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INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

INTERVIEW WITH MATTHEW NEUHAUS

SO: Sue Onslow (Interviewer)

MN: Matthew Newhaus (Respondent)

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow talking to Mr Matthew Neuhaus, Australian Ambassador in Zimbabwe, at Senate House on 5th June, 2013. Matthew, thank you very much indeed for coming to talk to me. Please, I wondered if you could begin by saying, how did your interest and engagement with things Commonwealth begin?

MN: My real engagement with the Commonwealth began in late '85/1986 when I did my MPhil in International Relations at Cambridge University. I chose as my topic the negotiation of Zimbabwe's independence and particularly the Commonwealth role in that, especially through the Lusaka CHOGM and the subsequent Lancaster House negotiations where the Commonwealth's role has often been rather undersold, but was actually quite important. And recently I had the privilege of a breakfast with Andrew Young, in which we recalled that engagement as well.

But the other reason for doing the subject at the time, was that I was someone who had spent a lot of my childhood in Africa and had already had my first diplomatic posting in Kenya at the time. But the reason for picking on Zimbabwe was more because of the lessons that could be learnt from that, from the bigger issue of South Africa at the time. And indeed subsequently, when I returned to Canberra, I did write a paper on that, and I do believe that there has always been quite a nexus between developments in Rhodesia/Zimbabwe and South Africa. And actually, at the time, I think the Zimbabwe experience was quite important in terms of assisting in a more positive way forward on South Africa, which looked hopeless at the time, and also in terms of the Commonwealth's engagement, because the Commonwealth's success in Zimbabwe at that time emboldened it on South Africa.

SO: Well, certainly British and American documents bear out that they very much hoped that the unlikely, but successful negotiations over Lancaster House and the multi-party elections of 1980 could provide an example of transition to a multi-racial South Africa, as you say, offer the possibility of a copy trajectory for South Africa. Richard Moose (Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs under President Jimmy Carter) was very keen to emphasise this point in 1980, in the context of the Cold War.

When writing your paper, did you have in mind the question of how to deal with land from the Kenyan example – underlined by your time there? A particular and different approach to dealing with the land question was embedded in the Lancaster House settlement on Zimbabwe; land alienation also remains a key point for indigenous peoples in South Africa.

MN: Yes, I think that's absolutely right. Although I think there is a significant difference now between Zimbabwe, and indeed Kenya which was the model at the time for Zimbabwe, and South Africa which is more of an industrial state and where I think land has moved into a different place.

Very few people see land, or the reallocation of land, as fundamental to the social and economic future of South Africa. But in Kenya, where it was reasonably successful, although perhaps one tribe in particular, the Kikuyu, most benefited from it. I had been involved indeed in an Australian aid project as late as the 1980s which was focussed on reallocation of land, and indeed in Zimbabwe it was seen as much more fundamental to the economic welfare of people.

I think part of the problem for Zimbabwe, which did have more of an industrial base than Kenya, was that by the time that the land invasions happened by early 2000, in fact, that too was a country which had really moved beyond land as the fundamental for wealth. And indeed the result has been actually to push Zimbabwe backwards in terms of its economic development, because of a lot of reallocated land remains idle, despite the debate going on now by Ian Scoones and others about a reallocation of land, and donors like ourselves putting a lot of money into agribusiness development. No-one really believes that the land is going to be the driver of wealth in the future in Zimbabwe. People are now focussing on the mining sector and reindustrialising.

SO: If I could take you back please to your diplomatic career? In the 1980s, after doing your MPhil at Cambridge, you then went to Port Moresby?

MN: I did.

SO: And thereafter it seems you had a short stint in Canberra, but then went as First Secretary and then Counsellor to the Australian Mission in the United Nations. Did your work there have a particular Commonwealth dimension to it? I know that you were involved in international legal and disarmament security issues.

MN: Yes, not particularly. And indeed the Commonwealth's engagement with the UN has grown a lot more in the last decade, and especially during the time of Don McKinnon when we would every year go to New York and we would have the CMAG meetings there and we would have meetings with foreign ministers there. So that was something that really developed more recently. At that time, no. I did cover Africa issues in the Security Council issues, such as Somalia and Rwanda and so forth, but we did not approach these, at least from an Australian perspective, with any sense of a Commonwealth engagement. Nor did we in those days have those regular meetings that are now happening in New York. The only significant Commonwealth engagement was the beginning, and it was an Australian initiative, of what was called the Small States Office, largely for Pacific and Caribbean and Indian Ocean states, which has been a great Commonwealth initiative and one that people sometimes forget how important it was. And it's one of the building blocks as to why smaller states see the Commonwealth as very valuable.

SO: But just in terms of Australia's view through DFAT of the value of the Commonwealth: given Australia's relative size, it could be said it's the regional hegemon in the Pacific. And it has great power relations so that it doesn't need the Commonwealth in quite the same way as small states and others further down the hierarchy in the international system necessarily do. So how in that particular time did Australia see the value of the Commonwealth?

MN: Not particularly. In fact my first CHOGM was after my time in New York when Prime Minister Keating was our prime minister and I remember him saying as he left the Auckland CHOGM to go to an APEC meeting, "now I'm going to a real international conference." *[Laughter]*

Auckland was my first CHOGM. The argument with Britain (ironically defending France and the USA rather than its own activities) was over nuclear testing – this was the discussion, going late into the night at officials level. The ultimate formula in Para 21 of the Auckland communiqué was, "the overwhelming majority of Heads of Government condemned this continued nuclear testing..." "These Heads of Government urged the immediate cessation of such testing." So the Commonwealth helped to build the momentum for the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

That was the meeting at which of course Nigeria was suspended over the Saro Wiwa affair, and that was Mandela's first meeting. At many levels it was the birth of CMAG. That was a very significant meeting for the Commonwealth. So I have to say for Prime Minister Keating *[laughter]* all of that went past him. But at that time we were running for the Security Council, in what turned out to be a failed bid, and Gareth Evans was foreign minister and I was working very closely with him at that time and was using the CHOGM to do lobbying.

