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VOICE FILE NAME: COHP Sir Don McKinnon (Part Two)

Key:

SO: Dr Sue Onslow (Interviewer)

DM: Sir Don McKinnon (Respondent)

Part Two:

SO: This is Sue Onslow interviewing Sir Don McKinnon on Tuesday, 8th April 2014 in Auckland, New Zealand. Sir Don, thank you very much indeed for allowing me to come back to talk to you about this project. I wonder, Sir, if you could give me some more explanatory details about the CMAG process? You were at every meeting from 1995 until 2008 – first as Foreign Minister and then as Secretary General. Please, could you give me some reflections on how CMAG evolved and how it worked?

DM: It very much evolved. We were building it, as the saying goes, as the plane was flying. CHOGM leaders had given us a role and a mandate and we were trying to establish ground rules at almost every meeting, because there were different views on different issues within the membership of CMAG. Of course, at the first meeting, we really came to talk about Nigeria more than anything. We knew we had to engage in a way which was seen to be deeply thoughtful and considered – that was very important. Our friend from Ghana on the Committee, Victor Gbeho, was very, very defensive of Nigeria. He was Nigeria's protecting member, and – as I mentioned in my book, *In the Ring* – often the next-door country or a friend in the region is far more protective than others are in these circumstances. He did feel the need to protect Nigeria, if only because [of] the 3 million Ghanaians working there. Stan Mudenge, as Chairman, played a slightly biased and dubious role really because he didn't want to allow this issue to be determined by non-Africans, but he knew that leaders had said demanding things relating to expectations regarding the Nigerian military leadership. He also sustained a secret line of communication with Tom Ikimi, the Nigerian Foreign Minister. However, all were very conscious that it was Mandela who was really so incensed at Abacha's actions, and that was the reason that CMAG was set up. Therefore, there was a need to meet his expectations.

SO: But hadn't such an idea been forming in the minds of various heads and officials before the Auckland meeting?

DM: More in the minds of Ministers and senior officials. But yes, they had been forming for some time.

SO: There was the idea of a Contact Group.

DM: Malcolm Rifkind and I talked about a Contact Group well before the New Zealand CHOGM, in fact. We knew there was a need to engage with Nigeria, but Mandela just took us kilometres forward in one big leap. Setting up CMAG was very prescriptive about what we should do. But, of course, as you may appreciate, that's all very well done in the CHOGM meeting. When the CMAG first meets then everyone goes back into their own corner, adopting a national position.

SO: So, how much input was there from your own Prime Minister, Jim Bolger, at that Retreat in Queenstown in persuading people?

DM: I wasn't at the Retreat.

SO: You were back in Auckland. I just wondered if he'd ever filled you in on who were the key personalities that needed pushing on CMAG.

DM: I've never asked him. We only talked in generalities, but sometime I will ask him. As Foreign Ministers, we just took the mandate and went to work.

SO: Thereafter, though, it was, "Over to you, Foreign Ministers" – to pick up the issue and take it forward...?

DM: Very much so. And therefore there was a period of many months with any one Minister reflecting domestic politics and wishing to reinterpret what the CMAG role was. They were going back to some phrase within the Millbrook Declaration, saying, "Well, this could be interpreted this way..." [That] kind of thing. But, nevertheless, we persevered, obviously, with Nigeria in our sights, and everyone eventually agreed to just keep engaged. Our actions then became more coherent, but there was still a very long period before the Nigerian leadership finally came back and said, "Well, let's have a visit and get together."

SO: Did the Secretary General always sit in on the meetings of CMAG?

DM: Yes, he did, and his senior staff kept the minutes.

SO: How were they structured? As an informal get-together, in classic Commonwealth style, with a dinner beforehand, then a discussion in informal, closed session?

DM: The dinners didn't start until my time as Secretary General. What Anyaoku did was to have lunch, often in the middle of the CMAG meeting. So, you'd start the CMAG meeting in the morning, get to a certain distance, then have lunch together and – without officials – try and wriggle our way through the thicket of conflicting views, and then go back in the afternoon and hopefully have it resolved. And that was the reason, on becoming SG, I instigated the dinners

the evening beforehand. I felt it was important that the Ministers got to know each other. Amongst the members, there was often a new Minister or – much to my annoyance – a replacement official. You did not want to start with colleagues reading out their government’s policy and then getting locked in to a predetermined, immovable position. These were all senior politicians. They get used to judging the lay of the land and adjusting their position accordingly, which was easier if they had not committed too early. Regretfully, a junior Minister or an official was always looking over his shoulder.

SO: So, there was that informal sounding, that sort of political groundwork, which had been laid beforehand, before you actually went into the formal discussion?

DM: When I took over as Secretary General, yes: to ensure everyone knew where the ground was firm or where it was soft. It made it very possible for you to get an agreed position, in that Ministers were not embarrassed by having to back track or be seen to reverse their position in front of a colleague’s officials.

SO: That strikes me as very good staff work, Sir. As you say, to socialise people!

DM: Well, I’d say, “You Foreign Ministers are coming here for political reasons. If the leaders didn’t want you to address this issue politically, they would have left it to the bureaucrats. But they didn’t. It is a political issue that we’re dealing with now.” We wanted a political decision that is unanimous, and mostly we did [achieve that].

SO: So, how did countries end up on the discussion agenda when you were Foreign Minister, before you became Secretary General?

DM: Well, we only had Nigeria and Pakistan.

SO: But you had Sierra Leone and the Gambia on the agenda, as well?

DM: Ah, but they weren’t suspended...They were on the agenda, but they weren’t “CMAG-ed”, as such.

SO: Yes, but how did they end up in the discussion agenda? How did they get there?

