



University of London

INSTITUTE OF COMMONWEALTH STUDIES

VOICE FILE NAME: COHP Dave Steward

Key:

SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)

DS: Mr Dave Steward (Respondent)

SO: This is Dr Sue Onslow interviewing Mr Dave Steward in Cape Town on a very wet Wednesday, 17th April 2013. Dave, thank you very much indeed for agreeing to talk to me. I wonder if you could begin by saying, please... Having been born in Kenya then educated in Canada, did you form a particular view of the Commonwealth as a boy and young man?

DS: Before I do that, I'd just like to start with a story about Sonny Ramphal. When I was at the United Nations, after the very reluctant departure of Kurt Waldheim, everybody was casting about for a new Secretary General. Jeane Kirkpatrick – who was, at that time, the Ambassador of the United States to the UNO – had heard of this guy Sonny Ramphal, and thought he might be a good candidate. So, she asked her staff to set up an appointment with Sonny Ramphal. But, unfortunately, they got it wrong and instead of inviting Sonny Ramphal to this interview they invited a guy called 'Ramphul', [*Laughter*] who was the very flamboyant representative of Mauritius, at the time. He was renowned for his bright red socks! [*Laughter*] Ramphul said, "What's it in connection with?" "Well, we're interested in speaking to people about being candidates for the position of Secretary General of the United Nations." You can imagine his delight! [*Laughter*]

SO: [*Laughter*] When was it realised that this wasn't quite the gentleman they had in mind?

DS: Well, I think that after the introductions had been made, the penny dropped. [*Laughter*] Needless to say, he was very disappointed.

SO: Indeed, he would have been! I know that Sonny Ramphal was also disappointed not to have been appointed Secretary General of the UN.

DS: Okay, right. I started school in Canada, and Canada at that time was still very, very much a part of the British Commonwealth and the whole ethos that went with it. My Grade Three teacher, Mrs Dougherty, was of the opinion that nobody could ever surpass Queen Victoria in the role that they [the British] played in international and global affairs. There was, in fact, a national holiday on Queen Victoria's birthday, which was 24th May.

SO: Empire Day.

DS: That's right. At the time of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth, there was a great outburst of royalist fervour in Canada. I had the great honour of being called on to draw and establish the little golden coach and the royal montage around our classroom. So, my sentiments were strongly royalist. Then I actually went from there to school in England and I spent the rest of my prep school days in London. I then went to an English public school – St John's School, Leatherhead – where I spent three relatively agreeable years. The nature of such schools was naturally conservative: they all thought The Queen was a good idea and also [that] the Commonwealth was a good idea. So, I had very strong affinities with Britain and my education at school was, in essence, British, and I had a great affection for the culture and the history. I came back to South Africa in 1960 when I was 16, and I went to Stellenbosch University, which was a bit of a change.

I started at Stellenbosch in 1962 and it was a completely different experience, as you can imagine – in many respects, a very pleasant experience. My father's objective was to give me some emotion on the other side, the Afrikaans side. He was a diplomat, who had been posted in East Africa, Canada and then London. So, I arrived at Stellenbosch in the early 60s, when it was quite a different place from what it is now, and I really enjoyed it. It was an extraordinarily pleasant, lovely place: lots of academic stimulation and interesting politics. I did a not-very-demanding course centering on Political Philosophy – which is a wonderfully nebulous subject – [as well as] English and French. The whole objective of our Political Philosophy professor – whose name was Johannes Degenaar – was to urge young Afrikaaners to re-examine their values and their orientation in politics. My general response to that was reactionary. But I actually had lunch with him and a friend, one of my classmates, a couple of weeks ago. It was quite an interesting occasion: to see how, after the great gulf of years, things had changed, in that period.

I emerged from Stellenbosch University with a BA degree, some understanding of political philosophy, a moderate command of English [and] a smattering of French. [Laughter] I was still very young, so I decided that, rather than going into a career, I would be a journalist for a year. I joined the staff of the South African equivalent of *Time Magazine* – it was called *News Check*. The editor was a very feisty, liberal, *verlichte* Afrikaner by the name [of] Otto Krause. I had an interesting exposure to ordinary life in South Africa, because we covered stories in the Townships; we went to the rural areas and covered elections and all of the other tribal ceremonies of the National Party at the time. So, it was very interesting, but it was a bit of a strain because you have to meet deadlines if you are a journalist. I quite enjoyed the back room stuff and working out by-lines on articles that I'd written on Africa – 'War trouble in Mauritania' – or commenting on the great number of coloured teachers who were leaving South Africa to go to Australia and Canada, which I dubbed the '*Breyne* drain', *breyne* being the Afrikaans word for brown. And I enjoyed that but I was still very shy; I actually probably invented the concept of 'nerd' when I was at Stellenbosch University. I was quite tall [and] very thin; I wore extraordinarily thick spectacles and, I have to confess, I wore sandals with yellow socks. [Laughter]

**SO: I'm just thinking, was there any tweed in this particular ensemble?
[Laughter]**

DS: There was a tweed jacket! [Laughter]

SO: That's quite an image you're conjuring up!

DS: Now you have the picture! In any event, after a year with *News Check* – or nine months – I decided to apply to the Department of Foreign Affairs. I saw an advertisement in the *Johannesburg Star* and I cut it out and I sent it in. But with my father's contacts, I think I probably had a bit of a head start. I was also quite interested in international affairs, so I could answer most of the questions. I scored points because I read *News & World Report* rather than *Time Magazine*. So, I became a cadet at the Department of Foreign Affairs which was, again, very, very pleasant. The Department of Foreign Affairs was a wonderful place because the outcome of your career had actually very little to do with the energy or intelligence that you invested in the project. [Laughter] It was completely by happenstance. [Laughter] So, I went off to Australia – my first post was to Canberra...

SO: When you joined in 1966, the DFA was certainly a government department that attracted the English-speaking community in South Africa...

DS: Yes.

SO: ...more than the Afrikaans-speaking?

DS: I think it was about 50/50.

SO: Was there a cultural tension between the two?

DS: Not at all. The interesting thing about my career in the public service was that I was extremely English-speaking – because of my background, I didn't really speak much Afrikaans at that time – and it was never a problem at any time in my career. Nobody ever asked me what my political views were, or what party I voted for. It just didn't even come onto the radar.

So, those are two facets which I think are quite interesting, and I spent three and a half very pleasant years in Australia – another Commonwealth country – in Canberra, which was just like a big South African county town. But, as a young diplomat, it was lots of fun: Sydney was just around the corner, skiing in the snowy mountains, catching trout...

SO: So, you didn't pick up on any official criticism of South African...?

