, the strategic balance and 'burden-sharing' between the US and Europe were all daunting issues.<sup>86</sup> In other words, summits were fulfilling one of their key theoretical roles, providing the political weight to drive issues forward.

Another reason for the advances on the European Council and the G-7 was the dire economic situation in the mid-1970s, as inflation combined with lower growth and currency instability to create a situation that demanded imaginative, radical solutions. As in the wake of the First World War, states understood that they could not tackle such challenges in isolation from other powers. But if multilateral action was

<sup>85</sup> The case is argued in Piers Ludlow, *Dealing with Britain: The Six and the first UK application to the EEC* (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>86</sup> See Park, 'NATO Summits', 92–3.

necessary, those who organised it also remembered Cambon's point that large conferences can find it difficult to achieve anything meaningful. They could work well if, like Helsinki, the outcome was decided in advance or if, as with working funerals, a fixed ceremonial form was observed. It was a different matter with summits that were meant to discuss the challenges of 'stagflation' or the future course of the EC, hence the emphasis placed by Giscard on small, informal meetings of the key characters, heads of state and government. The same problem lay behind the talks on how best to organise Commonwealth meetings and led to discussion about such issues as room size, press briefings and the shape of the conference table. Far from being mundane or obsessively bureaucratic, these questions lay at the heart of making multilateral diplomacy effective.<sup>87</sup>

<sup>87</sup> On the importance of organising space and furniture appropriately in multilateral talks, see Andrew Seidel, 'The Use of the Physical Environment in Peace Negotiations', *Journal of Architectural Education*, vol. 32, no. 2 (1978), 19-23.

## 8 State visits

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When the Queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon and the Palace he had built, the food on his table, the seating of his officials, the attending servants in their robes, his cupbearers and the burnt offerings that he made at the Temple of the Lord, she was overwhelmed.

1 Kings 10.4 5<sup>1</sup>

John Dickie, long-serving diplomatic correspondent of the *Daily Mail*, once wrote that an 'important aspect of promoting Great Britain PLC which the Foreign Office is reluctant to acknowledge publicly is the way royal visits are fitted into the scheme of things'.<sup>2</sup> Yet, as Solomon's success in impressing the Queen of Sheba shows, royal families have been the focus of diplomatic exchanges from the dawn of history, not least because the real power in many countries down to the modern period was the monarchy. In the early twentieth century, before many European countries shifted to republican systems, royal actions could be significant, even for a constitutional monarchy like Great Britain's. A case in point was the state visit paid by Edward VII to France in 1903, which paved the way for the making of the *entente cordiale*.<sup>3</sup> Today, monarchs, except in the few cases where they hold executive power, no longer travel abroad to engage in diplomatic negotiations or gather intelligence, but they can have a real impact on diplomatic life. Coronations are an opportunity for gatherings of world leaders, royal receptions are regular events for the diplomatic corps in monarchies and, certainly in the British case, journeys abroad by members of the royals have become a more frequent occurrence, helping to support diplomatic ends. To take just one year: in 1973, apart from the Queen's own itinerary, visits were planned for her husband Prince Philip to the USSR; her sister Princess Margaret to Barbados, Egypt and Belgium; Princess

<sup>1</sup> *Holy Bible: New International Version* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1982), 356.

<sup>2</sup> John Dickie, *Inside the Foreign Office* (London: Chapman's, 1992), 46.

<sup>3</sup> Roderick McLean, *Royalty and Diplomacy in Europe, 1890 1914* (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 144 8 and chapter 4.



Anne to Ethiopia and Sudan; and Prince Charles to the Caribbean.<sup>4</sup> There were regular occasions in London where the monarch would mix with diplomats – at the Ascot horse race meeting in June, Buckingham Palace garden parties in July or the Queen's reception for the diplomatic corps in autumn – as well as meeting them individually, not least when they presented their credentials on taking up their post. The focus in this chapter will be on the most important type of royal encounter, the state visit, a topic which has barely been subjected to academic study, but which was certainly seen in the 1960s and 1970s as an important element in 'promoting Great Britain PLC'.

Unusually for modern diplomatic practice, the protocol surrounding state visits may be traced back to medieval times. In May 1416, when the Holy Roman Emperor, Sigismund, visited Henry V, he was welcomed at Dover by the King's brother, had all his costs covered by the English exchequer, lodged in the Palace of Westminster, saw parliament in session, was admitted to the Order of the Garter in a ceremony at Windsor and brought as a gift for Henry a relic purporting to be the heart of St George. The context may have been much altered, but five centuries later state visits were still the occasion for a ceremonial welcome, sumptuous accommodation, the award of honours, gift-giving and complaints from tax-payers about the cost.<sup>5</sup> The meeting between Henry VIII and Francis I at the 'Field of the Cloth of Gold' in 1520 was the last meeting of English and French heads of state until Queen Victoria visited Louis Philippe in 1843, but the Victorian era began a steep rise in the number of state visits. By then, of course, an increasing number of countries were presided over by not monarchs but presidents. The US was rather late in the process, with Woodrow Wilson becoming the first president to venture abroad while in office in 1919, when he attended the Paris peace conference, although the first *designated* 'state visit' only came in 1947 with Harry Truman's trip to Mexico.<sup>6</sup> Meetings between heads of state are now frequent. Their popularity has been boosted by similar factors to those that have led to more summits: the growing ease of communications, the desire to affect public opinion or boost trade and the need to signal the importance of particular diplomatic relationships. In some cases they overlap with summits, in that for many countries, such as the United States and France, the head of state is also the chief executive. But where Britain is concerned, state visits

<sup>4</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, PREM 15/2234, Armstrong to Heath (7 December 1972).

<sup>5</sup> Christopher Allmand, *Henry V* (London: Methuen, 1992), 104–6.

<sup>6</sup> Erik Goldstein, 'The Politics of the State Visit', *Diplomatic Studies Programme Discussion Papers*, no. 26 (Leicester, 1996), 4 and 25–6.

can easily be treated separately because the prime minister is at the 'highest level', executively speaking, the monarch playing a largely ceremonial role.

### British practice on state visits

Until 1971, the British operated what was called a 'double standard' for inward state visits to London, which went back to the years when monarchs were given a higher level of ceremony than presidents. The full-scale 'state' visit, usually lasting from Tuesday to Friday, was surrounded by considerable panoply, including a personal welcome from a member of the royal family on arrival in London, a drive to the palace, a banquet and various ceremonial occasions. The whole process was designed to impress, though Barbara Castle found her first experience of it as a Cabinet minister faintly ridiculous. The state banquet for Chilean President Frei in 1965 was 'pure Ruritania: gold plate, knee-breeched gentlemen advancing in an organized phalanx to serve the courses, roses everywhere, minstrels in the gallery, and the dining-room dominated by a huge canopied throne'.<sup>7</sup> Until 1971, below the full 'state' occasions were lower-level events, called 'official' visits, in which, for example, the prime minister might head the initial welcoming party. Both were paid for by the British government, but the second category was less expensive and less time-consuming.<sup>8</sup> It was also quite possible for heads of state to make 'private' visits to London at their own expense, but these were not deemed 'state visits' of any sort and, while they would be offered the chance to meet the Queen, they would be greeted only by a lord-in-waiting.

Apart from Buckingham Palace, state visits could be hosted at the two other official residences, Windsor and, in Scotland, Holyrood House. The last was traditionally the destination for Scandinavian monarchs. Thus, the visit by the youthful Karl Gustav XVI of Sweden in July 1975 began in Edinburgh (the first time this had happened since a visit by the king of Norway in 1962), where the ceremonies included a reception for the ambassadors of Scandinavian countries, but it concluded with an overnight stay in London. It was noted at the time that 'it is clearly more difficult for busy Ministers to cope with a State Visit in Edinburgh' and, sure enough, ministers were forced to rush back to Westminster for a Commons vote, missing the state banquet at Holyrood.<sup>9</sup> Then again,

<sup>7</sup> Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-70* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 47.

<sup>8</sup> Goldstein, 'State Visit', 3-4.

<sup>9</sup> PREM 16/698, Brimelow to Charteris (18 July 1974); John Curle, *Diplomatic Lightweight* (Tavistock: AQ & DJ Publications, 1992), 123-5.

similar problems could occur in London. In May 1967 ministers had to leave the state banquet for King Faisal of Saudi Arabia, at the Royal Naval College, Greenwich, in order to vote on EC entry.<sup>10</sup>

Windsor was the venue for German President Heinemann's visit in November 1972, which may serve as an illustration of the kind of attention lavished on a visitor and the range of ceremonies involved. Welcomed in Windsor by the Queen, the president joined her in the foremost of seven carriages, pulled by matched black and white horses through the streets of the town to the castle, where valets and lady's maids were on hand and an elaborate programme had been prepared, including alternative plans should the itinerary have to change. Written advice was provided on how to pronounce the names of the German party and on their proficiency in English. At the state banquet, the Yeomen of the Guard were on duty and continuous music was provided by the orchestra of the Coldstream Guards. On Wednesday, there was the reception of heads of the diplomatic corps, lunch at Hampton Court, a visit to Westminster Abbey and a dinner, hosted by the City of London, at the Guildhall. The Queen welcomed the party back to Windsor after 11 p.m. On Thursday, Heinemann was invested into the Most Honourable Order of the Bath, visited the Houses of Parliament and Scotland Yard (including its museum of horrors) and hosted dinner for the Queen at the German embassy. His programme ended with a flying visit to Scotland, where he was given an honorary degree at Edinburgh University.<sup>11</sup>

Timetabling was a particular headache for a number of reasons. For one, state visits were undoubtedly a strain, timetabled as they were over several days, and the Queen had numerous other demands on her time. Early June was always a problem because of her horse racing commitments, with the Derby and the Oaks, and her birthday.<sup>12</sup> For another, there was a need to maximise the advantage to Britain in what was, after all, a competitive environment. In late 1971, Heath became agitated that the Queen's visit to France, an important aspect of the prime minister's efforts to improve cross-Channel relations, might be quickly forgotten because Queen Juliana of the Netherlands would be going there soon afterwards. His private secretary, Robert Armstrong, gave such fears

<sup>10</sup> Tony Benn, *Out of the Wilderness: Diaries, 1963-67* (London: Hutchinson, 1987), 498; Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. II: *Lord President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons, 1966-68* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1976), 348-9.

<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Henderson, *Mandarin: The diaries of Nicholas Henderson* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1994), 45-51.

<sup>12</sup> PREM 15/2092, Martin to Armstrong (21 January 1974).

short shrift, inadvertently revealing just how cut-throat the business of state visits could be: 'There is likely to be more interest in Paris in the Queen of England [*sic*] than in the Queen of the Netherlands, and the Queen of England's visit comes first. There is no danger that Queen Juliana will steal any of our Queen's thunder.'<sup>13</sup> In some cases, so as to relieve the timetabling problems, the Queen's outward visits to distant destinations were combined, as with Ethiopia and Sudan in February 1965, Brazil and Chile in November 1968. But there was reluctance in the Palace to doing so, not only because it could be physically tiring but also because it could 'destroy much of the effect. No-one likes being lumped together with their neighbours . . .'<sup>14</sup> Timetabling problems also meant that it was no longer possible for the foreign secretary to accompany the Queen as minister-in-waiting at all times. On her long visit to Germany in 1965, Michael Stewart simply joined her for the first two and the last two days.<sup>15</sup> In 1975, Callaghan was unable to accompany the Queen on her visit to Mexico at all because of the pressures created by the renegotiation of EC entry terms. A junior minister went instead.<sup>16</sup>

Visits had to be planned far enough in advance, of course, to allow for all the preparations to be made; six months was seen as 'the minimum satisfactory time',<sup>17</sup> but the Palace did not like them to be announced so early that they became a hostage to changes in political fortune. In May 1972, the Queen resisted pressure from the government to announce a state visit to Yugoslavia a year in advance. The FCO, aware that such a visit had been discussed for almost thirty years, wanted to arrange an event that would coincide with President Tito's eightieth birthday before anyone else did, but the Palace was concerned that Tito might not actually reach eighty and that his death could be followed by upheavals that would put the Queen in jeopardy, so a state visit was made at an earlier date, October 1972. While the Yugoslav leader did, in fact, live until 1980, such royal insistence on the 'usual deliberation' seems sensible enough in the light of other experience.<sup>18</sup> A state visit to Nigeria was planned for 1975 but had to be postponed following the overthrow of its head of state, General Gowon, in a coup.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>13</sup> PREM 15/2091, Armstrong to Heath (20 October 1971).

<sup>14</sup> UKNA, CAB 165/61, Gore Booth to Adeane and reply (20 and 23 May 1966).

<sup>15</sup> Michael Stewart, *Life and Labour* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1980), 163.

<sup>16</sup> PREM 16/640, note for Wilson (6 February 1975).

<sup>17</sup> PREM 16/418, Dales to Stowe (20 October 1975).

<sup>18</sup> PREM 15/2091, Douglas Home to Charteris and reply (18 and 23 May 1972).

<sup>19</sup> PREM 16/418, RV(75)2nd (14 November 1975).

A unique element in the position of the British monarchy was that the Queen was simultaneously head of state of a number of Commonwealth countries, including Australia, Canada and New Zealand. Because of this, exchanges of state visit with those countries could not take place. As Saville Garner, permanent under-secretary of the Commonwealth Relations Office, explained:

In a country of which Her Majesty is Queen, there is no individual to whom a State Visit can be paid or who can be invited to this country in a similar capacity; indeed she is merely travelling . . . to one of her own realms, and the question of reciprocity does not arise . . . There is no form of inward visit possible . . .

But visits by the Queen to her Commonwealth realms did fulfil a similar role to state visits. Sometimes they took the form of a 'royal tour' of several different destinations in a particular dominion, but increasingly they were tied to key events. Thus, in 1967 the Queen was in Canada for the country's centennial celebrations, while in 1973 she went to Australia for the opening of Sydney Opera House. It was understood that 'the monarchical members of the Commonwealth, particularly the "old" members, should receive visits from the Queen or other members of the Royal Family at fairly frequent intervals'. Since 1926, for such countries, the governor-general could make and receive state visits in the monarch's place. But these were few in number and not all countries were willing to treat governors-general as heads of state. Canadian governors-general took the opportunity to visit the US early, Lord Willingdon being received as head of state by President Calvin Coolidge in 1927. But this was not officially described as a state visit; that title was only used when Lord Tweedsmuir went to Washington ten years later. And a Canadian governor-general did not make a state visit to Europe until 1971, which, coincidentally, was the first year that any Australian governor-general made a state visit.<sup>20</sup> Although, for most state visits involving Britain, London did not seek prior approval from the Commonwealth monarchies, it was sometimes felt wise to consult them. In 1966 Buckingham Palace took the view that the Commonwealth monarchies must approve any visit by the Queen to the Soviet Union, because this would be such a controversial destination.<sup>21</sup> With Commonwealth republics the situation was similar to non-Commonwealth countries in that exchange visits were possible, but inward ones were known as 'Commonwealth visits' and were less formal and of longer

<sup>20</sup> CAB 165/61, 'Draft Submission' (undated); Goldstein, 'State Visit', 4 5; and see the Canadian governor general's website at [www.gg.ca/gg/tr/sv/index\\_e.asp](http://www.gg.ca/gg/tr/sv/index_e.asp). I am grateful to Lorna Lloyd for pointing towards the last source.

<sup>21</sup> CAB 165/61, Adeane to Gore Booth (23 May 1966).

duration than state visits, so as to preserve 'the informality which is a valued feature of the Commonwealth connection' and allow visitors to gain a fuller understanding of Britain.<sup>22</sup>

### The value of state visits

As Erik Goldstein, one of the few academics to have studied the subject, has noted, 'a state visit is usually indicative of either warm relations, or of an attempt to signal a rapprochement', just as the denial of a visit may reflect disagreement or disapproval. In particular, there may be a need to demonstrate stable relations with close neighbours: in Britain's case there have been frequent exchanges of state visit with France just as, in America's, exchanges with Mexico are important.<sup>23</sup> However, there can be many reasons for agreeing to visits. In July 1965, several months after becoming prime minister, Wilson enquired of the FO what criteria were used, making it clear that he hoped 'the promotion of the national interest is the major purpose'. Replying, the FO confirmed that the 'fundamental consideration is always the promotion of the interest', but it was pointed out that this could involve commercial as well as political factors, that benefits could be 'general and intangible' (felt to be specifically true of exchanges with France), that interests could even 'in some circumstances be negative' (as with the recent state visit to Ethiopia, which the British hoped would prevent a deterioration in relations with a stable African regime that had wanted such a visit for several years), and that various complicating factors could enter into the equation.