DM: We’d get to them sometime under ‘Any Other Business’, and the Secretary General would probably just give us an update on what information he had most recently heard from Sierra Leone or the Gambia, or from other channels or sources, and so we persevered with them. I think, in a way, we were quite successful with the Gambia, even if not in recent years. We said quite clearly to President Jammeh [that], “While you’ve got Executive Order Article 17, you’re flouting all the democratic procedures. Article 17 has got very prescriptive limitations on what anyone can do politically and therefore is unacceptable in the Commonwealth.” So, he agreed to lift that Order, and in the end he did. Sierra Leone moved a bit more rapidly because, as you may be aware, Tejan Kabbah, the marginalised President, got invited to come to the Edinburgh CHOGM and the RUF got left behind. The message from the

heads was firmness through their action. So, things were moving in the right direction for those two countries, by comparison with Nigeria.

SO: So, they could come up under ‘Any Other Business’?

DM: At the beginning, yes. In fact, we wanted to take Sierra Leone off the agenda, but President Kabbah said, “Please, let us stay on so you don’t forget us.”

SO: Would they go out on the concluding statement?

DM: You’d have to look and see if there was anything recorded.

SO: I was just wondering if countries would be discussed, but then this would not go out in the concluding statement: it would filter out gently on the diplomatic grapevine.

DM: You see, this, again, is where we were in a little bit in ‘Suck it and see’ mode, because there was no set rule on whether a country should be referred to in a concluding statement. This is where we were kind of making it up as we went. I remember saying, at one point, “Well, look, all we’re trying to do is keep the Gambia on a watch list, and nothing more than that.” They’re not CMAG-ed. They were expected to attend to their deficiencies, which they were, and hopefully we’ll see an end to those deficiencies. However, to let it be known that a country and one of its activities may be discussed by CMAG would usually bring an immediate reaction from that capital, which sometimes solved the problem.

SO: So, CMAG was not responsible to the Secretary General – it reported to heads. Did they report to the Chairperson-in-Office? I’m just wondering how it worked...

DM: The Secretary General was very much part of CMAG, and no, the Chairperson-in-Office only came in 1999, so we’re looking at four years when I was Foreign Minister. No, Ministers only felt the need to report to leaders. However, each Minister on CMAG came to meetings with a firm view from his or her Foreign Ministry or political leader about what was expected by that country.

SO: But the rules on two terms only on CMAG – meaning four years – were established at the start?

DM: I’m not sure. There was a guide for two terms which the Canadians tried to rewrite to their advantage. I did have something to do with that, when I became Secretary General, and the two terms principle was there. But, as there was a consensus to keep Mompati Merafhe as Chair beyond his second term, I said we should be able to say, “Two terms unless there are exceptional circumstances,” in which case a country could do a third term. That was agreed by Heads at, I believe, the Coolum CHOGM.

SO: So, how were Chairs or Vice-Chairs elected? Or were they selected?

DM: Well, it got off to an inauspicious start. The first meeting was at Marlborough House and Secretary General Anyaoku said at the first meeting, “Well, the first thing we must do would be to elect a Chair.” I think Ghana probably

nominated Stan Mudenge, and then someone nominated me, and it went round and round and round. I was nominated partly as there was a Commonwealth tradition that the host country would carry forward a resolution of the CHOGM. I could see that we were not going to get anywhere: it just sat literally at four [against] four for about ten minutes. So, we had a tea break and I said, "Look, this is not going to go anywhere. I think, for the sake of this particular exercise, being that Nigeria is the problem issue, it's better to have an African Chair." So, I remember coming back to the meeting and saying, "Well, considering the views of some, I think it would be easier if I did not have my name in the hat." And Alfred Nzo, who was the South African Minister, said, "Oh, no, Don, we like you very much. We like you very much, but we think in the circumstances Zimbabwe should be in the Chair." I agreed. So, then, as soon as the Chair was resolved, Anyaoku nominated me as Vice-Chair. That was also unanimous.

Now, I can say – while we're on the subject – [that] as Secretary General, at all subsequent meetings, I went round all the Ministers first and said, "The first thing we're going to have to do is decide our Chair and Vice-Chair, and let's see if we can sort it out before we're on public display." Sometimes I did it with them independently, depending on the timing, other times I pulled them into the little Green Room, next to the main room at Marlborough House and said, "Look, it's easier for us to decide here and now who is going to be the Chair and Vice-Chair, rather than go in there and have an argument." Then, often as happened, such as in 2000, I'd be asked, "Well, have you talked to anyone?", and I could say, "Well, I think there is a significant amount of support for Foreign Minister Mompoti Meraphe from Botswana." The Malaysian representative, who was not a Foreign Minister, but a highly esteemed and rated individual, Tan Sri Musa Hitam said he was also available. However, not being a Foreign Minister, I suggested he would not get wide support and so he withdrew. And so the result was in favour of Meraphe. They all sort of nodded in agreement and that was it.

SO: So, the overall role for Foreign Ministers on CMAG was, as you said in your book, to make political decisions at the time, [and] not for them to try and link together and reinterpret all the Commonwealth Declarations.

DM: Correct: [to] not create further problems and confuse the issues. Commonwealth declarations over many years don't necessarily have an identifiable strand of joined-up thought that can lead to a clear decision. In fact, taken too literally could send you down the wrong track.

SO: How much constant input was there from Foreign Ministers and instructions from headquarters during these CMAG meetings, in your experience?

DM: Not a lot, and I was pretty tough on these Ministers because I said, "Look, you can't come along here with a brief to read, sit back and demand everyone agrees with you. You have to know the subject better than anyone in your country and you've got to be prepared to be part of a deal. You're not going to get everything you want, regardless, but you're going to get all the opportunities to say what you want to say. But let's make sure that, at the end of the day, we get a political solution that we all agree with."