DS: Oh yes, a great deal. In fact, when I was there, we had a Springbok rugby tour of Australia and New Zealand. It really galvanised public opposition to apartheid. There were widespread demonstrations – huge marches along the State Circle up to our offices in Canberra. It reminded me a bit of some of the scenes of *Doctor Zhivago*, which was on at the time – or maybe a little bit afterwards. And I even had my house painted [with] slogans – 'Racist, go home' – and all of this, which got me on the Channel 9 News, so I was quite chuffed with that. [Laughter]

All of this just made me much more interested in the debate and the topics, and I met some really interesting people there. One of the Australian Labour

Party shadow cabinet members invited me back to his home in Melbourne, and it changed my idea of socialists – which had not been terribly positive. He was a really, thoroughly, decent man. But then again, his colleague – the shadow foreign minister at about this time – went to Communist China and returned, and made the remarkable statement, “Yeah, we got on very well with the Chinese. After all, they are a working-class government with principles pretty close to those of the Australian Labour Party.” [Laughter] This was China in the time of the Cultural Revolution! [Laughter]

SO: Hmm. He clearly had not digested what was going on there.

DS: But it was a fairly intimate place. So, our Ambassador invited Gough Whitlam to dinner or lunch on one occasion, with his colleagues - that was interesting. And, also, the Prime Minister, John Gorton, who was having an affair with his chief aid whose name was Ainsley Gotto. And by an unhappy geographic quirk, one of the main features of Canberra is a place called Mount Ainsley, so, the joke was, “Where’s the Prime Minister?” “He’s gone to Mount Ainsley!” [Laughter] Very Australian. [Laughter] So, the reality is that very few people knew very much about the subject of South Africa. Australia was very parochial at the time. I used to go and address the Rotary Clubs – the Rotary Club of Batemans Bay – and after I’d given them my best pitch, one of the guys stood up and said, “Yeah, Mr Steward, that sounds all very well and fine, but what the hell are you doing with all them bloody Biafrans!”

SO: As you say, quite parochial and ill-informed.

DS: Indeed. But anyway, it was a great experience. I came back to South Africa and I spent quite a lot of time here on the North American desk and doing parliamentary duty – so, going up and down from Cape Town to Pretoria and doing the parliamentary sessions and really enjoying it, but then also learning how the system worked and what the constraints were. Particularly, at that time, the developing struggle was between Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Information, which was under the leadership of Eschel Rhoodie. [He was] an interesting guy, who was quite clever. We played cricket against Information. He [Rhoodie] was a great sportsman, and he would bat a metre outside of his crease. He’d hit the bowling around, but one of the realities of cricket – and indeed of politics – is that if you bat a metre outside of your crease, you are going to be stumped.

SO: You are. You’ve stepped too far out of your safety zone.

DS: You’ve stepped too far out of your safety zone. Now, he made no secret of his political ambitions and of the very high opinion he had of his own performance and qualities. He let it be known, more or less, that Connie Mulder was going to become the next Prime Minister, and that when Connie Mulder became Prime Minister, he was going to become Minister of Foreign Affairs. This was really very brash and upfront. And he also, as the Secretary for Information, fell into the enormous pit of communicating on behalf of other government departments, because that is the great temptation.

SO: To try to be the mouthpiece?

DS: Yes. Now, if your political head, like Connie Mulder, is the crown prince, you can pull it off, because you have necessary power. But you alienate people immensely. One of the things that I subsequently learned was that, if you

communicate badly on behalf of others, they will forgive you, but if you communicate well on their behalf, they will never forgive you. [*Laughter*]

SO: Because you make them totally redundant.

DS: That's right! [*Laughter*] Anyway, I'll come back to that later. And so he was alienating people, and going up and down in the lifts of the Hendrik Verwoerd Building...I saw it was not only the Department of Foreign Affairs that was unhappy with Eschel Rhoodie, but it was a whole lot of other government departments. That brings me on to another reality of politics, and that is that you don't get fired for screwing up; you get fired for screwing up when you don't have anybody to cover your back. So, the reality is that, when the Information Scandal broke, had Eschel Rhoodie and Connie Mulder not made themselves so unpopular with the rest of the establishment, the establishment would have closed ranks behind them.

SO: As it was, they all folded their arms and smiled.

DS: They all folded their arms and smiled. They left Prime Minister John Vorster dangling in the wind. So, those are rather important things to learn as a young officer: to realise that this is what the world is actually about. It's about making alliances and not making enemies, and a lot of it is about positional play.

SO: Was this particularly how the game of politics was played here, in South Africa, or do you think that's a truism?

DS: I think that's absolutely universal. It's universal. And the other thing, too, is how very unwise it is to make no secret of your ambitions.

SO: I'd agree there. Naked ambition is never attractive.

DS: Not a good idea. So, anyway, then from South Africa I went to Canada, and I was called into the office of the head of the North American division and he said, "Look, Steward, one thing I must tell you is that we really haven't got an interest in what happens in Canada. But, have a good time!" [*Laughter*]

SO: So, did you feel you were being cast off to outer darkness and everlasting night? [*Laughter*]

DS: For me, it was very much like snakes and ladders. Roll the die and you step on a ladder or you step on a snake. This was a minor snake.

SO: At least you hadn't gone back down to square one.

DS: Then, as the Fates would have it... had Mr John Becker been a student of Greek mythology, he would have realised the danger of tempting the Gods, because he was then posted as the South African Ambassador to Canada! [*Laughter*]

SO: That's rather a delicious irony. [*Laughter*] So, when did you go to Canada?

DS: I went there in 1976.

SO: That was an interesting year to go and defend the South African interest.

DS: It was. In fact, it was just after the Soweto riots, so the situation was becoming very tense. I went across there, and Ottawa is...I don't know, have you been to Ottawa?

SO: I was there two weeks ago.

DS: Yes, well, you would understand. It's a great place to be as a kid, because you have a lot of seasonal change, lots of festivals – Easter, Halloween – punctuating the year, which make it really nice for a kid. But it is really boring. It's a really boring place. So, my parting advice to my Canadian friends – which I didn't give them, because I was a diplomat – would have been to erect warning signs on all of the approaching highways: "Turn off your higher brain functions. You are now approaching Canadian Capital Territory."
[Laughter] It's a bit unkind, because the Canadians are the nicest people you could ever hope to meet. So, when I watch Canadian cop and robber movies on TV – and there are some quite good ones – I find it very difficult to believe they've actually got crooks! And I've developed this idea that if you were to line up a Canadian, an Australian, an American, a Brit, an Irishman, what have you... with no distinguishing marks, you'd be able to pick out the Canadian immediately – by the look of vacuous goodwill. [Laughter]

SO: In terms of your professional responsibilities there, was it a tough diplomatic post?