One such factor was the presumption that the Queen would return any visits 'before too long. For a variety of reasons, it might be thought undesirable for The Queen to visit the country in question.' Another was the practice of exchanging visits only once with any single country during a reign. Geographical considerations were also an element since, on the one hand, 'in view of our world-wide interests, we try not to concentrate visits to or from one continent too closely together' while, on the other hand, it was convenient to combine two outward visits if the Queen were travelling a long distance, as with Sudan and Ethiopia earlier that year; and 'a country which considers it is owed a State Visit . . . may feel aggrieved if Her Majesty omits to pay them a visit while paying a State Visit to a neighbouring country'. Timetabling was a problem not only for the Queen but also the visitor, which 'often proves the decisive factor'. There was also the fact that, since visits had to be

<sup>22</sup> CAB 165/61, 'Draft Submission' (undated). <sup>23</sup> Goldstein, 'State Visit', 1.

planned several months in advance, they were not responsive to sudden changes in the national interest. The FO added that while it played the primary role in discussing which visits should take place, its recommendations always went to the prime minister for approval before being put to Buckingham Palace, and to the secretary to the Cabinet, who chaired a Royal Visits Committee. This committee, which also included the Queen's secretary and the permanent under-secretary of the FO, usually met only a few times per year but was of central importance to state visits. It discussed and co-ordinated the programme of all foreign journeys by members of the royal family.<sup>24</sup> As the visit grew closer, the local embassy would become more involved, liaising with the host government on practicalities and helping to draft the Queen's speeches (an interesting sidelight on the value of embassies).<sup>25</sup>

The way the system operated, and the range of considerations that might come into play in planning visits, was demonstrated when the foreign secretary, Michael Stewart, approached Wilson about the proposed inward visits for 1966. President Jonas of Austria had the first claim simply because his predecessor had been due to make a visit but had died before the date set. Mexico was placed second because it was 'the most stable country in Latin America both politically and economically', an invitation 'would help our export prospects' and such a visit fitted the FO policy of 'showing a greater interest' in the region. The third person on the list, King Hussein of Jordan, was there not only as 'one of the stable factors in an area of constant and dangerous change' but also for the 'negative' reason that he had recently been on state visits to the US, France and Germany and was felt to be nourishing resentment at the lack of an invitation to Britain. Wilson approved Stewart's suggestions without comment.<sup>26</sup> Inevitably, Cold War considerations affected some state visits. In June 1971 the British agreed to a state visit by the king of Afghanistan, mainly because of a 'wish to encourage the Afghans to resist growing Soviet influence'. Mohammed Zahir Shah had been on the throne for thirty-seven years and had been pressing for a visit for the last ten, but London had not previously been able to accommodate him. The number of British visitors to Afghanistan had been increasing in the 1960s, though 'unfortunately many of them are hippies interested in the ready availability of drugs', and British economic interests there were limited. The visit perhaps helped the king in

<sup>24</sup> PREM 13/2357, Wright to Bridges (13 July), and reply (26 July 1965).

<sup>25</sup> See Jane Ewart Biggs, *Pay, Pack and Follow* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 147.

<sup>26</sup> PREM 13/988, Bridges to Wright (4 August 1965), and Wilson's handwritten minute on this.

his efforts to establish links with the West but it did nothing to prevent his country's increasing domination by Moscow.<sup>27</sup>

At a time when other aspects of British diplomacy were becoming geared to export promotion, it was also inevitable that state visits would be seen as a profitable asset. Indeed, this became a persistent aspect of British thinking. David Dain found that a state visit to Pakistan in 1998, soon after he became high commissioner, was of 'enormous benefit to our diplomacy . . . My reception generally, the degree of access that I had at every level, the co-operation we had from the Pakistanis to make sure it was a great success was enormous.' The visit 'gave us the chance to influence whatever it might be we wanted – our commercial interests to be promoted, our banking interests'.<sup>28</sup> Mark Pellew, who was involved in a state visit to Italy in 1980, had a similar experience. Such visits absorbed 'a huge amount of embassy time in the planning and then the actual execution seems unbelievably short', but they did bring both warmer relations and practical gains, as seen 'in terms of trade deals in the immediate aftermath . . .'.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes the desire to exploit state visits for commercial purposes was quite blatant, not least when the FCO pressed for General Mobutu of Zaire to be invited to London in 1973, 'because a decision is likely to be taken in Kinshasa on a \$34 million hydro-electric contract and the prospect of a state visit might swing the balance in our favour'. Mobutu might have been a corrupt, vain dictator but a slot was made available in December.<sup>30</sup>

Richard Nixon once pointed out to Edward Heath that, when it came to substantial discussions, the benefit of summits over state visits was that the latter were 'so tight with time' thanks to the panoply and formal occasions surrounding them, whereas in a working summit over a few days 'we can talk at considerable length about subjects . . .'.<sup>31</sup> However, in some circumstances state visits can be more valuable than summits. Simply because the former are principally symbolic, following a similar pattern wherever and whenever they are held, they do not generate the need for diplomatic agreements, surprise gestures or illusory breakthroughs that summits can, but they can still obtain all the gains

<sup>27</sup> PREM 15/223, Moon to Heath, 17 June, 'Background Note' (2 December), records of meeting (7 December), and Moon to Grattan (10 December 1971). Harold Wilson had earlier opposed a visit by Zahir Shah, arguing this would seem 'of little relevance in present day Britain', an ironic comment given the international significance Afghanistan was to assume after 1979: PREM 13/2357, Andrews to Mayall (10 April 1968).

<sup>28</sup> British Diplomatic Oral History Project (BDOHP), Churchill College Archive Centre, Dain interview, 22–3.

<sup>29</sup> BDOHP, Pellew interview, 12–13.

<sup>30</sup> PREM 15/2091, Armstrong to Heath (23 December 1972).

<sup>31</sup> PREM 15/715, record of telephone call (25 November 1971).



discussed above *and* they provide convenient cover for political talks held away from the public gaze.<sup>32</sup> Under the British system, of course, the monarch themselves would avoid political comments in such meetings. Bill Clinton recalled a meeting in 1994 with Elizabeth II in which ‘she discussed public issues, probing me for information and insights without venturing too far into expressing her own political views . . .’ He recognised that she had to be both politician and diplomat ‘without quite seeming to be either’.<sup>33</sup> But state visits double up as summits when the visitor is an executive head of state and meets the British prime minister on a one-to-one basis at some point. They then have the dual advantage of being a great ceremonial occasion and an opportunity to discuss pressing issues. When King Faisal of Saudi Arabia made a state visit in May 1967, Wilson was pressed by the FO to hold two meetings with him. Faisal was his own prime minister and foreign minister, not only the leader of an oil-rich Arab state, but also important to the development of British policy in Aden and the Persian Gulf.<sup>34</sup> The December 1971 visit by the king of Afghanistan coincided with the Indo-Pakistani War, which became the main subject of his conversation with Heath.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes heads of state carried such weight in their countries that, even if they were not also executive heads, it made sense for the prime minister to see them, as when Wilson met Presidents Saragat of Italy and Kekkonen of Finland within a few months of each other in 1969.<sup>36</sup>

Not everyone saw the point of state visits, however. As a Cabinet minister, Richard Crossman dismissed the Saragat visit of 1969 as ‘an interminable presidential week of entertainment, jollification and formal meetings at which nothing is achieved’.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, state visits had two great weaknesses in twentieth-century diplomacy: first, they were by nature bilateral events when so much diplomacy was becoming multilateral; and second, they did not involve the real power in many modern countries, the executive head of government. But there was more than one way in which the prestige of meeting the Queen could be used for diplomatic advantage. On a multilateral level, not only did she attend Commonwealth meetings (with the exception of Singapore in 1971),

<sup>32</sup> Goldstein, ‘State Visit’, 21.

<sup>33</sup> Bill Clinton, *My Life* (London: Hutchinson, 2004), 599. <sup>34</sup> PREM 13/1775, *passim*.

<sup>35</sup> PREM 15/223, Moon to Heath, 17 June, ‘Background Note’ (2 December), records of meeting (7 December), and Moon to Grattan (10 December 1971).

<sup>36</sup> PREM 13/2738, record of meetings (24 and 28 April); PREM 13/2618, record of meeting (17 July 1969).

<sup>37</sup> Richard Crossman, *The Diaries of a Cabinet Minister*, vol. III: *Secretary State for Social Services, 1968–70* (London: Hamish Hamilton and Jonathan Cape, 1977), 464.

but also, when multilateral conferences took place in London, they often included a meal with her. Thus, the CENTO conference of April 1968 included a dinner at Windsor Castle.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, during visits by important heads of government it was felt useful to arrange an audience to signal the good health of bilateral relations. To take just a few examples from the early 1970s, prime ministers who were granted a short audience at Buckingham Palace, usually over tea, included India's Indira Gandhi in 1971, Pierre Trudeau of Canada in 1972 and Japan's Kakuei Tanaka in 1973.<sup>39</sup>

### The record

The most significant state visit by the Queen in this period was that to West Germany in 1965. Its undoubted success was ironic since, in the early 1960s, the Macmillan government had put it off, fearing an adverse public reaction in Britain.<sup>40</sup> When she arrived to a twenty-one-gun salute at Cologne on 18 May, it was the first time a British monarch had been to Germany since George V in 1913. In the meantime, of course, two world wars had occurred and the visit was intended as marking a reconciliation, being arranged to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of VE day, lasting ten days, taking in much of the country and including, despite Soviet protests, time in Berlin – the British claiming this was merely 'a Sovereign visiting her Troops'.<sup>41</sup> A state visit by German Federal President Heuss to London in October 1958 had not carried the same symbolism. At the opening banquet Heuss' successor, Heinrich Lübke, pointedly declared: 'we see your visit as a sign of growing trust between our people. In our opinion, the German people have expressed their will to make amends . . .' while the Queen announced: 'This tragic period in our relations is happily over.'<sup>42</sup> Herbert Blankenhorn, the new

<sup>38</sup> David Bruce diary, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, 23 April 1968.

<sup>39</sup> PREM 15/960, programme for Gandhi (undated); PREM 15/715, 'outline programme' for Trudeau (undated); PREM 15/1722, communiqué (2 October 1973). However, when Nixon came in October 1970 the Queen went to Chequers to see him, a reflection of his particular importance and his position as head of state: PREM 15/714, record of Heath Nixon meeting (3 October 1970), adjourned mid way to allow for the audience. Rather more unusual was the invitation to the shah of Iran to stay overnight at Windsor in June 1972, while he was attending the horse races at Ascot. This was a private engagement rather than a state visit, but it provided an opportunity for Heath and Douglas Home to discuss Middle Eastern problems, oil and bilateral issues with him: PREM 15/991, record of meeting (23 June 1972).

<sup>40</sup> Ben Pimlott, *The Queen: A Biography of Elizabeth II* (London: HarperCollins, 1996), 355–7.

<sup>41</sup> See PREM 13/571, FO to Moscow (8 May 1965).

<sup>42</sup> See: [www.Britischebotschaft.de/statevisit/en/former\\_visits/visit\\_1965.htm](http://www.Britischebotschaft.de/statevisit/en/former_visits/visit_1965.htm) for Lübke's speech; [www.royal.gov.uk](http://www.royal.gov.uk) for the Queen's speech.

German ambassador to London,<sup>43</sup> and Paul Gore-Booth, the incoming permanent under-secretary of the FO, timed their appointments to coincide with the occasion.<sup>44</sup> The two governments were keen to play down political differences ahead of the visit, as can be seen in Wilson's talks with Chancellor Ludwig Erhard in March, when arguments over the vexed questions of foreign exchange costs for the British Army of the Rhine (BAOR) and NATO nuclear sharing were studiously avoided. Wilson told the US secretary of state, Dean Rusk, that Britain was determined to reduce BAOR costs, but would only press this *after* the state visit.<sup>45</sup>

Another noteworthy success was the Queen's May 1972 visit to France, which took some time to realise, having originally been conceived by Heath to help EC entry. He first raised the idea that France's President Pompidou should be invited to Britain in September 1970, but it was difficult to decide on an optimum time, given that the pace of the entry talks was uncertain. Furthermore, according to protocol it was the French turn to host a visit, since General de Gaulle had come to London in 1960.<sup>46</sup> By the time the visit went ahead, British membership of the EEC was already assured. Nonetheless, it served as 'a suitable endorsement of the renewed political amity between France and Britain'. The French 'spared nothing to make the aesthetics . . . quite exquisite'. Apart from Paris and Versailles, there was a visit to Provence, to the races at Longchamps and to an equestrian display on the Champs de Mars. The embassy judged it to have been 'far more than just another of those state visits at which the Parisians shrug their shoulders and grumble about the traffic . . . It seized the imagination of the French people and enhanced their view of Britain.'<sup>47</sup> There were complaints from 'anti-marketeers' in Britain, however, about the way the Queen was used to support EC entry, a step condemned as compromising national sovereignty and undermining the Commonwealth; while, for the British press, the real significance of the visit was the rare meeting that took place between the Queen and her uncle, the former Edward VIII, who had lived in Paris for many years and was close to death.<sup>48</sup>

<sup>43</sup> [www.germanembassy.org.uk/a\\_change\\_of\\_ambassadors.html](http://www.germanembassy.org.uk/a_change_of_ambassadors.html)

<sup>44</sup> Paul Gore Booth, *With Great Truth and Respect* (London: Constable, 1974), 323.

<sup>45</sup> PREM 13/329, Roberts to Stewart (2 April), and /214, record of Wilson Rusk meeting (14 May 1965).

<sup>46</sup> PREM 15/67, Armstrong to Moon and reply (22 September) and Armstrong to Graham (9 November); PREM 15/386, Graham to Armstrong (3 November 1970), and Greenhill to Armstrong (12 May 1971).

<sup>47</sup> Ewart Biggs, *Pay*, 146–50. <sup>48</sup> Pimlott, *Queen*, 406–8 and 415–17.

Being such delicate occasions, surrounded by protocol and ceremonial, state visits may easily throw up dangers. Some ill-timed controversy, demonstrations against the visitor or simple gaffes can cause embarrassment. Even long years of British experience and the most detailed planning could not prevent hitches. There was nothing as controversial in these years as Charles de Gaulle's 1967 visit to Canada, perhaps, when he stirred thoughts of Québécois independence. But in July 1963, at the fag end of the Macmillan administration, a visit by King Paul of Greece proved embarrassing. Although Greece was a NATO ally and its royal family closely related to the Windsors, there were tensions between the two countries over the future of Cyprus, a former British colony that was mainly Greek-populated, and these were inflamed when the Greek Queen Frederika, on a private visit to London ahead of the official visit, was mobbed in the street by some Cypriot communists. The Greek premier, Constantine Karamanlis, advised that the state visit be cancelled and, when the king refused this advice, resigned. The visit was subsequently marred by further protests.<sup>49</sup> Frederika's right-wing leanings, including pre-war membership of the Hitler Youth, did not help. Harold Wilson, the leader of the opposition, refused to attend the state banquet and at the Aldwych Theatre both royal families were booed, an example of the increasing irreverence of British society in the early 1960s that provoked outrage from more traditional quarters.<sup>50</sup>

The most embarrassing occasion under Wilson came courtesy of George Brown, during the state visit of President Sunay of Turkey in November 1967. This was in itself further evidence of the danger of events intruding on long-made arrangements, since Sunay's arrival coincided with the sterling crisis that brought the devaluation of the pound. The FO was also worried that King Constantine of Greece was in London on a private visit at the same time and that, only a week later, the patriarch of the Eastern Orthodox Church was due to hold a historic meeting with the archbishop of Canterbury. 'All we need now is for Makarios [President of Cyprus] to turn up!' remarked one official.<sup>51</sup> When Sunay's party arrived at Victoria Station, Brown was in the party that greeted them but, in contrast to Wilson and Roy Jenkins, he insisted on wearing a lounge suit instead of the morning dress that protocol demanded. Then, on 7 November 1967 at Hampton Court, the foreign

<sup>49</sup> Goldstein, 'State Visit', 22 3. <sup>50</sup> Pimlott, *Queen*, 321 2.

<sup>51</sup> Ivor Lucas, *A Road to Damascus* (London: The Radcliffe Press, 1997), 83 5. Lucas nonetheless considered the visit 'a resounding success', while FCO 9/628 gives a highly positive report of the visit, Allen to Brown (7 December 1967).

secretary became drunk on gin and tonic, departed from his prepared speech into a rambling discourse that took in Catholicism and trades unionism, and is reputed to have told Sunay, during a ballet performance, 'You don't want to listen to this bullshit – let's go and have a drink.' Fortunately the details did not reach the newspapers.<sup>52</sup>

In some cases, the benefits and drawbacks could be complex, as seen with King Hussein's visit in 1966. On the positive side, this had a telling personal impact on the king, thanks to the ceremonies that were organised for him. Among other events, he was made an honorary air chief marshal of the Royal Air Force, confirming his abilities as a pilot by performing acrobatic rolls in a jet trainer. He also received plenty of amused media coverage when he accelerated an armoured vehicle so hard that the British colonel accompanying him fell and broke a tooth. Yet the foreign secretary, George Brown, feared that the British learnt 'nothing new' from their official talks with the king during the visit and doubted it would have much lasting impact on Anglo-Jordanian relations. The problems of timing such visits were exposed when King Hussein's arrival coincided with an upsurge of his personal differences with Egypt's President Nasser, who castigated him as a reactionary friend of the West. The fracas undermined the FO policy of 'avoiding the crossfire . . . in the inter-Arab [*sic*] propaganda war'.<sup>53</sup>

On outward visits royal security was a persistent nightmare that put question marks over various destinations, though visits generally went ahead despite the dangers. One that caused particular concern was to Sudan in 1965. Only eight months before, President Ibrahim Abboud had visited London, but in the interim his military regime had been toppled following mounting civilian demonstrations and, as the Queen's arrival date drew near, street fighting was under way in Khartoum between various factions. The interim government was determined to go ahead, however, and the gunmen proved ready to hide their differences during the visit, which passed off successfully.<sup>54</sup> Ten years later there were also fears about security in Mexico, where various guerrilla groups were active, but the embassy was adamant that local security was good and the visit again went ahead without incident.<sup>55</sup> Sometimes, reasons arose to prevent visits taking place at all. One visit the British were determined to avoid was from President Ferdinand Marcos of the

<sup>52</sup> Peter Paterson, *Tired and Emotional: The life of Lord George Brown* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 195–7.