It's interesting because I have been closely involved with the two subsequent CHOGMs that Australia hosted: the one that was supposed to be in Brisbane but became Coolom in 2002, and most recently the one in Perth. And at both those times, by that time I think ironically the Commonwealth was seen as of more value to us for other agendas that we were wanting to achieve internationally; and certainly the CHOGM that was just held in Perth was largely driven, the desire for it, because it was certainly not Australia's turn, but its desire to hold it, and to hold it in Perth, was largely driven by a UN Security Council campaign and the desire to use it to reach out to a lot of countries, especially in Africa, that Australia had neglected for quite some time. And given the result in terms of the vote we got it was, we would say, an outstanding success.

SO: How much of that was the personal policy and agenda of Gareth Evans?

MN: Well, both Kevin Rudd and Gareth Evans, you know, in terms of the Security Council campaigns and of course the one which we'd lost, Gareth Evans had left the scene and it was inherited by a Liberal Government that really wasn't very interested in it. So there was a real stepping back from it and so the resources weren't put into it. The more recent one, even though Kevin Rudd lost the prime ministership, he continued as foreign minister to drive it for quite some time and certainly the commitment across the Labour Government and, indeed more deeply in the Department of Foreign Affairs, was so deep that we were on a trajectory to win, and the policy building blocks had been put into place to achieve that. Including an Africa Strategy which was the thing I worked on when I left the Commonwealth Secretariat

at the end of my term there and returned to Australia. I was pulled out for three months by Steven Smith as foreign minister to actually put together an Africa Strategy as part of our broader UN SC strategy.

SO: Just in terms of where foreign policy and its conceptualisation sits in Australian politics: does the Department of Foreign Affairs have a considerable degree of autonomy to drive, to shape and to frame policy agenda? Or is it very much, obviously depending upon personalities as well as the complexions of the Government, within the direction of the Prime Minister's office?

MN: That's a very interesting question and I think it waxes and wanes. When I returned from being High Commissioner in Nigeria in 2001, I was briefly back in the Department but quickly moved to Prime Minister and Cabinet International Division when an opportunity came up. Because it became very clear to me in the post-Gareth Evans era with the Liberal Government that John Howard had concentrated a lot more power in Prime Minister and Cabinet; and interestingly we really drove the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting out of Prime Minister and Cabinet and the Department of Foreign Affairs had very much a subsidiary role there. So my role in Prime Minister and Cabinet was actually to drive our CHOGM policy objectives, and of course the issue of Zimbabwe was a big one for us.

More recently though, and you might think this somewhat counter intuitive, given that we have in Kevin Rudd a prime minister who was heavily engaged on foreign policy, but he couldn't do everything and be everywhere. And also, with the shift to Julia Gillard, who was less interested in foreign policy, there was a definite shift back from Prime Minister and Cabinet to Foreign Affairs. Particularly, and often you forget the importance of the secretary of foreign affairs as well as the minister and we had a very powerful secretary in Dennis Richardson, who had been a former ambassador in Washington and a very senior civil servant. So when we came to the CHOGM in Perth, I set out before then, heading off to my ambassadorial appointment in Zimbabwe a CHOGM task force, policy task force, so the policy task force was run out of Foreign Affairs, with Prime Minister and Cabinet just adding value to it. And the logistics task force was run out of Prime Minister and Cabinet in a separate way.

So I think that illustrates that this waxes and wanes and so I would certainly say in more recent years Foreign Affairs has reasserted itself. What will happen under a new Liberal Government is hard to say. But given that, if Julie Bishop were to become foreign minister, she is very active and engaged and has a lot of autonomy, and Tony Abbot certainly initially as prime minister, we would be, I believe, more likely to allow this to happen. And indeed there has been an article in the Guardian only this week that basically says that there will be even more authority given to Foreign Affairs to lead the foreign policy process. So certainly that's the trend; having been strongly centralised in the early 2000s under John Howard, it's gone back to Foreign Affairs.

SO: On the big push to develop the Africa Strategy then, situated within your Department: did you have particularly a Commonwealth dimension, or was it regionally focussed? I was just wondering how it was conceptualised. Was it driven by marketing strategies, commercial links for reaching out in terms of ideological political influence?

MN: That's a very interesting question. I think the thing that's most important in this is to be conscious that the foreign minister at that time was Stephen Smith who came

from Perth in Western Australia, and there has been a really major growing mining engagement between Australia, and particularly Western Australia, and Africa. And so you had a foreign minister coming on board. Alexander Downer, as the previous foreign minister, did not take a particular interest in Africa and what engagement he did have indeed was largely through the Commonwealth because of membership of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group. But under the Howard Government there was no interest in playing a big role multilaterally. The focus was very much on our region: issues like East Timor, Solomon Islands, the engagement with China and Japan. But of course with Kevin Rudd setting the broader policies settings of wanting to engage more multilaterally, campaigning to be on the UN Security Council, engaging on climate change, there was definitely a desire to, and need to, engage with the wider world which would include Africa. But on the issue of Africa itself, much of it was left by Rudd to Stephen Smith; and Rudd was focussing on the bigger picture like climate change, and the G20 in particular became very big, our engagement with the G20. So the commercial link was important and when we developed the Africa Strategy the Commonwealth was seen as a platform, a natural platform, that we had in Africa from which we could engage further.

So we basically had two platforms. One was the Commonwealth and one was the commercial and mining engagement. And then the first big issue to be dealt with was, would we be prepared to extend our development assistance to Africa? And given the commitment to moving to 0.5% and the fact that we had given so much development assistance into the Pacific, that was at saturation point, and that Asia was moving ahead, Africa coincided with the two other pillars. So you ended up being able to use the development money, much more than we expected to have, than when we were first doing the task force work. But some of the thinking definitely piggy-backed off the commercial engagement and it piggy-backed off major companies. Companies, like Rio Tinto, who have major mining engagements in places like Mozambique and Guinea, and other companies, BHP Billiton, which has a strong South African connection anyway.