DS: It was the toughest diplomatic post, because nothing was happening. There was no material to work with. I was the second-in-command of the Embassy, and so I ran the Embassy, but there was very little possibility of really achieving anything at that time in Canada. I took the South Africa desk officer out to lunch at one of the places in Hull, across the river, and wanted to get to know him. I didn't want to make any challenging statements. His name was Geoff Weir, [and] he was absolutely bristling with indignation. And I just said to him, "Well, you know, is there anything that we can do that will satisfy you?" He said, "No, not really." So, that was a bit discouraging.

SO: Well, you had a tough brief as a diplomat then, because after all, South Africa had moved troops into Angola and was being castigated at the UN and under huge pressure to withdraw.

DS: Well, we moved the troops into Angola with the support of half of the members of the OAU...

SO: From the January vote at the OAU Addis meeting, yes, which was evenly balanced...

DS: That's right, and with the support of and at the request of the Americans. Not quite as black and white as one might think.

SO: Were you aware of that? This question of whether you had American encouragement and support?

DS: Yes, I was aware of that at that time.

SO: Because I know that this was enormously controversial, with Pik Botha, your Ambassador to the US, only finding out what was going on from watching American television screens and then contacting Prime Minister Vorster, who said, "I have it on the very highest authority that we have American backing on this."

DS: Yeah, maybe I picked that up later, but I think that the orientation of the OAU was fairly well known at that time. The commander was talking about "the tiger with her ravening cubs" coming into Africa. So, yes, it was a very difficult brief but what I'm pointing out is there was nothing really to do: the doors of the Department of External Affairs were closed, virtually. There was a little work that you could do on the trade side, and you could address groups of Empire loyalists and this and that. But it was all extremely peripheral and very frustrating, and the image that I had of it was of the elm tree outside my office window dying of Dutch elm disease, which seemed to sum up the situation. [Laughter]. I then tried to urge our Ambassador to take a more activist role. He was a quintessential gentleman, who had been in the army during the Second World War – moustache, intelligent man, sensitive man... I said, "Look, you've got to go and try and put the case on TV. You can't expect Canadians to understand what's going on if we don't put our case." And he did, and he just didn't have the debating skills to make his point. He was carved up – little pieces of Ambassador all over the studio walls. Then he left. He was recalled to South Africa at the end of his tour, and I went to the farewell lunch for him at the Department of External Affairs and it was a little bit strained, as you can imagine. And he said, "I must apologise. I believe that I failed to do my duty as an Ambassador here because the relationship between Canada and South Africa has deteriorated to such an extent during my posting here." And they said, "Oh, no, it's not you as an individual." But it was an indication of the extreme difficulty of doing anything at all as a diplomat under those circumstances. Then, fortunately, I stepped on a ladder – or a ladder came and stepped on me, whichever way it was – and after less than two years in Ottawa I was transferred to New York.

New York was a completely different kettle of fish, because there one was dealing with real issues: negotiations on Namibia, where South Africa – although the villain of the piece – was the role player, so you had the raw materials of diplomacy that you could work with. I arrived just before the adoption of Resolution 435. I spent a lot of the subsequent three or four or five years working on the Namibian negotiations, which were very interesting, and which indicated, again, the bad faith of the West and of the five Contact Group countries. The reality is that, when Resolution 435 was adopted, Resolution 432 was adopted, too, which simply gave Walvis Bay to Namibia. This was pulled at a very late stage against South Africa, without really giving us proper warning – by the West, by the five Western countries on the UN Security Council – because that was the price that SWAPO had demanded for their even considering to go along with 435. It was absolutely illegal. There was not a respectable international jurist in the world who would have tried to argue that Walvis Bay was not properly a part of South Africa. It had been even before the advent of the Germans in the territory. I can assure you it is.

SO: I'm just trying to visualise...I know the importance of that deepwater port on the South West African coast, and I'm just trying to visualise, geographically, exactly where it is and its distance from what was identified as South Africa...

DS: Oh, it's a long way. It's half way up the coastline. But that is neither here nor there. It was part of South Africa in terms of international law – even the UN's own international lawyers admitted that – but it was simply given to SWAPO. It was then the first of a number of deep disillusionments with the West. The reality is that whenever SWAPO objected to anything, the West would come around to SWAPO's way of thinking, and they would re-double their efforts on South Africa to make the necessary concessions.

SO: In what way was SWAPO encouraged to elicit support particularly from within the Western contact group? What was the balance of opinion within that group? Was the Carter administration particularly sympathetic towards a particular African Liberation movement?

DS: Well, it's not just SWAPO. They were confronted by the Afro-Asian block at the United Nations – and, of course, the Afro-Asian block was being egged on by the Russians. So, it was enormous pressure that could be brought to bear on the West, and there were numerous indications of this. So, for example after we'd agreed to implementation, we went ahead with the invitation to the UN to send a military group to South West Africa to do the detailed planning for the implementation of the independence process. The leader of the UN group was a General Hannes Philipp from Austria, and they reached an agreement with the SADF on how troops should be confined to base and what the timing should be, etc., etc. But he went back to New York and the SWAPO said, "We're not going to accept it." So, Philip was kicked out. [Laughter] And they came along with an implementation plan which was egregious and completely one-sided. South African forces would be confined to their barracks in northern South West Africa and monitored by UNTAG, but SWAPO forces just across the border in Southern Angola wouldn't be monitored, but would have immediate access to the most populated part of the territory, if they wished so to do. So, there were numerous elements where what had been a relatively balanced agreement, drawn up with General Philipp, was twisted immediately into a very unbalanced document. This, I think, brought us to about the spring of 1979, and PW Botha was incensed over this. He regarded this as a breach of faith and he wanted to pull out entirely. In fact, he wanted to pull out entirely after the debacle with General Philipp, and then he announced that he was going ahead with the internal elections at the end of 1978. The West sent a Contact Group to see him with Cyrus Vance - I think it was Cyrus Vance – and persuaded him not to go for a UDI on the basis of the successful outcome of the election, as far as the internal parties were concerned. He then agreed that he would leave it up to the parties themselves to decide whether they wished to go back to the UN plan – which they did. But then with the next Implementation Plan, which was published at the end of February, there were further shocks, again, showing the degree to which the Secretary General and the West had capitulated to the demands of SWAPO and the African block at the UN. I think at the beginning of March PW Botha was keen to break on the whole issue, because he was an irascible man.

SO: Indeed. What was the diplomacy of South Africa's attempts to resolve this issue? Did you form particular alliances behind the scenes at the United Nations? Or did you find yourselves increasingly isolated? As you say, you were under pressure from an Afro-Asian block and from a particularly sympathetic administration in Washington which was predisposed to supporting racial justice in southern Africa.