<sup>53</sup> PREM 13/988, Brown to Philips (15 August 1966).

<sup>54</sup> Anthony Parsons, *They Say the Lion: Britain's Legacy to the Arabs: A personal memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1986), 97–9.

<sup>55</sup> PREM 16/640, Galsworthy to Curle (4 March 1974).

Philippines. He was a pro-Western leader and the Philippines was a potential export market, but the security situation there was poor and the British did not wish to give a seal of approval to his oppressive regime.<sup>56</sup>

More remarkable was the fate that befell a planned Southeast Asian visit in 1971. Under Labour it was expected that the Queen should attend the first regular meeting of the Commonwealth outside London, which had been set for January 1971 in Singapore.<sup>57</sup> Cautious as ever on timetables, Buckingham Palace was reluctant to make a firm decision ahead of the general election, especially since attendance at Singapore made it sensible to plan a fuller itinerary, with state visits to Malaysia and Thailand.<sup>58</sup> The Thais had wanted a state visit for ten years now and a possible combined visit to the three countries had been discussed for some time.<sup>59</sup> There were worries about security problems, especially because the Vietnam War was raging and inter-communal violence had recently occurred in Malaysia. But what ultimately told against a visit at this point was the likelihood that Singapore could prove 'a somewhat explosive conference' in view of the controversy stirred by the Conservatives' decision to sell arms to South Africa.<sup>60</sup> Heath wrote to the Queen in October advising her not to attend because of possible 'criticism and embarrassment', although, to placate Singapore, Malaysia and Thailand, a visit to all three was planned for 1972.<sup>61</sup> The cancellation of the Queen's attendance at a Commonwealth conference was a telling commentary on the divisions besetting the organisation.

### Reforming the system

It has been said that, in contrast to many other diplomatic meetings, state visits 'provide one of the few areas of diplomatic activity which have seen but little relaxation of the formality of protocol'.<sup>62</sup> Yet, whatever the tradition behind them, state visits were not immune to change. In the early 1960s there had been considerable debate between the Palace, Downing Street, the FO and CRO over the most fitting programme for visits, the optimum number there should be each year and to what extent

<sup>56</sup> CAB 165/900, Greenhill to Charteris (21 September 1970).

<sup>57</sup> PREM 13/3110, Moon to Trend (17 June 1970).

<sup>58</sup> CAB 165/900, Adeane to Greenhill (3 June 1970).

<sup>59</sup> CAB 165/215, especially Gore Booth to Adeane (26 January).

<sup>60</sup> PREM 15/386, memorandum for Adeane (16 July), Armstrong to Greenhill (20 July), and Armstrong to Heath (18 September 1970); and see PREM 15/627, *passim*.

<sup>61</sup> But the visits were not announced until after the Commonwealth meeting: CAB 165/900, Heath to the Queen (15 October 1970), and Greenhill to Armstrong (3 February 1971).

<sup>62</sup> Goldstein, 'State Visit', 2.

it was appropriate to treat Commonwealth visits like state visits, especially given that many Commonwealth countries were becoming independent as republics. Beginning with President Abboud of Sudan in 1964, a programme was introduced that reduced the time spent on ceremonies and allowed individual visitors to see aspects of British life that interested them. This reform simultaneously made 'things less tiresome for the Queen'.<sup>63</sup> Soon afterwards, more fundamental questions were raised about whether the system of state visits was well designed for the task. In particular, the tradition of having only one exchange of visits with any country in a reign was called into question. In June 1966 the *Sunday Times* reported that, with Elizabeth II's reign in its fourteenth year, 'The Queen is running out of countries to state visit'. She had been to a total of fifty-two countries already, twenty-two of those on full state visits. All the crowned heads of Europe had now visited her.<sup>64</sup>

This followed several weeks of discussion between the FO, CRO and Buckingham Palace, as well as the Lord Chamberlain, Lord Cobbold, the figure responsible for the procedure of conducting state visits in Britain. An FO memorandum to the Royal Visits Committee early in May noted that 'the more important countries pay and receive visits early on' in each reign, but that this created a problem with long reigns: 'eventually a point will be reached when state visits will cease altogether since every country in the world will have paid and received a visit during the reign'. But there were problems in considering a programme of visits from every single country. A few important ones were felt unlikely to exchange state visits in the near future: the Emperor of Japan, still viewed by some as a godlike figure, had never left his country, while a state visit to the Soviet Union was a delicate matter owing to the regicide of Nicholas II, a close relative of the Windsors. As to 'minor unimportant countries', visits were unlikely to stir the public imagination or be worth the inconvenience to ministers: 'there are very friendly small countries such as Luxembourg or Laos for whose head of state the public might criticize a traffic hold-up even for a carriage drive from Victoria Station to Buckingham Palace'. If the state visit were to remain 'a useful instrument of foreign policy', plans should aim at 'improving friendly relations with countries which are important to us' so that there

<sup>63</sup> The debates of 1961-4 can easily be followed through PREM 11/4795, *passim*, quote from Wright to Douglas Home (26 March 1964); and see de Zulueta minute (6 November 1963) for a comment that the 'primary duty' of the Prime Minister's Office was 'to ensure that heavier tasks are not put upon' the prime minister, 'who already has more than enough to do in entertaining foreign visitors'.

<sup>64</sup> *Sunday Times*, 12 June 1966.

was a case for repeating state visits, perhaps after a long interval, say of ten years.<sup>65</sup>

The FO paper was expanded with references to Commonwealth visits by Saville Garner and rewritten as a memorandum for the prime minister to submit to the Queen. Commenting on a draft, Michael Adeane, the Queen's private secretary, believed that what the British government wished to achieve was a situation where foreign heads of state could visit Britain 'when it is most expedient for them to be invited and without regard to whether they or their predecessors have been to London before'. More negatively, they sought 'the elimination of Heads of State from the invitation lists if they have no particular significance for this country'. Such a visit returned 'practically no dividend except one of surprise that they should have been asked, and inconvenience . . . when it has to be returned', although Adeane also pointed out that not every remaining country was 'a dead loss'. Saudi Arabia, for example, was 'far from being in this class'.<sup>66</sup> Cobbold went further and argued that visits from 'minor countries with unknown Presidents' not only served little purpose and generated little public interest, but could be positively damaging to the whole value of state visits, because if these seemed merely 'routine' rather than rare, special occasions, 'the currency could very easily depreciate'.<sup>67</sup>

The Royal Visits Committee finally approved the memorandum in October.<sup>68</sup> It was explained to Wilson that the Queen had been to 'the more important countries' from a British perspective, 'so that the prospect is for a succession of State Visits to and from minor countries'. Following discussion with the foreign secretary and Commonwealth secretary as well as some dilatoriness, Wilson eventually raised this with the Queen in March 1967. The principal recommendation was that in future 'visits should be exchanged with countries which are important to us politically, economically or strategically, even if this means that certain countries would not exchange State Visits at all while others were visited more than once in the same reign'. But it was also proposed that incoming state visits be limited to two per year with, 'occasionally', a Commonwealth leader also being invited. Furthermore, outward visits to Commonwealth countries should move away from the traditional 'royal tour' to become shorter, more frequent and more geographically widespread. One way of placating heads of state who felt sidelined by

<sup>65</sup> CAB 165/61, RV(66)1 (10 May 1966).

<sup>66</sup> CAB 165/61, 'Draft Submission' (undated), Adeane to Garner (20 August), and see Adeane to Gore Booth (23 May 1966).

<sup>67</sup> CAB 165/61, Cobbold to Garner (8 September 1966).

<sup>68</sup> CAB 165/215, RV(66)2nd (18 October), and RV(66)4 (Revise) (31 October 1966).



such a system was to encourage them to make informal visits to London. The key point was that policy would be more flexible in future, dovetailing the programme of visits with current diplomatic realities. The Queen, already familiar with the arguments, accepted the changes.<sup>69</sup> The first time the British broke with the practice of one visit per reign to or from any country was when President Saragat of Italy came to London in April 1969.

Following the 1970 election, the new prime minister soon made an impact on the programme of state visits, when he discovered that a list of forthcoming arrivals did not have a major world figure on it. The problem was that, despite Wilson's reforms, in most cases of high-profile figures where relations with Britain were good, either a visit had recently taken place or it was the Queen's turn to make one.<sup>70</sup> Then, in November, the Japanese proposed that Emperor Hirohito should come to Britain. This was just the kind of coup Heath had been wanting because, if taken up, it would be the first ever visit by a Japanese emperor abroad. Despite the problems of fitting it into the existing schedule, the prime minister was determined not to miss the opportunity, pencilling Hirohito in for the following autumn.<sup>71</sup> And, as the visit approached, Heath, anxious to impress the Japanese, threatened to upset existing protocol by hosting a government function for the emperor. Whatever was done for one leader had to be done for another, to avoid any hint of a snub, and Heath was warned that his decision would create a precedent that would have to be followed in future. On reflection he changed his mind, at least to an extent: the prime minister should henceforth give hospitality, not to every head of state (and not to Hirohito), but to any who was also executive head of government. This was not a frequent event: the first time it occurred after June 1971 was with the state visit of President Luis Echeverría of Mexico in April 1973, who was invited to Downing Street for lunch, as was Nigeria's Yakubu Gowon a few months later.<sup>72</sup>

Meanwhile, in April 1971 the whole process of visits was called into question when President Mobutu of Zaire cancelled an 'official' visit at short notice because he wanted London to turn it into a full 'state' visit,

<sup>69</sup> PREM 13/2357, *passim*, especially memoranda to Wilson (9 November 1966 and 13 March 1967).

<sup>70</sup> Heath's initial complaint referred to both royal and prime ministerial visitors. PREM 15/386, Graham to Andrews (24 July), and Graham to Moon (7 August 1970).

<sup>71</sup> PREM 15/386, Home to Heath, and Heath handwritten minute (12 November 1970). On Hirohito's visit see PREM 15/504, *passim*.

<sup>72</sup> PREM 15/386, AJCS to Armstrong (23 June 1971); PREM 15/1753, record of meeting (4 April 1973); PREM 15/1803, record of meeting (13 June 1973).

such as he had recently been given in America, France, Belgium and elsewhere. Douglas-Home was determined not to bow to Mobutu on this occasion.<sup>73</sup> But confusion over British practice was not surprising, especially to a French-speaking leader, because the French term for a state visit was *visite officielle*.<sup>74</sup> The fiasco of the Mobutu cancellation coincided with renewed debate over the programme of state visits for the next year or more, and it led high-level officials, including Denis Greenhill in the FCO, to renew their long-standing criticism of the 'double standard' of state and official visits. As Greenhill explained, 'the State Visit is being increasingly used throughout the world as a weapon in diplomacy. Our competitors are exploiting it to the full, particularly in connection with Heads of newly emerging states who are particularly sensitive on matters of ceremonial and personal dignity.' The FCO had no desire to 'debase' the value of full state visits by holding too many, but it was recalled that in October 1963 the Lord Chamberlain had suggested that they be limited to three per year. It just so happened that in the decade 1961–71 there had been fourteen 'full' visits and sixteen 'official' ones, so that a limit of three 'full' ones per year under a new system – alongside the abolition of the 'official' visit – did not seem overambitious. There would still be something of a 'double standard', in that a lower level of entertainment, called 'a private visit as the guest of Her Majesty's Government', mainly involving a meal at Buckingham Palace, would be given to those heads of state who arrived at short notice or who had already been given a 'full' visit while Elizabeth II was on the throne. It was not felt that this would upset anyone, especially as they would still be paid for by the British government, and heads of state could also continue to come to London for purely 'private' reasons. The proposed reform was agreed by Heath, who secured acceptance of it from the Queen at their audience on 6 July. After some debate, it was decided to upgrade 'official' visits in the pipeline to full 'state' occasions, beginning with the king of Afghanistan in December.<sup>75</sup>

The idea of a 'private visit as a guest' continued to cause some uncertainty, however. There was no demand for this provision to be used until 1973, when the presidents of Liberia and Sudan were due to make the first such visits since the new practice was adopted. Early in the year there was a series of exchanges between the vice-marshal of the

<sup>73</sup> PREM 15/386, McCluney to Moon (29 April 1971).

<sup>74</sup> See PREM 16/418, Brimelow to Hunt (9 May 1974).

<sup>75</sup> PREM 15/386, Greenhill to Trend (21 June), Armstrong to Heath (6 July), and Armstrong to Trend (8 July); CAB 165/901, RV(71)2nd (19 July 1971). Actually, in his letter of 29 October 1963, the Lord Chamberlain had suggested that two inward state visits and one inward Commonwealth visit should be the annual limit: PREM 11/4795.

Diplomatic Corps (the equivalent of other countries' chief of protocol), John Curle, and the Queen's private secretary, Martin Charteris, to try to clarify exactly what should be included in this new type of visit. Its very title was confusing, since genuinely 'private' visits by heads of state to London were going on without any royal entertainment. After consulting Heath and Douglas-Home, Curle suggested that the 'private visit as a guest' should include a welcome by a guard of honour, a meal at the Mansion House and an exchange of decorations with the Queen. But Buckingham Palace feared that this risked recreating the faults of the old 'double standard'. The problem, as Charteris explained it, was that visitors had believed 'they were being fobbed off with a second-rate State Visit'. The Queen herself wanted to make the 'private visit' as different to the state visit as possible, perhaps involving a lunch at the palace, an exchange of gifts and the presentation of a signed photograph of the Queen.<sup>76</sup>

Debate over the 'private visit as a guest' was still raging when Wilson returned to office in 1974, though it was becoming an ever more baffling semantic exercise. In May that year, the permanent under-secretary at the FCO, Thomas Brimelow, wrote to the Cabinet secretary, John Hunt, to suggest that the term itself was indeed recreating all the problems of the old 'official' visit: 'it is liable to be taken amiss by Heads of State as indicating a good deal less than is actually offered . . .' He suggested renaming the three levels of visit as 'state', 'semi-official' and 'private' (the last meaning 'genuinely private'). Hunt was not convinced that this would be any better and the issue went before the Royal Visits Committee, where, finally cutting through all the tedious memoranda about terminology, it was decided to avoid the problem of nomenclature altogether and simply 'to spell out in some detail what form the programme would take' when heads of state were invited for 'visits . . . of the kind described'. Why this common-sense solution had not been suggested earlier must remain a mystery. It could, after all, have prevented the original difficulty, three years earlier, with Mobutu.<sup>77</sup>

### **An American example**

As the Heath government drew to its premature close, the prime minister's desire to milk the programme of state visits for maximum

<sup>76</sup> PREM 15/2091, Curle to Charteris (31 January and 1 March 1973), and reply (19 February 1973).

<sup>77</sup> PREM 16/418, Brimelow to Hunt (9 May), reply (22 May, suggesting use of the term 'Government visits' instead of 'Semi official'), and RV(74)1st (12 June 1974).

advantage ran into trouble in a way that highlighted the many problems surrounding the practice. In particular, timetabling such prestigious events was becoming ever more difficult in an environment where the constellation of events was changing ever more rapidly. In December 1972, when the programme for 1974 was being tentatively planned and a visit from Georges Pompidou was still being discussed, Heath hoped there might be a full state visit by Richard Nixon at some point.<sup>78</sup> When he met the president two months later, Heath said this could be in 1976 to mark the bicentenary of the American declaration of independence. But Nixon suggested that that might be a better date for the Queen to go to the US, while he could visit Britain in 1974. The Royal Visits Committee did not want to stand in the way of the remarkable coup of having Nixon and Pompidou visit in quick succession, but the pressure on the royal timetable would mean trying to defer another visit, probably one that was due to Japan – and this could offend the Japanese. The committee was also concerned by two particular fears about a presidential visit. First, there was the danger that he would treat it not as a proper state visit but as a brief ‘look-in’ to London, merely part of a more extensive tour, thereby devaluing the occasion. The other was that he would require security arrangements that prevented the usual programme being carried through, including a carriage drive in public.<sup>79</sup>

A possible opening was provided when the Japanese themselves asked to defer the Queen’s visit to Tokyo, but dates could still not be fixed for either Nixon or Pompidou to visit because of uncertainties surrounding their own timetables. In any case, as the Watergate scandal raged in America, officials were ‘uncertain how he would be received here’.<sup>80</sup> In early February, Heath told the US ambassador, Walter Annenberg, that the British still hoped Nixon would come to Britain as part of a European tour. The Americans were still keen that this should include a meeting of some sort with the Queen. But within days Heath had lost office.<sup>81</sup> Ironically, one of the results of having tried to make 1974 a spectacular one for state visits was that it became a particularly lean year. The only non-Commonwealth head of state to come to London was Queen Margrethe of Denmark.

