VOICE FILE NAME: The Hon. John Howard

Key:
SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)
JH: Hon. John Howard (Respondent)

SO: Sue Onslow talking to Mr John Howard in Sydney on 31st March, 2014. Sir, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to us for this project. I wonder if you could begin, please Sir, by reflecting when you were at the Treasury in the late 1970s and early 1980s while Malcolm Fraser was, of course, an extremely active Commonwealth head as Prime Minister of Australia. Was there a particular Commonwealth dimension to any of your work, or was it focused exclusively on Australian affairs and domestic policy?

JH: There wasn't a particular Commonwealth focus, not even in the context of Australia's international economic relations. We were a participant in certain Commonwealth programmes and I went to a number of meetings of the Commonwealth Finance ministers. I recall going to several of them, not all of them. I think I went to one in Malta, I went to one in London and I went to one in the Bahamas. I also went to one in Canada in Toronto in probably 1982. But there wasn't a great Commonwealth emphasis, no. No, there wasn't.

SO: It's been commented those Commonwealth Finance Ministers' meetings are enormously valuable for smaller states, and I wondered if Australia, as a large power within the Commonwealth, had the same attitude that they were beneficial?

JH: Well, I'm trying to recall and when you recall these things, you obviously remember what had the biggest impact on you. In the context of those smaller states, certainly Australia, even then and more so as the years went by, saw itself as having a particular role in the Pacific; and many of the Forum countries in the Pacific were Commonwealth states, in fact most of them were. It was almost a mini Commonwealth: you had Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji at that time, some of the micro states, Tonga, and the list goes on.

SO: Sir, Malcolm Fraser was responsible for setting up a Commonwealth Regional Heads of Government meeting for the Pacific. How much do you recall Fraser being a little out of step with the Liberal Party in his active participation in Commonwealth affairs?

JH: I don't think he was out of step. He was certainly a very strong international and public opponent of apartheid. He saw the agency and the councils of the Commonwealth as a way of bringing about a change in the policies either of the South African Government or whatever combination of developments that was needed to bring about a better situation. My recollection is that while there may have been some people in the Liberal Party would have been a bit critical of his position on Rhodesia, as it then was; some people, his general advocacy of the cause of a multiracial Commonwealth was something that most people supported because we believe in it.

SO: Sir, could I ask you how important is foreign policy within Australian domestic politics?

JH: It has an enormous role, of course.

SO: Well, that doesn't necessarily follow for all countries; for example, in Britain, foreign policy, unless it's Europe, doesn't really feature in general election campaigns.

JH: Tip O'Neill is right: all politics is local when it comes to election campaigns, but there was a time years ago in Australian politics where national security and foreign policy issues dominated. In my time as Prime Minister, it's fair to say that in one election in 2001 national security issues would have held equal billing with economic issues because it was just after the terrorist attack of 9/11. And the terrorist issue bit quite deeply in Australia because we also lost a lot of people in Bali in 2002. Then we had the asylum seeker debate. Foreign policy is important, but it doesn't dominate elections. I don't think it does anywhere unless there's a perceived threat to the security of a country; or there's been a huge dominant event such as the terrorist attacks, that provides a bit of a backdrop. But in the '50s and '60s the whole communist issue was very large in Australian politics.

SO: In your experience, how much autonomy does the Prime Minister have in driving a particular foreign policy agenda? I was wondering about the dynamic of decision-making between Prime Minister and Foreign Minister here in Australia which, of course, is unique to Australia. As you have a federal structure, too, the process is different from decision making in Britain; it's different from the decision making process in other Commonwealth countries.

JH: The Prime Minister has the capacity to pursue a lot of things that he or she is interested in. So the answer to that is 'quite a lot'.

SO: In other political environments the locus of day-to-day decision-making as far as foreign policy is concerned, can sit very firmly in the Foreign Ministry with the Prime Minister focusing on other aspects. I'm just wondering what the balance was here in Australia during your Premiership?

JH: Well, the way I worked, I worked very closely with the foreign heads and I had the same Foreign Minister for 11½ years.

SO: Alexander Downer, yes.

JH: Yeah, and he's our longest serving Foreign Minister. His appointment as High Commissioner to London was announced this morning.

SO: Congratulations by association! That's very good news.