SO: You've mentioned elsewhere that the British, particularly, had their CMAG watchers on Sierra Leone, but that the Commonwealth also collaborated with ECOWAS and ECOMOG, the monitoring group?

DM: Yes.

SO: How did that work? Was it informal?

DM: It was informal and it was mostly me making telephone calls to key people in the region. Of course, it was important that we collected as much information as possible from the regional Commonwealth countries, as I said in relation to Nigeria: taking note of the views of Ghana, who were on CMAG for four years, but also to listen to the regional organisations such as ECOWAS and ECOMOG and the OAU.

SO: Because the Commonwealth, the UN and the OAU were all moral guarantors of the 1996 peace agreement.

DM: Yes, for Sierra Leone, they were. So, there were more players who had a considered view.

SO: Yes. So, there was a particular interest from others?

DM: Yes, there was a regular telephone conversation amongst us all. UNDP were picking up a lot of the bills, as was the DFID in the UK, and I just wanted to make sure that we were all on the same page. So, I did make telephone calls pretty constantly about where CMAG was. "Where are you, are you prepared to go in this direction or that direction?" And, "We'll need some funding for capacity-building," [that] sort of thing.

SO: And the British were co-operative on that?

DM: Pretty much, yes. They were putting a lot of coin into it and there wasn't really a problem with anything like that.

SO: So, a good news story about your relations with the FCO in King Charles Street, rather than as on Zimbabwe! Could I ask you, please, about your general relations as Secretary General with other international organisations? You've mentioned the UN and UNDP, particularly with Kofi Annan as another Secretary General.

DM: Pretty good. In 1998 I bumped into Kofi Annan somewhere and he said to me, "I hear you're running for Commonwealth Secretary General. I would like to see you get there, and if there's any help I can give you, please let me know." I don't recollect that I actually ever rang him and said, "Can you lean on someone to help me?" He was always very open. At times I might have spoken to him every few weeks on something or another.

SO: Was there any informal or institutionalised regular meeting?

DM: No. The only meetings would have been held at a technocratic level, sort of thing. Kofi Annan did, as the UN Secretary General, instigate meetings – maybe two or three times – of Secretaries General from significant organisations, which was quite useful.

SO: So, it wasn't a question of every year, around the UN General Assembly meeting, that you would use the opportunity to meet?

DM: Yes, I would do that. In other words, I went to the General Assembly; we'd have a meeting with the Secretary General and we would discuss the relevant issues. He came to Marlborough House once, I think. However, at General Assembly time we'd arrange many other meetings and would also see Annan at various regional or other summits, such as the OAU and later the AU.

SO: It would be you and the UN Secretary General, or there were other Secretaries General there as well?

DM: Well, he set up this gathering of Secretaries General, of which I went to about three of them, I think. We had the OAU, as it was then, the Islamic Conference, the OAS from Washington, the Arab League... There was probably about eight or ten of us there, I suppose. He wanted to establish regular meetings with Secretaries General, which, in the end, actually I don't think went very far. I always remember [when] the former Egyptian Foreign Minister, Amr Moussa, got very vociferous on this 'clash of civilisations' and it got a bit away from what we were doing. I think we were expected to be slightly below the level of the big stratospheric issues like clash of civilisations, yes. [*Laughter*]

SO: Exchanging 'philosophical approaches to lunch'?

DM: Yes, sometimes. But more down-to-earth operational issues such as managing elections, building capacity and countering corruption, etc.

SO: Did you find that a benefit, though, meeting other leaders?

DM: In politics, the benefit of meeting people face-to-face is always of paramount importance. It means you can get them on the telephone the next day, and that's always a benefit when you want something.

SO: So, it wasn't a question of comparing notes of the challenges of being a Secretary General.

DM: Well, we talked about those things. You talk about those things over lunch or over dinner, sort of thing. I remember one of the big surprises I got talking to the African Union Secretary General – I can't remember which one it was – and him saying to me that he only collected about 5% of all the full assessment of funds of all his countries. Instead of sending the money, the countries would send staff members in lieu, and leave them on their own country's payroll. He said, "You can't manage these people. They come along, but they're not your staff. You ask them to do something, and they just say, 'No, it's not in my interest.' They're just their country's representative, not an asset to me," which he found really frustrating.

SO: But you didn't have quite that problem.

DM: No, not at all. No, I thought, "My God, I am lucky by comparison." I collected 95% of my assessments.