<sup>78</sup> PREM 15/2234, Armstrong to Heath (7 December), and Rowley to Acland (8 December 1972).

<sup>79</sup> PREM 15/2234, Armstrong to Charteris (6 February), and Trend to Heath (19 March 1973).

<sup>80</sup> PREM 15/2091, Trend to Heath (4 September), and Greenhill to Downing Street (2 October 1973).

<sup>81</sup> PREM 15/2234, note for the record (7 February 1974).

With Labour back in Downing Street, an event occurred that was even more surprising than Heath's decision to prevent the Queen going to Singapore. Heath, after all, was known for his scepticism about the Commonwealth. But now Wilson, the renowned Atlanticist, decided that the US president should be shunned if he tried to visit. In July 1974 Annenberg told Foreign Secretary Callaghan that Nixon would like to visit London later in the year. But, thanks to Watergate, Nixon was now in danger of being impeached by Congress and his enthusiasm for overseas visits seemed primarily designed to save his political skin at home. The British had been fearful of such an approach for some time and Wilson was determined to avert a visit. The British ambassador to Washington, Peter Ramsbotham, feared that it might not be possible to hold out against the president for long, because Britain was trying to follow a policy of 'business as usual' with Washington despite Watergate, the exact timetable of any impeachment of the president was uncertain and Nixon was likely to react badly to any rebuff. But Callaghan was prepared to take the risk, telling Annenberg that while 'the question of impeachment still hung over the President a visit could cause some embarrassment to the Royal Family and others'. Wilson praised Callaghan for his candour and the British were saved from any vindictiveness from Nixon when the latter resigned the following month.<sup>82</sup>

Thereafter, the focus shifted to the possibility of a state visit by the Queen to the US in its bicentenary year. But this too had its problems, not least because of British protocol. When it was first seriously discussed by the Royal Visits Committee in November 1974, the US government's plans for the bicentennial were not settled but it was feared they might invite the Queen to a celebration on 4 July alongside other heads of state. The Queen 'had never accepted invitations to celebrations involving a number of Heads of State' and there would be difficulties in having her represented by another member of the royal family if she were subsequently to make a separate visit of her own. On the other hand, the US was a close ally and 'a visit in the Bicentennial year would prove of considerable value'. The Queen was also due to attend part of the 1976 Olympic Games in Canada and it would be difficult to do that while ignoring America. The committee also touched on the thorny question of whether a monarch should attend 'a celebration of independence from the British Crown', before deciding that the best way forward was for the ambassador to Washington to make clear that London preferred a state visit by the Queen to any multilateral

<sup>82</sup> PREM 16/291, Ramsbotham to Killick (16 April), Acland to Charteris (12 July), and Armstrong to Acland (15 July 1974).

gathering of heads of state.<sup>83</sup> The Ford administration subsequently gave serious consideration to a state visit that would include the 4 July celebrations, before deciding that the president would be too committed on that day with visits to Boston and Philadelphia. The British still hoped it would be possible to combine the state visit with the opening of the Olympics in Montreal on 17 July, but the Democratic Party was due to hold its convention around the same time and the ambassador, Peter Ramsbotham, considered that ‘There is no question in my mind that the Queen should not be here when the attention of the whole nation will be focused on a political convention.’ With the Republican convention due in August the possible dates were actually few; the visit therefore went ahead on 7–11 July 1976 and proved a high point of the bicentenary.<sup>84</sup>

### Conclusion

Alongside multilateral conferences, bilateral summits and special missions, state visits were a ‘growth area’ in twentieth-century diplomacy, one in which the British were determined to remain competitive with their rivals. As a high-profile event, with maximum public impact, the state visit was highly valued by prime ministers and the FCO. Douglas-Home, who as foreign secretary attended the Queen on a number of visits, believed ‘such appearances do more in days to gain goodwill for Britain than all the politicians and diplomats lumped together could achieve in years’.<sup>85</sup> The successful visits to Germany in 1965 and Paris in 1972 can be seen as evidence of what could be achieved. Then again, the king of Greece’s 1963 visit shows what could go wrong, just as King Hussein’s 1966 visit showed that the advantages need not be clear-cut. Many other visits passed off without controversy, serious incident or outstanding success and seem to have had only an ephemeral significance. Nonetheless, the British were not alone in seeing them as valuable events, part of the competitive environment in which states existed. Leaders in the less developed world were as keen to take part in such visits as were wealthier governments in the West, who clearly tried to outbid each other in planning a high-impact programme. President Sunay’s visit to London in 1967, for example, was part of an

<sup>83</sup> PREM 16/418, RV(74)2nd (6 November 1974); and see Bernard Donoughue, *Downing Street Diary* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2005), 309, for evidence that the Queen herself ‘refuses to get mixed up with other monarchs’ and had doubts about a visit that took place on 4 July, ‘which she considers “their” day’.

<sup>84</sup> PREM 16/418, Washington to FCO (3 April 1975).

<sup>85</sup> Lord Home, *The Way the Wind Blows* (London: Collins, 1976), 201–2.

ambitious programme that year in which the Turks planned four inward visits and five outward.<sup>86</sup> Hence the influence on British plans of the 'negative' argument that some leaders would be offended if they were not brought into the Queen's itinerary.

An analysis of the fourteen-year period 1963–76 (see the list at the end of this chapter) shows twenty-six inward visits and eighteen outward, a total of forty-four, slightly exceeding an average of three visits per year. The British thus fell short of the number of state visits they hoped to achieve, given the general principle that they wanted three inward visits per year.<sup>87</sup> There were also wide discrepancies between particular years: there were seven (four of them outward) in 1972, but only three in 1974 (and only one of those outward). Otherwise, however, the programme seems to have fitted well into the aims of foreign policy. The practice of trying to arrange return visits to or from the same country within a few years clearly emerges, with inward *and* outward visits occurring in twelve cases.<sup>88</sup> In this way, the British obtained the gains of both types of visits: the inward ones impressing the visiting leader and advertising what Britain had to offer; the outward ones impressing the local public and boosting exports. The geographical spread was quite broad. Of the outward visits, seven were to European countries (but only one to an Eastern European country), five to Asia (if one includes the Maldives), four to the Americas (three to Latin America and one to the US) and two to Africa. Of the inward ones, ten were by European leaders (none from Eastern Europe), nine from Asia, four from Africa and three from Latin America. There may seem to have been a bias towards European visits, which made up more than a third of the total, and it is noteworthy that inward visits included all six founder-members of the EEC. True, there were outward visits to only four EEC countries, but the Queen had visited Italy in 1961 and the Netherlands in 1958. Overall, this reflected the importance of nearby countries and need to enter the EC. Moreover, the picture is distorted by the existence of the Commonwealth. If the Queen's visits to her Commonwealth dominions are added into the equation, then Canada, Australasia and the Caribbean loom larger. The large number of journeys to Canada – no less than six – can partly be accounted for by the need to focus different visits on particular provinces. Incidentally, looking at the programme of Commonwealth visits down to 1976, the

<sup>86</sup> FCO 9/628, Allen to Brown (7 December 1967).

<sup>87</sup> PREM 16/418, RV(74)1st (12 June 1974).

<sup>88</sup> Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Chile, France, Finland, Japan, Luxembourg, Mexico, Sudan, Turkey and West Germany.

old 'royal tour' seems to have survived, as does a tendency to focus on Canada, Australia and New Zealand.

Although it was dealing with an area surrounded by tradition and protocol, British policy on state visits in these years was flexible and reacted to the emerging challenges quite well. The decision to abandon the tradition of one visit per reign to any particular country can hardly be faulted. Given the length of Elizabeth II's reign, the possible openings for visits would eventually have been exhausted under the old system. As it was, by 2007, thanks to her longevity, the Queen had made four state visits each to the US, France and Germany. Abandoning the old 'double standard' for visits was also sensible. But while reforming the system, all was done to keep state visits truly special; unlike the pound sterling, this currency must not be devalued. Therefore, the Queen would not take part in too many visits; she would not attend any multilateral gathering of heads of state; nor would she indulge, as de Gaulle did, in too many state visits to multiple destinations in a particular region. Even the most important relationships were not allowed to tarnish the state visit. The decisions that the Queen should stay away from Singapore in 1971 and that a meeting with Nixon should be avoided in 1974 were evidence of that. The Palace was keen to protect the Queen from tiring herself with visits and to avoid hasty planning, but sometimes it was the government who exercised caution in using the state visits as a weapon of foreign policy. In November 1971, when the Queen herself asked whether the upcoming visits of Queen Juliana and President Heinemann might be announced simultaneously with the proposed one from Georges Pompidou, Downing Street felt that separate announcements had more impact. Besides, Heath did not want to appear to be using the monarchy to support his European policy too openly.<sup>89</sup>

In light of all the efforts that went into planning the programme and safeguarding the aura of monarchy, it is a sad comment that the Queen herself seems to have gained only a limited appreciation of her various destinations and to have sometimes felt at the mercy of events. In 1976, when she gave an audience to Christopher Ewart-Biggs on his appointment as ambassador to Dublin, he recorded a conversation about the latest exchange of visits with France. When his wife, Jane, remarked on how beautiful Paris was, the Queen said 'was it'; 'on her visit she had only seen the Elysée and the Embassy'. As to Giscard d'Estaing's forthcoming visit 'she said, strangely, "We don't have very much to do with it." The French had been difficult about the

<sup>89</sup> CAB 165/901, Armstrong to Adeane (8 November 1971).



arrangements.’ A remark that she had scotched the idea of Giscard arriving at 6 p.m. by helicopter showed that the Palace did retain some power where matters of protocol and appearances were concerned and it is clear from other evidence that she did contribute ideas to the general policy on state visits.<sup>90</sup> But in this field, as in so many others, the monarchy, which in previous centuries had been at the centre of diplomatic life, was now at the mercy of government priorities, and while some of these were agreeable enough, such as the maintenance of Commonwealth unity, other ways of ‘promoting Great Britain PLC’ were less exalted, including as they did trade promotion and placating dictators such as Mobutu or, in 1978, Romania’s Nicolae Ceauşescu.

### **State and Commonwealth visits, 1963–1976**

#### *Inward visits*

- 1963 King Baudouin of Belgium (May), President Radhakrishnan of India (Commonwealth leader) (June) and King Paul of Greece (July)
- 1964 President Abboud of Sudan (June)
- 1965 President Frei of Chile (July)
- 1966 President Jonas of Austria (May), King Hussein of Jordan (July) and President Ayub Khan of Pakistan (Commonwealth leader) (November)
- 1967 King Faisal of Saudi Arabia (May) and President Sunay of Turkey (November)
- 1969 President Saragat of Italy (April) and President Kekkonen of Finland (July)
- 1971 Emperor Hirohito of Japan (October) and King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan (December)
- 1972 Queen Juliana of the Netherlands (April), Grand Duke Jean of Luxembourg (June) and President Heinemann of West Germany (October)
- 1973 President Luis Echeverría of Mexico (April), President Gowon of Nigeria (June) and President Mobutu of Zaire (December)

<sup>90</sup> Ewart Biggs, *Pay*, 188; and see PREM 11/4795, Adeane to Bligh (25 March 1963), about the programme of visits, saying the Queen ‘has given a lot of thought to it herself and . . . contributed not a few original suggestions’.

- 1974 Queen Margrethe of Denmark (April–May) and Tuanku Abdul Halim, Yang di-Pertuan Agong of Malaysia (Commonwealth leader) (July)  
 1975 King Karl Gustav XVI of Sweden (July) and President Nyerere of Tanzania (Commonwealth leader) (November)  
 1976 President Geisel of Brazil (May) and President Giscard d'Estaing of France (June)

*Outward state visits by the Queen*

(There were no visits between November 1961 and February 1965)

- 1965 Ethiopia and Sudan (February) and West Germany (May)  
 1966 Belgium (May)  
 1968 Brazil (November) and Chile (November)  
 1969 Austria (May)  
 1971 Turkey (October)  
 1972 Thailand (February), Maldives (March), France (May) and Yugoslavia (October)  
 1974 Indonesia (March)  
 1975 Mexico (March) and Japan (May)  
 1976 Finland (May), USA (July) and Luxembourg (November)

*Commonwealth visits by the Queen*

(Stopover visits for refuelling aircraft are excluded)

- 1963 Australia, New Zealand and Fiji (February)  
 1964 Canada (October)  
 1966 British Guiana, Bahamas, Jamaica and fourteen other Caribbean island dominions (February)  
 1967 Canada (June–July, celebrating the country's centenary) and Malta (November)  
 1970 Australia, New Zealand, Fiji and Tonga (March–May) and Canada (July)  
 1971 Canada (May)  
 1972 Malaysia, Singapore, Brunei, Seychelles, Mauritius and Kenya (February)  
 1973 Canada (June–August, including Commonwealth Conference), Fiji and Australia (October, including opening of Sydney Opera House)

1974 Australia, New Zealand (including Commonwealth Games), Papua New Guinea and several Pacific territories

1975 Bermuda, Barbados and Bahamas (February), Jamaica (April, including Commonwealth Conference) and Hong Kong (May)

1976 Canada (July, including Olympic Games)

[www.royal.gov.uk](http://www.royal.gov.uk)

## 9 Recognition and diplomatic relations

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It was not I who sent the Assyrians, my own subjects, to you. Why have they come on their own authority to your country? If you love me, they should not do any business with you. Drive them away empty handed!

Burna Birriash of Babylon to Akhenaten of Egypt, c. 1340 BC<sup>1</sup>

The Babylonian complaint about Egyptian dealings with the upstart power, Assyria, reflects the difficulty down the ages of new regimes: others might not accept the legality of their existence, especially if they seem to break accepted norms of behaviour. In the Amarna period it was understood that the 'Great Kings' were a select group and that one would not enter into diplomatic relations with the vassals of the others. In the modern age, there is a reluctance to deal with a regime if there are doubts about its stability or its readiness to accept international obligations. While much of this book has concerned the way Britain communicated with other countries, there have always been situations in which governments choose not to have diplomatic relations. At times, governments refuse to recognise a country in the first place, as with the Western refusal to recognise East Germany until the mid-1970s. At other times, they recognise each other's existence but sever diplomatic relations, not least in wartime. The 1960s were important for seeing a large number of breaches, often carried out abruptly and for purely symbolic reasons, especially by newly independent states who wanted to signal disapproval of 'imperialist' behaviour. However, the decade also saw the growth of 'interests sections', whereby a government kept diplomats in a country with which it had broken relations, placing these under the protection of a third power. This was fresh evidence of an old phenomenon, the desire by governments to continue communicating even in the most difficult circumstances. Britain was central to these developments because it was one of the first countries to use

<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Carlo Zaccagnini, 'The Interdependence of the Great Powers', in Raymond Cohen and Raymond Westbrook, eds., *Amarna Diplomacy: The beginnings of international relations* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), 150 1.

interests sections on a large scale. This chapter looks at British practice on recognition, the breach and re-establishment of diplomatic relations, and the ways in which London communicated with states where diplomatic relations did not exist.

## Recognition

Before any two states can enter into normal diplomatic relations they need to recognise one another; but the subject of recognition, though much discussed, is an elusive one in international law. In practice, states take their own subjective, pragmatic and sometimes contradictory approach to the question based on such diverse factors as historical practice, current political expediency and predictions about the durability of any would-be government.<sup>2</sup> One important difference in practice is between those countries, like Britain in the period under discussion, which extend recognition to particular *regimes* and those countries which prefer to focus on the recognition of *states*, an issue which will be discussed more fully below. Although there is no legal obligation to recognise another state or regime, it is generally understood that recognition should be extended where a would-be state has a clear territory, the loyalty of most of the population and the ability to survive without external military support. An FCO paper of 1974 summed up British practice as follows:

Unlike many other states, it is the long established practice of Her Majesty's Government to treat the recognition of a regime which has come to power unconstitutionally as subject to a conscious act of recognition. Our criteria for recognition are that the regime should have effective control of much the greater part of the national territory and should enjoy the obedience of the mass of the population, with a reasonable prospect of permanence.<sup>3</sup>

Recognition can be an especially complex issue when a country sinks into civil war. When Biafra looked likely to secede from Nigeria in 1967,

<sup>2</sup> In the past, even when a state's existence was recognised as a fact (*de facto* recognition), doubts about its regime, perhaps revolving around its ideology or stability, might still prevent full legal relations (*de jure* recognition); but this distinction was little used by 1963. On recognition in general, see: A. C. Bundu, 'Recognition of Revolutionary Authorities', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, 27 (1978), 18–45; Satyavrata Patel, *Recognition in the Law of Nations* (London: Sweet & Maxwell, 1959); M. J. Peterson, *Recognition of Governments: Legal doctrine and state practice, 1815–1995* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Jose Ruda, 'The Law of Friendly Relations between States: Recognition of States and Governments', in Mohammed Bedjaoui, ed., *International Law: Achievements and prospects* (Paris: UNESCO, 1991), 449–65.