SO: And Mozambique.

MN: And Mozambique. So all of that came together in a strategy. But where the Commonwealth was important, and this was why Australia pushed to hold the Perth CHOGM, and it was no coincidence that it was in Perth and that there was a big business forum alongside of that was, the Commonwealth was seen with what is it, 19 African Commonwealth countries as a really good base, a natural base for us to engage with broader Africa.

SO: Ok, thank you. Just to go back to the 1990s when you became High Commissioner to Nigeria, as well as Sierra Leone, Gambia and Ghana. Three of those were suspended from the Commonwealth from '97, so was there a particular Commonwealth dimension to your work as Australia's representative? Were you used as a conduit, as a supporting role to CMAG's and the Secretary General's 'Good Offices' in trying to establish platforms and bridges back into the Commonwealth?

MN: Very much so, Sue. To put this in context; at the time, our High Commissioner in Nigeria was our only post in the whole of West Africa. Yes, I think British people often find that surprising. I was nominally responsible for 23 countries in West Africa and I only had two other Australian staff members.

SO: So the rest were locally engaged?

MN: All the rest were locally engaged. We had a post of a total of about 15 people. You can imagine the consular engagement and we also had a growing mining engagement. But it shows where Australia has come from, both in terms of its own diplomatic reach, but also its sense of that part of the world. In fact the Secretary at the time, Ashton Calvert, was even of the view that perhaps we didn't need a post in West Africa at all. But then I went there with the Abacha regime, you know this is one reason that a fairly young and junior person often takes such a job, as I was, if I might say so at the time. I like to say it was more of an outpost than a post, and there was a big debate whether we should follow the Canadians who had closed in Lagos and pull out of West Africa altogether.

SO: So how did that fit within Australia's broader diplomatic representation across Africa?

MN: Well, we had posts in Kenya, South Africa, Mauritius and Harare at the time. We didn't have Addis Ababa. Obviously we didn't have Accra and of course we did have Cairo. So it was our only post in West Africa and we had a few down the southern-eastern side. Now, the Commonwealth was a big focus of the work. We'd just come, and indeed one reason for not shutting the post was precisely because Nigeria was such a big Commonwealth issue and John Howard had come in and was already wanting to host a CHOGM to coincide with the 100th anniversary of the formation of Australia. That was going to be the Brisbane CHOGM later in Cooloom. We had actually wanted to do it for the year 2000, but that slot was already taken with the Durban CHOGM in '99 and so we went for what then became the 2002 CHOGM. But be that as it may.

So clearly we weren't going to shut in the midst of all that and indeed, in terms of my formal accreditations, it was Commonwealth countries. As you have pointed out, at that time both Gambia and Sierra Leone were very much on CMAG's agenda, as well as Nigeria itself. The Ghanaian relationship for us was one of a growing mining engagement but all the other formal accreditations except Senegal were Commonwealth countries. Cameroon had just become a member, but I didn't get accredited to there, but I did engage with Cameroon. So the Commonwealth was a big focus, and in particular, when Abacha died and the opportunity was there to encourage the return to democratic government, we were quite active on that and very supportive of the Commonwealth teams as they came through. Obviously Chief Anyaoku, being a Nigerian, had a particular interest, even to the point where, in between observing various rounds of the elections I would keep the Commonwealth Secretariat's equipment at my High Commission [laughter]. So it was quite fun to do!

SO: What were your observations as an Australian High Commissioner of Chief Anyaoku's style, his approach to 'Good Offices', his support for the CMAG process?

MN: I am a bit of a fan of Chief Anyaoku. I think Sonny Ramphal is where it starts for me. Obviously I don't go back to the earlier days. But I interviewed Sonny Ramphal when I was at Cambridge about his role in Zimbabwe and he has always been a great inspirer and speech maker. Chief Anyaoku had a more diplomatic style, but he was very accessible. Even as a fairly junior ambassador, on my way to Nigeria I had a call on Chief Anyaoku. Now it might have helped that I had also helped organise his programmes when visiting Australia, but at that point he could not travel

back to Nigeria, for fear of what Abacha might do to him. So he was always very interested to stay in personal touch with the High Commissioners.

Interestingly too, we may come to this later. The other person I had a meeting with was the Queen. Because there used to be an old custom that where the Queen was the Head of State of a country, and of course she remains Head of State of Australia, she would meet with her Ambassadors if it coincided appropriately; and she was extremely interested as well in all that was happening in Africa, and at that time it was mostly over in Nigeria because of Nigeria's status. And Chief Anyaoku, as soon as the opportunity was there, he took it. I remember very well when Abacha died. I was actually at the OAU summit in Ouagadougou of all places, and most of us were there. He was due to arrive and when he didn't arrive, people started asking questions and then we heard that he'd had this heart attack whilst using viagra and then everyone knows the story as they say, he was entertaining two Asian ladies. Then we all rushed back, those of us who were at the summit, and to my surprise, actually they didn't close Nigerian air space so we all managed to get back fairly quickly. And then the amazing thing was that General Abubakar, who was the senior general, took over, and he was a man of a very different calibre. The interesting thing was that within a week, he had a meeting with all the major Commonwealth High Commissioners. We were still High Commissioners because they were only suspended; they never actually were expelled. And I remember having this meeting with Abubakar, and of course the British did and of course the American Ambassador did and the Chinese Ambassador and a few others. There were about 10 of us who he met with and quite a few of them were Commonwealth, and I remember saying to him "You know well it would be good if you could send some signals, release General Obasanjo," who was well known. In fact I had worked a bit with Malcolm Fraser, our former prime minister who was a very close friend of Obasanjo's, and he said to me when I went on my posting, "you've got to get Obasanjo out of jail." I said "I think that might be a bit beyond me, Mr Fraser," and he said "Well, you've got to try." [Laughter]

SO: And had you tried?