DS: We found ourselves very much on the defensive throughout the Carter Presidency – the remaining part of the Carter Presidency. So, we were very disillusioned with the behaviour of the West within the Contact Group countries in 1978 and 1979. This led to a whole process of proximity talks and efforts to...Where I think the West did try to make constructive contribution to ensure that the demilitarised zone that we secured, etc., with all sorts of stuff that could detect movement through the zone. But it didn't really amount to very much. Then there were more proximity talks in Geneva at the beginning of 1980, I think, which ended in an inconsequential manner, but then of course Reagan came into office.

SO: Did the outcome of the Rhodesia/Zimbabwe settlement at Lancaster House and the subsequent elections influence you dramatically on the South West Africa question?

DS: Not really, no. I think this was firmly on another track at the time. So, in any event, the Reagan administration came into office the beginning of 1981 – yes, because the election was in 1980. That changed the situation. The Americans suddenly had an appreciation for our geostrategic concerns on the presence of the Cubans and what have you in Southern Angola, and they agreed to 'linkage' – that 435 wouldn't be implemented until the Cubans were withdrawn from Angola. So, my period at the United Nations ended in December 1982. In 1981, to my enormous surprise, I was made Ambassador there. I was only 37, and I think the reason is that nobody else really wanted the job.

SO: I can't believe that! [Laughter]

DS: I was crazy enough to accept the job.

SO: Surely it had a lot to do with the knowledge that you had gathered since you went to New York from Canada.

DS: Well, what I did when I went to New York was to try and find out how the old phenomenon of the anti-South African campaign fitted together, and I did. I'll get you a book here... This was the result of my analysis which I drew with my own hands...

SO: [Reading from book] 'Organs and sub-organs of the United Nations system involved in activities affecting South Africa'. This diagram is in *United Nations versus South Africa* by Jan C Heunis [Johannesburg: Lex Patria, 1986]. Did you contribute to this diagram?

DS: I made it.

SO: You made this diagram? It's on page 189.

DS: I did a 300-page analysis of this campaign against South Africa, and it was really clear to me that the Russians were absolutely, intimately involved in the whole process, at every stage.

SO: So, be it the Economic and Social Council, the General Assembly, the International Court of Justice, the Trusteeship Council, the Security Council or the Secretariat at the UN – it permeated every level?

- DS: Virtually every level. Virtually every speech in the General Assembly – the general debate – also included South Africa.
- SO: So, you attributed this entirely to the influence and the direction of diplomacy from Moscow.**
- DS: Not entirely to, but it was certainly enhanced by the global Soviet capability – the Rainbow Coalition, peace councils and allied organisations, anti-apartheid movements and what have you. It was an enormously complex thing, and each one of these bodies had council meetings and special days and weeks against this aspect of apartheid or that aspect of apartheid, whatever it may have been.
- SO: Dave, can I ask you...Did you identify any particular Commonwealth association or organisation within this multiplicity of associations, groupings, [and] committees?**
- DS: No, this was purely within the United Nations family, but there would have been very similar sentiments within the Commonwealth structures, too.
- SO: I'm just wondering whether there was any overlay of Commonwealth identity that you appreciated as a South African diplomat.**
- DS: No, not really. For me, this was... Well, I suppose, it was paranoia. We thought of inviting the American Psychological Association to set up an observer post in our mission, because it was one of the few situations where paranoia might be a normal reaction to your environment!
- SO: How far do you think this was a South African interpretation through Cold War lenses?**
- DS: I don't think so, no. The Cold War was real. It wasn't a make-believe thing at all. We know that because our forces were involved in Southern Angola as late as September 1987. In big, big battles, against the Russian- and Cuban-led forces. So, we had no... and I think subsequently, when the archives were opened, yes, Virginia, there was an intention to exploit proxy wars in colonial territories – Africa and elsewhere – and there was a National Liberation model, as well. I think this probably, obviously, added fuel to the fire of P W Botha's views on the 'total onslaught' [i.e. the belief that the South African state faced threats on every level of society].
- SO: Yes. So, you were at the UN until 1982 and then you were called back to Cape Town, or to Pretoria?**
- DS: Yes, I was. I returned to Cape Town and I was put in charge of what they call the 'Planning Division' but in effect it was responsibility for Namibia, Southern Angola, [and] working directly with the Minister, which I liked a lot. The reality is that ambassadors don't actually have much ability to change events; they are right at the end of the tentacle of the beast. They might send a stimulus up the tentacle and it might or might not impact on the brain, but it's very much a peripheral role. Many ambassadors completely overestimate their importance: because everybody else thinks they're important, they think they're important. And they send off all sorts of stuff to their headquarters saying which way the country should actually go. Most of the time

headquarters are not interested, but it is important to keep the headquarters briefed on what's happening.

So, for me, the important thing is getting to the heart of the matter, getting into positions where you can actually make a difference – very much behind the scenes – with real decisions. This was an ideal opportunity because I didn't really have to worry about bureaucracy. I hate bureaucrats. I didn't really work through the Director General or anyone like that. I was fairly junior – I was only a councillor – but I had a lot of freedom of movement, and operating on that front also meant it was very important for me to build up a good relationship with the South African Defence Force, which many of my colleagues didn't do. So, there was always a rather dismissive approach on the part of the army – the defence force – towards diplomats, whom they characterised as being 'the lavender power'. [Laughter]

SO: Dave, this is very much the era – as far as historians are concerned – of the State Security Council and the 'Securocrats'. Is that a misrepresentation of the dynamics of decision-making, in fact, at the heart of South African foreign policy and diplomacy at this time?

DS: Not at all. In fact, PW Botha was a very good administrator and he had quite successfully built up the SADF into a really effective fighting organisation, I would say. Really effective. They really knew what they were doing, and they were disciplined and also not unenlightened. They realised at an early stage that there couldn't be a military outcome: that South Africa couldn't maintain the status quo through military force. At an early stage, they realised that. But they were not good in communication [or] public relations and some of the more subtle arts...[Laughter]

SO: 'The dark arts' – is that what you're reaching for? [Laughter]

DS: No, they were quite good at the dark arts! They were not so good at the subtle arts. I managed to develop quite a good relationship with them. So, I spent a lot of time with General Geldenhuys – playing bridge with him on the way to talks with the Angolans, on the way to the operational area. I was the contact guy from Foreign Affairs with Jonas Savimbi, who was a very impressive man, and who commanded incredible loyalty from the South African Defence Force.

SO: That I knew, yes.

DS: They had a very high opinion of him. He was very charismatic.

SO: Yes. Very well educated, and a consummate linguist.

DS: Very well educated; a linguist. This was around 1984-85, and my son was born in 1984. I actually thought of asking Savimbi to be his Godfather, but then I said, "No, sooner or later he will sell him out."

SO: At this particular point, did you think that Angola could be carved up? That UNITA could dominate a separate entity of Angola, in Ovamboland or...?

DS: Not really, no. No.

SO: Okay. I just wondered if this was ever part of the scenario.

