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JULIAN HARSTON

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is the 12th of April 2021. This is the interview with Julian Harston, retired British diplomat and retired Assistant Secretary General in the UN, done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training. My name is Biljana Jović.

Let us start this interview by talking about your early life. Can you tell me when and where you were born, and then we will talk a little about your family background?

HARSTON: I was born in Nairobi in October 1942, it was the Kenya colonies at the time. When I was born, my father, who was a colonial soldier, was fighting in Ethiopia, you could say liberating Ethiopia from the Italians, and I was alone with my mother for some time after birth. I ended up with four Christian names because my father was to choose one when he returned. When he eventually returned, he said - I don't care. So, then I ended up with the name Julian. Of course, we spoke English at home, as my father and mother are both British. And their families were both from the north of England. My mother's father was a mining engineer in the north of England. And my father's father was something of a drifter. At one stage he even was a cowboy in the United States but came back eventually. I had such a strange background, but, because I was born in Nairobi, I was almost destined to go back to Africa.

Q: Did you have any siblings?

HARSTON: I have a sister who died last week sadly.

Q: I am sorry to hear that.

HARSTON: Yes, it's quite a blow really. My sister stayed in England. Even to the extent that when we moved from Kenya, at the end of the war, my father was moved to run a British military mission in Ethiopia, which was training the Ethiopian army. And he and

my mother took me out to Ethiopia because I was not yet of school age, but my sister stayed in England for a couple of years living with her grandmother.

Q: I see. Did you have any traditions at home, given the fact that you were born so far away from Britain?

HARSTON: I am not sure what you mean by traditions, I mean you know we had all the usual celebrations for Christmas and birthdays, but no I don't think that we had any special traditions.

Q: The only language that you spoke at home was English, I guess?

HARSTON: Yes, it was, although when I was little, a small four-year old boy in Ethiopia, I spoke Amharic because all my little friends were Ethiopian. So, my father would pull me to the door to answer it back then speaking Amharic at the age of four.

Q: Were there any home environment influences or circumstances that led you towards international work?

HARSTON: Well, I think, yes, quite obviously the fact that I was born in Africa. My father was a soldier. When we came back to England, he was then posted to Germany to the British Army on the Rhine, which occupied Germany. He was posted to Copenhagen, Denmark, what was then called NATO headquarters Denmark. So, yes, I mean, I was traveling from a very early age. Of course, it was a different time, looking back on it. You know, as a thirteen-year-old, my parents allowed me and the parents of a friend of mine allowed him to hitchhike from England to the south of Spain, two thousand kilometers. Nobody worried about us at that point.

Q: What type of elementary and high school did you attend?

HARSTON: I was at a prep school in England, I was at the choir school in Canterbury Cathedral. Then I went on to London University and got a scholarship from there again going back to Africa to do African Studies at what was then called the University College of Rhodesia and Nyasaland in what was then called Salisbury, and that college was a college in London University. So, I ended up with a London University degree in economics, and an African politics degree from Rhodesia.

Q: What were your favorite classes at a time?

HARSTON: At school French, German, and English. At university, African politics.

Q: Did you have any extracurricular activities during that time?

HARSTON: At school, I had a lot of music, I was singing a lot. I was at the oldest school in England called the King's School Canterbury, and it was in the precincts of the Canterbury Cathedral. There was never a moment when you didn't hear music from the site, whether it was from the choir, the chorus, and all those things related to singing. I had a very musical education in that sense. Going on to university, my extracurricular activities were political. I was president of the school's student union in my second year. That was a very political job because this was University College in Salisbury, which was then, I think, the only multicultural institute in Rhodesia where blacks and whites worked and lived together. So politically, it was a difficult place to take on student politics. When I was elected president, I was, in fact, the last white president of that student union.

Q: Did you also have a chance to travel or to engage in some other unique experiences at that age, other than then you have just mentioned?

HARSTON: Traveling to and from Africa was an experience because going down to Rhodesia we went on a boat from Southampton in England to Cape Town and then by train from Cape Town to Salisbury, which was two days on the train. This was frightening in appearance, an old steam train, you opened the windows and your seats got covered in ash from the wood burning. When I was in Salisbury, we were able to travel on long holiday weekends to Mozambique. And then coming back from there, at the end of 1964, I came by sea from Mozambique to London, and that was a full week. It was then a regular line up the East African Coast. I visited extraordinary places like Zanzibar, Tanga, Dar es Salaam, and through the Suez Canal and around the Mediterranean before getting to London. That was an extraordinary experience.

Q: You already mentioned it briefly, but can you tell me more about your university? What were your major and minor subjects? What are your memories about your university education?

HARSTON: Well, it was a wonderful place. I mean, first of all, because Salisbury is a wonderful place, Harare is a wonderful place. It is high enough never to get too hot and never to get too cold, with sunshine three hundred days a year, and it was a brand-new university, it had only been opened about ten years before, so all the buildings looked modern and new. It had this unique feature for Rhodesia, which was not an integrated society. It was not as bad as it was in South African apartheid, but it was difficult. It was fascinating to be in the only institution in a country which was multiracial. My degree says economics, University of London. In fact, I specialized very much in African politics, with a bit of French on the side. It was not an economics degree at all, but there were shorter titles in those days.

Q: Did you have any mentors at that time that left a great impression on you and influenced your career?

HARSTON: I think if there were one, it was the provost of the university Sir Walter Adams, who was an extraordinary, talented, and very interesting man, who was as much

interested in extracurricular activities, as he was in your academic progress. We were very close because I was president of the student union and there were almost daily or weekly problems which had to be sorted out. So, I worked very closely with him, and I thought he was, in all senses of the word, a great man. He went on to be the provost of the London School of Economics.

Q: Did you have any jobs prior to joining the British Foreign Service? What were they and why did you leave them for a career in diplomacy?

HARSTON: Well, we were lucky in my generation. I often think how lucky we were compared to the modern generation. When you left University in 1964, 1965, you wrote to companies expecting them to answer and expecting them to offer you a job, and so I wrote to a number. I was interested in doing something overseas. I wrote to the usual suspects: I wrote to BOAC, Barclays Bank, I wrote to Rio Tinto Mining Company, I wrote to a number of companies which had overseas representation. I also wrote to the Foreign Office and got a gray little postcard that came back saying that I hadn't even crossed the first hurdle. But I joined the British National Tourist Office, the British Travel Association as it was then called because it had a very good one-year induction program and offered very early going overseas and that's exactly what happened. After a year in London, I was sent to run my own office of the tourist organization in Copenhagen, and after a year and a half in Copenhagen, I was then sent to run my own office in Vancouver, Canada. It was fun selling Britain as a tourist destination and doing a lot of traveling around with travel agents and so on. For a young man, it was a challenge, and it was a lot of fun. I got to see the whole of Western Canada and almost every town in Denmark. I learned Danish, and I had a very good time but, by the time I had done six years, I had enough. I was in London, and I was doing marketing jobs which I quite enjoyed. When I was in Copenhagen, running the tourist office there, I got to know the British ambassador very well because I was working in a building which is part of the embassy. Before I left, he said to me: “Julian, if you ever want to join the Foreign Service, get in touch and I'll see if I can put your foot on the first rung of the ladder”. So, when I finally got back from Canada, I telephoned him, and he was by then what was called Chief Clerk in those days in London. He was running the whole administration of the Foreign Service. We had a lunch and, two or three months later, I ended up in the Foreign Office.