MN: Indeed. We had become very friendly with Stella Obasanjo during that period and had been quite active on it; in fact I even raised it with General Abacha when I presented my credentials. I must say that was a bit of a chilling moment, because General Abacha was the sort of person who, when you went to present credentials he wore black sunglasses, so you couldn't see into his eyes. He had a pistol beside him on the table, and you were slightly nervous that he could pick up this pistol and shoot you at any time. [Laughter] It was just that sort of environment; it was quite bizarre. But anyway, of course, Abacha's reaction was "Well, you know this man is in jail because of serious charges against him, plotting against the country." So we'd actually engaged on that issue.

Anyway, Abubakar responded very well on three points I raised with him: (1) release of Obasanjo, (2) engage with the Canadians because they were out (Abubakar himself had been trained partly in Canada, so that was quite useful), and (3) move to elections and regularising your status with the Commonwealth. And within the month Chief Emeka Anyaoku was out there as part of his 'Good Offices' to engage with General Abubakar. Kofi Annan came from the UN as well, they both arrived at the same time and there was a major gathering that I was at, a dinner connected with it up in Abuja. And things moved very quickly, Obasanjo was released from jail within about two weeks and his wife rang us up and said, you know, you must come and join us at the celebration at our home in Abeokuta. This was of course my first time to

meet with him and we had the privilege of not only going to the major celebration but going back to his home afterwards and I was able to have a one-on-one. At that point I said to him "Well, General, do you think you might now run again for politics?" And he smiled at me and he said "Isn't Nigeria an impossible country to govern?" And I said "Well, of course if anyone knows, you'd know." [Laughter] But I have to say, you know, then steam built behind Obasanjo. One thing that was very curious was that in the early days, we were obviously very enthusiastic for Obasanjo because of the whole Fraser/Obasanjo relationship over South Africa and the Eminent Persons Group, once again through that Commonwealth lens, but the British were very suspicious about Obasanjo. They were not at all enthusiastic.

SO: When you say the British, are you identifying the British High Commissioner, his staff, the...

MN: Yes, the British Government. The British High Commission, yes. The British High Commissioner and his staff were initially very reticent and I understand also that the FCO were pretty negative, from messages we were sending backwards and forwards. I think their preference at the time would be that there might be a civilian person to emerge, and of course they may have thought that it would need to be a Northerner. I don't know, but eventually they did come around to Obasanjo.

But you know, if I might say so, not unusual for Britain. It is always a bit reticent about who would be the next person. It's a bit like their attitude towards Morgan Tsvangirai, which has definitely got more positive in Zimbabwe in recent times, but they started off really questioning his capacity to run. So it's interesting. I'm a great believer though in identifying the sort of leader who has decency and has, in my view of course, some commitment to Commonwealth values, but also strikes a chord with their own people, what we call charisma. I think you need leaders with charisma.

SO: If I could just take you on a slightly tangential approach: talking about the Commonwealth High Commissioners' network that exists in post. How valuable did you find it in Nigeria? Indeed, did you find it, because as you say, you had multiple posts that you were supposed to represent? Was that a useful source of knowledge-networking for Australian diplomats?

MN: Yes, I think for Australian diplomats it can be useful. It partly depends on how much the Australian High Commissioner himself uses it and it partly depends on the post. It's certainly very valuable from a Commonwealth Secretariat point of view when you visit a country. When I used to travel with Don McKinnon, and even if I was travelling without Don McKinnon, we would make a point of meeting with the High Commissioners as a group and it was always invaluable because you saw that debate. Funnily enough, where it is most valuable for me is currently in Zimbabwe where, of course it's not a Commonwealth country, but I coordinate the Commonwealth group and we meet now on a pretty regular basis, at least every two months and we have a special speaker, normally a prominent politician or the Chair of the Electoral Commission and so forth and we have a very open discussion. And why it is invaluable, particularly in Zimbabwe is, it brings together the key SADC and African players with some key western players, like Australia, Britain, and Canada. Of course the Americans aren't there, but we have other ways of engaging with them. And it brings them together in a way that, because it's Commonwealth, no one feels dominated by the other. And I think this is one of the enduring values of the Commonwealth. Indeed at the last meeting I was very struck by the Kenyan

Ambassador saying to me afterwards “This is far more valuable than even our AU meetings.”

And it certainly has enhanced our understanding between us and SADC over what we would see as the marker for free and fair elections. It has also helped because each of us host in turn and we all have our own different contacts so we’ve been getting political people from across the different divides. So that too has really added to it. So it can be invaluable and it certainly has been in Zimbabwe.

SO: If I could ask you in terms of your personal chronology about joining the Commonwealth Secretariat: you made reference to working as Director of Political Affairs for Don McKinnon. Could you comment please on the contrast between his particular style and approach to ‘Good Offices’ with what you had experienced and witnessed with Chief Emeka from your posting in Nigeria?

MN: Well, of course under Don McKinnon Good Offices became much more regularised and I think this was a major initiative which we saw too as part of a Coolum initiative. Australia was very supportive of this. And you will remember there was this high level panel that came out of Durban that reported into Coolum, and so in my division we set up the Commonwealth Good Offices Section and a chap called Victor Pungong, who sadly died at a very young age, was the initial Head of that and as a Cameroonian, extremely effective. And under Don McKinnon, he really drove Good Offices in a very regularised way you know, we would have our regular meetings and things were done with a Good Offices tag.

I think under Chief Emeka it was a little more *ad hoc*. Good Offices was only in its beginnings and I think we need to credit Chief Anyaoku with Good Offices coming to the fore, as we also should credit him with pushing the two-term issue for presidents and the multi-party agenda which has been so important in Africa. But certainly under Don McKinnon in my time there, it became very regularised and it became very much at the centre of our activity. And we also linked it more and more into CMAG so that we began this tradition, which has now been formalised since the Perth CHOGM and the further reform of CMAG, of reporting on, essentially reporting on Good Office issues under other issues of interest to ministers. Also under Don McKinnon we reached the high point of our special envoys, in terms of numbers of special envoys. We even on one occasion engaged with people like Lakhdar Brahimi and so forth. We had a gathering of our special envoys and we discussed how we went about the work of that. Now this is not so strong at the moment because, we don’t have as many special envoys working away. I think we have Don McKinnon in the Maldives and Fiji has gone a little bit into abeyance, at least as formal Good Offices. So we came to a bit of a high point and a better organised point and I think it is something that the Commonwealth is good at and should definitely be more of a focus of attention.