DS: No, it wasn't. The other reason is that Savimbi wasn't a nice man. Charismatic, but he was an African warlord. A good one – much more accomplished and impressive than most – but a warlord, at the end of the day. And I developed a good relationship with the Defence Force, where I think that they had more respect for me than they had for many of my colleagues. But even so, there were often strains. When I went up there they said, "Why don't you wear a uniform, Dave?" I said, "No. Soon as I do that, I'm part of your structure." [Laughter] And I was involved in the process leading to the withdrawal of our forces from Angola: the negotiations in Lusaka, the Mulungushi Minute and so forth. Then we set up a team together with the Angolans – a joint monitoring commission. There was always a Foreign Affairs guy that we chose to serve in the bush in Southern Angola. Derek Auret was our representative on the Joint Monitoring Commission and I used to fly out for meetings with the Angolans. It was very interesting because they always came to us for meetings, because we had food. We had food and drink. And it was significant that the military guys don't have a problem with one another. Even if they're so-called enemies, they belong to the same culture, actually. The soldiers don't have a problem with one another. Their guys... Their soldiers had problems with their diplomats, and our soldiers had problems with our diplomats. [Laughter] It's a fairly general phenomenon. But it meant that I had to also represent the Department of Foreign Affairs in difficult situations. I recall one lunch, soon after our decision to withdraw from Angola, where I was having lunch with the Administrator General at Windhoek. I was sitting on his left and General Georg Meiring – who was the officer commanding at that time – was sitting on his right. General Meiring was saying, "Ah, but I don't see why the army should be forced to give up these strong positions that had been won fair and square in battle and... Why should the army do it?" I just looked at him – he was a Major General and I was the equivalent of a Colonel – and I said, "General, you do it because that is the instruction of the civilian government." [Laughter]

SO: Yes. "To which you are accountable."

DS: Yeah, and his moustaches bristled but he didn't question it. [Laughter]

SO: The Commonwealth is nowhere in the scenario you are describing here. You're talking about hard-headed politics, hard fought battles on the ground, and that the Soviet-Cuban threat in Southern Angola was very real and ever present, and was a key factor in how any solution of the South West Africa problem was to be resolved.

DS: Yes. But now, getting back to the Commonwealth, [and to] the Eminent Persons Group in 1986. I think that you have to judge that against the background of what I've been mentioning. The deep distrust that PW Botha developed for the international community in general as a result of his experiences during the Namibian negotiations... He wasn't a guy who wanted to be pushed about. Then, if one considers the Commonwealth itself, the feelings of the government were particularly negative towards the Commonwealth. They dated back to the circumstances under which South Africa withdrew from the Commonwealth in 1961, where the Canadian Prime Minister John Diefenbaker played a particularly important role. I think [that], for many South Africans – especially those of English decent or the old United Party supporters – this felt like a great betrayal. I think they realised that

Botha was doing what he could to stay on as a member, and leaving the Commonwealth was a bit of a betrayal and it was seen to be the work of newly emergent independent African members of the Commonwealth and, of course, India. But then also, particularly, Canada, and then later Australia.

SO: So, PW Botha and the National Party held a very negative view of the Commonwealth.

DS: That's right, and there was a feeling that the old Commonwealth had been... South Africa had been part of that, had fought in the war with the British and the Canadians and the Australians, and so there was a very strong sense of rejection that white South Africans felt.

SO: Particularly English-speaking South Africans?

DS: Particularly English-speaking South Africans, and Afrikaners who were members of the United Party. There was a certain degree of animosity that developed, particularly toward the newly-independent countries but especially toward Canadians – because of the role that they'd played – and later to the Australians, because of the role they played subsequently with Bob Hawke and Malcolm Fraser, in particular. So, I think having Malcolm Fraser on the Eminent Persons Group was not a good idea. He was loathed. There was no problem with General Obasanjo, no problem at all. But the South African side loathed Malcolm Fraser.

SO: What was the opinion towards Anthony Barber? Was he seen as a representative of Britain, as he had been Mrs Thatcher's suggestion and was a former Chancellor?

DS: There was much greater sympathy, a much greater tendency, to listen to any representative of Britain because of Margaret Thatcher. There was a strong sense that she was prepared, at least, to take into consideration the reasonable concerns of all sides. There was a degree, again, of paranoia – maybe not paranoia, because it was well-based – among white South Africans at the time. One must understand that, from the end of the 1970s, there were huge changes in the country. Up until '78, when Vorster was Prime Minister and then for a short period as President, there was still commitment to the idea of separate development – this chimera, this illusion, that Dr Verwoerd had foisted on the country which gave whites the illusion that they had a solution to the problem. So, everybody, faithfully – even after Verwoerd was dead – kept on implementing this thing. And Vorster would say, "This is a problem to be solved by the next generation." By 1978, when Vorster fell from power, it was clear it wasn't working: it wasn't going to work. We needed a solution, and so PW Botha came along and he was a reformist. He said, "Fine. We must adapt or die. We've got to find a way to dismount this tiger we find ourselves on. We don't want to be ruling black people, but how the hell do we get off without being eaten? The rest of the world is shouting at us, 'Get off the tiger!' with not the slightest concern about what might happen to us in the process." That was very much the sense with the Commonwealth, with the exception perhaps of Britain.

The other countries represented really weren't concerned about the interests of white South Africans, and white South Africans naturally have a slightly different perspective. They had three main concerns. The first was the fear that, if we accepted a 'one-man, one-vote' outcome at that stage, then it

would be 'one-man, one-vote-once', as had happened in so many other African countries – that we would decline into corruption, dictatorship, ethnic conflict etc., etc. That was a real fear, particularly in the wake of refugees coming down from Angola and the Congo area and so forth. Then the second concern was that Afrikaners actually believed that they were a nation. The idea of national self-determination had been the central theme of their history, ever since they'd left the Cape, and they had twice fought Britain trying to defend that self-determination. And, you know, the Anglo-Boer War was the biggest war that Britain fought between the Napoleonic Wars and the First World War. It was bigger than Crimean War. It was actually bigger than the American Revolution: there were over 400,000 Imperial troops deployed in South Africa. But the question for Afrikaners – in the whole of the 20th Century, up until 1960 – was this desire of Afrikaners to re-establish their republic. So, now the world was asking them to give this up.

SO: Did English-speaking South Africans that you were involved with, in your community, have any similar sense of identity of nationhood with the Afrikaners?

DS: It was emerging, but not to the same extent. There was the beginning of a common approach later on.

SO: But did the Afrikaners community, that you recall, feel that British speaking South Africans could 'always go home'?