Q: Did you have to apply and do the test?

HARSTON: Yes. Oliver Wright was his name, by the way, he ended up as the ambassador in Washington. Sir Oliver Wright, Margaret Thatcher appointed him to Washington as the ambassador. In those days, and probably still for all I know, there was a thing called the civil service selection board. It was a three-day affair. As a group of five or six at the time, you did a number of tests, written and oral tests and ran with the others in the group as the committee discussed something. It was very good, very efficient, and not at all scary. A week or two later, they wrote and said, okay you passed the civil service selection board, now you go to the final board. The final board consisted

of sixteen or seventeen officers, and I think the process lasted around two hours. Finally, I also got a letter from them saying: “Welcome! Please come on the 17th of June” or whatever date it was.

Q: Did you receive any training before your first assignment? I guess you must have. Any specialized training?

HARSTON: You would guess that, wouldn't you? In those days, the Foreign Office did no training, no official training. What you did was we went in around the political side, we went into what they call the third room which was covering a few countries. And you were the new person so if the telegram had to be answered, you did the first draft. You learned the hard way. What an extraordinary pleasure that was when you saw that one of your drawn up telegrams or cables, for the first time ever, had been signed off by your head of department, and signed off by the under secretary, signed off, if necessary, by the secretary of state. It was a thrill. But no, no formal training at all.

Q: It is surprising, I have to say.

HARSTON: I think there is now. There is a Diplomatic Academy in London. I think there is quite serious formal training now.

Q: When you were assigned to the job, was it the job of your choice? Were you happy to get a job?

HARSTON: I'm not sure we were given a choice, actually, to start with. I don't even remember what that first job was. But I do remember in 1973 meeting a girl, who worked in the personnel department, on a dark winter afternoon in London, four o'clock in the afternoon. And, as she passed me in the corridor, she said, "What do you think of Hanoi?" And I said, well, not very much. At the time I think Nixon was actually bombing Hanoi. It wasn't for another month at least, that I got summoned to the personnel department and asked whether I would like to go out to the consulate in Hanoi as my first job abroad.

Q: What were the main issues that you dealt with? Can you tell us just generally?

HARSTON: I was a consul in Hanoi. So, in theory, responsible for British subjects, but there weren’t any. There was a girl who worked for radio Hanoi, an English girl, so very much of the regime, and she was my only consulate charge. The main job at that time was simply to be there because we didn't have diplomatic relations with North Vietnam. We had a consulate general there because we had always had a consulate general. It was the consular office of the British Consulate General in Tonkin of our embassy in Saigon, where we had kept the office, kept the consulate general name. And the reason that the Vietnamese allowed us to stay there, was because they had a consulate general in Hong Kong, which was incredibly important for them as an outlet for almost all their public relations, propaganda call it what you will. They were desperate to hang on to Hong

Kong, a British Crown Colony at that time. So, they kept this consulate general in Hanoi, until 1974, when we recognized North Vietnam, and it became an embassy. But our main job was just to be there. There was a great deal of disappointment in Washington at that time, that the United Kingdom had not really supported the Americans in Vietnam, had not sent troops there. Australia, New Zealand sent troops, the UK never did. There was a socialist government in the UK at the time. I think we were there really as an indication that the UK hadn't totally forgotten the United States. The US of course, had no representation there, so we were there as a token of friendship to the United States.

Q: I see. Did you need any language skills other than English when you were there?

HARSTON: I had pretty good French. That was essential, actually, because, if we were dealing with any senior middle range official in the North Vietnamese government, it was in French. It was not unusual around the world, you would speak French to them before a meeting, but as soon as you started the meeting, they would speak Vietnamese and it would be translated into French. Which is an old trick of course in the diplomatic world, it gives them time to think while the interpreter is speaking.

Q: Exactly. Were there any other aspects of intercultural communication that you had to learn?

HARSTON: I mean, people used to ask me if we were followed, for example. My wife was there by the way at that time, and she worked as a secretary for the two of us. It was all very cozy. People asked us if we were followed, but there was no need to follow us any more than it would be if you were a ten-foot-tall green giant walking around Washington. You didn't need to be followed. You could ask people and they will have seen you. As the blonde haired, six-foot-one man with the blonde wife walking around Hanoi everybody knew where we were, what we had done, who we had spoken to and so on. We had very little contact with the Vietnamese. Even our interpreter - we were walking one day together with our interpreter, and there was an argument going on outside a baker's shop. And I said to him, "What's going on over there?" To which his answer was "Where?" It was a very controlled society. I used to go for a walk every afternoon. I never slept in the afternoon. I would go for a walk, and I would choose three or four different walks, but you could only walk a maximum of about a kilometer in one direction before you came up against what we call a cam sign, with a C on it, a road sign which meant no further. We were basically within a one or two square kilometer box. We were allowed out when they decided we could go out. They would ring the telephone maybe 24 hours before and say, "Tomorrow, you are going to the port of Hai Phong", or "Tomorrow you are going up to the Chinese border", or whatever. So, we got out three or four times. Then of course, we got out because one of us, the consul general or me, would accompany our diplomatic bag out to Vientiane in Laos once every two or three weeks, and then spend a week outside and come back. So, we got a bit of travel, and we were able to go to Vientiane, Saigon, Hong Kong, and even to Singapore on one occasion. So, we got quite a lot of travel to compensate for our so-called miserable life. We actually did love it. Anytime I went back I had to calculate how many toilet rolls and how many jars

of butter I would need for a year because on the way into Hanoi, the Foreign Office said we should go to a place called Singapore Cold Storage and buy the food and cleaning equipment and anything else we would need for a year. They would pay to air freight it in. So that's what we lived on for a year.

Q: How long did you stay there? When did you leave Hanoi?

HARSTON: It was a one-year post in '74, and it was a hardship post. So, it was quite useful in a way because, in those days, you wouldn't get extra money, but they gave you extra time towards a pension. So, I spent one year there, which earned the next three years towards my pension, and it really wasn't a hardship post. We did the typical things of course. No risk. I had quite a close kinship with our fellow diplomats, and even the ones from the Soviet Bloc. So, it was okay.

Q: When you look back, what would you say were your principal accomplishments during your assignment?