<sup>3</sup> UK National Archives (UKNA), Kew, FCO 9/2061, Goodison minute (30 April 1974). This definition was quite consistent: see, for example, FO 371/189154/4, letter to Mills (17 February 1966).

the FO did not rule out eventual recognition,<sup>4</sup> but did not wish to rush into this for fear of precipitating the break-up of a former colony. Once civil war broke out, London decided to back the Federal government and refused to recognise Biafra.<sup>5</sup> London did not establish diplomatic relations with the newly independent Angola in 1975 because, while a Marxist regime controlled the capital, civil war raged with other independence movements. An ambassador was only sent in October 1978, when the outcome of the civil war was clear.<sup>6</sup> When Rhodesia made its unilateral declaration of independence (UDI) in 1965, the British refused to recognise its existence largely because, although there was no civil war as yet, Ian Smith's regime did not command the loyalty of the majority, black population. London insisted there would be 'no independence before majority rule'.<sup>7</sup>

Once granted, recognition is not usually withdrawn and it is certainly not necessary to renew it with every change of government, if these changes are constitutional. But sometimes there is room for debate about whether a change of leadership has been 'constitutional', and certain states will see a need to extend recognition anew, while others will not. Despite a bloody coup in Nigeria, a Commonwealth member, in January 1966, London continued normal relations with the incoming military regime 'without any formal step'.<sup>8</sup> When the military seized power in Greece in April 1967, Western countries continued recognition on the grounds that the head of state, King Constantine, remained in place, even though he had opposed the coup. The decision provoked criticism in Cabinet, where the foreign secretary, George Brown, explained: 'We could avoid any question of recognition of the colonels' new regime, or approval of it, if we took the line that we were merely continuing relations with a Government whose Head of State was unchanged.' Policy was based on the need to protect British interests in Greece and exert influence on Athens, while signalling that a return to parliamentary democracy was desirable.<sup>9</sup> Premier Wilson was uneasy,

<sup>4</sup> UKNA, PREM 13/1661, FO to Lagos (30 May 1967).

<sup>5</sup> But the FCO maintained unofficial contacts with the rebels, especially through secret meetings with the Biafran representative in London: for example, PREM 13/2262, FCO to Addis Ababa (11 December 1968), and /2817, record of meeting (10 January 1969).

<sup>6</sup> For all details on levels of representation, see *The Diplomatic Service List* (London: HMSO, annual).

<sup>7</sup> The British also pressed others to avoid recognising Smith. The key problem was Portugal, which had dealings with a Rhodesian 'representative' in Lisbon: see PREM 13/567, especially Stewart to Wilson (11 and 23 September), and FO to Ankara (4 October 1965).

<sup>8</sup> UKNA, DO 195/321, Duff minute (25 February 1966).

<sup>9</sup> UKNA, CAB 128/42, CC(67)23 (27 April), and see 28 (4 May) and 30 (11 May); FO 800/968, Murray to Brown (3 May 1967); Barbara Castle, *The Castle Diaries, 1964-70*

but Brown pointed out that British opinion had recently tolerated military coups in two other allied states, Pakistan (1958) and Turkey (1960).<sup>10</sup> Constantine's banishment in December 1967 led to a short-lived frostiness between the colonels and their NATO allies but, barely a month later, London was prepared 'to resume doing business' with the regime. British embassies were told that such a move gave 'a better prospect of influencing it in the direction we want'.<sup>11</sup>

Again, in 1970, Western powers simply continued to deal with the Lon Nol regime in Cambodia, arguing it had come to power by constitutional means, whereas China and others decided to support the government-in-exile of the ousted Prince Sihanouk.<sup>12</sup> But in September 1974, when Marxists seized power in Ethiopia, imprisoning Emperor Haile Selassie, there was a difference of opinion in the FCO. The East African Department felt it legitimate to carry on business with the new government because, like Greece in 1967, the monarchy remained in place. However, Vincent Evans, the Office's legal adviser, felt an act of recognition was required, given that Haile Selassie had been deposed. Yet this was little more than a technicality, since the new regime, having taken full control of Ethiopia, fulfilled the British criteria for recognition. It is important to note that, in any case, however complex the debate surrounding the principle of recognition, the way this was put into effect was simple. There was no ceremony or special document; London simply began to conduct normal diplomatic correspondence with whoever was recognised. In the Ethiopian case, the embassy in Addis Ababa was instructed to reply to a note from the new regime.<sup>13</sup>

Recognition can be used as a political weapon to express approval or disapproval of a new regime and influence its policies. Great Britain was generally seen as a country which did not normally let ideological or moral differences affect recognition. But 'normal' practice always has its exceptions, the factors that influence it have shifted over time and, during the period covered by this study, the Cold War had a particular impact on British behaviour. London did not recognise such Communist regimes as North Korea or Albania at all at this time. Relations were only opened with Mongolia, a Soviet puppet state, in January 1963, following its entry into

(London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1984), 247 (27 April 1967). On the background, see Effie Pedaliu, 'Human Rights and Foreign Policy: Wilson and the Greek dictators, 1967-70', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 18, no. 1 (2007), 185-214.

<sup>10</sup> PREM 13/2140, Wilson to Brown (28 April), and reply (1 May 1967).

<sup>11</sup> PREM 13/2140, FO to Washington (18 January), and FO/CRO circular telegram (30 January 1968).

<sup>12</sup> Peterson, *Recognition*, 16, 43 and 157.

<sup>13</sup> FCO 31/1681, Neilson minute and minute reporting Evans' views (both 12 September), and FCO to Addis Ababa (18 September 1974).

the UN.<sup>14</sup> Britain entered into diplomatic relations with North Vietnam and East Germany in the 1970s, helped by progress on East–West détente. The establishment of diplomatic relations with North Vietnam followed the January 1973 Paris Accords between Hanoi and Washington. The British raised the idea a few weeks later, but were careful to ascertain that the US and South Vietnam would not object. The British also waited until all American prisoners of war were released before the ambassador to Beijing formally proposed talks to the North Vietnamese ambassador there. The negotiations themselves went remarkably smoothly, the North even tacitly accepting that London would continue to recognise the pro-American regime in the South. Diplomatic relations were formally opened on 1 September 1973.<sup>15</sup> On East Germany, too, despite a desire to boost exports to the Soviet bloc, London was careful to keep in line with its major allies. The first British ambassador, Curtis Keeble, took up his post in January 1974 following progress on Willy Brandt's *Ostpolitik* and the entry of both Germanies into the UN.<sup>16</sup>

US policy on recognition has generally been more subjective, more likely to be swung by moral considerations, than has Britain's. This was true even on Cold War issues. London recognised Communist China in 1950, whereas Washington did not do so until 1979. Then again, London only appointed an ambassador to Beijing in March 1972, having previously been represented at the level of *chargé d'affaires*. Moreover, the British were quite capable of letting presumed 'national interests' influence the timing of recognition. This was most apparent over recognition of the Yemen Arab Republic (North Yemen), established in September 1962 when a military coup toppled Imam Mohammed al-Badr, who retreated to the mountains to conduct an insurgency. The Republicans soon controlled urban areas and most of the population, but they looked for support to Egypt's President Nasser, who backed anti-British groups in Aden. So, while the Foreign Office favoured recognition as a way of securing influence over the new regime, the Colonial Office, backed by the Ministry of Defence, argued such a step would demoralise pro-British elements in Aden. In February 1963 the Cabinet decided recognition should only be extended if Egyptian troops left Yemen.<sup>17</sup> In this case, then, the survival of the Badrs as an

<sup>14</sup> FO 371/170841, *passim*.

<sup>15</sup> FCO 15/1853, especially Squire minute (31 August 1973).

<sup>16</sup> Henning Hoff, *Grossbritannien und die DDR, 1955 1973: Diplomatie auf Umwegen* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2003).

<sup>17</sup> Clive Jones, *Britain and the Yemen Civil War, 1962 1965* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2004), 30–55; Christopher Gandy, 'A Mission to Yemen', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, vol. 25, no. 2 (1998), 247–73.



alternative government alongside the Egyptian military presence (which suggested the Republicans could not survive without external support) gave London the excuse to avoid recognition of the Republicans. But there can be no doubt Cabinet decisions were primarily driven by self-interest.

Bangladesh in 1972 again shows how Britain's self-interest could shape particular decisions. During 1971, the eastern and western halves of Pakistan had drifted apart. West Pakistan enforced military rule on East Pakistan, which claimed independence as Bangladesh. In December, India launched war with a view to breaking its neighbour in two. On 7 January 1972, with the Indian army in occupation of East Pakistan, Sheikh Mujib-ur-Rahman, the Bangladeshi leader, was released by the Pakistani government and put on a flight to London. This presented the British with a dilemma because India and Pakistan were both members of the Commonwealth, there were substantial Pakistani and Bangladeshi communities in the UK and, while India was the world's largest democracy, Pakistan was a long-standing military ally. The White House had controversially taken the Pakistani side during the war, on the grounds that they were a Cold War ally, and warned London not to recognise Bangladesh precipitately.<sup>18</sup> Gordon Britten, deputy high commissioner in Dacca, reported that the 'conduct of gov[ernmen]t compares favourably with that of other gov[ernmen]ts which we have recognised after revolutionary take-overs'. It had popular support, a functioning administration was establishing its authority in an orderly way, and, despite recent events, could not be considered an Indian 'puppet'. From a self-interested perspective, the British had greater trade interests and investments in East Pakistan than in West, notably in the tea and jute industries. Prompt recognition would also forestall any danger of the new country being tempted to look to the Communist bloc. On the other hand, as the high commission in India pointed out, recognition could undermine premier Ali Bhutto of West Pakistan, himself a leader who had been democratically elected after years of military rule, and 'goad him into retaliation against our interests'.<sup>19</sup>

Facing such diverse considerations, the British procrastinated. On 8 January, Heath held what was described as a 'private and unofficial' meeting with Sheikh Mujib and while the prime minister was evasive on the issue of recognition, he did say Britain would encourage Bhutto to accept realities. The drift of British policy was also evident from the steps they were taking to normalise postal and banking links with

<sup>18</sup> PREM 15/751, Washington to FCO (8 January 1972).

<sup>19</sup> PREM 15/751, Dacca to FCO (6 January), and Delhi to FCO (7 January 1972).

Bangladesh.<sup>20</sup> When the Cabinet discussed the situation on 11 January, there was clearly sympathy for Sheikh Mujib, who, Heath explained, was determined to establish control of Bangladesh, secure Indian withdrawal and remain a member of the Commonwealth. The prime minister subsequently wrote to a number of Western leaders reporting on his conversation with Sheikh Mujib and arguing that the problem was 'not so much whether to recognise Bangla Desh [*sic*] but when to do so'.<sup>21</sup> Douglas-Home hoped to extend recognition in late January, in co-ordination with other Commonwealth members and Western allies (except the US, which was still anxious to side with Pakistan), but the Pakistanis still hoped for some kind of constitutional link to East Pakistan and argued that it was under Indian occupation. Heath wrote to Bhutto on 24 January, encouraging him to 'come to terms with the realities as they now exist': Sheikh Mujib would settle for nothing less than independence and 'it is certain that we shall recognise before long'.<sup>22</sup> On 27 January, with the Indian army beginning its withdrawal, Douglas-Home told the Cabinet that Bangladesh fulfilled 'practically all our criteria for recognition', but only on 4 February did the British extend it. This was largely because of continuing protests from Bhutto and the announcement, on 31 January, that Pakistan would leave the Commonwealth in protest at Britain's decision.<sup>23</sup> The British delays were understandable enough in terms of foreign-policy aims, but the important point is that, in order to protect a range of national interests, they delayed recognition well after it ought to have been extended on the basis of their usual criteria.

There were other cases where debate about recognition focused as much on *timing* as on the principle itself. In April 1974, following the overthrow of Portugal's Salazar dictatorship in the 'Carnation Revolution', it was clear that the new regime had full control of Portugal and its colonies, but Labour ministers pointedly timed their own act of recognition to coincide with a visit to London by the Socialist leader, Mario Soares. This underlined British support for his brand of democracy against his Communist rivals.<sup>24</sup> But the basic fact is that British criteria

<sup>20</sup> PREM 15/751, record of meeting (8 January 1972).

<sup>21</sup> CAB 128/50, CM(72)1st (11 January); PREM 15/751, FCO to Paris (13 January 1972).

<sup>22</sup> PREM 15/751, Douglas Home to Heath (13 January), FCO outward telegram (19 January), and FCO to Islamabad (24 January 1972).

<sup>23</sup> CAB 128/50, CM(72)4th (27 January) and 5th (3 February); PREM 15/751, FCO to Dacca (24 January), and Heath to Bhutto (29 January 1972); Janice Musson, 'British Diplomacy Surrounding the Recognition of Bangladesh' (MA thesis M14336, University of Nottingham, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> FCO 9/2061, *passim*; PREM 16/241, Wilson Soares meeting (2 May 1974).

for recognition revolved *not* around moral questions like human rights or respect for liberal values, but around *practical* questions about who held real power in a country. This was highlighted in the case of Chile in September 1973, when its Marxist president, Salvador Allende, was overthrown in a military coup led by General Augusto Pinochet. There were numerous appeals from the public not to recognise the new regime.<sup>25</sup> But the FCO's Latin American Department was clear that the Pinochet regime fulfilled the normal criteria for recognition. Arguments about morality and the fact that Allende was freely elected were beside the point: Pinochet now controlled the country and the bulk of the population, so he ought to be recognised, just as Britain had recognised other Latin American military regimes following recent coups in Argentina (1966), Peru (1968) and Ecuador (1972).<sup>26</sup> Nor did this suggest any official preference for right-wing governments over leftist ones. In May 1975 there was hardly any debate about recognising the Khmer Rouge government in Cambodia, which had toppled the pro-Western Lon Nol.<sup>27</sup>

### The impact of Europe

When discussing recognition of Pinochet's regime, the British decided to sound out their partners in the EC. But most of these took a different approach to Britain on recognition, extending this to *states* not particular *regimes*. There was one powerful reason why some governments had taken up the 'states not governments' approach in the twentieth century: recognition of regimes smacked of interference in a country's internal affairs. Latin Americans led the way, following Mexico's adoption of the so-called 'Estrada Doctrine' in 1931, because they resented American meddling. Having adopted this approach, France was especially quick to enter into normal diplomatic contacts with Pinochet, avoiding discussion about whether and when to extend recognition. Following the outrage provoked by the Pinochet coup in Britain, Douglas-Home wanted to know – in 'a very brief answer' rather than 'a long legal treatise' – whether it was possible to 'move to the French system thereby avoiding a lot of . . . heart-searching whenever a change of regime takes place'. In fact, Vincent Evans, the FCO legal adviser, had already looked at the question and concluded that the French system was not so different from the British because, after any violent change of regime,

<sup>25</sup> FCO 7/2418 20, *passim*.

<sup>26</sup> FCO 30/1684, Hunter to Hankey (18 September 1973).

<sup>27</sup> FCO 15/2052, Squire minute (1 May 1975).

Paris still had to decide who was in control of a country. Such difference as there was lay in the sense that, by refusing to talk of any particular act of recognition of a new regime, the French avoided the controversy that surrounded some British decisions.<sup>28</sup>

Increasingly, however, this difference seemed an important one. When, in December 1973, the colonels finally abolished the Greek monarchy, London again consulted its EC partners only to be told by most that, since they recognised 'states not governments', the issue of recognition did not arise! Denmark alone shared the British approach. As an official in the Southern Europe Department noted, British policy was to recognise 'the people in power as soon as we are sure they are firmly in the saddle, whether we like them or not'. It was supposed to be a practical question about where power rested, not a moral one about their conduct. But the debate that followed any 'unconstitutional' change of regime drew attention to the fact that Britain was choosing to deal with unsavoury characters. The 'states not governments formula', by seeming to sidestep the issue of choice, 'avoids the criticisms which the British policy attracts'.<sup>29</sup> When, in 1974, the incoming foreign secretary, James Callaghan, again asked for a report on French practice, Evans continued to defend British policy: it was akin to that followed by Washington and Commonwealth countries; the French approach only worked smoothly in straightforward cases; and, while other EC members might share the 'states not governments' formula, they often differed among themselves about the timing of diplomatic contacts with new regimes.<sup>30</sup> Thus, while Paris almost instantly entered into communication with Pinochet's regime in 1973, Belgium and Germany took longer to do so, while in Italy there was considerable heart-searching partly because, as in Britain, there was popular revulsion over the ousting of an elected president.<sup>31</sup>

John Leahy of the British embassy in Paris launched something of a campaign to persuade the FCO of the wisdom of French policy in late 1974, even sounding out the views of a legal adviser at the Quai d'Orsay.<sup>32</sup> Staff at the embassy in Addis Ababa also reported, after the overthrow of Haile Selassie in September 1974, that their EC partners seemed 'free from any pressure to make any dramatic once-and-for-all decision'.<sup>33</sup> Only weeks later, however, came more evidence in support

<sup>28</sup> FCO 7/2365, Acland to Evans (19 September), and Burrows to Acland (20 September 1973), with Evans memorandum (11 February 1972).