- SO: How about relations with the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, particularly given the Islamic dimension within the Commonwealth?**
- DM: Well, I did start that. I recollect we used to have an annual meeting with them. They were in London more than I was [in Jeddah], where they are based, and so they'd come and see me and we'd chat about these particular overlap issues between the two [organisations]. That was very valuable and increased our outreach. It also gave me a better understanding of internal challenges. Managing international organizations is itself a major challenge and requires certain talents within that required leadership. So, talking to others often revealed alternative ways of doing things.
- SO: Yes, and the same went for *La Francophonie* and the Lusophone group, as well?**
- DM: Yes, the Lusophone group allegedly started up because of Mozambique jumping ship. Not jumping ship, but joining our Commonwealth ship, and so they decided to set up their own organisation. Jaime Gama was the Portuguese Foreign Minister at the time. He came to New Zealand a couple of times, just asserting Portugal's role in the Lusophone states, and called on me in London to talk about co-operation. Soon after, their new Secretary General called on me to invite me to attend one of their summits. I would add a postscript here and say that Mozambique became more committed to the Commonwealth than many of our older members.
- SO: It was Arnold Smith, after all, who tried to persuade first General Spínola and then Mário Soares to adopt the Commonwealth model.**
- DM: Yes, and of course, for example, it was *La Francophonie* who were, formally, a cultural linguistic organisation who wanted to actively move in the direction of the Commonwealth on issues of governance. Boutros-Ghali, when Secretary General of *La Francophonie*, and I used to meet every year, either in London or in Paris. That was about a half-day meeting at a lunch or a dinner, and they were very useful. But they were getting more from us than we were getting from them, because, as Boutros Ghali said, "We need to do more of what you are doing on governance issues, but I can't imagine *La Francophonie* having a CMAG without France being a permanent member."
- SO: You've mentioned the frustration of the Secretary General of the African Union. Did you always have chats with OAU/AU High Commissioners before an OAU/AU Summit, just to get a feeling of the lie of the land?**
- DM: Yes, I did. One, it showed me that they weren't always up with the play of their own domestic politics, and sometimes it allowed them to argue amongst themselves over a regional issue. However, in wishing to know what was going on in Africa I was poorly served, and the same with the Caribbean. I'd ask various envoys to come and see me when they were calling by or ankle tap them at a reception and say, "Well, look, this is an issue which seems to be bubbling along in the press of St Kitts and Nevis," and often the High Commissioner had no idea. So, I established in Marlborough House a wider news gathering service. When I arrived at Marlborough House, they gave me the relevant daily cuttings from the British newspapers and that was fine but a very Anglo view of the world, even if it was from *The Telegraph* on the right to *The Guardian* on the left. So, I said, "Hang on, I want to find out what people

are thinking about in Barbados and Apia and Johannesburg.” So, the library team in Marlborough House then set up a Commonwealth news cutting service. A staffer was designated to be there early in the morning and electronically scan all major dailies throughout the Commonwealth and just slice out articles of general political interest to me and our senior staff. So, that meant I had a second bunch of news things to read. That was very good – not that I disliked reading what *The Telegraph* or *The Daily Mail* said, but to only read what *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* said in that job was letting UK thinking set the agenda.

SO: Just going back to your relations with Kofi Annan, particularly with UNDP over Zimbabwe, I’m just wondering the extent to which you tried to leverage that connection?

DM: Oh, we did. Yes, we did.

SO: Or did they try to use you?

DM: They were of real value to us. We at CMAG had pushed them, so they knew that we were in the front of this thing, but when it came to that programme of land redistribution they were very keen to be a part of that. And, of course, so were we. We had some good ideas, were engaged, but they had more money. So, we had quite a big team there in Zimbabwe, working with the UN folk all very enthusiastically on the issue of land reform. They lasted about three months and then the security situation got so bad and what they were doing did not please the Government of Zimbabwe, so, everyone had to come home.

SO: Mark Malloch Brown was Head of UNDP at that particular point. Was he very determined to do it with the Commonwealth?

DM: Mark Malloch Brown said to me, “Don, consider UNDP a branch office of the Commonwealth.”

SO: Oh, really?

DM: Those were his words. Meaning, I think, he wanted me to do the linkage with the government work: he’d pay the bills, I’d do the “on the ground”, hard labour work. Also, Kofi Annan knew he would inevitably clash with Mugabe, something he did not want.

SO: Well, that was spreading the responsibility, wasn’t it?

DM: Yes.

SO: But I’m sure that that didn’t suit Mugabe, as increasingly the relationship between the Commonwealth and Mugabe deteriorated.

DM: Correct. We put a lot effort in, dealing with Zimbabwe, trying to pull them out of the hole they were digging and really trying very hard to be positively engaged. Remember, Mugabe had by this time alienated the World Bank; he’d alienated the IMF, he had angered the Americans, [and] he had angered the Brits. His own neighbours were angry with him, and they’d often tell me. Muluzi of Malawi, Mwanawasa of Zambia, King Mswati of Swaziland and

Chissano of Mozambique were all prepared to be publicly critical, at least once. Kofi said he was getting exasperated dealing with Mugabe – although, like others, in calmer circumstances, felt the need to publicly defend him. But privately they were saying to me – as much in sorrow as in anger – “You know, he is just disrespecting Africa. He’s giving us all bad name.”

SO: You must have got enormously frustrated with the stance of SADC: the fact that it was prepared to say one thing in private and adopt a rather different stance in public?

DM: Yes. I kind of understood, because their constituencies are very large. When you went to a function and Mugabe got a standing ovation, you knew you were up against something really difficult and different. Therefore, you can’t ignore that sort of thing. They were politicians like I was a politician. If the crowd is roaring its favour on something, well, you’re an idiot if you stand up and oppose it. But I was very pleased with the SADC parliamentarians who were very critical of the conduct of the Zimbabwe elections where they had an observer team.

SO: I noticed in your book that you said you tried to use Sonny Ramphal to contact Mugabe in the early days.

DM: Yes, he made five telephone calls. They just went nowhere, over three weeks: Sonny just couldn’t get through. Mugabe knew what I was up to, using Sonny.

SO: So, did Sonny come to you and volunteer his services?

DM: No, I asked him. I talked to a few people and they said, “Well, there are two people who can get through to Mugabe: Mahathir and Ramphal.” I knew Ramphal well, and therefore, I said, “Well, I may as well try Ramphal first.” I then talked to the Malaysians about Mahathir and they weren’t interested. On further questioning, they knew it would embarrass Mahathir, so said, “Please don’t call again.”

SO: Did the white farmers ever appeal to you for help, going back to this land question? I know you said that the younger elements were less fixed in their feudal ways.

DM: They didn’t appeal for help, they just demanded [that] we support them. I was to tell the UK Government to buy their farms and as soon as possible.