HARSTON: I think survival. I don't know, I think just an ability to make the best of it, you know. We had some very good contacts. The Swedes at that time had very good relations with the government, because the then Swedish Prime Minister Olof Palme had not only not supported the American war in the south of Vietnam, but openly opposed it and gone on marches, and so on. So, the Swedes were the flavor of the month for the North Vietnamese, and we were very close to the Swedes. There was an extraordinary Swedish Ambassador there called Jean-Christophe Oberg who became a friend of mine. I learned an awful lot from him, because he had very good access to what was going on. And the French ambassador was an extraordinary man, too. The French had a very large embassy in residence because of their ex-colonial position there. We had this French ambassador who was very funny, and very approachable. He was married to an English woman whom he had met in the Resistance in Paris during the war. His father had been ambassador in Beijing, and he ended up as ambassador in Beijing. He was a close friend. Of course, they had a post-colonial relationship with the Vietnamese, but nonetheless, an interesting relationship. Reporting from there about what was going on was not difficult because there were friendly fellow diplomats there who were quite well connected. It was fun and it was only a year.

Q: Have you kept in touch with contacts during that assignment? I assume you must have with other diplomats, but have you kept any contact with your interlocutors from the local community?

HARSTON: No, we didn't have that kind of relationship at all. I mean, the only Vietnamese I got to know very well was our interpreter. And no doubt at all he was reporting every day to the security. But he was the only Vietnamese I got to know the whole time I was there. It wasn't that kind of post, unfortunately. As for colleagues, well it would be about fifty years ago, so no not many.

Q: What was your next post?

HARSTON: My next post was to come back to London. I was doing all sorts of things in London. Then I went to Blantyre, Malawi, which was an interesting post to go to, because, at that time, we had the Rhodesia problem. It had been a problem for some time. Rhodesia had unilaterally declared independence from the United Kingdom under Ian Smith. It became a real problem for us because we had no less than half a million British subjects in Rhodesia at that time. It became a problem for us in our relationship with just about every country in the world who supported South Africa – actually not South Africa, but the Africans in South Africa. It had been a real problem. At that stage, dealing with this colony which had declared independence took more than a third of the effort of British foreign policy. The posts which surrounded Rhodesia - we had no official representation in Salisbury - the posts which surrounded it in Blantyre, Zambia, Malawi, Kenya, and South Africa became very important. More important than they had ever been, and ever have been since. So, I was lucky enough to be sent on my own to Blantyre, Malawi with a watchful eye for Rhodesia. At that time, the only way to get in and out of Rhodesia was either to fly to Blantyre in Malawi or to fly to South Africa. The Africans almost entirely wanted to get out via Blantyre. As the first secretary in Blantyre, I had an opportunity to meet just about every African leader from Zimbabwe, because they all came into the Consulate General there to renew passports. We had promised Rhodesians, particularly black Rhodesians at that time, travel documents if they could get to a British office. I met all of them: Mugabe, Sithole, Abel Muzorewa - names which mean nothing to anybody now, but were then very important. So, I was able to report very important political information from Blantyre.

Q: How long did you stay there?

HARSTON: I think it was three years, and then back to London. But it was three very interesting, very exciting years. My son was born there in 1978, and it was a very interesting time. And I still have friends from that time, black and white.

Q: You would return to the area a few years later, but off to London, then you had something totally different from your work in Africa. You were stationed in Europe, in Portugal?

HARSTON: Yes, in Lisbon. Funnily enough, at that time Lisbon was also an African post because the Portuguese had just stopped fighting these two colonial wars in Africa. Back to Mozambique of course they were neighbors to Rhodesia. One of the things I didn't mention was that while I was in Malawi, I used to visit Mozambique and was privileged on each visit to speak and spend time with the president of Mozambique, Samora Machel. That was a very interesting challenge. He spoke no English but was, in a way, a great admirer of the British. He found himself surrounded by members of the Commonwealth, surrounded by people who drove on the left-hand side of the road, as did Mozambique. He asked me one day, "What's wrong with Mozambique?" And I said to him, "Your Excellency, where would you like me to start?" And he said, "No, no, no, no.

What's wrong with Mozambique is that we were colonized by an underdeveloped country, Portugal". And funnily enough, years and years later, Mozambique was the first country to join the British Commonwealth which had not been a British colony. So, it was a strange relationship. Again, because Mozambique at that time was the home of ZANU (Zimbabwe African National Union), Mr. Mugabe's political party. And it was, of course, very interesting to talk to the president who, after all, gave them permission to be there.

Q: Did you have any great accomplishments during your tour in Lisbon?

HARSTON: Well, it was a difficult tour in a way because there wasn't that much going on. I mean, Portugal is our old ally. There have never been any real problems. I was a political counselor. As far as politics are concerned, not much was happening. It was a lovely place to be, it was a good place to have a child. I had a beautiful house. From the work point of view, it wasn't an enormous challenge. I mean, of course, we did the usual reporting, and, just before I left, we prepared for the Queen's visit. But not really, it was not a very exciting post from my point of view. I mean, Britain has had a very special relationship with Portugal going back - as I said they are the oldest ally we have. So not boring, but not challenging.

Q: After Lisbon, you returned to Africa? How much time did you have in between?

HARSTON: I went straight from one post to the other. I got a phone call one day saying - how would you like to go back to Harare? I grabbed it because Mugabe was already the Prime Minister and big changes were going on in Zimbabwe. It was home for me in many ways. So we flew from Lisbon directly to Johannesburg and then to Harare.

Q: How much was the situation different from what you had left earlier?

HARSTON: It was totally different. I mean, when I left, it was a rebel white dominated colony that was by now an independent African state. For the first ten years or so from its independence, people forget that Mugabe actually did precisely and exactly what he was required to do. He was not a bad leader for the first ten years. He was obliged by the Settlement in Lancaster House with London to do a number of things and not do a number of things for the first ten years, and he kept absolutely to what he had signed. People forget these first ten years because the subsequent thirty, forty years have been a nightmare. From my point of view, of course, it was totally different. It was still the same very beautiful city. Still the same Jacaranda trees, and everything was still working quite well. There was plenty of electricity, plenty of water, and so on. Life was not bad at all, but it was politically very difficult because we were fairly loud critics when Mugabe did anything that we disapproved of. So, we had to be very careful. I forgot to say that, actually, when I was in Blantyre, I was involved in the process which led to the independence of Zimbabwe. First of all, there was a conference in Geneva. It was the first time Robert Mugabe had been involved in negotiations in the Palais des Nations maneuver. It was an extraordinary sight to see Ian Smith, who was white, and his white

government sitting down at the table with Mr. Mugabe, Bishop Muzorewa, and Nbabaningi Sithole, the leaders of black independence movement in Rhodesia where there had been a very nasty war going on. So here they were around the table in Geneva. We had one of those traditional things, which happened at the last moment in those kinds of negotiations. Mugabe and the others refused to sit at a table where Ian Smith's delegation was referred to as the Delegation of the Government of Rhodesia. So, we decided to call them Mr. Sithole's delegation, Mr. Mugabe's delegation and Mr. Smith's delegation. I was asked by the chairman to go and explain to Mr. Smith that this was going to happen. Of course, he immediately said, "Oh, no, this is not acceptable. If that is on the table, I will not go, and we'll go home then." Which of course, he did not. Those were very interesting two or three weeks leading up to Christmas. That was when I was in Malawi. And then again, I was involved in London, in the so-called Lancaster House talks, which followed those in Geneva a year later. Finally, there was an agreement under Lord Carrington, British Foreign Minister at that time, for a handover to black rule in Rhodesia and Zimbabwe. That was a fascinating thing to be involved with, in London, on home territory, relatively easy, and a real privilege. It was a seminal moment in our relationship with Africa.