SO: So, on arrival as Director of Political Affairs Division, was there a concerted review of how Good Offices should be strategized? You said that there was a creation of a Good Offices section.

MN: The recruitment of the first, what we call a Head of Good Offices Section and two other staff members. So it was carved out of the Political Affairs Division and we recruited people specifically for the task.

SO: How early on was that instituted?

MN: Within my first 12 months. So it happened in the course of 2003. I arrived in October 2002, it had been a decision of the CHOGM in February that year and we did the recruiting and interviews while I was there, so it was all done in 2003. It was all bedded down in the course of 2003.

SO: Had there been very much discussion amongst senior officials in the run up to Coolum that this should be institutionalised?

MN: Yes, it was in the report of the High Level Review Group.

SO: Yes. Had you been an initiator in that?

MN: No, I wasn't an initiator. At that point I was working with the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and I was providing advice to our senior officials working on it. Max Moore-Wilton was in fact the Secretary of Prime Minister and Cabinet; was in fact our man on the High Level Review Group.

SO: So, in terms of Don McKinnon's style towards 'Good Offices', how much would you say the failings of the S-G's 'Good Offices' in fact associated with Secretary-General McKinnon's decline in Mugabe's eyes?

MN: Yes. Look, I think that's the unfortunate thing. Zimbabwe came to define Good Offices, and as a result people have lost sight of a lot of successes. I think first of all McKinnon had a good style for Good Offices. He was very outcomes-orientated, he was very engaged and he was more than happy at any time to pick up the phone to leaders and opposition people. And being a politician, and I don't think only politicians are like this, you can have certain diplomats who are sensitive to politics, but being a politician, he really did understand the interplay of government and opposition. In fact we used to run the workshops for Commonwealth countries on government and opposition and I think that's another area that we need to do more on. It's really quite invaluable and we used to do it with the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, and their involvement was important.

But you know against the so-called failure of Zimbabwe... but let's say Zimbabwe was a failure and I will come back to that, because I'd say Zimbabwe is still a work in progress, given where I am at the moment. We had a success in the Maldives. Now I know Maldives is back to being a problem, it's the nature of these things. But we actually saw democratisation in the Maldives and a change of government. We got a constitution in Swaziland, once again, it's still a job that's not finished, but it moved from being essentially a dictator monarch to at least a constitutional monarch. We had a success on Zanzibar, which everyone has forgotten about now as a conflict, but was at the time, people were carving one another up. There was significant conflict in Zanzibar and particularly between Pemba and Zanzibar. Once again, Zanzibar could come back as a problem, but I think that Commonwealth engagement not only helped with the political issues at the time, but it was that there was a severe terrorist threat underlying Zanzibar as well, given the Islamic nature of the society there and its connections into the Middle East and so forth and I think helping to resolve that conflict helped there.

Guyana was also a success. I remember my first meeting, indeed the very day I took over the job, Don McKinnon had me to lunch with Archbishop Paul Reeves, the late Paul Reeves, Valerie Amos and Clare Short and we discussed Guyana. And Guyana

looked like it was going to blow. And then we spent a very active next few years working on Guyana. Now Guyana still has its tensions, but no-one sees it as a crisis point anymore. Once again there was a very nasty sort of drug-running, terrorism angle growing in Guyana. And, there are other issues in Commonwealth countries too that maybe didn't quite become formal Good Offices. In Uganda there were some issues and so forth, but another one where we had a special envoy was Cameroon, and once again there was a stress there with Cameroon and Cameroon is still a work in progress. It hasn't democratised as much as we would want, but it hasn't blown up in a crisis since. So as against the Zimbabwe problem, I would say that the Commonwealth's record on Good Offices has not been bad. Fiji is another work in progress as well, and we mustn't forget about Fiji when we are talking about Good Offices. Zimbabwe did leave the Commonwealth, but that has never meant that the people in Zimbabwe think of it as having somehow left the Commonwealth.

SO: It sounds like 'the South African people had not left the Commonwealth, even if Verwoerd did in 1961.'

MN: It's very like South Africa. And even the MDC, in its policy document that came out only a month ago, has a section that says should we be elected we will seek Zimbabwe's re-admission to the Commonwealth. So, I think what has happened, like South Africa, the Commonwealth stood for principle; and as it stood firmly for it, in doing so, it lost a member. Could Don McKinnon have done it in a different way? Probably yes. Did Don McKinnon's lack of experience in Africa not help? Probably yes. But would Chief Anyaoku have faced the same crisis. Probably yes.

SO: How much micro-management was there from the Secretary General for Good Offices? I am just wondering the extent to which particular staff had a specific autonomy, that you knew there was an identified problem and so initiated contacts? How did the process work?

MN: Well, first of all Don McKinnon was not a micromanager. I would say he was the best boss I ever had, because he knew how to be engaged and we haven't even by the way talked about Pakistan because this was reminding me about Pakistan, which once again, you could argue was actually quite a success for the Commonwealth because over that period we got Pakistan back, after going backwards and forwards. But what would happen, is that we would meet every week in a political meeting. We would go through the big issues of the time, we would go through where we were on, where our special envoy's activities were and where we were up to and Don would give broad sort of guidance and we would just go to it in the Political Affairs Division and within the Good Offices Section.