<sup>29</sup> FCO 7/2365, Cornish to Wright (21 December 1973).

<sup>30</sup> FCO 49/497, Evans to Coles (22 May 1974). <sup>31</sup> FCO 30/1684, *passim*.

<sup>32</sup> See his correspondence with officials (16 September–4 November 1974) in FCO 49/497.

<sup>33</sup> FCO 31/1681, Addis Ababa to FCO (24 November 1974).

of Evans. The new military regime in Ethiopia faced a violent internal split, leading to numerous executions. No-one considered that this involved any issue of recognition, but the French and others wanted to signal their abhorrence of events, so there was a concerted suspension of EC diplomatic contacts with Addis Ababa.<sup>34</sup> The FCO debate over the 'states not governments' approach would continue, however, eventually leading to the announcement, in April 1980, that London would change its long-standing tradition and recognise states rather than governments.<sup>35</sup>

### Breaches in relations

So much for the principle of recognition; what of cases where states already recognised one another but chose to break off diplomatic contacts? Britain was at the centre of a sudden upsurge in such cases in the mid-1960s thanks to the Rhodesian rebellion. It was a time when, in the aftermath of independence, many small African states believed that, by joint action, they could exert greater influence in world affairs. Lacking military and economic power, they turned to rupturing diplomatic relations as a weapon.<sup>36</sup> On 3 December 1965, shortly after UDI, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), formed two years earlier, called on its thirty-six members to break off diplomatic relations with Britain if it did not take effective action within twelve days. The only two Commonwealth states who answered the call when the deadline passed were under two radical, non-aligned, socialist leaders, Kwame Nkrumah's Ghana and Julius Nyerere's Tanzania. Wilson tried desperately to prevent them doing so, insisting he was serious about ending UDI, but Nyerere never showed much sign of being deflected from his course. Some Ghanaian officials were doubtful about the OAU decision, but Nkrumah had hosted the OAU conference.<sup>37</sup> Other Commonwealth countries felt they could not afford to put British development aid and military assistance at risk for the sake of ideology and regional solidarity. In addition to the two Commonwealth states, only seven others broke relations: Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Egypt, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania

<sup>34</sup> FCO 31/1681, Ewans to Aspin (25 November 1974).

<sup>35</sup> But London continued to enter into dealings with regimes that came to power unconstitutionally only in the light of their ability to maintain effective control of a territory and population. Colin Warbrick, 'The New British Policy on Recognition of Governments', *International and Comparative Law Quarterly*, vol. 30 (1981), 573-6.

<sup>36</sup> Susan Gitelson, 'Why do Small States Break Diplomatic Relations with Outside Powers?', *International Studies Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 4 (December 1974), 451-84.

<sup>37</sup> PREM 13/548, CRO to Dar es Salaam (14 December) and reply (15 December), CRO to Accra and replies (15 December 1965).

and Sudan. Egypt had been the key player in the decision, which seemed calculated to keep Nasser in the vanguard of 'progressive', anti-colonial opinion in Africa. Furthermore, in four cases, all involving former French colonies, relations with Britain had never been close: Congo-Brazzaville had no diplomatic representative accredited to London, and the other three conducted relations from another European capital. And in the five most important cases – Algeria, Egypt, Ghana, Sudan and Tanzania – some British diplomats were allowed to remain, generally as 'interests sections', an institution which will be discussed more fully below.

The process of severing relations was conducted in a surprisingly civilised way. In Sudan, the foreign minister assured the British ambassador, John Richmond, that British subjects and business interests would not be affected and that, while he must leave, most of his staff could remain as an 'interests section'.<sup>38</sup> In Dar es Salaam, a Tanzanian official not only accepted that some British officials would set up an interests section but hoped the break in relations would not last long. The Ghanaians actually pressed the British to keep education and trade sections operating in Accra. Even in Mali, which had few meaningful links with Britain, a government minister had an 'amicable' discussion with the ambassador, set no time limit for his departure and promised to deal with him over any problems on an 'unofficial' basis.<sup>39</sup> In the case of the two Commonwealth states, the British went out of their way to minimise the economic impact, at least in the short term. So long as Nyerere and Nkrumah made no attempt to leave the Commonwealth, the Overseas Policy and Defence Committee was willing to keep its technical experts in both countries and continue existing aid programmes, though it would not agree to any new ones. James Callaghan, the chancellor of the Exchequer, did ask 'Why should we let these people push us around?'; but Wilson, Commonwealth Secretary Arthur Bottomley and Overseas Development Minister Barbara Castle were against any 'retaliation'. (It was, however, impossible to conclude any *new* aid programmes or loans without diplomatic relations.)<sup>40</sup> Even in Egypt, whose decision to proceed with a break had been of cardinal importance, the British embassy was given four weeks to settle its affairs and the British agreed that a 'restrained reaction' was the wisest course.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> FO 371/184158/4, Khartoum to FO (18 December 1965).

<sup>39</sup> PREM 13/548, Dar es Salaam to CRO (15 December), CRO to Accra (16 December), and Bamako to FO (16 December 1965).

<sup>40</sup> NA, CAB 148/18, OPD(65)193 (22 December 1965); PREM 13/3224, Trend to Wilson (21 December 1965), and PREM 13/3510, Ennals letter (6 February 1967); Castle, *Diaries, 1964-70*, 81 (22 December 1965).

<sup>41</sup> FO 371/183914/9, Cairo to FO (17 December 1965), and /14, Higgins minute (20 January 1966).

Only in Algiers was there anything approaching anger, when Ambassador Bromley decided to tell an official 'some home truths'. According to his own report of the meeting, Bromley declared:

[It] did not help African unity to follow the most violent in taking foolish decisions which were bound to be disavowed subsequently by many Heads of State. There seemed always a tendency to follow the most violent like sheep. I thought in my case that breaking diplomatic relations for insufficient cause was becoming far too common; at times of difficulty it was rather the preservation of contact that was needed.<sup>42</sup>

These sentiments seem to have been widely shared on the British side. John Waterfield, who as joint ambassador to Guinea and Mali had the unenviable distinction of losing two posts at once, privately complained of the 'pig-headed and precipitate action'.<sup>43</sup> In the House of Commons, Michael Stewart, too, talked of an 'ill-judged and inappropriate action' that could only give 'comfort to the rebellion in Rhodesia', but he also recognised that 'Behind the passionate impatience of many African states over this question there lies the long memory of every insult . . . that has ever been done to a man with black skin by a man with a white skin.'<sup>44</sup>

African countries soon found that severing diplomatic relations was a blunt weapon, with limited impact. In the British case, most of the OAU countries who took action 'lacked the close bonds to exert real influence' and there was no discernible impact on British policy.<sup>45</sup> However, if breaking relations proved all too easy, restoring them proved a long and difficult task in most cases. As Geoffrey Berridge has pointed out, 'since the state responsible for the breach is expected to take the initiative in repairing it, fear of lost prestige may stand in the way of a quick return to normality even if the circumstances that prompted the breach are . . . significantly ameliorated'.<sup>46</sup> Nasser's Egypt case was the most significant because of its central role in both the Arab world *and* the OAU. The 1956 Suez Crisis had already generated considerable bitterness between the two sides and brought a three-year break in relations, and Nasser's support for the anti-British guerrilla campaign in Aden had rekindled animosities. Even so, when George Brown became foreign secretary in August 1966, he was keen to restore relations, believing that progress on

<sup>42</sup> FO 371/190381/6, Algiers to FO (13 January 1966).

<sup>43</sup> FO 371/182183/6, Waterfield to Allen (15 December 1965).

<sup>44</sup> Hansard, *House of Commons Debates*, fifth series, vol. 722, cols. 1710–11.

<sup>45</sup> Gitelson, 'Small States', 474.

<sup>46</sup> G. R. Berridge, *Talking to the Enemy: How states without diplomatic relations communicate* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 9–10.

Middle Eastern issues could only be tackled in co-operation with the most powerful Arab state. In November 1966 he was in Moscow at the same time as the Egyptian vice-president, Field Marshal Abdul-Hakim Amer, and they arranged a meeting, the FO's public line being that Amer, an old acquaintance, had 'invited Mr. Brown to have tea with him'. This led to an exchange of messages between Brown and Nasser himself. Unfortunately, these became mired in mutual accusations about stirring up divisions in the Middle East, but it was decided to leave the 'door open for further contact'.<sup>47</sup> In April 1967, following a summit in Cairo with four of the other African countries who had broken relations, the Egyptians sent a message to the British via Nasser's confidant, the well-known journalist Mohammed Heikal, hinting at a settlement<sup>48</sup> but, within weeks, the Six Day War intervened to set back progress.

In September 1967, with the war three months past, a newspaper article by Heikal encouraged Brown, again acting in an unconventional fashion and without fully consulting the Foreign Office or Cabinet, to send a message to Nasser urging a resumption of relations. Britain's efforts to secure a Middle East settlement at this point, alongside the decision to withdraw from Aden, probably helped improve the atmosphere, as did Brown's decision to send Harold Beeley for 'path-finding' talks with Nasser in October. Beeley had been ambassador to Cairo in 1961–4 and was trusted by both Brown and the Egyptian leader. It also seems that Nasser was anxious to restore relations with Britain as a step towards restoring them with the United States. Egyptian–British relations were duly restored on 12 December 1967, with Beeley taking up his former post as ambassador.<sup>49</sup> Brown reminded the Cabinet that Egypt was still the most powerful Arab state and argued that the restoration of relations would help keep Egypt's distance from the Soviet bloc. He also predicted it would encourage others to restore diplomatic relations with London, a thought that had been central in FO thinking since the start.<sup>50</sup>

Middle East conflicts had gravely worsened Britain's difficulties in the realm of diplomatic relations. During the Six Day War there were false accusations that Britain had provided military assistance to Israel. This 'Big Lie' led to three Arab states breaking off relations: Iraq, Sudan and

<sup>47</sup> George Brown, *In my Way* (London: Gollancz, 1971), 137–8; FO 371/190209/56, Moscow to FO (22–4 November), and Gore Booth minute (19 December 1966).

<sup>48</sup> FCO 31/165, Cairo to FO (11 April), and Scott minute (13 April 1967).

<sup>49</sup> Frank Brenchley, *Britain, the Six Day War and its Aftermath* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2005), 65–73; FCO 39/269 and /270, *passim*; and Brown, *My Way*, 138–40.

<sup>50</sup> CAB 128/42, CC(67)63 (2 November 1967); Robert McNamara, *Britain, Nasser and the Balance of Power in the Middle East, 1952–67* (London: Cass, 2003), 276–9.



Syria. As an expression of solidarity, Lebanon also asked the British ambassador himself to leave, but his embassy continued to function and a replacement ambassador arrived in October.<sup>51</sup> Revolutionary Iraq and Syria took a strong line, giving the British ambassadors only a few days to depart, severing consular as well as diplomatic links and allowing no interests sections to remain. Sudan, which had broken relations with London over Rhodesia only to restore them in April 1966, now expelled the ambassador again, but allowed his staff to remain as an interests section under Italian protection.<sup>52</sup>

Once Nasser began moves to resume relations with Britain, however, the other Arab states soon followed, as did the Black African states. Predictably, the Sudanese leader, Mohammed Mahgoub, was one of the first to move. This time it was Malcolm MacDonald, Wilson's special representative in East Africa, who held 'path-finding' talks in Khartoum in late November. Guinea agreed to resume relations on 20 February 1968. Meanwhile, Somalia, which had broken relations as far back as March 1963 after accusing Britain of supporting Kenya in a territorial dispute, resumed relations on 5 January, with MacDonald again having paved the way with a visit to Mogadishu. Algeria, Congo-Brazzaville, Mali and Mauritania, known as the 'Algiers Group', all did so on 10 April, after the FO deputy under-secretary, Richard Beaumont, an Arab specialist, made a preliminary foray to Algiers. Even Iraq resumed relations on 1 May. Negotiations had been particularly difficult in the last case because of the Iraqi decision not to let a British interests section function in Baghdad. However, contacts were possible via various channels: the 'protecting power', Sweden; conversations between the British and Iraqi delegates to the UN; through an Iraqi official at the Arab League's London office; and by using Nasser as a go-between. Less than twelve months after the Six Day War, the only Arab country with which a breach remained was Syria, ruled by a radical regime closely allied to the Soviets. Relations were not restored here until 1973.<sup>53</sup>

Ironically, the last country to restore relations after the December 1965 breach was a Commonwealth country, Tanzania, the one which had most to lose from rupturing links with Britain. Ghana had restored relations after a coup toppled Nkrumah in March 1966.<sup>54</sup> But even a combination of commercial ties, aid programmes, Commonwealth membership and growing isolation could not induce Nyerere to resume

<sup>51</sup> FCO 17/32, FO to Tokyo (23 June 1967).

<sup>52</sup> For example, FCO 17/32, Henniker minute (7 December 1967).

<sup>53</sup> Brenchley, *Six Day War*, 65 and 73 9.

<sup>54</sup> DO 195/261, Snelling minute (7 March 1966).

links at an early date. The British position was always that they wished to resume relations with Tanzania but, since there was 'no reason why we should contemplate modifying our Rhodesia policy to get Mr. Nyerere out of his jam', it was up to him to make the first move.<sup>55</sup> Even a toughening of Britain's policy against Rhodesia in 1966–7 did not pave the way for a breakthrough. Nevertheless, Nyerere hinted that he wanted a resumption of relations on several occasions: in April–May 1966, for example, in the immediate wake of Nkrumah's fall; in May 1967, when he was influenced by Nasser's readiness to restore relations; and again in October 1967, when Commonwealth Secretary George Thomson flew out to see him. However, only when Malcolm MacDonald visited Dar es Salaam in June 1968 was the way for a resumption cleared. By then Nyerere was keen to attend the upcoming Commonwealth meeting, timetabled for October, an event that Wilson too wanted to turn into a demonstration of solidarity following the divisions in 1965–6.<sup>56</sup> This was, in a sense, a self-imposed form of pressure: Nyerere had boycotted the Commonwealth conferences of 1965–6 despite remaining a Commonwealth member and despite the general principle that states without diplomatic relations may still attend meetings of international organisations. Relations were restored on 4 July 1968.

This was not quite the end of diplomatic breaches in relations provoked by African and Middle Eastern issues within the period. Iraq broke relations with London again on 1 December 1971, accusing Britain of colluding in Iran's seizure of disputed islands in the Persian Gulf. This time, however, an interests section was established in Baghdad and an Iraqi interests section in London.<sup>57</sup> There were moves in mid-1973 to restore relations, with France and Lebanon used as go-betweens. Saddam Hussein, then the rising star of the Iraqi leadership, seemed positive but the 1973 Arab–Israeli War intervened.<sup>58</sup> In early 1974, the British again used France as a means to contact the Iraqis and Alec Douglas-Home was keen to restore relations, but this time progress was disturbed by Britain's general election. Eventually, in April, Donald Maitland, a Middle East expert who had served in Iraq in the 1950s, was sent to Baghdad to pave the way for the restoration of relations, which took place on the 10th. In this instance, the British were more prepared than usual to take the initiative in approaching a government that had

<sup>55</sup> DO 213/115, Norris minute (28 April 1966).

<sup>56</sup> The course of relations can be followed through DO 213/115 and /116, and FCO 31/165 and /166.

<sup>57</sup> FCO 17/1733, *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> FCO 8/2103, especially Wright minute (13 March), and Parsons minutes (14 March and 30 July 1973).

severed relations, mainly because of the rising importance of Iraq as an oil exporter.<sup>59</sup> In contrast, when dealing with Syria, which had no such assets, London 'wanted the Syrians to make the running' on restoring relations because 'It was they who broke off relations in the first place.'<sup>60</sup> It was the Syrian example that was in line with accepted practice: the government that has taken the initiative in creating a breach should also take the lead in the resumption of relations. With Somalia too, a decade before, the FO insisted: 'we shall not want to take the initiative or appear to be running after them'.<sup>61</sup> But the Iraqi case was hardly unique. With Brown's courting of Nasser, too, the British showed their ability to shift established practice to suit particular circumstances.