JH: Alexander's wife is English, or was British born and still has family in Britain. And Alexander's father was Australian High Commissioner to London between 1964 and 1972. He in fact spent some of his school years in Britain; he went to Radley College, I think.

SO: What was his particular attitude towards the Commonwealth, as Foreign Minister?

JH: His attitude towards the Commonwealth was very similar to mine. Let me, perhaps, make a couple of general observations. I always looked at the Commonwealth in a sense separately from our bilateral relations with the old Commonwealth. Let's be realistic: there is a difference. Those countries that belong to what is called 'the old Commonwealth' have a closer affinity with each other than with those countries that do not. That's always been my feeling. And it's true. We're bound by obviously the common sharing of a monarch, our institutions and customs and - this is particularly relevant in the modern world - the close intelligence co-operation which is one of the strongest bonds of the lot. Mind you, the United States is part of that. And all of us, when I say 'all of us', my government was very attentive to that. Not that we were indifferent to the broader Commonwealth, but it's almost unmanageably large. You talk about leadership. Well, it's very, very difficult for the Secretary General because it's so big; it's 53 countries and they range from very big to very small. It's valuable but it can't be very cohesive. There's nothing in my view about the total Commonwealth which is as intensely unifying the links that exist between some of the older countries and some of the bilateral links that exist between them. I can see, for example, the bilateral links between Australia and India growing more strongly as years go by. I remember having a conversation with the current Indian Prime Minister about seven years ago and he rather thoughtfully said to me, "Australia and India have a lot in common but we haven't had much to do with each other." I said, "That's very true, we have a lot in common." A shared history with the British link, the English language, cricket, most importantly of all, a federal system of government, a similar legal system, shared very similar military traditions which are quite strong. But he said, 'Why was this so?' and I said, 'Well, for 40 years the Indian government tended to follow a pro-Soviet line rather than a pro-American line in the Cold War', which was true. Nehru was on the Soviet side of neutral whenever there was a foreign policy dust up.

SO: So what you're describing then, Sir, is the Commonwealth has as a core, hard power considerations which are mutually beneficial through that old Commonwealth relationship?

JH: Yeah, but I don't see that relationship really as being a core which then radiates outwards its influence. In a sense I see that almost as a separate entity. I actually see Australia in a way, as having a split personality when it comes to the Commonwealth; we've got that 'old Commonwealth' relationship and then you've got our participation in the broader Commonwealth. And I think it's important to understand and state that, otherwise you get an unreal impression. Because I think the relationship between those old Commonwealth countries is quite strong still. And it's not just bilateral

relationships between Australia and Great Britain, but the relationship between Australia and New Zealand is very strong and the relationship between Australia and Canada has not been as close although it's got a little stronger. It's got stronger in the last seven or eight years.

SO: Sir, that underlines your view of the continuing importance of that core group across the end of the Cold War, and across the end of apartheid. And that despite changing challenges in the international system, changing challenges in international security, there is still a core group of countries which are mutually supportive because of hard core security issues?

JH: Well, not only on core security, but with similar values and traditions. It is very difficult to find four countries in the world more alike than Australia, Britain, New Zealand and Canada.

SO: Well, the United States was of course part of Britain's 'first empire'.

JH: Yeah, but culturally America is a little different. Our culture is still not British but it's closer in many ways than what it is to American culture. And I'm very familiar with the States; I go to America a lot. One of my sons has been living there for a number of years. I know America well and it's very close; we're very close to America.

SO: In terms of the wider Commonwealth though, Sir, as a multilateral community, did you see that being of benefit to the Australian foreign policy?

JH: I thought it was helpful on occasions. It was not dominant. I am not a fervent multilateralist I have to tell you. I'm not saying this just in the context of the Commonwealth; broadly I think the thing that's important about the foreign relations with my country are the accumulated bilateral relationships we have and they matter. There's no such thing as an Asian foreign policy; there's a foreign policy in Australia towards Indonesia and Japan and China and India and Malaysia and Singapore. There are bilateral, regional associations which are helpful, but we still live in a world of nation states. So I'm just stating my views, and obviously my views they condition my attitude. And I don't want to sound as though I'm indifferent to the Commonwealth. I think it's a great multiracial institution. And that's very important; it's always important to have groupings that bring different people with different racial and ethnic backgrounds together, I think. It is hugely important; it's always been important and will continue to be important, just as I believe in the United Nations when it works.