SO: Ah! So, that was the white farmer constituency, rather than actually a generational divide between them?

DM: Yes, it was the Old Guard, [who were] far more rigid than the younger ones, who could see the future had to be different. They were prepared to accommodate the new demands.

SO: Obviously, Zimbabwe was very much part of the discussion at the Coolum CHOGM. Was there a deliberate decision to keep the discussion at the Retreat, so it was discreet? Was the informality, the below-the-radar element, part of the approach?

DM: Yes. And it was the best way to proceed, and it brought everyone into the debate. When you put leaders in the Executive Session, they're as much worried about what an official of one of their neighbouring countries is thinking as they are about what their own officials are thinking. So, no, leaders are very, very candid in the Retreat, very candid about every issue. They feel unshackled; they can be critical to the point of rudeness, but also praiseworthy when required.

SO: As far as the Retreat is concerned, though, it was part of your responsibilities and approach to nurture a certain element of discussion – to bring certain heads together, to direct and support what they wanted to talk about. Am I right in thinking this? That was very much the Ramphal approach, one which I know Anyaoku continued. It requires a great deal of choreography by the SG with the heads.

DM: Yes. With John Howard at Coolum, he was pretty straightforward, but by the time we got to Coolum I had decided that there was a better way to do all this, especially the big issues such as Zimbabwe. But many leaders were just not in the loop, so I personally talked to a few of the non-African leaders, giving them some thoughts on how they could advance the debate in a productive way. It all helped, but highlighted the fact that the lack of time was the enemy. So, that was the beginning of my thinking to bring Foreign Ministers into the equation. I didn't want leaders wasting time, dealing with issues that might only affect a few – such as the Cyprus issue. These were big picture people. Therefore, because I'd already been given consent to have a Foreign Ministers meeting in New York once a year, in the margins of the General Assembly, slowly but surely Foreign Ministers got to be part of the Commonwealth debate. Up until the time that I became Secretary General, they were not. They were right out of it. Their Ministries were the behind-the-scenes actors, but the Ministers were not. So, the consequence of that was that, at the following meeting, I was able to say, "Look, the objective of bringing in the Foreign Ministers is to deal with all these little issues which you, as leaders, haven't got time or interest in, and so reduces your time in very public Executive Sessions. Let the Foreign Ministers make up for that, then you'll have more time in the Retreat and deal with three or four substantive issues that are generally of wider global concern."

SO: So, you can really concentrate the minds there?

DM: Yes.

SO: You note in your memoirs that there was a high degree of African sensitivity on the Zimbabwe/Pakistan juxtaposition, and what they felt to be sharp differentiation of treatment on that. Obviously, Pakistan had become the 'anchor state' for the British and the Americans with the War on Terror following 9/11. Was there an element that you noticed – a kind of 'Five Eyes' discussion and dynamic going on there with Pakistan? I know about the intelligence sharing network of the 'old Commonwealth' and the US.

DM: Yes, I know. There probably was, yes. I would agree with that, and Britain was always on a high wire act, really: prepared to be part of the Commonwealth when it came to criticising Pakistan, but, on the other hand,

crossing the other side of the park and holding hands with Pakistan in the War on Terror.

SO: You've said that there seemed to be a pattern where it's "not unusual for a Commonwealth member to use the Commonwealth to beat up a country, but to treat them literally as bosom buddies on bilateral issues." So, was this a classic example?

DM: Yes, it was. A good example, especially when they invited Musharraf to the UK as a guest of the government when the country was suspended. It would not have happened to the leader of Fiji, also suspended.

SO: How was your relationship with Jack Straw as British Foreign Secretary generally, as well as specifically on this complicated issue of how to treat Pakistan?

DM: No, Jack was pretty good, actually. He put a lot of effort into reading all these new ordinances of the Musharraf government. This was Jack, the lawyer, just getting a buzz out of reading all this material about Pakistan. We used to laugh about Pakistan: the only place in the world which could be governed by the 'Doctrine of Necessity', which means that if you think something is important enough, you can do anything under the Doctrine of Necessity. He was pretty clear in his mind what we were trying to do with Pakistan within the CMAG area, but he was conscious that Britain needed to prop up Pakistan in the War on Terror.

SO: How closely did the US follow CMAG's actions on Pakistan?

DM: Very closely, indeed. I went to Washington at one time – probably late in the day of my stewardship. The first thing John Negroponte, Deputy Secretary of State, said to me was, "We were sorry you had to CMAG them again," and I thought, "My gosh, they are following us very closely!" Another time we issued a tough statement on Pakistan, the State Department issued a statement about four hours later and it was all our wording.

SO: As you say, that was flattering!

DM: Yes, but I made a point of engaging with the Americans very early on, because I felt [that], up until my time, there was a bit of a 'holding your nose' attitude. You know, "We, the Commonwealth, are truly global. [We] don't need to talk with the US." You just can't ignore superpowers, no matter who you are or think you are. And much of what they wanted to do around the world was all about good governance and improving institutions, which was our territory, too. So, I started regular engagement with them, which meant we went beyond the State Department: we went to the White House; we went to Capitol Hill, as well.

SO: So, you went beyond Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State? You went, as you say, to Capitol Hill?

DM: Capitol Hill was good. There were some pretty good people there who had been following Commonwealth affairs for years, such as Senators Carl Levin and Richard Luger, and some very enthusiastic Commonwealth supporters in the House.

SO: Did you notice a particularly intense concern in America about the memory of the AQ Khan sales of nuclear technology?

DM: It was there, yes. Everyone was horrified about this guy doing so much damage to the difficult balancing act in South Asia. Of course, when I raised it in Pakistan, they'd say, "You can't touch the guy: he's bigger than our best cricketer! We can't criticise him." I thought, "Oh my goodness, this is a world upside down."