DS: I don't think at that stage, no, and I think that most English-speaking South Africans were orientating toward the kind of response that Smith, an English-speaking person, had in Rhodesia. So, there was fairly solid support to resist the demands being made by the rest of the world, although most English-speaking South Africans would have been happy to have some kind of qualified franchise and move in a direction... They weren't concerned about Afrikaner nationalism. So, they were, you know... The Progressives had this idea of qualified franchise, of course, which even by then would have been unacceptable to the majority of black South Africans. So, that was the second concern – that this couldn't survive in a one-man, one-vote situation. And Afrikaners felt just as strongly about this as Israelis feel about their right to national self-determination, and I think that's why PW Botha just couldn't take this step to give up sovereignty.

The third concern was the role of the South African Communist Party in the ANC. People now think, "Oh yeah, 'Reds under beds'", but in fact it wasn't... From my vantage point at the UN, I didn't think this was 'Reds under beds' at all. The reality – as we subsequently found out – was that virtually all of the members of the ANC National Executive Committee during the 70s and the 80s were also members of the South African Communist Party. We knew that the South African Communist Party had the classic two-phase revolutionary approach. First phase: national liberation under the vanguard leadership of the national liberation movement, i.e. the ANC, [which would] unite all factions opposed to the regime etc., etc. Then, with the success of the national liberation, the Communist Party becomes the vanguard party and then moves on to the establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat and a Communist state. Now, I've got not the slightest doubt that that was the game plan during most of the 80s. I think that, if we had had a settlement before then – which would have been impossible anyway, before 1990 – that would have been the path that the SACP would have followed, and the ANC would have come

along with it, with the continuing, existing support of the Soviet Union. And I wasn't terribly keen on this. [Laughter]

SO: I've gathered that!

DS: And it's still, by the way, the intention of the South African Communist Party. The South African Communist Party and COSATU still have this idea, I think, [of] an 'entry-ist' approach of moving South Africa beyond the 'National Democratic Revolution' to the Socialist Revolution. So, those were the three concerns – and they're reasonable concerns. One is confronting existential problems, and that is why it is also very important – within the scope of the discussion of sanctions – that people are not going to respond to sanctions if they think that their continued existence is at stake. They may be right or they may be wrong, but if that is what they truly believe, they're not going to change their policies just so that they can play cricket against New Zealand. It's not going to happen. And that is one of the reasons why sanctions was such a problematic approach in many respects to dealing with the South African situation. Something that Margaret Thatcher understood very well. Margaret Thatcher understood, also, what the factors were that were actually promoting change in South Africa at this time. A lot of people say, "Well, what change?" But in fact, the 80s were a period of quite dramatic changes in South Africa, starting with the labour reforms of the Wiehahn Commission at the end of the 70s, which extended real trade union rights to black South Africans for the first time. The tri-cameral Parliament was PW Botha's effort to get one of the legs off the tiger and to bring the coloureds and the Asians into a consociational system. And then, of course, the huge debate was, "What about the rights of black South Africans?" And it was a conundrum. In the meantime, by 1986, I think about a hundred apartheid laws had already been repealed. And what incensed Botha further was the complete lack of recognition by the international community of these changes which had been implemented. It might not have meant very much for the ANC or others, but they meant a lot for Botha's power base, and it led directly to the split of his party in 1982. But there was no appreciation of these dynamics by anybody other than Margaret Thatcher and later Ronald Reagan.

SO: Did you feel that Geoffrey Howe, as Margaret Thatcher's Foreign Secretary, was appreciative of these dynamics within South Africa? You're very much personalising the intellectual appreciations of Thatcher recognising the challenges and the geo-political strains on South Africa, and how it was necessary to try to support South Africa going through these changes. Did you feel that other British politicians were equally as aware?

DS: No, Geoffrey Howe didn't want anything to do with it. He was deeply opposed to the whole idea.

SO: He found apartheid morally repugnant and...

DS: And he thought it was a death trap: "Don't get involved there. You will get carved up, horribly." And, of course, he was right as far as the Eminent Persons Group was concerned, as things turned out. So, you have PW Botha, who was very unhappy about what he regarded as the *mala fide* of the West in the negotiations on Namibia... He was also extremely frustrated by the fact that these reforms that had cost him a lot, and that had directly led to the unrest in the country from 1984 onward and the split of his party, were

simply dismissed – not recognised at all. And it led him to conclude that nothing but absolute surrender would ultimately satisfy the international critics. No, the West would no doubt make a limp effort to hold the line somewhere along the road because they didn't want anything to collapse, but at the end of the day, the sense was that the West would shake its head sadly and say, "Well, they had it coming to them anyway." That was the sentiment, I think, that motivated P W Botha. The reforms that he introduced were the direct, I think...one of the main causes of the unrest. PW hadn't read de Tocqueville and didn't know that revolutions take place in situations not of repression, but of rising expectations. So, all of this poisoned the atmosphere incredibly in the run up to the EPG initiative. It was Margaret Thatcher's initiative, and I think that's why PW dropped his initial absolute opposition to it. I think she pointed out that it would be better than the alternative, so give it a try. And he did, and again that is an indication of the influence that she had. But also I think that, had Margaret Thatcher not been able to hold the line on more draconian sanctions at that time, the consequences might have been very negative, because PW Botha was just as easily capable of shutting down: dropping the shutters and moving into a very grim survivalist regime based on military strength, with a much greater potential – military potential – than North Korea, by the way.

SO: Indeed, because by that point you had nuclear capability, certainly, and had constructed at least five nuclear devices...

DS: We had six and half, but it wasn't the nuclear weapons that worried the Americans. It was the fact that we were really advancing very quickly with inter-continental missile capability. The Americans played an extremely important role: again, because they were prepared to take into consideration the reasonable concerns of South Africa. So, Chet Crocker played an incredibly important role in managing the whole Namibian process over a number of years. It wasn't going to be quick, but if anybody should have a statue to them in Windhoek it's Chet Crocker, because he really did play a masterful role in Southern Africa. He understood the dynamics and he understood the personalities. He knew how to adjust and to take into consideration real concerns, and [he] really applied considerable pressure, on the other hand.

SO: By the time the Namibia question was moving towards a conclusion and with the ending of the Angolan war – the parallel withdrawal of Cuban troops and the recognition of Namibia moving to independence with the Accords signed in New York in December 1988 – do you think that those regional scenarios were of critical importance in creating a more propitious climate for accelerating change in South Africa itself?

DS: Absolutely. Again, Margaret Thatcher also understood something which none of her contemporaries did: the really important impact of socio-economic change that was happening in South Africa at the time. The reality is that it wasn't a static situation. People think about apartheid as a monolithic black thing or big white thing [*Laughter*] that started in 1948 and stopped in 1994. But, of course, it wasn't like that: it was subject to the same forces and influences as any other political situation. One of the main ones was the dramatic changes that started to happen on the socio-economic front from 1970 onwards. We had reasonably rapid economic growth during the 50s – about 4.5% – but rapid economic growth in the 60s and in the first half of the 70s brought more and more black South Africans into the economy at higher

and higher levels. For example, in 1970, the black share of personal disposable income was 22% and the white share was 67%, and coloureds and Asians were the remainder. By 1994, the white share of personal disposable income had dropped to below 50% and the black share was around 38%, with coloureds and Asians and the rest.