SO: Yes, when it works! So, Sir, your attitude is that the Commonwealth was a useful multilateral global subsystem for bringing together diverse and different nations with shared values, and that this is generally useful international ongoing relations? But that the Commonwealth was not actually an effective 'soft power' organisation, or indeed effective on high policy?

JH: I witnessed one of its spectacular failures and that is in relation to Zimbabwe. The total failure of the Commonwealth in relation to Zimbabwe was because the Southern African states largely put a protective arm around Mugabe.

SO: The idea of the 'troika' first emerged as a way for Zimbabwe not to be suspended, came out of the Abuja process - as a way for General Obasanjo, yourself as chair and also Thabo Mbeki, to be a collective triumvirate to …

JH: Well, that came out of the Coolum Summit in Brisbane in Queensland in 2002, and there had been multiple findings of fraud, intimidation, crookery, murder, everything in that realm. Julie Bishop who is now our Foreign Minister was on an all-party delegation that went to Zimbabwe for the election and I remember I rang her from Australia. I think she was in Pretoria or somewhere; she gave me a blow-by-blow account of just how bad the whole thing had been. And there was a general feeling that if the Commonwealth was to come up to the mark it had to do something about this and then a lot of argument and people were defending Mugabe.

SO: But Alexander Downer at that point was on the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group?

JH: He was on CMAG. And you will find that it wasn't just the old white Commonwealth getting together, or the conservatives. Helen Clark, as Prime Minister of New Zealand, who's further to the left than me was just as exorcised about what was happening in Zimbabwe as I was. But unfortunately it just died in the sand because frankly the southern African states' sense of fraternity they felt towards the Zimbabwean leadership was greater than anything else.

SO: Obviously you actively tried to discuss this sense of African regional solidarity, both individually and within SADC, with your 'Troika' colleagues?

JH: We discussed it within the troika and I found that President Obasanjo was very helpful. I liked him. He's a good man and … but the southern Africans, I speak collectively not just of South Africa, they weren't keen on doing too much to put pressure on Mugabe.

SO: Was that because you felt President Mbeki was trying to use the SADC vehicle to cajole President Mugabe?

JH: No. I felt in reality that the region's liberation struggles were the crucial fact… and I understand the history that Mugabe had been a warrior against white domination in Rhodesia, and therefore as a warrior against apartheid. That counted more than anything else. And I understand that.

SO: You mentioned the Coolum Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in 2002, if I could just take you back to earlier Commonwealth Heads' meetings that you've attended …

JH: I've been to two prior to that one. I went to one in Edinburgh in 1997 and that was my first Commonwealth meeting. Nelson Mandela was still President of South Africa then, so it was the first opportunity I had of meeting him. And Tony Blair chaired the meeting. I'd met Tony earlier in the year when I'd paid a bilateral visit to Britain. I also did five Commonwealth meetings I think. I did Edinburgh, I did Durban in 1999. That was a week after we'd have the referendum on the Republic here in Australia which, in my view, had gone the right way. And in 2002 we had Coolum. And then end of 2003 we had Abuja.

And then in 2005, we had Malta. And then the next one was held on the day of our election so we couldn't be there. Richard Alston our high commissioner in London represented Australia.

SO: Sir, at each of these meetings, how much importance and value did you attach to debating the executive sessions, and the private discussions at the Retreat?

JH: Well, I went to 11 APEC meetings, I went to five Commonwealth meetings. In my role as a head of government I went to UN meetings. Once you get beyond a certain size discussion is distinct from speech making. It becomes impossible and it's just the natural dynamic. And the Commonwealth is far too big a body to have anything other than just sort of … and that's just the reality of it. Now that doesn't mean it's bad, and it's just something that they hold in common. APEC is getting close to that. And I went to 11 APEC meetings and I chaired the last one that I went to. I was in the chair because it was held here in Sydney. That's not an indictment of the Commonwealth. It's just an observation. This is not meant in any patronising way, it's truthful. I can understand that smaller countries have an opportunity on a larger stage, they want to say a lot of things. I understand all of that. I generally … what happens in a way at those larger meetings when you've got a cross section, the larger countries tend to say very little. George Bush said very little at APEC. He was very attentive at APEC meetings, he came to them all, he was very well informed, he was very gracious. He did not try and dominate the scene. And that was sensible. It was like me at meetings of the Pacific Islands' Forum: you try not to, you don't want to look as though you're dominating things. But it's just … you just can't avoid that.