SO: Indeed.

DM: Yes, AQ Khan is beyond criticism.

SO: How about linking up with the Number 10 Foreign Policy Special Adviser on this, to try and get the British to have a quiet word as well?

DM: Yes, I talked with John Sawyer from time to time, but you never knew what was carried through. One FCO official I knew well showed me a secret cable – totally breaching protocol – and said to me, "Did you say this?" I looked and it was exactly the opposite of what I said. "Be warned," I thought.

SO: Nigel Sheinwald?

DM: Nigel Sheinwald – he was so European! He just couldn't get his mind away from Europe. That was so weird. The Commonwealth for him was away over the horizon. He was a real Europhile; that guy was of no use to us at all. Michael Jay, a little the same. We just didn't appear on their screen.

SO: Yes, that's something that has consistently been said about the British Foreign Office. I know Sheinwald was only Foreign Policy Adviser.

DM: Europe was it, with him. Generally, within the FCO, it's the American relationship, the EU, NATO and the Middle East, roughly in that order.

SO: So, who were your two key point people in the Secretariat on Pakistan?

DM: Syed Sharfuddin and Amitav Banerji.

SO: How about Matthew Neuhaus?

DM: He was there as head of Political Affairs, but these two had a greater depth of information. Sharfuddin was a Pakistani diplomat; Banerji an Indian diplomat, who was my Chief of Staff, but he had served in Karachi. I knew that yes, of course, he was not a Muslim and had a different view of these things, but he was pretty good with his analysis and how far he could push. He would never accompany me to Pakistan.

SO: How far do you think that India was also trying to use the Commonwealth and CMAG as a lever for Indian policy?

DM: Well, I was very much aware of this. When I approached the Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh at Coolum in Australia, I said, "Jaswant, I can't ignore India's role in the Commonwealth. We can't keep you off CMAG forever. It's

my belief we should bring you onto CMAG and I'm prepared to nominate you on to CMAG. But I want you to tell me you will not use CMAG as a means of extending India's foreign relationship with Pakistan. You will treat that as a bilateral, a separate, issue. You won't use CMAG to beat up Pakistan." He said, "Don, I fully understand what you mean," and he did adhere to that position. Now, when he switched over jobs with Yashwant Sinha – from Foreign Affairs to Finance – that was when Yashwant Sinha came into the picture, which I am sure pleased the Indian diplomats. That became evident when Yashwant came to the CMAG dinner the night before the formal meeting with a whole sheaf of papers. I had to say to him, "This is not the time to read out a litany of Indian grievances or recycle old speeches, my friend. You're here to listen to all, to speak from the common sense point."

SO: What about your relations and contact with Benazir Bhutto as the opposition?

DM: She would come and see me regularly and we would discuss her views on the military leadership. She was always well informed and sought guidance on her future. I always felt she would rather just go home and watch her kids grow into adults. She was a generous person and, after she left, she would always send me a box of mangoes. Of course, I received a box of mangoes about two weeks after she was assassinated.

SO: Oh, that's very poignant.

DM: She also gave me a book which is a biography of her, written by someone else – not an autobiography. I read it and I thought, "This is really very light; very light indeed. Just very average," and I chucked it on to a pile of likely give-aways. When I got back to New Zealand, I shoved it in to a box to give to a school – I mean, I had so many books and I gave a whole lot of books to schools because they were, dare I say, 'Indonesia from the Air' coffee table books: you only look at them once. Anyway, the school rang me and said, "Do you know this has been signed by Benazir Bhutto?" I said, "It is?" They said, "Yes, but she signed the back of it." And what I realised was the cover of the book was on backwards and she had opened up the book literally on the back page and written, "To Dear Don..." blah, blah, blah. So, I've still got her book.

SO: I know that smaller parties in the Pakistani opposition were keen that the Commonwealth should help them try to return the millions that had been taken by the feudal families of Bhutto and also Nawaz Sharif?

DM: Something that Musharraf was determined to do.

SO: Yes. Were you able to initiate that?

DM: No, [there was] never a direct request, in fact. Musharraf was adamant that he wanted the Bhutto and Sharif billions. He was convinced that there were billions sitting in bank accounts somewhere or everywhere. It wasn't until about three or four years after Obasanjo became President of Nigeria that he decided to chase after the billions taken by the Abacha family, and I said, "Well, you'd better talk to the Pakistanis, because they're trying to trace all this money," which he did. Now, I don't know what came of that...

SO: So, this was the Commonwealth Asset Repatriation Committee?

DM: He initiated that, in one of the CHOGMs: that the Commonwealth should be able to pronounce on money that had clearly gone missing, and there should be a means of doing something about it.

SO: I don't know how much work the Secretariat was able to do with that.

DM: I don't think a lot, actually. It was more Obasanjo wanting some international imprimatur for what he was trying to achieve.

SO: Please, if I could ask you about the Maldives and your involvement there? How were you asked to be a Commonwealth Special Envoy?

DM: Well, I got rang by the Secretary General and that was probably about a week after the coup – well, I'm not allowed to call it a coup, so forgive that. The change in leadership. I then spoke to some of my former Secretariat colleagues and asked them, I said, "What have you guys been doing on the Maldives since I left?" The answer was 'nothing', and I thought, "Well, you know, you did have this one coming." When I left there, we had helped get them a new constitution. They had an election in May 2008, and it went extraordinarily well. Gayoom lost and Nasheed came in, and everything continued. Now, Nasheed was a street fighter and he'd been a street fighter for twenty-five years. He did not know how to be a President, and I say that quite candidly.

SO: Well, how long had he also spent in jail?