Now, this might sound rather statistical, but it translated to quite a rapidly closing gap between relative incomes. Not that it's significant on a per capita basis, but it meant that large swathes of the consumer market were now controlled by black South Africans. So, it also meant that cities were becoming more integrated. The Verwoerdian idea of "unscrambling the omelette" was doomed to failure more quickly than it otherwise might have been. It meant also that whites began to realise that they could not manage the rapidly growing economy on the base of four-and-a-half million whites: more and more black people – just out of necessity – had to become employed in the economy. Hence the Wiehahn Commission report and the idea that, first of all, you had to have a proper relationship between management and labour. But then, also during the 80s, more and more companies – under the influence of the Sullivan codes and the European employment codes – started bringing black South Africans into white collar jobs at higher and higher levels. So, you would have a black bank teller working beside a white bank teller, with the same qualifications, doing the same job. No way they're going to go to separate restaurants; no way they're going to go to separate places of entertainment, or ultimately to separate suburbs, and the reality is that under the pressure of the socio-economic forces, apartheid, such as it was, was crumbling. Across a broad front, hundreds of thousands of black South Africans had moved into so-called white areas. Without being opposed. This was a really, really significant process. Government often came along, and what PW Botha called 'reform' was legislative recognition of what was already happening on the ground.

SO: I've got three things coming out of this. First, I'm very struck by the similarity of the language you've just used with that of de Klerk's autobiography, which I know that you helped him write...

DS: Well, I wrote it! [*Laughter*]

SO: ...[*Laughter*] To what extent are these arguments indeed your own arguments, or had you reached these conclusions with FW de Klerk?

DS: We have a symbiotic relationship. [*Laughter*] The other thing, too, is the changes in education. Again, if you listen to people, anything that was remembered from before 1994 was Dr Verwoerd's statement – taken out of context – in 1954 that, "Blacks cannot be trained above a certain level because they will be more or less hewers of wood and drawers of water." In fact, the situation began to change quite dramatically again at the end of the 70s. In 1980, just a little fewer than 30,000 black South Africans wrote the matric exam, and of those 15,000 passed. In the same year about 49,000 whites wrote the matric exam; probably about 95% passed. By 1994, 410,000 blacks wrote matric and 201,000 passed. That was now three times as many as white matriculants. So, by 1994, there were more non-whites registered in South African universities than whites.

SO: So, you're describing very powerful socio-economic forces at play here: shaping and reframing South African society. People often argue that

disinvestment was one of the factors that prompted the end of apartheid, because the economy was starting to stutter and falter and yet it needed to maintain its dynamism if there was to be a degree of peaceful change. The second factor helping to explain the end of apartheid is held to be the role of sport sanctions.

DS: Not at all. It would be foolish to say that sanctions had no effect: obviously, they were extremely unpleasant and they caused sometimes serious distortions in the economy. They led us to spend twelve billion Rand investing in Mossgas, which was not really a fruitful investment. And they cost about 1.5% per annum in economic growth. But at no time did they seriously affect daily life in South Africa. On the contrary, they had a lot of effects that were the opposite of intentions. It was, in effect, a classic example of the law of unexpected consequences: when you interfere with economic processes for ideological purposes, the result of your action is nearly always the opposite of your intention. Take, for example, the arms embargo. Because of the threat of the arms embargo from the beginning of the 60s, South Africa developed maybe the fifth or sixth largest armaments industry in the world. And not only did we develop the industry for ourselves: it was one of our biggest exports. Because of the oil sanctions, we bought up an enormous amount of oil at the beginning of the 60s at about \$1.50 a barrel and put it in gold mines. When the price went up to whatever it was - \$80 – at the end of the 70s, the government sold it and made a huge profit. It also spurred the government to establish Sasol, which was producing maybe 40-45% of the country's petroleum requirements. We could always get oil; it wasn't a problem. Although you had to pay a premium again, so... But that was the difficulty. Then, as for disinvestment, again the reality was so far removed from the theory or the perception that it's almost unbelievable. You take, for example, the investment of General Motors in South Africa. For all of the good people in the United States who thought they were punishing the horrible apartheid government by disinvesting from South Africa... They had this idea a whole lot of money would be pulled out of South Africa, the nasty whites would be punished and the good blacks would be rewarded, and everybody would be able to tell one another what good people they were, etc., etc. What were the realities? The only funds that ever came from Detroit to Port Elizabeth were £25,000 in 1926. All of the rest of the investment was locally-generated loans and locally-generated profits. It was worth about 600 million Rand, I think, by the time of disinvestment. Now, because of the enormous pressure on General Motors, they did disinvest, but what do you do? They had to sell it to somebody, and the only possible buyers were the white South African management. So, they sold it to the white South African management. But there was only one problem, and that is that they didn't have enough money. So, for the first time since 1926, money went from Detroit to Port Elizabeth – I think about 130 million Rand or so – to enable white South Africans to buy out an American interest at about a third or a quarter of its price! The company continued to make exactly the same Opel vehicles without losing a beat, except it was no longer subject to the Sullivan principles, so they could do all of the things they wanted to do, to rationalise, that they couldn't do before. They fired a lot of black and coloured employees and the company started to make a bigger profit.

SO: Because its overheads were reduced, yes.

DS: Again, my wife's father was the chairman of a big American oil company here – Caltex. I don't think he was particularly religious, but I'm sure that, in this

period, if you peeked into his bedroom at night, you'd have seen him praying fervently for Caltex to disinvest. [Laughter] Which they never did, unfortunately. [Laughter]

SO: So, he never made the killing that he hoped for.

DS: That's right.

SO: Sports Sanctions...You said they made no impact whatsoever?

DS: No, obviously they made people feel very upset and unhappy and isolated. The reality is that you're not going to adopt policies that you think will be suicidal because you're playing cricket again Australia. Yeah? It's just not going to happen.

SO: I'm just wondering if you felt that, for other South Africans not involved in policy-making, that sport sanctions might have had a greater influence. After all, this is a sports-mad nation.