I was very lucky in Africa. I was involved in Africa at the time when it was very important to Her Majesty's government, taking up a lot of our time. If I have an opportunity to say so now I will - I think I played a significant part in bringing us to the solution at the Lancaster House and I was very honored to do so. I met our foreign minister Lord Carrington in Venice later. We were walking along the street in Venice and bumped into him and his family and he said – with his amazing memory of the names - he said, "Julian, I never did thank you, did I?" And I said, "No, you didn't". He was rather surprised. He said, "Yeah, okay. Well, thank you now". So that was a lovely moment. He visited Malawi when I was there. He was not in office then, he was actually a chairman of a bank and had been in Zimbabwe in that capacity. Because he was who he was, I met him at the airport. My son had just been born at the end of February 1978, and my wife was suffering from quite severe postnatal depression, so she didn't get to meet him. He came and sat on my balcony, and we had whiskey, and we talked about Rhodesia and so on so forth. At the Lancaster House I met him again, and he said, "Is your wife okay now? She was going a bit haywire." I replied, "Yes, she's fine, thank you". But he had an amazing memory. I mean he didn't have people standing next to him reminding him about these things, he had this extraordinary talent.

Q: You stayed in Harare for five years?

HARSTON: I think three, certainly not five. And then I came back to London after that, and then to Geneva.

Q: I can see that you worked as a crisis support liaison. At that time, the main crisis was actually growing in Europe. Did you get involved in the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia? Did you follow it at the time?

HARSTON: I did. I'm just trying to think about when I first got involved. I think it was in Geneva actually. I remember for some reason I was at a meeting in London. One of the things that surprises people in the Balkans and surprises Slav people more than anything else, was the disbelief that we did not have some kind of master plan. You know, at that time and even today, Serbs and others will say "Yes, but you must have known what it was you wanted to do. There must have been a conspiracy". They want to believe that what happened had been part of a plan. And it really was not. I go back to Peter Carrington on this, when we first were going to have this meeting in London, the Lancaster House Conference on the future of Rhodesia, Zimbabwe. He held a meeting with a lot of staff, and he stood up on the chair so everyone could see him and said, "What I want you to understand is that I want to get rid of this problem of Rhodesia. I don't care about kissing kin. I don't care about the fact there's a lot of white people in Rhodesia, I don't care about this. I care about British national interests." And for many people, myself included, it's the first time I'd ever heard a British Foreign Minister talk seriously about British national interests. Now the French are quite good at this. They identify national interest, and they pursue it. The UK, in my experience, during my time had a reactive policy on most foreign relations issues, it was not proactive. So, it was not surprising to go to a meeting at the beginning of the war and form a scenario. So in this particular case, we had a meeting where people said that there was no British national interest involved in this, it would not become a NATO issue, it would not affect our relations with Yugoslavia's neighbors. We don't have enormous investment in Yugoslavia. So, on the whole, we will get involved politically but not otherwise. There was one voice, which said, "Wait a minute, we have to have an interest in this, we need to take an active role". This was the Ministry of Defense. "We need to provide troops because we are permanent members of the Security Council, and we need to show that we can do something that the Germans cannot."

So, if you're looking for reasons that the United Kingdom became involved before the UN Protection Force, which was one of the biggest United Nations operations in its history, the reason for the UK involvement was because we were permanent members of the Security Council, and we needed to bolster that position. And because we knew the Germans could not. No Serb or Yugoslav, whether it was the past president of Serbia or the present Minister of State Security that I told this, ever believed me. They simply do not believe me when I tell them that story. Because it is, as you well know, a land of conspiracy. Apart from that meeting, I found myself in Geneva at the time, when Lord Owen, Martti Ahtisaari, and Cyrus Vance were involved in negotiating and dealing with the Balkans problem. As I was a political counselor in the mission, I was expected to brief David Owen, learn from him what was going on, and report it. I spent a lot of time in his office, with him and Martti Ahtisaari, who is still a very good friend, by the way. I got to know really for the first time what the hell was going on in the former Yugoslavia. And of course, I met all the people who were involved on the Yugoslav side, the Serbian side, the Croatian side, and who was on that stage. It was a new interest for me, and one which has been with me ever since.

Q: What were your impressions? Why all these initiatives - and many of them were launched at that time, many peace plans - why didn't they work?

HARSTON: It's difficult to say. I mean, if you look at it from the Yugoslav side - people that were involved on the Yugoslav side: Croatians, Bosnians, and so on- I don't think there was really an understanding at that stage that the peace talks needed to work. This was a local problem. It was a problem which had been asleep for many, many years. Somebody once described the division of Europe, the Iron Curtain, as having created a glacier and freezing in it all the existing potential problems to be solved after the Second World War: Czechoslovakia, the Baltic States, Eastern and West Germany, and, of course, Yugoslavia. When that glacier melted and down came the wall, all those problems were still there. Luckily, we had the Velvet Revolution in Czechoslovakia. We had the reunification of Germany, and the solution in the Baltic States, but Yugoslavia was still there. I don't need to go into a history of who was right and who was wrong. There was a potential dynamic which we'd seen in Northern Ireland and many other places between nationalism, religion, and history. And so no. I can't answer your question now. I can answer it later on, for example, at the conference that took place in Paris, which was not supposed to succeed. If you're looking for conspiracies, that's the conspiracy. There was no chance that there was ever going to be a solution hammered out there, because it wasn't the Serbs who were there who didn't want a solution, it was the people who actually set up the conference with the aim to have it fail. So, you know, from time to time, there is a conspiracy. But I think the reason those initiatives failed is because they weren't any good. You know, there were never any real solutions to the problems there. They were always unfair to one side or another.

Q: Well, let us stop here because then next time when we continue with our interviews, we will talk about your more active engagement in the field. If you agree, I will stop our interview for today and then we will continue in a couple of days.

Q: Today is the 16th of April 2021. We are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, retired British diplomat and retired senior UN official. Last time, you talked about your assignments in North Vietnam, Malawi, Portugal and Zimbabwe, then you spent some time in London working as a crisis support liaison. When did this assignment start and what were the main crises that you dealt with at a time?