He also was very good at leaving his special envoys to get on with their job. So he gave Paul Reeves quite a lot of autonomy in Guyana and I think Paul did an excellent job there. Tun Musa Hitam in Maldives had a lot of autonomy on managing the Maldives issue and as a Muslim, I think that was a very sensitive choice. Ade Adefuye who was actually Head of Africa Section was mostly handling Swaziland and Zanzibar and he was left to take his head a lot on that, with some guidance from myself. But Don was very good at choosing important special envoys. He had a former prime minister of Canada in the Cameroon...

SO: Joe Clark.

MN: ...Joe Clark, and once again, Joe was very much given his head on that one too. And he would take their advice and so forth, so no, he wasn't a micro-manager at all. But he gave guidance and support as needed and of course he was conscious of reporting back to CMAG and to the wider Commonwealth. It was once said to me that one Secretary General said – oh it was the best job in the world because he didn't have any bosses. Well, I think Don McKinnon was very conscious that there were 54 bosses! *[Laughter]*

SO: So, what was the input from the Deputy Secretaries-General or the Assistant Secretary-General?

MN: Well, we didn't have the Assistant General Secretary in my time, that's only been for the last year or so. And it is essentially an administrative role. Under Don McKinnon there were two Deputy Secretary-Generals and of course the most relevant was the political Deputy Secretary-General. For most of my time there was Florence Mugasha who had been head of the public service in Uganda and she was also responsible for administration in the Secretariat. So she spent relatively little time on political issues and Good Offices Issues, and focussed on administration which Don had really given her as her role. And the other Deputy Secretary-General was an economic one and their role would generally be to provide support to Winston Cox, and then Ransford Smith. Their role would be to provide support. If we were to identify a Good Offices mission that would really be helpful, a couple advisors in such and such a role, technical advisors and technical support, they would come up with it, but they had relatively little engagement on the decision making.

SO: So what was Amitav Banerji's contribution?

MN: Oh, his was important, because he was Chief of Staff to Don McKinnon and he had a crucial role. Amitav is first of all a first-class diplomat, but he was also a very experienced Commonwealth Secretariat official and he knew the history of things, more so than anybody and certainly more than Don and myself.

SO: So having that institutional memory was important?

MN: Institutional memory is invaluable and this is why I am one of these people who say it's all very well to have rotation policy in the Commonwealth Secretariat, but you do need some good institutional memory as well and it benefits from people like Amitav Banerji who had been there some time. And of course that was something that Chief Emeka Anyaoku had; was a real strength for him. I mean Don McKinnon brought a fresh, new approach which I think was important but of course he missed that sort of institutional background that was quite invaluable for Emeka.

SO: If I could take you from Good Offices onto this question of CMAG and the use of the Troika. Yes it's getting back to Zimbabwe, but Zimbabwe since 2000 has posed a significant challenge for the Commonwealth, and the work is ongoing, as you've said. Reading Don McKinnon's memoir, *In the Ring*, it's clear the extent to which the Troika seems to substitute for the particular role of the Secretary-General. Can it be said that it also diminished the role of CMAG?

MN: Yes. I think that the Troika was a mistake. I was there when it was created and one thing I was determined in my time, and I think we've got to this point, is that it having not succeeded as a mechanism, that we should never go back to a Troika.

And the reason I think it was a major mistake is the Commonwealth benefits from a diversity of views and working hard to build a consensus from that diversity of views.

The problem with a Troika is that it really minimises a diversity of views, especially as happened in the Troika that we had of having two Africans and a Westerner. Now what happened was this. As we were approaching the Coolum CHOGM, Zimbabwe was the big issue and we had a meeting which I was at here in London, of the Committee of the Whole. And we had a side discussion on how the issue might be handled at Coolum. Now by that time CMAG was stuck on Zimbabwe, partly because Zimbabwe was a member of CMAG, and even getting it onto the agenda, which happened just in December 2001, they finally managed to push it onto the agenda. But it was clear that CMAG was going to be blocked on this. Personally I think the mistake was, that was only going to be a temporary thing. I think later on it would have been easier. The following year, post-CHOGM with Zimbabwe no longer there, CMAG could have handled it. But then there was this feeling that, well this has elevated itself, it's got too big, it's become too big for foreign ministers, heads are going to have to handle this.

So then this idea of the Troika came up because Troikas were fashionable. Other international institutions use Troika ... the EU was big into Troikas and AU was using Troikas. So there was this discussion, Australia was part of it. And rather reluctantly, because John Howard was very reluctant to buy into this Troika mechanism, but the Secretariat and Don actually did push the idea of a Troika. Anyway, the way it played out was when it came to CHOGM itself, the thought that the results of the elections and the Commonwealth Report, the Heads of Government, when they were meeting in the retreat, said, 'Well, it's better that this report goes to the Heads rather than CMAG. Let's make a Troika of the Heads.' Then when the report of the election was so adverse and the three Heads had to come here to London to meet (I was not at that meeting, I was still in Canberra at that time) in the drafting there was a mistake because they agreed to suspend for 12 months. It was essentially Obasanjo, (Mbeki) and John Howard. John Howard came with very, very strong riding instructions because we were appalled at what was the obvious manipulation of the electoral result in Zimbabwe, as well as of course, the report of violence. And don't forget, we had two very senior Australians who have gone on to have very distinguished careers, Kevin Rudd and Julie Bishop were both on the Commonwealth Observer Group.

Anyway, when they drafted the decision, they drafted it with this reference to 12 months. And that was a mistake for suspension, because there was then a dispute over this 12 months and Zimbabwe got into this way of thinking that, 'Oh well, all we have to do is hang tough for 12 months and then we'll be off the hook.' And there was no mechanism there for properly referring it on. And because then there was what was seen as the half-term, six-month Abuja meeting, which was a dreadful experience, especially for John Howard who came back from saying "I'll never meet again." By this time I was with Don McKinnon. So we were faced then at the 12-month point with "What do we do now about the suspension?" Because nothing had changed, in fact things had got worse. And that's when Don McKinnon did his round of consultations and I was with him at the NAM summit where he spoke to a lot of leaders and then he had phone calls with those who couldn't meet; including the controversial phone call with Mbeki, which no-one witnessed. I witnessed the meeting with Obasanjo; I was there and I know exactly what Obasanjo said, but no one witnessed the phone call with Mbeki. So we only have Don's word for it; in the end that Mbeki agreed to the suspension continuing. It was the obvious thing. And it

really didn't matter in the end whether Mbeki agreed it or not, because by then there was certainly a broad view, and I can count for that, I was keeping the list, of across the Commonwealth, the Caribbean and others, that really we've got to keep Zimbabwe suspended until we get to CHOGM, and then we will see what we can do. But, you know, that was where there was the big dispute about what Mbeki said and what he didn't say, and his officials in SADC were very upset about this and we had some very difficult meetings here.