DM: All added up together, his time in jail could be ten to fifteen years. He tried to be President but it did not work. For a street fighter to suddenly become a President and know how to run a Presidency was near impossible. I can say this now, because I know you're not publishing this immediately: this issue is an absolute failure of my successor. He should have had someone going to visit the Maldives about every couple of months after the 2008 election, holding Nasheed's hand, asking, "How are you getting on? What about this? Why have you lost your supporters? I read in the paper this is happening: that's not a good thing. You must fix this now, not later." Then take him through it. You see, Nasheed lost his first coalition partner within two weeks of becoming the President. Now, that's a vote of no confidence.

SO: It certainly is.

DM: But because he was elected the president, he regarded that his authority was complete, never to be questioned, which is a recipe for disaster. Remember the words of Abraham Lincoln: "We govern with the consent of the governed." So, for Nasheed, very soon he had lost the consent of the governed and then another two parties left the coalition, which left him with only his own party who represented about 24% of the vote. There's an old saying, "You campaign in poetry and govern in prose." He was trying to govern in poetry. A really nice guy, and a pity he was not able to better manage Maldives politics – rather than tilt at every windmill.

SO: That's not a mandate to lead.

DM: I agree, but he didn't realise that. If I'd been in London, I would have got alongside him, saying to him, "Mate, you're screwing up. You're not going to get away with this. They'll come and drag you out of the castle." And so, four years had gone by, and then I could see what was happening. He was governing without the consent of the governed. The coalition parties who'd been with him started to oppose him very clandestinely and it all happened on that day in February.

SO: It did, indeed.

DM: Now, that was a failure of the Commonwealth after I left office. They should have been hand-holding Nasheed all the way through. Not blatantly, but very quietly – as much out of sight as possible.

SO: So, you were contacted.

DM: Yes. I'd worked with Gayoom for over three years to help him get a new constitution – [working] on how to get the constitution ratified, all this. We weren't just telling him what to do: we were encouraging him to do these sorts of things that would be very acceptable to his fellow Commonwealth leaders. I'll give him his dues. He took most of the advice I gave him, and we don't give this advice publically – it's only done privately. "This is good, try this," this sort of thing. Yes, I know, Nasheed doesn't know much about governing, but I'm sure he's learned from his mistakes. Look, that's politics. You know, these things happen from time to time. And soon, re-engaging as a Special Envoy, we nursed him and others through the whole thing over a couple of years and I was very happy they had that November 2013 election. I thought they are under way again. But, of course, that's just the beginning. The underlying pressures and faults are still there. These issues should have been addressed by the government immediately after the November 2013 election, and now we're back to square one again with Nasheed and some Ministers back in jail.

SO: I know that the Secretariat sent back their team four times, if not more. How many trips did you make, Sir?

DM: About ten. So, it was a matter of going back and reintroducing myself to a whole bunch of people I vaguely knew. Alison Pearman was the point person. She was very, very good. She got to know everybody very, very well, and we just slowly worked on them and then, of course, the Waheed government had produced a Commission of Enquiry. But I had to convince them there was no way anyone's going to believe a Commission of Enquiry that is just [composed of] local people. No one will believe it to be independent. So, we had to walk over a lot of broken glass to get three outsiders to be part of that Commission. The result was – as you heard – "there was a resignation". However, the people who were involved in this Commission of Enquiry said to me quietly that, "Everyone is telling lies on this, but our best conclusion – as people who have been judges or prosecutors – is 'this is what happened', and so we say that Nasheed resigned." So, at that point, I was able to draw a line under that, because that part of the issue had to come to an end, and that's when we started really to move forward. "Okay," I said, "Now, let's work on the question of the elections, but in the meantime, you've got to deal with the issue of police brutality," and so on and so on. Well, that brutality issue got left to one side, because the elections started looming up in everyone's minds.

So, it was really just keeping the peace until they got through to those elections. There were so many false starts to that election; I really had my doubts whether we were going to see it through, but they got there in the end.

SO: How much were you also liaising with other key regional heads?

DM: Well, the key players at the end of the day were the Commonwealth, the United States – by virtue of the Assistant Secretary of State and then his Ambassador in Colombo – and the UN. The UK was very much back a few paces, and India and Sri Lanka always had advice to give. So, there were really just the three of us. Well, Alistair Burt of the UK was, when he was there, [involved]. When he left office, his successor took little notice.

SO: How confident are you going forward?

DM: Well, the issue now is that President Yameen wants to run his own ship. The Commonwealth still wants to go back, but the Maldivian Government sees me as being associated with the post-coup period and therefore inappropriate. They don't want anyone back there, frankly. But the thing is, they've got to sort out some of the very fundamental issues which caused them to run in to the problems leading up to the February tragedy. I'm no longer the right person.

SO: So, questions around the repression of political rights have been raised?

DM: No, it's really the institutions. There are very, very immature – sometimes utterly stupid – decisions emerging from the judiciary. And then there is a fragile and competent but not well-established electoral commission, and a new human rights commission. A President's office that needs to be 'tidied up' and given clear structures in which to work – [i.e.,] "This is the area you should work in, not over there." The operation of the Majlis, the Parliament, needs a lot of advice from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association. You have to remember [that], as of last year, Maldivian democracy was barely five years old, and we're expecting them to function as though they were a hundred years old. So, you had the Majlis doing things they should never have done according to conventional parliamentary practice, the judiciary issuing judgements they should never have given within even Sharia law, the presidency demanding unconstitutionally that the Majlis do certain things... The separation of powers is something they haven't really fully grasped. This is a long-term, ten to fifteen year project

SO: It's 'constitutionalism', not the constitution.

DM: Correct.