HARSTON: This assignment had started before I went to Geneva in 1992, in around 1990. We were dealing with the possibility, and, in fact, the reality of embassies being besieged, people being kidnapped and that sort of thing. And what we did about it, because the UK probably, like most countries, I assume, certainly like the United States and France and Germany, has a twenty-four hour a day, 365 days a year capability of intervening almost anywhere in the world in a given time. If an embassy is under siege, or if people are kidnapped, and so on and so forth. So that's essentially what we were doing or planning and practicing, rehearsing in England, rehearsing in Cyprus, and so on. Very interesting job.

Q: This was also the time when the disintegration of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia started. What were the UK administration's expectations in regard to this crisis?

HARSTON: Well, as I mentioned earlier, I found myself at a very important meeting where it was being discussed whether the United Kingdom should send forces to Yugoslavia—to former Yugoslavia. People in the Balkans are always looking for conspiracies, or at least they are looking for people having a plan at the back of their minds on how they were going to operate. And I was forever telling my Serbian interlocutors that, on the whole, British Foreign policy is reactive. It's not proactive, and it hasn't been proactive during my time. When it became proactive in Rhodesia, for example, it was because of what Peter Carrington specifically said, "I want to do this, this and this, because it is good for the United Kingdom."

So, there was a meeting to discuss this kind of thing on former Yugoslavia, and everybody said, “It is really of no great interest to us. It is not a great threat to us, whatever is happening there. And it is very unlikely to involve NATO.” Therefore, we simply did not run to get involved until one person from the foreign office said, "Well, wait a minute. We need to protect and to justify our permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council." And so, point one. Point two, it was very useful for us to be able to do things that the Germans cannot do. At that stage, an interpretation of the German constitution was that German forces could not serve outside Germany at all—later amended and changed. So, it was decided at that meeting that we should send forces to join UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force] in Bosnia and in Croatia in order to - really - to justify our seat on the Security Council. And I used to, as I say, have arguments with my ex-Yugoslav interlocutors, when they said, "Oh, you must have had a long-term plan for the Balkans." We did not. But I didn't get involved in the Balkans until a bit later, until I was in Geneva.

Q: During this time, London officials played an important role as negotiators in the Yugoslav crisis, and they co-authored a few peace plans. From this perspective, what was the most comprehensive plan put on the negotiating table? What's your opinion about that?

HARSTON: As I said, I wasn't really involved in Yugoslavia until I got to Geneva. But the International Conference of Former Yugoslavia was an interesting advancement in that process. I followed it as a bystander when I was in Geneva. I was never convinced that we would be able to negotiate some kind of solution to that problem, because I had been involved in Northern Ireland. I was involved in the early days of the peace talks in Northern Ireland, and I had seen firsthand how difficult it was and what a long-term process it was likely to be to sort out what was essentially a civil war involving religion and history. And here was another one. Here was one based on religion and history, and of course, ethnic origins.

But basically, we were fighting - you were fighting at the front line between the Turkish Empire, as it were, and the Christian Empire. And so it went on. So I was never convinced in a tangible progress that much. The Vance-Owen Plan was interesting, I think. And I got to know David Owen very well in my early days in Geneva, because I was the counselor in the British mission to the United Nations. And there we had this ex-foreign minister involved in the peace process. So I would spend an hour or two every day in their offices in the Palais des Nations and get to know Martti Ahtisaari, who is still a friend to this day, actually. He's not very well at the moment, but he's a survivor.

David Owen was a very interesting man to work for. I had met him before when I was in Zimbabwe. I met him in Pretoria in South Africa. And there was a wonderful moment when we all trooped off to see the then president of South Africa . And David Owen, very young - youngest foreign minister since Pitt in England and the United Kingdom - started the conversation by saying, "Well, Mr. President" - "I'm here to tell you -" and that's as far as he got when the President said to him, "No, young man. You're not here to tell me anything. I'm here to tell you." And it was really not a very successful meeting.

But David Owen… Funnily enough, you've heard me call Peter Carrington "Peter." I'd never called David Owen "David." He was a very difficult man to deal with. Very arrogant, very full of himself. He is a medical doctor, but he never practiced as a doctor, he only practiced medical research for a while after he had left medical school. And he had an extraordinary mind. If you gave him a briefing for a meeting, you could see him mentally ticking off each point. He'd read it once and he ticked off each point as he went down the list. Very clever. At the end of the day, he was always a politician. He would say the most appalling things to you, and you'd be leaving his office in the Palais des Nations in Geneva, having decided that you're never going to go in there again, ever, ever, ever, ever. And just as you were leaving - he was a consummate politician - he would say, "Oh, Julian, I'm having a meeting with the foreign minister of Belgium this afternoon. Really useful to have you there. Because, you know, I really respect your political judgments." And of course, you came back. He never wanted to lose a vote. So there we are. I did work quite closely with them when they were working out towards sorts of plots and plans. But I never personally believed it was going to get very far. And I was right.

Q: Was there anything that could have been done differently? From this perspective, do you think that if there had been different decisions, different moves on the table, whether it would have changed the course of events?

HARSTON: I really don't have an answer to that. All my instinct says not, since, first of all, as I said to you before, the glacier had melted. So, there was the problem with Yugoslavia. Not just Yugoslavia, but Yugoslavia without Tito, without the stability of a long-term Croat leader based in Belgrade. It was almost inevitable that Yugoslavia would break up because it didn't have that central leadership. I think there would have been a possibility to make things easier, had the Germans not rushed to release Slovenia, and to embrace their old friends in Croatia. I think that had the international community been

tougher about the original separation, then we might have seen a period in which deals could have been done, but I think separation was inevitable, particularly if you add that to a sudden realization by Milošević during his visit to Kosovo that nationalism would keep him in power. The best way of massaging the natural nationalist tendencies in the former Yugoslavia was to behave in the way he did. So, I don't know. But I do think that Genscher and the Germans could have done better. And it might have given us a breathing space of some kind, but it didn't happen. And we saw what happened after that.

Q: You mentioned that there was an absence of coordination between principal international stakeholders. But what did the multilateral organization do? Did OSCE play any role in the crisis?

HARSTON: I don't remember OSCE [Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe] doing that. It's possible. As I said, I wasn't really involved until I left Geneva and went directly to Zagreb, but I don't remember an OSCE hand in all that. I honestly don't know. The UN, crippled as usual by some problems in the Security Council, easily passed a resolution to send the Protection Force, so called UNPROFOR. No problems with the Chinese or Russians at that stage. Let's not forget that it was called a UN Protection Force because it was there specifically to protect food convoys, which were transiting a growing war zone in order to feed people. So UNPROFOR rather changed direction as it got older. I don't think it presented a problem at that stage with the Security Council. Other than that, I honestly don't remember.

Q: Well, their impact was obviously very limited. I mean, no one can remember what really happened in that regard.