### Communication without diplomatic relations

It is already clear that, even when they break off relations, states try to maintain diplomatic contact, because 'diplomacy is not simply about negotiation but also involves gathering information, clarifying intentions and . . . looking after citizens overseas'.<sup>62</sup> Even when there are military clashes, states may keep their embassies open: Britain and Indonesia maintained diplomatic relations throughout the 'confrontation' along the Malaysian border in 1963–6. True, in February 1976, shortly before Wilson's retirement, Iceland broke off relations with Britain over a dispute over fishing limits, the so-called 'Cod War', even though they were military allies in NATO; but this breach lasted only four months, it came at the worst point in many years of tension and, while it represented an 'all-time low' in bilateral relations, these had 'turned quite sunny' by the end of the year.<sup>63</sup> But even if embassies are closed there are several well established ways of communicating. Contacts via international bodies are one method, it being accepted that states continue to participate in multilateral organisations even if they break relations with other members (and may be in the same organisation when they do not recognise one another). Without talking to each other, states may 'signal' that they want to improve relations: the US used a relaxation of trade controls with China as a first step to the 'opening' of relations in the 1970s.<sup>64</sup> Most international conflicts since 1945 have attracted some form of third party

<sup>59</sup> FCO 8/2328, *passim*, especially Wright minute (13 March 1974); Donald Maitland, *Diverse Times, Sundry Places* (Brighton: Alpha Press, 1996), 205–6.

<sup>60</sup> FCO 17/1592, Beckett to Quantrell (25 November 1971).

<sup>61</sup> FO 371/178665/12, Scrivener to Killick (3 July 1964).

<sup>62</sup> Berridge, *Talking*, 10. <sup>63</sup> FCO 33/2835, East to Crosland (31 December 1976).

<sup>64</sup> See Raymond Cohen, *Theatre of Power: The art of diplomatic signalling* (London: Longman, 1987).

mediation, ranging from a go-between who passes messages between two sides – the role France assumed between Britain and Iraq in 1973–4 – to a fully fledged attempt at conflict resolution, as when Britain helped to resolve the dispute between India and Pakistan over the Rann of Kutch in 1965.<sup>65</sup> The Vietnam War attracted numerous would-be intermediaries, including Harold Wilson, whose most celebrated peace bids were the Davies mission to Hanoi (discussed in chapter 5) and the ‘sunflower’ talks of February 1967, when Soviet premier Alexei Kosygin was in London. But successful mediation depends on a number of factors, including influence with the conflicting parties, genuine desire for a settlement, the susceptibility of the dispute to compromise and the scale of the differences. Peace in Vietnam proved an impossible prospect in the mid-1960s, when the two sides both hoped for a military victory and were fundamentally divided over the fate of the South.<sup>66</sup>

In the twentieth century, an increasingly popular way of maintaining diplomatic contact where relations had been broken was to keep resident missions open in a disguised form, calling them by some title other than ‘embassy’. One ploy was to use consulates. Under the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, it was confirmed that *consular* relations could continue even if *diplomatic* relations were broken. Of course, consulates are supposed to be primarily engaged in such mundane tasks as issuing visas, helping citizens in difficulty and providing commercial advice. They carry less status than embassies and are not necessarily staffed by persons of the highest calibre. The British Consular Service, in common with many others, used to be separate from the Diplomatic Service and treated as a second-class body. Nonetheless, consulates can play an inconspicuous role in relations between two antagonists, including passing diplomatic messages. Unlike interests sections (discussed below), they do not require a third power to protect them and they continue to fly the national flag during a breach.<sup>67</sup> When Guatemala broke diplomatic relations with Britain over the future of British Honduras (now Belize) in 1963, the British consulate remained open in the capital, and when London closed its high commission in Rhodesia in 1965, a ‘residual office’ remained in the form of its consular

<sup>65</sup> See 100 above.

<sup>66</sup> On mediation in general, see G.R. Berridge, *Diplomacy: Theory and practice* (third edition, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005 [second edition, 2002]), chapter 11. On the Sunflower episode, see: John Dumbrell and Sylvia Ellis, ‘British Involvement in Vietnam Peace Initiatives, 1966–1967: Marigolds, sunflowers, and “Kosygin Week”’, *Diplomatic History*, vol. 27, no. 1 (January 2003), 113–49; Harold Wilson, *The Labour Government, 1964–1970: A personal record* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), 345–66.

<sup>67</sup> Berridge, *Talking*, 44–9.

section. To avoid conceding recognition to the 'illegal' regime, staff were accredited to the British-appointed governor, Humphrey Gibbs. At the same time, Rhodesia House stayed open in London, again functioning as a consulate. Both missions were closed when, in June 1969, Rhodesia voted in a referendum to become a republic.<sup>68</sup> The British also had a consulate in Enugu, the capital of Biafra at the time it declared independence from Nigeria in 1967, though this was soon withdrawn.<sup>69</sup> Nor was this use of consulates a new departure for the British: in 1950, after recognising the Communist government of China, London continued to deal with the rival Nationalist regime in Taiwan via a consulate in the city of Tamsui.<sup>70</sup>

The key British example of a consulate as 'disguised embassy' at this time was in Hanoi, the capital of North Vietnam. London did not recognise the Communist regime when it was established in 1954, but a consulate general had existed in Hanoi since the days of French colonial rule and for some reason the Communist authorities did not try to close it. In the absence, until 1973, of recognition, there were practical difficulties in exchanging messages with the Communists: relations were actually conducted via the external affairs bureau under the Mayor of Hanoi, which would send messages to British consuls general, not by using their title, but simply by sending letters to their name and address. The result was that Britain preserved 'a listening post *par excellence*' throughout the Vietnam War. Despite the difficulties of operating in a police state, London was able to pass information to Washington about such issues as Northern morale, defence preparations and Sino-Soviet differences.<sup>71</sup>

The way North Vietnam was represented in London was through a third type of disguised embassy, the so-called 'front mission'. These have existed for many decades, taking diverse forms. The key point is that, unlike interests sections or consulates, they do not on the surface appear to be any kind of diplomatic mission. The Communists often

<sup>68</sup> FCO 36/578, /579, /583 and /584, *passim*. Soon after becoming prime minister, Heath asked about re opening a mission in Salisbury, but was advised that this would breach mandatory UN sanctions: PREM 15/163, McCluney to Moon (9 July), and reply (18 August 1970).

<sup>69</sup> In September, angered over the British refusal to recognise them, the Biafrans seized the consulate's radio equipment and soon afterwards the Deputy High Commissioner decided to escape to neighbouring Cameroon: PREM 13/1662, documents of 12 September–9 October 1967.

<sup>70</sup> Peterson, *Recognition*, 116–17.

<sup>71</sup> Simon Kear, 'The British Consulate General in Hanoi, 1954–73', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 10, no. 1 (1999), 215–39 (quote from 236); and see also John Colvin, *Twice around the World* (London: Leo Cooper, 1991).

used the 'cover' of a commercial office. The East Germans set up a commercial office, operating as KfA Ltd, in London in 1959, and this also engaged in political contacts and propaganda activities. When Britain extended recognition to East Germany in 1973, this was transformed into the East German embassy, its head becoming the new ambassador.<sup>72</sup> In the North Vietnamese case, however, the 'front mission' was a pair of journalists, actually members of the ruling party in Hanoi, who were used to pass messages to the British government. This was hardly an efficient way of conducting business: the 'journalists' had few resources for diplomatic work, no diplomatic immunity and no regular access to British officialdom. But, given the embarrassment that could have been caused to both sides by higher-profile exchanges during the Vietnam War, this was better than no contact at all.<sup>73</sup> In September 1973, when the North Vietnamese appointed their first chargé d'affaires to London, it was none other than Lai Van Ngoc, who had first come to London in 1970 as a supposed correspondent of *Cuu Quoc*, a weekly official journal. The FCO had known all along that he was actually a European specialist from the North Vietnamese foreign ministry.<sup>74</sup>

There were, in fact, numerous ways in which states without diplomatic relations could communicate, as three other examples will serve to show. Another 'disguised embassy' was the representative office, as used by the US in Beijing after 1972; the British did not use this institution at the time, but in mid-1972 the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) suggested it might set up an 'office' in London. The FCO did not see on what legal grounds they could object to something as vague as an 'office' but there was an outcry against the idea from pro-Israeli groups. The PLO itself backed off from the proposal after the murder of several Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics.<sup>75</sup> In British relations with the Vatican, since 1938 the Pope's apostolic delegate had acted in a diplomatic capacity although, strictly speaking, his mission was a religious one. Dealings between Protestant Great Britain and the papacy had been a delicate issue for centuries and, although a British minister had been appointed to the Vatican in 1926, diplomatic relations were not established until 1982.<sup>76</sup> When Julius Nyerere wanted to sound the British out on a possible resumption of diplomatic relations in April–May 1966, he used the Tanzanian honorary consul general in the Netherlands,

<sup>72</sup> Hoff, *Grossbritannien und die DDR*.

<sup>73</sup> For examples of meetings with them, see: PREM 13/1271 (4 January), and /1276 (Palliser to Maclehoose (4 July 1966).

<sup>74</sup> FCO 15/1853, note on Ngoc (undated). <sup>75</sup> PREM 15/2090, *passim*.

<sup>76</sup> Berridge, *Talking*, 54–6; John Mugerwa, 'British Vatican Diplomatic Relations, 1914–82' (MA thesis, University of Leicester, 1982).

a Dutchman named van Eeghen, to pass messages both ways. This might seem a cumbersome route, but van Eeghen, a long-time confidant of Nyerere, had opposed the break in relations with Britain and could be trusted to act discreetly. British diplomats also suspected that the Dutchman's 'unofficial standing and his white face' added to his appeal as a go-between and they were quite happy to communicate through him, even though the initiative ultimately came to nothing.<sup>77</sup>

### The 'interests section'

The most significant development on these lines in the 1960s, however, was the growing use of the interests section, whereby diplomats continued to work in a country with which they had broken relations, but as part of the embassy of a third power, not under their own flag. This grew from the well-established practice whereby, if a country lacks a mission in a country, it can ask a third, 'protecting' power to look after its interests. Such situations were governed in part by the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, which entered into force in April 1964. Article 45 stated that when relations are broken, and on a reciprocal basis, 'The receiving state must, even in case of armed conflict, respect and protect the premises of the mission, together with its property and archives.' These are entrusted to the protection of a third country acceptable to the receiving state. Governments also ask a protecting power to act when no break in relations has occurred, perhaps when they have insufficient resources to establish an embassy or where the scale of their interest in a country does not justify one. Thus, Britain protected the interests of fellow Commonwealth states in numerous countries. Neutral states, such as Switzerland and Sweden, are often seen as suitable protecting powers because of their supposed impartiality, their determination to avoid involvement in armed conflict and their willingness to take on such tasks. The role of a protecting power may vary from occasional actions on specific issues, sometimes called 'good offices', to a broader role, including the provision of consular services.<sup>78</sup> However, there was no expectation that the protecting power would act against its own interests in pursuit of its role and the obvious danger was that the diplomats of a protecting power might not be familiar with the interests involved or strongly motivated to defend

<sup>77</sup> DO 213/115, especially Dar es Salaam to CRO (27 April 1966).

<sup>78</sup> Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations, 1961, *United Nations Treaty Series*, vol. 500 (New York: United Nations, 1965). For a discussion, see James Blake, 'The Origins and Use of the Protecting Power', in David Newsom, ed., *Diplomacy under a Foreign Flag: When nations break relations* (London: Hurst, 1990), chapter 1.

them. In December 1963, when Mexico refused to recognise a new government in the Dominican Republic, Britain agreed to act as protecting power for them both. But it is clear from the relevant file that London would have preferred a Latin American country to do the job. It helped that, while breaking diplomatic relations, the two countries agreed to maintain consulates on each other's soil, so that Britain did not have to provide burdensome consular services.<sup>79</sup>

The great advantage of the interests section was that, while tied to the embassy of a protecting power, it was staffed by diplomats from the 'protected' country who could properly look after their own affairs. Interests sections so called were first developed by Egypt and West Germany after May 1965, when Cairo broke diplomatic relations because Bonn had recognised Israel. Nasser thereby signalled public disapproval of Germany's decision without having to pay the price of a full breakdown, which could have damaged trade and harmed the position of Egyptian students in Germany.<sup>80</sup> Twenty-two German staff were allowed to remain in Egypt under Italian protection. Similar arrangements were made in other Arab capitals that decided to emulate Nasser's break. As Frank Roberts, British ambassador to Bonn, explained to Michael Stewart, in these posts 'the German Embassy staff has been able to continue to function under the protecting power almost at full strength, enjoying bag facilities and even ciphers; the same applies to Arab missions in Bonn'.<sup>81</sup> Actually, as Geoffrey Berridge has noted, the idea of basing one's diplomats in the embassy of another country was not an entirely novel one. The British embassy in Constantinople transferred some of its staff to the Dutch embassy when relations with Ottoman Turkey were broken in the 1820s. The same embassy transferred staff to the US embassy for a time when relations were broken in 1914.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, such steps seem to have been rare and involved only a limited number of staff.

The British proved significant in making the practice widespread and permanent simply because within months of the Arab-German breach came the OAU action over Rhodesia. In some of the cases, London was happy to rely simply on the appointment of a protecting power. The US protected British interests in Guinea, Mali and Mauritania. In Congo-Brazzaville, there was an intriguing situation in that the British had been

<sup>79</sup> FO 371/173886, *passim*.

<sup>80</sup> Simon Kear, 'Diplomatic Innovation: Nasser and the origins of the interests section', *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2001), 68–71; Berridge, *Diplomacy*, 133–8.

<sup>81</sup> FO 371/183009/72, Roberts to Stewart (2 September 1965).

<sup>82</sup> I am grateful to G. R. Berridge for this information. His history of the embassy in Constantinople is forthcoming.



looking after US interests there for the previous four months. West Germany quickly agreed to look after both US and British interests in future.<sup>83</sup> But where greater interests were at stake, the idea of a disguised embassy had appeal. The interests section is sometimes portrayed as a Western innovation, with West Germany and Britain described as 'the first to employ this new device'.<sup>84</sup> In December 1965, however, it was very much a case of Egypt, backed by Algeria and Sudan, with Tanzania following, pressing the innovation on London. Several days before the formal breach, the Egyptians said they envisaged a rupture 'on the German pattern'. One element of this was that, while diplomatic relations would be severed, consular, commercial and cultural relations could continue. Britain's consulate general in Alexandria would remain open, as would its shipping office in Port Said. More significantly, on terms 'similar to those agreed in the case of Germany', British diplomats in Cairo could continue to operate as an interests section, with their own diplomatic bag, ciphers and wireless facilities. The British ambassador, George Middleton, felt 'it would be to our advantage to accept this pattern' and the Egyptians proceeded almost as if there were no alternative. The FCO wanted time to consider its position, 'whatever assumptions the [Egyptian] government may be making', but soon agreed to the 'German' solution as the best way to protect British interests and preserve some goodwill in Cairo.<sup>85</sup> Twenty-two diplomatic officers from the former British embassy stayed on under a counsellor, with Canada the protecting power. As members of the Canadian embassy, British diplomats and their families continued to enjoy diplomatic privileges and immunities. They also had twenty-three administrative and technical staff to support them, making forty-six staff in all, hardly a small-scale operation. They even continued to operate from the former British embassy building, though without its Union Jack, and were able to deal directly with the foreign ministry.<sup>86</sup> As with the German case, Nasser was able to reap the political and propaganda advantages of a breach, while minimising the practical inconveniences this might have brought. It should be remembered that, as the agreement was reciprocal,

<sup>83</sup> FO 371/161770/1, Bonn to FO (17 December), and see FO 371/181769/1, FO to Brazzaville (5 August 1965), on Britain becoming protector of US interests after Congo Brazzaville expelled a number of American officials and Washington broke off relations.

<sup>84</sup> Newsom, *Foreign Flag*, 4.

<sup>85</sup> See especially: FO 371/183914/2, Cairo to FO (7 December 1965), /9, Cairo to FO and reply (both 17 December 1965), and /14, Higgins minute (20 January 1966); and Kear, 'Innovation', 71–5.

<sup>86</sup> FO 371/183914/20, Cairo to FO (12 December 1965); Kear, 'Innovation', 75–83.

Egypt set up an interests section in London, with a thirty-eight-strong staff under Iraqi protection.<sup>87</sup>

Events in Algiers followed a similar course. Here the Swiss agreed to act as protecting power; they already fulfilled this role there for West Germany. The very fact that West Germany already had an interests section in Cairo and Algiers meant that the pattern for dealing with Britain was already set: the Germans would hardly be pleased if the British were given a more generous deal.<sup>88</sup> The Algerians were also adamant that, while they wanted to preserve contacts with Britain, they did not want a 'disguised embassy' in the form of a consulate. This would simply look like a mere change of name for the embassy, especially because the Union Jack would still be flying over it. Ambassador Bromley and his staff had some doubts about how an interests section would work, Bromley feeling a consulate would be 'more watertight and dignified'. But he conceded that 'the German solution could probably be made to work and that it would have some advantages, especially as regards access to the [Foreign] Ministry. It would also facilitate retention of some political staff.'<sup>89</sup> Simon Dawbarn, formerly counsellor in the embassy, duly became 'Head of the British Interests Section of the Swiss Embassy'. As in Egypt, those expelled included the defence attaché, leaving this field uncovered. But the British again retained their own communications and offices, their diplomatic immunities and privileges.<sup>90</sup> In London, an Algerian interests section was established in the Kuwaiti embassy. Sudan was an even easier case, partly because the government was anxious about the position of its numerous students in the UK. Here most British diplomats remained, forming an interests section under US protection.<sup>91</sup>

In Tanzania, a British interests section was established within the Canadian high commission. A Tanzanian official remarked that its creation showed that the breach was not vindictive in character and helped the two countries to continue co-operating on such problems as economic assistance to Zambia (then threatened by a Rhodesian economic stranglehold).<sup>92</sup> In Ghana, however, arrangements were rather different. Instead of an interests section, residual staff formed a 'consular section', using the existing British high commission building, but now as part of

<sup>87</sup> See FO 371/19207/20, 29 and 30, *passim*.