SO: Sir, could I ask you, please, just to summarise what you found to be the frustrations of being Secretary General?

DM: Well, there's a lot of exhilaration – more pluses than minuses. But, on the negative side, it's the long time it takes to get things done. The lack of motivation of many long-serving staff with no sense of urgency can be exasperating. Government officials who play games such as not returning calls. Some people will procrastinate on process and completely lose sight of

the objective. Senior managers who cannot rise above the smaller operational issues. Then, a coup is announced, having taken place in Fiji, all over radio and TV, and no one feels the need to get to the office earlier than usual. Governments that promise and never deliver were very frustrating.

SO: Let me ask you about the exhilaration, then! Let's start with the positives...

DM: Well, there were so many things happening all the time. You really were kept on your toes, but you do know you can change people's lives for the good. When the rotation policy of staff took hold and began to really change things, you could feel the energy levels rise; you could feel the greater enthusiasm to get things done. New people brought in new ideas, enthusiasm and a desire to show they were very good and better than those who had left. You see a project in a developing country through to fruition and the benefit it is giving young people is always a buzz. I'm pleased to having got Foreign Ministers involved, even if [it was] totally opposed by some big players, and to hear people making favourable comments about the Commonwealth near the end of my term was good.

SO: Your memoir really does lay out how the events were piling on each other.

DM: You really were kept on your toes, but I don't think I ever lost much sleep at night worrying about the next day. You've got to keep a balance to your life.

SO: It must have taken an enormous physical toll on you?

DM: It does, but as long as I could go running in Hyde Park three times a week – and I went horse riding occasionally – you clear the bugs out of your system and you get a bit more oxygen and you go back and you can deal with the pressures. That was my favourite fix: a couple of laps of Hyde Park on a Household Cavalry Life Guards horse. By the time you get back, you could take on the world.

SO: Absolutely, a great place to ride.

DM: What were the frustrations? The staff ones were quite heavy. When I got there...

SO: You've written about those.

DM: ...they were the old style staff, too many who didn't have a new idea. They didn't have any energy left. Good ones had gone and I thought, "Oh my goodness, what are these people doing? How can they get paid when they're doing so little?"

SO: You must have felt that particularly strongly, coming from a bureaucratic culture in New Zealand where you'd recently had 'the cleaning of the stables' in the New Zealand civil service.

DM: Yes. So, I spent time with groups of staff explaining that we had to rotate people and stabilise the budget. So, we got the stables cleaned out and it made a hell of a difference. Suddenly, with a whole lot of new people, it was

in a better working mode. A new person brings new ideas, innovation, wants to prove themselves and suddenly everything happens. Once that had been in place for a couple of years, it was a changed place.

SO: Given the stresses on the current Secretary General and the Commonwealth Secretariat – the reducing income and also ever-expanding requests on its capabilities – how far do you feel that the Commonwealth Secretariat would benefit from focussing on a few core aspects?

DM: I think that always reads well. It reads well for donor countries, but, frankly, you've got to do a far better job of doing what you're doing. If you're succeeding in the very things that you're doing, governments don't complain about the money they're spending. When they're getting reports from their diplomats in London that, "Oh, I can't get any sense out of these people in the Secretariat's health sector or the legal sector," or something like that, those negative reports give reasons for governments to lose interest and cut back the funding. You've got to make sure the London missions are sending back positive reports about what you're doing.

SO: So, that then suggests the calibre of the staff is paramount. Did you ever have to run an appointments ratio system, as they do at the UN?

DM: No, not specifically. But in the back of my mind I was always thinking about the balances. If you've got a Ugandan heading your legal division, there's no way you're going to put a Ugandan as a deputy. You wouldn't even put an African as a deputy; you would put an Asian deputy there. If you've got an Indian running another, you'll put an African or a European in as a Number Two.

SO: That complicates the Secretariat as a meritocracy, then?

DM: Not much. The difference between this person and that person of differing ethnicities is not always that great. If both have got good graduate degrees in this particular subject, [and] one's from India and one's from Zambia, there's not a lot between them, frankly, in terms of ability. It's marginal. More important is how they do the job, how do they deal with people of different ethnicities, how they manage others.

SO: What would you say about the Commonwealth going forward, at the moment?

DM: Look, they've just got to do things a lot better. It has to get actively engaged, and publicly so. You know, there's an awful thing about publicity we should all acknowledge: you can't survive without it. As an international organisation, you have to create some television news items at least once every couple of weeks. It doesn't always matter what it is. If you are never in the news, most ordinary punters would think the Commonwealth was dead. I know it's a shallow measure of performance, but that is the way the world is. The official stuff you send out to governments is well and good, but it's not enough. Now, unfortunately, my successor doesn't believe in publicity.

SO: The current Director of Information does.

DM: Yes, so what sort of a signal is that giving us?

SO: Unfortunately, the Commonwealth got quite the wrong sort of publicity at the 2013 Colombo meeting.

DM: Well, that should never have happened. I stopped Rajapaksa hosting an earlier CHOGM, just personally telling him, "You will not get it. Don't push for it."

SO: Did you have backing from heads to do that?

DM: Well, I told him I did.

SO: Superb diplomacy!

DM: He should never have got it, and that's when the Secretary General has to protect the members who don't want to see it happen but aren't prepared to say so publically.

SO: Back to that staff work, as you say: making sure that you did indeed have the backing. An awful lot is riding on the next Malta CHOGM.

DM: Yes, well, the last one in Colombo was a shambles, somewhat saved by the change in government. But the Commonwealth needs a very active person to come on now and really steam the place up again. That alone will generate more governmental support.

SO: It does indeed. Sir, thank you very much indeed.

DM: You're welcome.

[END OF AUDIOFILE PART TWO]