HARSTON: I mean, the Americans were very reluctant to become involved. Americans sent nobody to UNPROFOR. They were a very reluctant participant in the peacekeeping operation. In Macedonia, they were really talked into that, because it would at least give them a presence in the former Yugoslavia without them having to be involved in a war. So, they sent a battalion of troops down to the mission in Macedonia. But otherwise, they were very reluctant from the beginning to be involved, certainly to be involved militarily.

Q: Did your work in the mission in Geneva involve interaction with the staff from other missions accredited there?

HARSTON: Yes, of course, it was a multilateral mission. And I was a political counselor. So yes, I had, funnily enough, the closest interaction I had with the brand new Croatian mission run by a man who was later Foreign Minister of Croatia. We had pretty regular encounters, as you know, with the Russians, with the Americans and so on. The work of the mission was going on and we were doing all the stuff that the UN does in Geneva. But I was more and more involved in former Yugoslavia. So, I was involved in meetings in Geneva, which brought together all the major players. I mean, at that time, we were negotiating but failing to reach any kind of sensible agreement.

Q: I forgot to ask you about how you decided to go to Geneva. Was it difficult to get that job? Did you have to lobby for it?

HARSTON: No, I didn't. I had never really thought of going to Geneva. I was lucky because I, actually, by that stage, and it's a long story—I owned a property in Switzerland, a small apartment in Gstaad. So, for me, it was, in many ways, an ideal post to go to Geneva. We didn't have the sort of a sophisticated bidding system for an office that now exists for every job. Having people apply for it, bid for it, and so on and so forth. At that time, it was largely a shadow process. Suddenly somebody said to me, "We'd like you to go to Geneva," and I thought that was terrific. So no, we didn't have that sort of system, particularly not for senior posts. I mean, it was slightly different for ambassadors, maybe the high commissioner, but otherwise, no. I was very happy to go.

Q: You stayed there for three full years.

HARSTON: Yes, I did. And then I left the service.

Q: So when you look back, what would you say were your principal accomplishments at this post in Geneva?

HARSTON: I think it was really all to do with the former Yugoslavia and meeting people, keeping people informed of what was going on and so on. Otherwise, Geneva is, as I said, multilateral diplomacy, which I wasn't very good at. I mean, those missions are incredibly busy. And particularly if you're a permanent member of the Council, because that means that you're on every subcommittee and every meeting, and there has to be somebody there. We had to be present at meetings of the World Health Organization, the Meteorological Organization, you name it… I largely avoided those sorts of presences because I had no technical expertise. The thing I enjoyed most, apart from the Yugoslav adventure, was that, from time to time, I was also accredited to our disarmament mission, which is in the same building, but with a separate ambassador, and occasionally, I would be the chargé in that mission. When the head of mission was away, I was the senior counselor. And it was fun to go to some meetings, it was something totally different for me, and very interesting, although pretty time consuming, because like all UN meetings, everybody gets a chance to speak. So you end up with Zambia's view on space, weaponry, and so on. But otherwise, it was a challenge and it enabled me to meet a whole lot of new people. For example, the Indian ambassador and the Pakistan ambassador, and so on. That was fun and a new adventure. And while we were there, we were beginning to set up the Convention on Chemical Weapons [Chemical Weapons Convention], which ended up with a separate headquarters in the Netherlands. But the initial work on the convention was done in Geneva while I was there. It was a whole new world for me, and I enjoyed it very much.

Q: You stayed in Geneva until 1995. What prompted you to look for a new challenge outside the UK Foreign Service framework and enter the UN system?

HARSTON: I looked forward and I thought, "Well, it's not probably going to get better than this." I was already the rank of about half our ambassadors around the world. I was able to take advantage of a scheme by which we could retire at the age of 55 or 54. They gave me a chunk of money. And I thought, well, if I do go back, I'm going to be in London probably for most of the rest of my career. And I didn't want to do that. So I took the money and ran. I was in a good position. I applied for all sorts of jobs and itp got very depressing. The most depressing thing you can get when you're looking for a job is to be told after an interview or after a special visit to London or whatever it is that you're overqualified. I think they were frightened of my CV, a lot of them. But I got in touch with a colleague in New York and said, "I'd like to join the UN and I'd like to go into peacekeeping." And he said, "Well, the only way—the best way of doing that is to come here. I'll put you up in my apartment, and I'll take you into the UN building and introduce you to some people who will be able to help."

And that was precisely what I did. I went to New York, and I stayed with him for a week or more. He was a counselor in the British mission to the UN in New York. He introduced me to some pretty influential people in the building, after which I returned home. At the time, I was living in an apartment in France, in fact, just outside on the outskirts of Geneva. I was rather scared because, you know, I'd been in a good, well-paying job for a long time and suddenly I was unemployed. But I had met the two most influential people in the UN dealing with the personnel issues: Luiz Carlos da Costa, who was in charge of personnel in New York at that time, who was a Brazilian Portuguese speaker and I spoke Portuguese, and Hocine Medili, his boss and the head of the whole of the UN administration at that time. I got on very well with da Costa, who was a Portuguese speaker, and Medili, who was Algerian, and I summed each other up pretty well. Most people didn't get on well with him. At that stage, the UN was running a very large peacekeeping operation in Angola, and in Cambodia, and was now faced with running a very large peacekeeping operation in the former Yugoslavia, with very little support in New York. I mean, looking at it today, you wonder how on earth they managed. At that stage, there were no more than thirty or forty people in New York on day to day involved in bringing together UNPROFOR and making it work.

Anyway, I went back to Geneva and within a couple of weeks, I got a fax - remember those? - offering me a job in Angola as the deputy special representative of the secretary general or to go to UNPROFOR in Zagreb, to head up a new political unit in the mission's headquarters. And very typical of the UN that you should be offered two jobs in the same week. I decided against Angola because I had spent enough time in Africa. And so I was on a plane from Geneva to Zagreb. And I must say that it was quite salutary for me when I heard the pilot of the Swiss aircraft saying, it's an hour and whatever it was, twenty minutes flying time, and I thought, "My god." I never focused on how this was happening so close to us. You know, for me up to that time, although I had been on holiday in Budva, Montenegro shortly after I had got married, I hadn't focused on the fact that it was just happening down the road. I had a rather odd interview with Yasushi Akashi, who was the Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG), and the

Head of the Mission. Our officers were in old army barracks in Zagreb, and on the top floor of a - I don't know what it was, five story building - was the Office of the SRSG, previously occupied by a Scandinavian head of mission. So it was full of plants and rather nice teak furniture. And the first view I got of Akashi was just this little Japanese face behind all these plants. It took me, you probably won't remember, but there was a period in the 1960s or 50s when they kept on discovering Japanese on tropical islands in the Pacific who didn't know WWII was over. That was the thought that flashed into my mind as I saw this little Japanese face behind the plants in the office.