SO: Did you manage to use those meetings to form any particular good political relationships?

JH: I found all of those meetings in the Commonwealth no less an opportunity of getting to know individual Commonwealth leaders. I formed quite a good friendship with Jean Chretien Canada. I remember James Patterson, from Jamaica. I don't want to overstate it but we became … got to know each other and you'd bump into each other at other meetings.

SO: The Commonwealth really likes to emphasise the fact that heads get to know each other, the informality of the Commonwealth …?

JH: Yeah, but that was true in the 1950s and '60s when you had a manageable number. Now I'm not saying we go back to then. But when you had people like Menzies, Hollyoake, Macmillan and Nehru, it was a small manageable number. It was easy to get to know each other.

SO: Pearson.

JH: And then Pearson. Very true, then, but not to the same degree now. Not really.

SO: So in your view as a long standing Australian prime minister then, what is the utility of the Commonwealth going forward?

JH: Well, people see the Commonwealth as in part an expression of our history. Some people when they think of the Commonwealth, they think of Britain and

the Queen. Other people think a little bit of Britain and the Queen, but they think more of it being a multiracial body in which a lot of people have … which brings together a number of countries that have a lot of shared history and customs. They don't see it as an economic thing because our economic links are so strong in this part of the world; and although the Commonwealth is obviously Malaysia, Singapore, India, Pakistan, it does not include Indonesia, China, Japan. Now our three major export destinations now are China, Japan and South Korea so none of them is a Commonwealth country.

There have been a couple of odd decisions taken about Commonwealth membership which I admit have been a mistake.

SO: You mean the decision to include Mozambique, and Rwanda?

JH: Well, what's the historical connection? I didn't agree with that at all. I don't think I was there, I'd been booted by then. Removed from office, I was no longer prime minister.

SO: So in terms of a general attitude then, the Commonwealth doesn't have a particular utility for Australian foreign policy as a vehicle, as a middle ranking power, the whole question about it's a platform to be a good international citizen, it doesn't have any role in the debate, that Gareth Evans would say, about a responsibility to protect, it doesn't provide a niche foreign policy role, but on the other hand it's …

JH: But on the other hand most Australians separately from the question of whether you're a republic or not, that's another matter I'll come back to. But most Australians would not want to leave the Commonwealth, they'd continue to support it quite strongly.

SO: Why?

JH: Well, because they see it as a worldwide multiracial body that means more than just being a member of the United Nations. Everybody is in the United Nations.

SO: Yes.

JH: Whereas they look at the Commonwealth and they think; but that's a bit different, that came from the British Empire and that's … we've got a few things that we all have in common still.

SO: You've mentioned the Queen and you've mentioned this question about being a republic. Would you elaborate on that particular dynamic?

JH: There is a clear difference between the countries that have the Queen as head of state and those that don't. If you choose to have the same person as your head of state you obviously have a different attitude towards and relationship with other countries that are in a similar position.

SO: So how important do you think the Queen as monarch and head of the Commonwealth has been, providing 'the invisible glue' for the association?

JH: She's been hugely important because she's been a very dedicated Commonwealth head. She has in that as she has in just about everything else she's done, she's done it extremely well. She is a very dedicated component of the Commonwealth. And she carries out her duties as head of the Commonwealth extremely well. As she carries out her duties as the Queen of Australia and Queen of Canada very well.

SO: How much do you think the question of the headship once the Queen has inevitably passed on might become a contentious issue?

JH: Well, if it does you really are looking at completely … that could well be a terminal point. The idea that you would have anybody other than the monarch of the United Kingdom as head of the Commonwealth is ludicrous. Because one of the few things … once it was decided in 1949 that India could remain in the Commonwealth while becoming a republic, the fall back, the default position was oh, well, the Crown would be a symbol of the unity of the Commonwealth countries and the headship of the Commonwealth by the British monarch … well, once that goes what's the rationale for the organisation? One of the rationales for membership was a common historical association with Britain. That's why I don't understand Mozambique and Rwanda.