DS: Absolutely not. And you can see that by the way people voted. The National Party won election after election on the basis of standing up to threats from overseas. And that happens to other targeted countries as well. So, it is just not the way. Sanctions can be used as a weapon in particular circumstances, but not when there are perceived existential threats involved. What changes countries, on the contrary, are the old process of economic growth – social and economic change. It's *exposure* to the international community that changes attitudes. The reason that the National Party changed – one of the underlying reasons – was that there were huge movements within the Afrikaner population between 1948 and 1978. In 1948, the National Party was a party of small poor farmers and blue collar workers, with a smattering of teachers and intelligentsia. It was genuinely a Socialist party. They didn't like big business, and there were strong trade unions. They didn't like Anglo-American and the big mining houses. And the first thing they did when coming into power was to vastly increase the role of the state in the economy. So, you had that, but then, by 1978, the situation had changed a great deal. A whole segment of the Afrikaner population had migrated to the middle class – again, because of the economic growth of the 50s and 60s. [They] had gone to university and, more importantly, they had travelled: they'd gone to the United States and Britain and they became...

SO: So, you're arguing that rather than being an isolated redoubt somewhere at the bottom corner of Africa, in fact, the Afrikaner constituency was better educated, more urbanised, more sophisticated...?

DS: It was changing, and as that happened, many of those involved became more and more uncomfortable with apartheid. I think FW de Klerk is a prime example: he was an Abe Bailey Scholar and went to Britain as one of a number of South African students. I think that probably had a very big impact on him; his horizons before then didn't stretch much beyond the Western Transvaal. So, you change people and you change societies by exposing them to contacts [and] by promoting economic growth. So, sanctions would have just the opposite effect. Reducing the economic growth rate is really dumb. The other thing, too, for example, is that I think that the fact that the SABC showed the Cosby Show at the end of the 70s or the beginning of the

80s probably changed the attitudes of whites to race more dramatically than any of the cultural sanctions of...

SO: So, you think light entertainment really should be borne in mind as a...

DS: I absolutely do, because it introduced ordinary white South Africans to models of social behaviour involving blacks that they just weren't aware of.

SO: I've got two questions to draw to a conclusion. What's your view of the role of the international community and international players in assisting transition? Allister Sparks has said it was very much a South African success – it wasn't the UN, there wasn't a Vance-Owen Plan, it wasn't a Lancaster House. But would you identify key players, key international forces, helping South Africa's transition?

DS: Yes, I think so. I agree basically with Allister that the strength of the South Africa process was precisely that it was home grown. And it was actually quite a sophisticated process, too. Some of the Arab countries going through transitions would have done well to have looked a little bit closer at the mechanisms of the negotiating forum at CODESA. It was a sophisticated process, and it involved and was driven overwhelmingly by South Africans. But that doesn't mean that foreign interests didn't and couldn't play a positive – and sometimes very positive – role in helping to nudge things in the right direction, particularly when they got off the track. As, for example, they did in June 1992, in the 'winter of discontent'. I think that Western influence there – in front of and behind the scenes – and all of the parties urging them to return, particularly the ANC, to negotiations, probably had some influence.

SO: Would you identify any particular international influence, or was this pretty much a general surge of encouragement?

DS: I think that Robin Renwick played a good role, and so did Princeton Lyman, the American Ambassador. They were both ready to put their shoulders to the wheel when it seemed that the process needed assistance, pushing it here or pushing it there. And I think that Margaret Thatcher also played a very important role in staving off draconian sanctions until the situation was more ripe for change – which happened, of course, in 1989-1990. That is probably her main contribution to the process: that she helped to hold the line and that, had we really been confronted by draconian sanctions in 1986, had PW Botha got the impression that there was no alternative but resistance, then it could have been a completely different situation. It was so important to ensure that everything remained on track until the situation became ripe. By 'ripe', I mean until all sides really, seriously agreed that there could not be an armed or revolutionary outcome, and the ANC really only accepted that around 1988-89 – ironically, with the success of the 1986 state of emergency. Another really important thing was the successful implementation of the Namibian Independence Plan. If things had gone wrong in Namibia – if there had been a revolutionary take over by SWAPO, as Sam Nujoma wanted – it would have been much more difficult for the South African government to persuade its supporters that there could be positive outcomes to negotiations with your enemies and properly constructed constitutions, etc., etc. So, I think the success of the Namibian process...

SO: And Thatcher played a part there, too.

DS: Yeah exactly...[Namibia] was of considerable importance in the process. Then there were other elements that happened more by luck than by planning. PW Botha's withdrawal from the scene was perhaps essential before we could move forward, because – he could go to Mount Nebo and he could cross the Jordan River – he just wouldn't give up that idea of national self-determination, because he belonged to the 1948 generation. And FW de Klerk was prepared to do it within a consociational framework with a good constitution, etc., etc. Now, that was very important. And then, of course, the collapse of the Soviet Union was critically important. It not only meant that the central strategic threat disappeared, but it meant that the SACP was in disarray. The whole idea of a two phase revolution was in shambles. It looked very unlikely that any emerging party would be able to avoid the Washington Consensus. So, a window of opportunity was opened at the beginning of 1990.

SO: So, you feel that the end of the Cold War was of critical importance?

DS: It was of critical importance, for all of these reasons. We were really concerned about the geo-strategic threat, so the withdrawal of the Cubans was very important, but also the withdrawal of Mr Vladimir Shubin [i.e. of Soviet military advisers]. [*Laughter*]

SO: Indeed.

DS: That was very important, because we felt we could always deal with the ANC – as fellow South Africans – but we were not sure we could deal with the alien influence of the South Africa Communist Party.

SO: How aware were you that the Secretary General of the Commonwealth was giving guidance and advice to the ANC? The Secretariat, of course, was providing advice on economic strategic planning, post-transition, to the ANC at this particular time.

DS: Again, I think anything that helped the ANC to move away from its original position on nationalisation and central planning to the position they ultimately adopted under Trevor Manuel was really welcome. But I think there were a number of factors involved in that.

SO: Yes.

DS: But, again...Anything that moved in that direction was good.

SO: Okay, so you weren't aware of this, but you would have welcomed it as an adjunct to negotiations.

DS: Absolutely.

SO: Did you have any qualms or any views on South Africa's decision to re-join the Commonwealth under Alfred Nzo? I know it was 'Point Five' on his list of priorities on becoming Foreign Minister after 1994.

DS: No, I think everybody was very happy to come back to the Commonwealth. No problem.

SO: Would you say that South Africa has played a particular role in the Commonwealth since? I know that you stayed on as Chief of Staff of de Klerk's office after 1994. Do you think that South Africa brought a particular moral authority to the Commonwealth?

DS: Not really. I think South Africa's efforts were focussed more on the OAU, at that time – the African Union, later – and the United Nations, etc.

SO: From your standpoint now at the de Klerk Foundation, how important would you say is South Africa in the Commonwealth? Or is its focus now primarily towards the BRICS, in South/South relations, in its regional relations?

DS: I would say that South Africa's list of priorities would probably be BRICS, United Nations...No, I think BRICS, African Union, United Nations, Commonwealth.

SO: Okay. Down the pecking order, but somewhere there.

DS: Somewhere there, yeah.

SO: Dave, thank you very much indeed.

[END OF AUDIOFILE]