Anyway, we went through with that. I remember Don at the meeting with High Commissioners and a few of the SADC ones protesting against this sort of continuation of the suspension and Don wrote me a note saying "how long can we cope with this?" And I said "We've got to just cope with it to the end, there is no choice." So we got to the CHOGM in Abuja. And then you see, the Troika has collapsed as a mechanism and what just happens then, and this was Obasanjo's idea, it was a very good idea, was let's get six people, six of the Heads together as a committee, and I was in fact secretary to that committee, so I drew up the list and I had two African colleagues, Victor Pungong and Ade Adefuye who I've mentioned, with me. On that committee was Australia and Canada, was chaired by Jamaica, P J Patterson who was excellent, South Africa, Mbeki was very reluctant to part of the committee but Obasanjo said you have to part of it, Chissano from Mozambique, India (who were very low key): there were 6 members. Anyway, I think it's there. We got together and there was a consensus in that committee, of which South Africa and Mbeki was part. It was sort of like a mini CMAG at Heads level in a way, that things have not changed enough. There must have been a Pacific member for balance, but I can't remember who the Pacific member was now, possibly Samoa.

Chretien and P J Patterson played particularly helpful roles. Obviously you had John Howard at one end and Mbeki at the other and Chissano. Those three were the key members, and then they reported back to the Heads in the retreat and that was when the suspension was formally extended. Then of course what was most unfortunate was the way that Blair, who left the CHOGM early, briefed the media - and this always happens, you know it - but he briefed the media that this was a victory for Britain. And that's when you had the SADC revolt and Obasanjo then had to - it's mentioned in Don's book - had to really push hard to make sure we didn't get a SADC statement that came out at that same time as the Commonwealth consensus. But there we were. Of course I was with Obasanjo and P J Patterson when they rang Mugabe and Mugabe at the other end said "Well, if this is what you're going to do to me I'm leaving the Commonwealth." And poor Obasanjo, because he's such a great African, he just looked at me, shaking his head and said "I've lost him, there's nothing more I can do". But you know, both P J Patterson and Obasanjo, and they were the crucial players in the end, were very determined to stand for Commonwealth principles and not have, somehow, Zimbabwe escape just because it was African. And I thought that was something very admirable. But as for the Troika idea, it was a bad idea at the start and I hope it never comes back again.

SO: If I could just ask you about the collapse of the Troika as a mechanism. How much was it predicated, or complicated by different personalities and outlooks as well? As you say, the Africa element and the old-Commonwealth element of John Howard?

MN: Yes, and of course one has to remember that John Howard himself was very old-Commonwealth. If he had been a sort of Chretien in Canada, you know, it might have helped but he was a bit more like Steven Harper is now. John Howard had a

history which Mbeki had never forgotten. Howard, even during the Fraser years, still supported sporting contacts with South Africa. He was very much from that very conservative side of things. And also Howard had a hearing problem. I remember when working for him, he never wanted to speak particularly to foreign leaders on the phone [laughter] because he couldn't hear them very well. And I'd been in a retreat situation, and he's literally going "Ehhh?" to Don. I remember this, "Eh, who's that over there? What's he saying?" [Laughter] He really couldn't hear. There was one of his ears ... so that even made communication, apart from accents and so forth, very difficult for him. But also he's a strong-willed person with very fixed views, and anyone would say this; he is not a natural negotiator, it's not his style. So that didn't help. But it was very easy for him to see it as him against the two Africans, and you know the whole set up is wrong. The beauty of CMAG and indeed even this six-member committee, with CMAG now nine members, is you've got to have at least two from every major region of the Commonwealth.

So while it may be a little bit harder to get to a consensus, you are going to get a much better consensus and I think that is what is so important in the way the Commonwealth works, its representative nature, and that's why a Troika is a very bad idea. The other thing that makes the Troika a very bad idea is that it just depends on chance who you might have. You may have CHOGMs, because it just depends who was hosting and who's chaired a Commonwealth, you may be lucky and have them from completely different parts of the world but you could theoretically have three African CHOGMs in a row [laughter] and that would look bad for a Troika.

SO: Just following up on that: the eventual compromise then at Abuja that you describe, can it be put down on the scorecard of success for Don McKinnon's Good Offices?

MN: Well, I would put it as a success for the Commonwealth and principle for the Commonwealth. And it has remained a bench mark for Zimbabwe's return to proper democratic process. It's a benchmark which Zimbabwe hasn't yet met and as a result, there is still a feeling that Zimbabwe is not a full democratic member of the community of nations, and that's why these coming elections become so important.

SO: So the affirmation of the Latimer House Principles, coming out of Abuja, was part of Don McKinnon's determination to put markers down?

MN: Absolutely, I mean that was something running in parallel. That wasn't related necessarily to Zimbabwe, but it has proved extremely helpful and it has been one that has now, you know, in several other countries that's been an issue. It has come up in the context of Sri Lanka, of Pakistan and of Fiji for example.

SO: I'm very conscious of time, but if I could just ask you the extent to which on Zimbabwe, how much your work as Director of Political Affairs and Don McKinnon's work as Secretary-General was complicated by trying to stay out of the cross-fire between the British Government and the Zimbabwe Government?