SO: Sir, you mentioned earlier the issue over Zimbabwe, the Commonwealth noted a spectacular failure.

JH: Well, it did. Well, I thought the democratic cement of the Commonwealth would be more important than anything else in that.

SO: But how much could you say that Commonwealth did provide a below-the-radar assistance to conflict resolution, and mediation in terms of …?

JH: Well, we tried to very hard. But we met strong resistance.

SO: I was going to say in the Bougainville Process, in the Solomon Islands …

JH: Well, extremely well because the driving force in both of those places were Commonwealth countries.

SO: Well, indeed, and in your own particular 'backyard'.

JH: Hugely important. And the Commonwealth link was there not in an official way, but was actually there in East Timor. We led the … I asked the New Zealand prime minister at the time and she, Jenny Shipley, readily agreed to send … and it was a very big contribution by New Zealand. Now, you might say that's the Commonwealth, you might say that's the ANZAC … probably more … well the two conveniently …

SO: As allies.

JH: They overlap and they worked in concert, so there's no point in saying which was more important. But New Zealand made a very big contribution; given her size, she contributed a whole battalion and Helen Clark kept it once the change of government occurred which occurred very soon after. And the

Solomon Islands, well, that was very much a Pacific thing. But even in East Timor, the British provided a Ghurkha battalion. It was a Ghurkha company, I think. It was a detachment of Ghurkhas. And they provided them very quickly. That, to me, was an indication of special commitment; they did it I suppose partly because of the bilateral relationship between our two countries.

SO: Australia though was also very supportive of Don McKinnon's attempts to resolve the crisis of democracy in Fiji …

JH: Oh, yeah. We tried very hard, but we couldn't stop Bainimarama in the end.

SO: No. It's going to be interesting what happens in Fiji's elections in September of this year.

JH: I guess the issue no longer … what it was because the ethnic balance has shifted, so many of the Indians left.

SO: Dramatically so.

JH: They went to the west coast of the United States. Many of them. Some to Australia.

SO: So did you in any way see that the Commonwealth, or the Secretary General, could play a part in trying to mediate in the Sri Lankan civil war?

JH: I think he endeavoured to. It came to a head those two or three years I was out of office. I didn't come across it as, say, Kevin Rudd or Julia Guillard would have been. It was a role there, yes. I can't make a judgement as to how influential that role was. I'm sorry.

SO: I'm just aware that the mechanisms that the Commonwealth put in place with the creation of CMAG after all out of the Millbrook summit of 1995 and that whole oversight and the agenda of supporting democratisation or the return to it. But there's also the whole question of the Secretary General's good offices, his private diplomacy to …

JH: Well, that's always … and if you have the right person who is good at this then that can be a like a secretary general of the United Nations, the Secretary General of the United Nations can do wonderful things in particular situations. And I'm sure that the Secretary General of the Commonwealth in some situations can do that. But …

SO: Did you have a view on the efficacy of Don McKinnon as an SG?

JH: Well, he had lots of background and I don't know that I can pass a conclusive judgement. He was very attentive to African interests.

SO: Yes. Well, there were a particular number of African interests, there was Sierra Leone, there was the Gambia, there was Zimbabwe, there was the issue of Cameroon and Rwanda wanting to try and join the Commonwealth at that particular point. I've often been struck the extent to which the Commonwealth is an African problem solving institution.

JH: Well, this is part of it; it is one of the dilemmas. I go back to Zimbabwe, but I was quite heavily involved in that. I got involved in some quite lively discussions on it and it was obvious that southern African countries just were not going to align themselves with something that passed a harsh judgement on Robert Mugabe.

SO: Sir, did you have particular debates with the Blair government about this?

JH: No, the Blair government and I were agreed. I mean, I thought the attacks that were made on Blair by some of the southern African countries, on Britain, was just ridiculous. This wasn't a conservative thing, and, as I say, Helen Clark had exactly the same views on this as I did. She just thought it was outrageous.

SO: It's been said that the Commonwealth faces challenges going forward over whether a values based organisation it either now abides by the rules of the charter, or it just dwindles into ever greater insignificance.