Anyway, I had an interview with him, which was very unremarkable, and I thought "Well, I have no idea what he thinks." I then went out to lunch with his people, I later learned that they were called “his children”. He was surrounded by a group of young people who had total control over access to him as the boss. Emma, an Irish-Kenyan, Mary, an American, John, a Canadian man. There was also Zaid, a Jordanian prince and a real gentleman, whom I liked very much. Anyway, we all went out to lunch, and I suddenly realized, at the end of the lunch, that this, in fact, was the interview. So, on my way back to the airport in one of those awful big American cars, New York taxis that we used at that time, I said to the driver, who was a Fin – and drivers are always very well informed, always worth talking to - "Well, do you think I got the job?" And he said, "Yes, you did." So that was it and surely enough, a week or two later, I got an invitation to go and head up this political unit in UNPROFOR, Zagreb, and joined the UN on July 4, 1995.

Q: Since this was your first impression and your first experience in the UN system, what were your impressions about the recruiting system in the UN?

HARSTON: Of course, I was a slight exception, because I was being recruited at a pretty high level and it was still possible in those days - I don't think it is now - to be parachuted into the UN system at a fairly high level. I mean, I went in as a P-5, which is the equivalent of a first secretary. Two or three months after I got there, I got the rank, which I had been offered, which was a director. And it was done entirely on a personal basis of having met the two people in New York, who had seen my CV and who decided that I was right for this particular job. So, from my point of view, of course, it was a system, in inverted commas, that worked very well. I have no idea how difficult or easy it was at that time to join as a secretary, join as an engineer, join as a junior political officer, I honestly don't know. But I imagine it was difficult. And in all the changes that have been made since, it's been made more difficult rather than easier. It has always been disgraceful, and it remains disgraceful. The recruitment into the UN takes too long. They don't even read more than half of the applications because they don't have time and so on, so forth. Don't get me on to that stuff.

Q: You mentioned that your post formally started on the fourth of July, 1995. What did your first day in the office look like?

HARSTON: Well, it was, you know, the usual first day in a way that one was collecting stuff and collecting papers and collecting passes, and so on and so forth. But I was not made to feel that welcome by the little group that surrounded Akashi because I learned afterwards, they had strongly opposed the setting up of a political unit. Akashi had decided and told New York he wanted a political unit run by British, with a Russian and French deputy, to give him political advice on what was going on in UNPROFOR at the time, the savvy at the time. So that's what happened. I got a very interesting Russian deputy Karen Tchalian. The Frenchman, Prince Trubetskoy, was really not worth having around. Tchalian, on the other hand, was brilliant as a deputy. Tchalian was one of the laziest officers I've ever worked with. But when he worked, he wrote the most beautiful English and was very well informed on the history of former Yugoslavia and an enormous asset. I then recruited Mark Pedersen, a young New Zealand ex-soldier and a veteran of the UN Cambodia Operation, Philip Watkins, a young, ex-British Army officer, and Peggy Hicks, a young American woman who is now running a very large humanitarian NGO, and we set about our business, still finding it very difficult to have access directly to Akashi. I managed to have access to him, but I was increasingly resented by this little group of people that surrounded him. My third day there, I think Emma, the young Kenyan Irish, walked into my office and said to me, "You're not going to be here long. We got rid of your two predecessors. And it won't be long before you leave, too." I thought, well, that's nice, you know, that's a good way to start.

I then realized that I would have to set up my own little group and work without these people. And I did, and we were relatively successful, although fighting against the odds. And it was, of course, an incredibly difficult period for the mission because we're just coming up to Srebrenica, which happened soon after I had arrived. And then the Operation Storm, when the Croatians took back what we called "Sector South," Knin, and also the operation in, what we called, "Sector West." So, it was a very busy time. And what I saw was a mission which was more or less headless. Akashi had run a partially successful mission for the UN in Cambodia but was hopelessly out of his depth in a European mission. He never spoke to anybody apart from the people who surrounded him. He never went one floor down to speak personally to the extraordinarily competent French general, who was his force commander, General Janvier. So, I saw immediately, there was a need for us in our group, and for me in particular, to liaise with the military, because the military leadership and civilian leadership in the mission were moving further and further apart in their ambitions and in their understanding of the situation. And that was a very useful task for me and one, as Janvier later said, that had been critical for him. I'm a French speaker, which always helps.

Then Srebrenica happened. The gap between the Mission and New York was appalling. Boutros Boutros-Ghali didn't think that there ought to have been such a large peacekeeping operation in the rich man's world in Europe, as he called it, and therefore gave very little support. His office criticized, in cables from New York, decisions made in Zagreb on a regular basis. And it was fascinating, it was all about what our mission should not be. "It was arrogant. It was chaotic. It lacked leadership. It lacked purpose." And it was not a surprise that every blow that came our way was almost fatal. So,

Srebrenica was, for the mission, of course, a nightmare. A disaster. And probably the best report ever produced for the Secretary General was prepared by a colleague of mine, David Harland, who, at that time, was in Sarajevo. Harland was in Sarajevo for most of its siege. But, in New York, he produced a report for the new UN Secretary General Kofi Annan on what had happened in Srebrenica. It is available on the UN website and, as I said, it is probably one of the best reports produced, without seeking to put blame on anyone. It shows all that went wrong in the decision making and so forth.

I am still, would you believe all these years later, asked by audiences whom I speak to, not just in Serbia, but also in Germany or Geneva or in Stockholm, I am asked by young audiences - "Who was responsible for Srebrenica? Was it the Dutch?" They desperately want to find a scapegoat. And so many people were involved. The UN leadership, the UN military leadership, made terrible mistakes. The UN leadership in New York made mistakes, the Security Council made mistakes. And so it goes on. But at the end of the day, who was responsible for Srebrenica were two Bosnian Serbs: Mladić and his so-called President Karadžić. And you don't need to go further than that in apportioning the blame. It was, quite clearly to me - and I've never been persuaded otherwise - a deliberate act, which was carried out by Bosnian Serb forces under the control, direction, and management of Mladić and his political boss. And so, you know, you can argue until the end of time as to who was responsible. Was it the Dutch? Dutch who sent soldiers, who were national servicemen, who didn't volunteer to go, who had been too long in Srebrenica, who had a quite shockingly unprofessional relationship with the people of Srebrenica, particularly the women of Srebrenica? Was it Naser Oric's militia forces who the Dutch permitted to go out of Srebrenica, raid certain positions, slaughter civilians in surrounding Serbian villages, and come back in the middle of the night? Was it New York, and so on. A blame game can go on forever. But as long as you focus very firmly on who was actually responsible, it is not too difficult.

Q: I have a few more questions about Srebrenica. But I just want to ask you first, given the security situation, did you ever go on field visits? Or did you just work from the office?