<sup>88</sup> See FO 371/190381/7, Dawbarn to Speares (14 January 1966).

<sup>89</sup> FO 371/184109/12, Algiers to FO (25 December), and reply (30 December 1965).

<sup>90</sup> FO 371/190381/11, Dawbarn to North and East African Department (24 January 1966).

<sup>91</sup> FO 371/184158/4, Khartoum to FO (18 December 1965).

<sup>92</sup> DO 213/115, Dar es Salaam to CRO (17 February 1966).

the staff of the Australian high commission, Australia being the protecting power. Trade commission staff also remained behind and reciprocal arrangements were made in London.<sup>93</sup> The Commonwealth Relations Office (CRO) actually complained at one point to the Ghanaians that the terms being offered were not as generous as those being offered by Egypt and others,<sup>94</sup> but about twenty-five British staff remained in place and the situation did not last long, since Ghana quickly restored relations. The break with Commonwealth countries was a novelty for the CRO, which followed established FO practice in such cases. Thus, British diplomats were instructed that they could sit with Tanzanian and Ghanaian representatives at multilateral conferences and attend other diplomatic functions where they were present, but they must not 'hold bilateral consultations . . . or be seen mixing socially'.<sup>95</sup>

It should not be thought that interests sections were a cost-free exercise, a way of withdrawing recognition without negative effect. Apart from the public nature of the breach, the ill feeling generated and the way the position of ambassadors was undermined, relations suffered from a reduced level of diplomatic contact and the smaller number of staff involved. Given the lower rank of diplomatic representatives in such sections and the fiction that they were actually on the embassy staff of another country, the quality of their contacts with the foreign ministry was bound to be affected: typically they seem to have held talks only with middle-ranking officials, while any official *démarche* to the foreign ministry had to go through the protecting power.<sup>96</sup> The reduced size of the section was a particular problem. The defence attaché always had to leave with the ambassador, so that one section of the traditional embassy was removed. And, particularly in the Tanzanian case, there were differences over the size of the interests section. Several months after breaking relations with London, Nyerere insisted there must be only eight British diplomats in Dar es Salaam. At that point, the British had twenty-four diplomatic officers or other UK staff in the section, plus thirty-eight locally engaged personnel. The British argued that sixteen of the Britons were engaged in supplying Zambia with aid and that this would be harmed if they left. However, Nyerere argued that the Zambian situation had improved and would not be deflected. The need to select only eight British staff not only led to differences between the Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Overseas Development about whom to include, it also harmed the section's ability to communicate

<sup>93</sup> DO 195/247, Hickman minute (13 January 1965).

<sup>94</sup> DO 195/246, CRO to Accra (5 January 1966).

<sup>95</sup> DO 195/115, CRO Office Notice (21 January 1965). <sup>96</sup> Berridge, *Talking*, 38–44.

fully with London, since the ability to use ciphers was reduced. Later, the Tanzanians insisted that any British staff who were away on leave must not be replaced.<sup>97</sup>

Tensions could also arise with the protecting power. In Iraq in the early 1970s, British staff found the Swedish ambassador, under whom they now worked, to be cautious and fussy, evidently expecting that some of them were spies. 'His Swedish Excellency is something of an old woman', went one complaint, 'His principal preoccupation after the break seemed to be the relative size of case of the words "Royal Swedish Embassy" and "British Interests Section" on the rubber stamps we had printed.'<sup>98</sup> There were also tensions in Algiers, at first, the British feeling frustrated at the cautious way the Swiss proceeded.<sup>99</sup> But such difficulties seem to have passed quickly, helped by the fact that the interests sections were physically separate from the embassies of the protecting powers. In Algiers, the Swiss ambassador was soon full of praise for 'his' British staff: 'He sharply contrasted their co-operative and tactful attitude with the insensitive and troublesome manners of the German interests section.'<sup>100</sup>

### Conclusion

With respect to issues of recognition and diplomatic relations, the British took a pragmatic approach. The main reasons to deny recognition revolved around Cold War considerations and particularly countries like Germany, Vietnam and Korea, where two regimes, one Communist and one pro-Western, claimed to be the sole legitimate authority. Otherwise, London liked to deal with those it took to be in control of a territory. As one veteran diplomat put it, 'To be in relations with a government should not mean you approve of it, but only that you have interests in the country which you want to protect and therefore have to deal with the people who are governing it.'<sup>101</sup> But policy could often be shaped to fit circumstances and meet specific British interests. As the high commission in Delhi noted during the birth of Bangladesh, 'criteria for recognition [are] inherently elastic'.<sup>102</sup> In the Bangladeshi case, recognition was *timed* to encourage particular outcomes and this was not

<sup>97</sup> See especially DO 213/115, Scott to Norris (7 June), and /116, Dar es Salaam to Commonwealth Office (21 November 1966).

<sup>98</sup> FCO 17/1733, Lewty to Beckett (31 December 1971).

<sup>99</sup> For example, FO 371/190381/7, Unwin minute (18 January 1966).

<sup>100</sup> FO 371/190382/28, Purves to Department (22 April 1966).

<sup>101</sup> Humphrey Trevelyan, *Diplomatic Channels* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1973), 17.

<sup>102</sup> PREM 15/751, Delhi to FCO (7 January 1972).

a unique example. When Nkrumah was overthrown in March 1966, officials saw it as 'a significant set-back to the extremist forces in Africa' and felt it would 'be most helpful to have early recognition from the largest possible number of countries' of the new government.<sup>103</sup>

Yet, it would be wrong to suggest that the British were able to ignore the 'normal criteria' whenever they wished. Often, there was little choice about the course to follow. In January 1972, for example, when the elected premier of Ghana, Dr Kofi Busia, was overthrown by the military, he begged Western countries not to 'join in the burial of democracy by rushing to recognise the new regime'. The British had previously tried to bolster Busia with financial aid, they wished that the new government included civilians and they were disappointed that it would not formally accept Ghana's international obligations (particularly its debts). But there was no doubt that the military were in control. African countries favoured recognition and, after two weeks, London had little choice but to fall into line. However, the FCO instructed its embassy in Accra to resume relations as unobtrusively as possible and, in April, Edward Heath made a point of inviting the ousted leader for tea at Chequers.<sup>104</sup> This example suggests that, contrary to criticisms of immorality in recognising the Greek colonels or General Pinochet, decision-makers really did feel uneasy about those they had to deal with. It also confirms that recognition was about *reality* not *morality*. However, because of this very readiness to accept realities, Douglas-Home, Callaghan and some officials increasingly felt the need to escape highly charged debates about dealing with dictators. This neatly coincided with entry to the EC, where most members followed the policy of recognising 'states not governments', a formula that seemed to provide an escape from the dilemma. It is ironic then that the 'states not government' formula, which London adopted in 1980, had its origins in a moral cause, Latin America's wish to escape Washington's judgemental approach to recognition.

There was a similar story of pragmatism with breaks in diplomatic relations. A Foreign Office memorandum of November 1967 noted that:

It is not our policy to make good or bad behaviour towards us a criteria [*sic*] for the maintenance or establishment of diplomatic relations with any country. Indeed, we maintain that when there are problems between countries there is all the more reason to have diplomatic relations so that the problems can be discussed and resolved.<sup>105</sup>

<sup>103</sup> DO 195/219, CRO and FO outward telegram (16 March 1966).

<sup>104</sup> PREM 15/921, Busia to Heath (17 January), FCO to Accra (27 January), and record of meeting (8 April 1972).

<sup>105</sup> PREM 13/1940, memorandum attached to Day to Palliser (17 November 1967).

London always tried to be moderate in its behaviour on breaches. When Somalia broke relations in 1963, the British expressed their regret over the decision, undertook to give the Somali ambassador 'sufficient time to conclude the affairs of his embassy' and promised to protect Somali 'property and persons' in the UK.<sup>106</sup> Certainly, Britain did not join in the fad for breaking relations as a way of signifying displeasure. Again, however, this policy may be criticised as amoral. London might have severed relations to indicate its displeasure at any number of events. Even years of baiting by Uganda's Idi Amin were allowed to pass before a formal break was finally made in July 1976. Then again, there was more than one way of expressing disgust. London may have recognised the Pinochet dictatorship in 1973, but in December 1975 representation was reduced from ambassadorial level to that of *chargé d'affaires*, in protest at the torture of a British citizen, Sheila Cassidy.<sup>107</sup> The British preferred such actions to the dangers of a complete breach, which could take years to close, perhaps leaving interests and citizens unprotected.

Whatever their own behaviour, the British were particular victims of the increasing tendency for governments to sever diplomatic relations for symbolic, supposedly moral reasons. However, overall the British coped with breaches well, demonstrating not only moderation but a readiness to act flexibly. In particular, when dealing with Egypt in 1966–7, the ever-unconventional George Brown was ready to take the initiative in reopening links, ignoring the principle of letting the state that had initiated a breach take the lead in healing it. The problems created by UDI did not lead to the disintegration of the Commonwealth, relations were usually restored after a few years and various means could be used to continue talking, including consulates, front missions and interests sections. None of these were problem-free ways of keeping in touch, but they each had their value in the particular context that London faced. Where interests sections were created, diplomats seem to have been able to carry out their duties quite effectively, even in the absence of an ambassador. True, interests sections were largely the result of Arab decisions and had already been used by Germany, but London's readiness to adopt the practice helped to make it more widespread and acceptable. Following the British experience, other governments faced with similar circumstances began to use interests sections, notably the US after the Six Day War of 1967, when it set up sections in several

<sup>106</sup> FO 371/172954/20, FO to Mogadishu (22 March 1963).

<sup>107</sup> Warbrick, 'British Policy', 569 and 571. Another ploy was to avoid a break in relations but leave posts vacant, as the British did with the Central African Republic from 1970 to 1977, when it was ruled by the megalomaniac 'Emperor' Bokassa.

Arab countries.<sup>108</sup> Thereafter, the interests section became almost commonplace.<sup>109</sup>

### **Breaks in diplomatic relations involving Britain, October 1963–April 1976**

Algeria:	18 December 1965 – 10 April 1968
Congo-Brazzaville:	16 December 1965 – 10 April 1968
Egypt:	17 December 1965 – 12 December 1967
Ghana:	16 December 1965 – 5 March 1966
Guinea:	15 December 1965 – 20 February 1968
Iceland:	18 February – 2 June 1976
Iraq:	8 June 1967 – 1 May 1968, 1 December 1971 – 5 September 1974
Mali:	16 December 1965 – 10 April 1968
Mauritania:	17 December 1965 – 10 April 1968
Somalia:	18 March 1963 – 4 January 1968
Sudan:	18 December 1965 – 16 April 1966, 6 June 1967 – 25 January 1968
Syria:	6 June 1967 – 28 May 1973
Tanzania:	15 December 1965 – 4 July 1968

*The Diplomatic Service List* (London: HMSO, annual)

<sup>108</sup> Newsom, *Foreign Flag*, discusses these cases at length.

<sup>109</sup> In 1976, when Iceland severed relations, the British immediately set up an interests section in the French embassy in Reykjavik, having prepared for the contingency in advance. FCO 33/2836, *passim*.

## 10 Conclusion

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If you ask any of the nibs who move in diplomatic circles and are accustomed to handling tricky affairs of state, he will tell you that when matters have reached a deadlock, it is not a bit of good just sitting on the seat of the pants and rolling the eyes up to heaven – you have got to turn stones and explore avenues and take prompt steps through the proper channels.

Bertie Wooster<sup>1</sup>

With a few exceptions, diplomatic practice, or the way diplomacy is actually put into effect, has escaped close scrutiny, for any country in any era. Nevertheless, the limited work that has been done suggests that it is a vast subject to be tapped. This study has tried to shed light on the way one country organised its diplomacy to achieve foreign policy aims in a particular time frame. While British diplomatic practice in the 1960s and 1970s is a closely defined topic, it allows comparisons to be drawn between different countries and time periods to gain a much fuller understanding of the subject. The book has shown that, even in this short period, diplomatic practice evolved in important ways and in several directions. London adapted its diplomatic methods to suit particular challenges as it searched for a new role in the wake of Empire. The Diplomatic Service was reformed, with an emphasis on supporting exports, and institutional change was carried through, notably through the creation of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Summits became more frequent both bilaterally and, in 1972–5, at a multilateral level. The British also proved flexible in altering old practices where these seemed outdated. This was particularly evident in the adoption of interests sections in 1965, in the willingness after 1973 to consider the recognition of ‘states not governments’, and in the reform of state visits so that the Queen could meet other heads of state more than once in her reign. Overall, there was an expansion of diplomatic activity marked by a more intense use of ambassadors, special envoys and summits.

<sup>1</sup> Or, rather, P. G. Wodehouse, in *The Mating Season* (London: Penguin, 1949), 99.



It is wrong to say, as certain analysts did at the time, that the resident ambassador was in terminal decline in this period, as other forms of diplomatic activity mushroomed in importance. Summits, special missions, multilateral conferences, cost-cutting and ever improving communications may all have seemed challenges to the permanent embassies in the twentieth century, but, in the 1960s and 1970s at least, the number of embassies was actually growing as colonies became independent, new posts linked to international organisations were created and there was more work for embassies to do in areas such as trade, immigration, tourism and public diplomacy. The combination of an increased number of states, swifter communications and the phenomenon of 'globalisation' (which was recognised at the time, even if that term itself was not yet used) meant that special envoys, bilateral summits and multilateral conferences could all grow in number and still leave plenty of room for more traditional forms of diplomatic contact to flourish. They were not competitors but mutual winners in the expansion of diplomatic activity, each with a place in maximising the country's diplomatic influence. Summitry may have become a mundane activity by the mid-1970s, but even the most energetic leader could not be in two or more places at once. Prime ministers and special envoys relied on ambassadors to pave the way for successful visits abroad, just as foreign ministers needed embassies to keep them informed about other countries' negotiating positions ahead of multilateral talks.

It has also become clear that diplomatic practice, besides having an intrinsic fascination of its own, has a real impact on the way events unfold. The methods of diplomacy are not neutral; they are dynamic and may have a profound effect on policy outcomes, sometimes in unpredictable ways. Anyone wanting to use summit meetings as a barometer of the British–American 'special relationship' could be sorely misled by appearances into believing there were few problems. The need to make summits *appear* successful when they were held between close allies, such as Britain and the United States, meant that disputes would be put into the background for a time. In other words, the method – summitry – helped to moderate any ill feeling, at least around the time the summit was held. As James Callaghan came to realise as foreign secretary, despite some high-profile failures, most 'Summit meetings are condemned to succeed' if only because states had learnt by then how to use them as 'publicity relations exercises'.<sup>2</sup> One must look beyond these high-profile events for a proper appreciation of any relationship.

<sup>2</sup> UK National Archives, Kew, PREM 16/838, Callaghan to Henderson (12 February 1976).

Similarly, anyone who felt that a breach in diplomatic relations signalled a worsening in bilateral relations might be surprised by the reality of some breaks, like those over Rhodesia in December 1965, which were designed to signal displeasure at a particular policy choice, but which did not prevent the continuation of bilateral contacts. In other words, the development of the interests section facilitated a situation whereby a breach in relations could be little more than a publicity stunt. Another telling example of the way a change in practice could open up new possibilities for policy-making was the creation of the European Council, without which the European Community might have atrophied. Despite Britain's reputation for being an awkward partner in the Community, London fully backed this French-led innovation, Harold Wilson showing as much enthusiasm as Edward Heath. Indeed, through the European Council and the Group of Six, the leaders of the West found that multilateral summits gave them an improved sense of control over the interconnected problems of the energy crisis, 'stagflation' and currency instability.

The dynamic impact and evolving nature of diplomatic practice are important reasons why international historians, as well as those studying contemporary international relations, need to factor it into their analyses alongside political issues, economic exigencies, defence policy, intelligence work and propaganda. The means by which diplomacy is executed are not some piece of background scenery framing the main event, but an integral part of the way that event unfolds. If this dimension were brought more into the foreground, diplomacy might become a significant focus for international history once more, not because of what officials said to one another, but because of the way in which diplomatic methods were central to the crises and conflicts, the disagreements and negotiations, the alliances and the rivalries of world affairs.

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DEFE 32 Chiefs of Staff, secretary's standard file  
DO 195 Commonwealth Relations/Commonwealth Office, East Africa Department  
DO 213 Commonwealth Relations/Commonwealth Office, West and General Africa Department  
FCO Foreign and Commonwealth Office series post 1968 (including FCO 73, private papers collections, post 1968)  
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