JH: Well, I think Zimbabwe was a failure. If you were looking at the democratic institutions we laid down certain markers when it came to Fiji, we laid down markers when it came to Pakistan. But we didn't lay down markers when it came to Zimbabwe. Well, Zimbabwe was suspended from the Commonwealth; but the whole idea was that it was going to be suspended and then Commonwealth good offices were going to be used to try and bring about democratic elections in Zimbabwe and that didn't happen.

SO: Robert Mugabe has accused the Commonwealth on being harsher on Zimbabwe than it was on Pakistan because of the events of 9/11; that because of the launching of the 'Coalition of the Willing' into Afghanistan and the whole dynamic of the Iraq war, Pakistan then became a geopolitical anchor state. And therefore that there was less international criticism of flouting of democratic norms, military dictatorship and authoritarianism in Pakistan that what was going on in Zimbabwe.

JH: I don't agree with that.

SO: Okay.

JH: I'm not lauding what occurred in Pakistan. I think the persecution of minorities in Pakistan, the intolerance displayed towards Christian and other minorities in Pakistan, the treatment of women in Pakistan is appalling. I've got no sympathy for that at all. But Zimbabwe was a classic opportunity for the good offices of the Commonwealth to achieve an outcome consonant with Commonwealth values. Here it was a country that had obtained majority rule after years of minority rule and with the support and intervention of old Commonwealth countries like Australia. And we get overwhelming evidence that the rules are being violated and there's a resistance to doing anything about … we had no alternative but to suspend Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth which that troika meeting in London agreed to do.

SO: Sir, did you talk to Malcolm Fraser at all about this?

JH: No, I didn't. I didn't do that.

SO: I know that Sonny Ramphal came through London and that the Secretary General Don McKinnon tried to get him to use his private good offices …

JH: I didn't know that. I'm not saying he shouldn't have done it, but I just didn't know that. But that wouldn't have made the slightest bit of difference. The South Africans were not going to shift their decision.

SO: How far were you able to link up with Matthew Neuhaus when he was head of the Political Affairs Division at the Secretariat? Was that a useful point of information for you and for your officials?

JH: It could have been for my officials. I knew him, but I didn't know him well.

SO: Sir, what do you see of the value of the Commonwealth going forward then, do you see it going to be splitting more 'old Commonwealth' versus 'new Commonwealth'?

JH: No, you misunderstand. I'd have to say this again. I don't see a dichotomy between the old and the new; it's just that the relationship between the old Commonwealth countries has always been, and will always be, closer and more intimate than the relationship across the body. And when I talk about that relationship, it is not only the relationship as a group but also the bilateral relationships between different countries. It's just who we are. People identify, we had the Lowy Institute doing a poll recently on attitudes to other countries, and notwithstanding the fact that we only sent 10% or something of our product to the UK, Britain and Ireland still came out right at the top of countries that people in Australia and New Zealand, where they naturally identify with. It's just who we are, it's the history and you can't ignore that.

SO: I was going to go onto to say that it's particularly because the Commonwealth is now identifying itself, because of the Charter, as a human rights value based association. And some well informed observers identify opening up of tensions between older Commonwealth members who adhere to a values based system, and a newer Commonwealth that is more resistant to embedding in legislation, intrinsic political rights …

JH: You get me into another area of scepticism. I'm not big on international declarations of human rights either, because I don't think they really are effective. I am a bit of a cynic with some of those.

SO: Well, if they're not implemented, they just stay part of declarations and process.

JH: Yeah, but in the end it's what countries decide within their own borders to do.

SO: Yes.

JH: And that's really what's most important.

SO: It is indeed. One concluding comment: others have remarked that the value of the Commonwealth in its varying forms is precisely because it's relatively invisible. It operates below the radar, it provides, yes, that

indelible emotional but also practical connectivity, but its soft power status and mode of working is valuable.

JH: I think there is a lot of truth in that. I don't dispute that, there is quite a bit of truth in that. And I don't see the Commonwealth breaking up. I think the Commonwealth will continue provided people don't attempt to turn it into an organisation which it can never be and that is something akin to a mini United Nations. It is something that grew out of the British Empire and if you break the common link, the historical association and quite honestly if sometime in the future the headship of the Commonwealth is a matter of debate and you say we're going to elect the head of the Commonwealth, forget it. It then becomes meaningless.