MN: I don't think that was a major problem or concern. I think this is over egged, this cross-fire between the two.

SO: McKinnon makes specific reference to this.

MN: He does, and one thing about Don is, he did have a bit of a problem with Britain and that comes through in his book. *[Laughter]* There were a couple of occasions when he did a couple of things *[laughter]*, he didn't tell me before he went public on them. He said "Matthew, because you would be trying to stop me doing this sort of thing, whereas I'm fed up with the British over X or Y." He does have a bit of a history with Britain. Overall, my own view was, and continues to be, that Britain has in the post-colonial era and working with the Commonwealth, generally tried to play a pretty positive role. Now there was the Margaret Thatcher period on South Africa, which I think was a difficult period, but you know, with due regard to Margaret Thatcher, first of all on Zimbabwe, she pulled things off and even to this day, we know what the sort of Tory backbench can be like and she went completely against where they were on Zimbabwe for a much bolder approach. And on South Africa, while she played a tough role and I remember this issue at Delhi where we had to agree that the consensus was everybody, minus one country, on an issue *[laughter]* relating to South Africa in the communiqué when there was a reference to a financial sanction. Anyway, in the past there had been these negotiations in which Britain had stood aside on some issues relating to South Africa. But overall I think there was a Clare Short issue, and there continues to be. When I presented credentials to Mugabe, his discussion with me went along the lines of "We used to be such good friends. Where did it all go wrong?" And he blamed Tony Blair and Clare Short. It all went wrong with Tony Blair and so forth. And I think there is some truth in that and I think Tony Blair did not show sensitivity in his approach. I remember him at the retreat in Abuja even, picking up his despatch box at one point, in the middle of the discussion of Zimbabwe, so pretty sensitive stuff, and start working through his papers and clearly ignoring people like Mbeki who are going on ...

SO: That's discourteous!

MN: Exactly. So those sorts of things did very much irritate Don, with good reason. But overall in terms of diplomacy I don't think they made much difference. However, there was one big issue with Don and the British and he quite rightly never really forgave them for this. I don't think it was ever deliberate policy, but once again at Abuja CHOGM with Don under a lot of pressure obviously on Zimbabwe where he had held the line of principle, there was a challenge to his leadership. Normally as second term goes through...

SO: But Mugabe had been lobbying?

MN: Yes, Mugabe had been lobbying. He had got together with Sri Lanka and the fact of the matter is, whether inadvertently or not, there are quite a few officials in the British Foreign Office who had taken a dislike to Don McKinnon and it was being whispered about and rumoured that Britain would not be unhappy to see Don McKinnon unseated. Now there was never a government point of view; no British minister would ever have subscribed to that point of view, but it was unhelpful and the other problem was when it became apparent... it took a while and we had to get to Blair for it to be made clear that Britain wasn't supporting that. But by that point this challenge had got legs, and he actually faced a challenge from the Sri Lankan foreign minister, who by the way didn't turn up. It was Obasanjo who - and I had a very close relationship with Obasanjo, so this was always helpful I have to say - really took a very firm line of support of Don and rallied the Africans and others and said "This nonsense that may be coming out of South Africa and Zimbabwe and on Don McKinnon I'm totally opposed to that. He's got my full support." And so that was extremely helpful.

So those sorts of issues. Don has reason to feel the British were perfidious. Britain has a reputation to this day for being perfidious Albion in its diplomacy. I often think it's less conspiracy and more cock-up *[laughter]* because there is a sense where the British, you know, there's a lot of different forces at play within British policymaking.

SO: Absolutely. At the time, in defence of the Blair Government, it could be said there was a proliferation of international issues. There's certainly a change of key officials and ministerial briefs, which Don McKinnon makes reference to in *In the Ring*. Just 'when you've sat next to somebody and become accustomed to their style, their diplomacy et cetera, they go and change on you.' So that wouldn't have helped maintain the necessary rapport.

MN: Yes, and it is personal style. I can think of the differences of approach of Clare Short and Valerie Amos over the situation of Guyana. Even at their very first lunch, I was telling you about. Because someone like Valerie Amos, whom I have the highest regard for, you know with her Guyanan background had a much more sensitive understanding about what was happening there; whereas Clare Short was getting very annoyed with Jagdeo and wasting a lot of the money that Britain had been putting in as development assistance, and felt that we should be taking a much firmer line with them. So right down to the individuals involved.

I remember Mark Malloch Brown ringing me up on one occasion whilst I was at a meeting in Geneva to talk about the Maldives, and he said "I want you out there in the Maldives." This was at a crucial time in 2008 in the negotiations. And I did go out actually within two weeks. "I want you out in the Maldives to help at this moment." I said, "Look, I'm willing to go" - and by this time Kamallesh Sharma was Secretary General - "but I'd need to be instructed by the Secretary-General to go. And it all worked out well. I spoke to Kamallesh Sharma and off we went.

So different people will have different styles and will push things and people, as in Mark Malloch Brown and Valerie Amos understood the Commonwealth well and work well with it. Other people in the British system found it harder to use it, and this brings me to a scene that I'm now developing as we talk now about future Secretary-Generals and so forth. Britain is now such a multi-cultural country with some very senior Commonwealth figures who happen to be British Barons and Baronesses and leaders and politicians and so forth, but they are actually deeply rooted also in other parts of the Commonwealth. In my view the time is also coming when Britain should not be shy even of putting a British person up for Commonwealth Secretary-General. I know there has been this feeling it shouldn't, but maybe the best Commonwealth person could actually be here in London. That's not to say there are not lots of great candidates out there from other Commonwealth countries, but whenever you come to London you very much feel you are at the centre of the Commonwealth and to, conclude on this point though, what that means is also you see a lot of the debates about the Commonwealth actually happening now in the British system because there's the people who are influential in the British system.

SO: Matthew, I think I'm going to stop there because you need to get back to your family. But thank you very much indeed.

MN: Well, I hope that's helpful. As I say, I'm more than happy to do a second interview.

[End of Audiofile]