SO: Sir, you've talked about attitudes to the Commonwealth within Australia, the value of the Queen as monarch and head, and the communality that she provides for certain groups. What was your view of the Commonwealth Secretariat as, if you like, a beating heart of administration of this diverse organisation?

JH: You need a secretariat, as long as it doesn't become a 'make work' exercise. And as long as it doesn't develop an agenda which is out of sync with what the member countries want. Now, I'm not suggesting it has. I've met some very good people. I've met Mr Sharma a couple of times, I don't know him well. I think it's good and it's where it ought to be, it ought to be in London. It ought to be at Marlborough House. And I think it does broadly what it's meant to do.

SO: You mentioned very much a bilateral attitude of Australia's relationships. The Commonwealth also benefits from the ABC countries; Australia, Britain and Canada in their financial support for the Secretariat, and also financial support for the Commonwealth's small states programme. I just wondered if you …

JH: I'm all in favour of that. When I say I'm not a rampant multilateralist, it doesn't mean that I don't support a whole lot of good multilateral programmes. It's just that I don't think it's a good foreign policy for any country to invest its destiny in, hand over its destiny to majority votes in international organisations.

SO: Just coming back to value for the Commonwealth here within Australia: it likes to promote itself now as a values based association. The question of human rights and minority rights is very much part of the discourse; it's there in the Charter. Was the Commonwealth ever a consideration in the debates about Aboriginal minority rights here in Australia?

JH: One of the things you have to understand if you want to get the Australian mood, most Australians see this country, rightly in my opinion, as one of the few countries that has been continuously democratic for more than 100 years. And although it's made mistakes and it's got plenty of blemishes and it can be criticised like every other country it doesn't take too kindly, for good reason, to listen to too many lectures from international bodies about human rights abuses. Sorry. Now that may not be the view you've got from other people you've interviewed …

SO: No country likes being lectured.

JH: No, no, no, no, no country does but we have, in our view, better reason to resent it because we have actually had a democratic system in this country for a long time. We did actually give women the vote in Australia much earlier than they got the full franchise in Britain or America.

SO: That doesn't surprise me. No, my grandmother didn't get the vote until 1930.

JH: That's right. Because of her age?

SO: And because she was married.

JH: Yeah, there you go. Well, here it was 1890 in South Australia and New Zealand. These are ancient things now but they help explain the intuitive rejection by many Australians of outside criticism. Human rights did not arrive in Australia in 1945 with the Declaration of Human Rights. Unfortunately the human rights dialogue around the world now is conducted in terms of it all started with the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights. It didn't. There was no declaration of human rights around when Wilberforce started campaigning against slavery.

SO: Indeed. **Sir, I'm obliged to ask what value, what pressure, the utility or otherwise, is there of the Commonwealth? This project is very much trying to set the Commonwealth in context. It is not trying to say the Commonwealth was overwhelmingly important, it's actually trying to explore while it wasn't important in these particular aspects, it was of …**

JH: Well, once again you have to look at… you have to know when you're talking about the Commonwealth, what are you talking about? You're talking about the Commonwealth as the 52 member body, full stop.

SO: Yes.

JH: Or, are you talking about the influences of our bilateral relationships with other countries that happen to be Commonwealth members?

SO: Yes.

JH: Now, which is it?

SO: Well, it doesn't have to necessarily be one <u>or</u> the other.

JH: No, obviously if it includes the second, it's hugely influential. But I tend to … the way I think about it, although it's unlikely the Commonwealth would disappear and our relationship with Britain and New Zealand, for example, would be unaffected, but the truth is that there was a Commonwealth influence, there was an Anglo-Australian influence in, for example, when I decided, my government decided to commit military forces to the operation in Iraq which was incredibly controversial. It is true that the US/Australian alliance was very important and was a dominant consideration; but it is also true that the fact that the British were also involved made that decision somewhat more acceptable in Australia.

SO: As well as the size of the British commitment.

JH: Yes, and the size of the British commitment.

SO: Because it was over 30,000 troops.

JH: 45,000 at its peak. Yeah, it was huge. And this came through a lot … well a number of people said, 'Well, it's good that the Brits are there as well as the Americans.' Now, yeah, they did. But is that the Commonwealth? I get back to my entry point into this whole discussion that there is a difference, and it's an error to try and morph the one into the other because it's a separate emotion.

SO: This question of the Commonwealth, as you've identified, is it means different things.

JH: Yeah, it does.

SO: The very words 'the Commonwealth' provide a 'catch all' description, yet …

JH: The Commonwealth to me is the larger body and it's a multiracial organisation; it has a common historical association with the UK and it more or less subscribes to democratic values and it's been quite effective in imposing these. Certainly the Gleneagles Agreement had a big influence on sport, there's no doubt about that. That was a very difficult controversial issue in Australia, particularly the cricket. And in New Zealand, of course, it was more heavily rugby. Rugby was important in Australia, but not quite to the same degree. But that's the Commonwealth. The word "commonwealth" is really a word which prompts thoughts of a group of friendships and associations with other countries. Australians don't go around all day thinking about our bilateral relationship with Britain or New Zealand. Of course not. But here's a simple example today where on the front page of the Australian is that story about co-locating certain embassies. That means to me … that's perfect common sense. But Australia would do that with Britain, but I don't know that we'd do it with many others; we might do it with New Zealand or Canada. You know, we're not going to do it in any of the huge embassies. I mean there is no way we are going to do it to our embassy in Jakarta or Beijing but it makes sense in some other cases where we are happy to, saves them some money. You share buildings … and because you have shared intelligence services; so much of our intelligence, and cables and all that kind of stuff.

SO: Yes.

JH: It's a very, very important part of the day-to-day representation overseas. Well, when you've got that sort of stuff occurring, why not co-locate?

SO: Exactly. You've got an extraordinarily intimate relationship.

JH: Exactly, a very intimate relationship. I mean, I found this out very much while I was prime minister because intelligence gathering was happening all the time. It was so critical after 9/11. And the best weapon against terrorism is timely intelligence.

SO: Yes, it is indeed. Going back to your point about the Commonwealth, as a catch all phrase, and it means different things. I'm very struck by the way that the Commonwealth has evolved from that earlier

intergovernmental association that conducts bilateral relations, as you've identified, into then the semi-official and the unofficial Commonwealth of the professional organisations. These include civil society organisations, and the NGOs.

JH: There used to be quite a strong legal link.

SO: Yes, the Commonwealth Lawyers' Association, the Parliamentary Association, the Magistrates' and Judges' Association, are all very active.

JH: They're very important links and they can have an influence, quite an influence. Certainly I think they've had an influence; I suspect they've had quite an influence in some of the tumult in Pakistan.

SO: Yes, indeed, and also there's been considerable support from the Commonwealth Magistrates' and Judges' Association to the judiciary in Sri Lanka.

JH: Yeah.

SO: And the stand-off between the Chief Justice and the Rajapaksa government. But it seems that if the NGOs are civil society organisations using the Commonwealth as a basis for grass roots activism and pressure on governments, there's certainly a tension from elected governments to feel that they have the mandate from the people, rather than these unelected NGOs which could have external support. So there are different tensions within the Commonwealth organisations and governments now that perhaps were not as prevalent in the 1990s.

JH: Possibly so. It could be. See, I've been out of power for six years so a lot changes in six years.

SO: Did you have a particular view of the choice of venue of Sri Lanka last year, following on from the Perth CHOGM of 2011. How wise did you feel was the decision to go to Sri Lanka for the heads' meeting, so soon after the civil war?

JH: I tend to agree with it. I didn't feel offended by that.

SO: You felt that it really was a chance for Sri Lanka to show how far it had made progress?

JH: Yeah, exactly. And whenever you have that you bring the hordes of journalists who are going to ask questions and everything. So there's a down side as well as an upside for the host.

SO: Well, there is indeed. It could be said it gave those who don't necessarily have a voice in wider Sri Lankan society, access to the international media.

JH: I always think that you shine a media light on these things. You always know when the jaws of a dictatorship are closing and the media are shut out.

SO: So it was a chance to pry those jaws open?

JH: Hmm.

SO: Sir, thank you very much indeed.

JH: Okay.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]