HARSTON: No, no, I did spend a lot of time in the field. In my UN memoirs you will find letters describing various places. I used to write to my son and tell him about these visits. I went to Sarajevo. I went over the top of Mount Igman in one of the worst rain storms I have ever witnessed. I stayed in a container in the back of the post office in Sarajevo while it was being shelled. I went up to see the people in the northwest of Bosnia, loyal to Fikret Abdic, a man who ran most of the businesses in that area. He and his people were turned into refugees by the Bosnian Muslim and Croatian military. I went to Knin. I traveled as much as I could. We were very lucky in having the resources to go to places and come back quickly. We had a lot of aircraft that we used for flights from Zagreb airport, and we were able to visit all areas. I went to Dubrovnik for the first reiteration of the Dubrovnik Festival with Akashi and we went to Knin after Operation Storm and so on. So, yes, I got about a fair amount of travel in the region.

Q: How many people did you supervise in your office? You had quite a challenging portfolio to deal with.

HARSTON: I had four people working for me. But I was a relatively senior officer, so I had the services, if you like, of a whole lot more people who would do what I asked them to do. But directly, about four or five people, that's all.

Q: I see. I'll just go back to Srebrenica. How is it possible that UNPROFOR had no intel information for the potential for such a tragic development?

HARSTON: Well, I don't think that's true. I mean, I think, first of all, it was at UNPROFOR's behest that the Security Council set up the so-called "protected areas." And at the time, UNPROFOR asked for twice or three or four times as many troops as they were actually given to protect those areas. So, I think it was quite clear that the—what were they called—protected zones were under threat. But I don't know whether the actual final attack on Srebrenica, the final overtaking of Srebrenica, whether we knew about it a day or two days or three days before. I know that we were actively prevented from tasking air cover. We had, at that time, the opportunity to ask NATO to provide air cover: to attack, from the air, forces on the ground. And the Dutch Minister of Defense at the time, denied this every time it was discussed. Just before the Srebrenica massacre, he was on the phone talking to me, overheard by David Harland in my office in Zagreb, saying that under no circumstances should we use aircraft as close to his troops. So Akashi, who had been in favor of close air support, then changed his mind. Once again, another crucial decision was made by somebody, but at the end of the day, I don't think it would change much. You can say - if there had been different kinds of troops there, if they hadn't been Dutch… I don't know. The final assault on Srebrenica and the subsequent actions taken by Bosnian Serb forces came as a complete surprise to me. I had no idea that they had the intention of effectively killing half the population of Srebrenica.

Q: That is one of the questions that is frequently asked. About the reasons behind the decision not to use the military part of the mission to prevent the violence in and around the protected zone for months before and during the massacre.

HARSTON: We didn't have the forces available. I mean, you know, the great irony, the greatest irony of UNPROFOR is that we had the UN-provided lightly armed troops, very many of them badly equipped, the Kenyans and so on, in the middle of a war. And NATO provided heavily armed troops, very large numbers, when the war was over. And that's a terrible irony if you think about it.

Q: It is, I agree. Another tragedy is that this massacre lasted for eleven days. And when you look back from this perspective, it is very difficult to understand why it was allowed to continue for such a long time. What was the reaction of your colleagues in the office during this time?

HARSTON: I think they were shell-shocked. We had no idea that this was going to happen. We didn't have forces in the area, actually. I mean, we had the ability to use the air force but we didn't have that many ground troops in that part of what is now Republika Srpska. But I don't know. As I say, I was there, I witnessed all this. I can still remember a great deal about it, but don't forget, I had only been there for two, three weeks when it happened. It was not an easy time.

Q: I apologize for interrupting you, but it actually started a week after your arrival.

HARSTON: Exactly. So there you go. I mean, you know, I didn't have time to take a breath.

Q: Were there any attempts for a coordinated effort with other principal international stakeholders to do something about this?

HARSTON: No, not that I'm aware of. I mean, because they were already involved. I mean, apart from the United States, UK, France, you name it. I've forgotten how many military contributors we had to UNPROFOR but the UK and France were heavily involved and thus NATO, in a way. Yes, I'm sure there were meetings going on, every day, all day. And in New York. There were certainly meetings where I was, although I was not yet really accepted as an interlocutor by then. I do not want to make any excuses but, you know, in a way fortunately for me, I really did not know what was going on.

Q: Today is April 21, 2021. We are continuing the interview with Julian Harston on his first UN [United Nations] post as the head of political affairs in UNPROFOR [United Nations Protection Force].

A week after the tragedy in Srebrenica, you went to Dubrovnik with the SRSG [Special Representative of the Secretary-General]. What was the purpose of this trip?

HARSTON: We were invited by the Croatian government to the reopening of the Dubrovnik Festival. And we went down, stayed in a lovely hotel and spent an evening watching some hardline nationalist historical spectacle. But it was extraordinary to be in Dubrovnik because, of course, it was empty except for us and the festival crowd. I think that this was probably the last time ever that you would be able to walk around Dubrovnik with nobody there. But the striking feature of the evening was that, sitting opposite us, were three or four rows of Americans in uniforms, including some quite senior officers, one-star generals, etc. They were not being hidden from us at all by the Croatians. They were assisting the Croatians to plan and equip Operation Storm.

Q: It was late July 1995. Did the Mission have any intel on what might happen in the sector South? Would the Mission take any steps to prevent it if it had it?

HARSTON: Well, you did not need intelligence, it was quite clear that that's what the Croatians intended to do. And they even started to sell Storm souvenirs. Cigarette lighters and so on—so it was not a secret. The only question was when. And I think the important intelligence, if you like it, was that it was quite clear. Milošević didn't care. He'd given up on Republika Srpska Krajina by that time, and he had no intention to take any part in anything that required facing off against the Croatians. Prevent it? Of course not. We did not have the means nor the mandate to prevent it, actually. The only thing that we did have, which I discovered afterwards, was that General [Bernard] Janvier, our Force Commander, had special troops at his own disposal at our base at Zagreb Airport. And he dispatched teams to make absolutely sure that the Serbs did not threaten Zagreb, which they had done once before, they had shelled Zagreb, and he ensured that, in the two or three locations where they could do that, they were prevented from doing it. So as far as I know, that was our only military intervention at that time.

Q: Your team and you personally were the first internationals that went to the area after Operation Storm had started. What was your objective?

HARSTON: Well, I went with Akashi as soon as it was possible afterwards. I suppose he was just showing that we were trying to keep an eye on things. But I mean, it was embarrassing, because Akashi was simply not equipped to be subtle in those sorts of circumstances. He agreed to a joint press conference with General [Ante] Gotovina and I refused to go. I advised him strongly that it was absolutely wrong to be seen by the international press on the same platform as Gotovina, who would most certainly be charged, at least, of being a war criminal. We spent a day there. The visit was, from my point of view, disastrous from a public relations perspective, as, at that time, the international community saw it as an endorsement of Croatian action in the Krajina.

In the meantime, I had formed in Zagreb teams of human rights observers, four members in each team, including members of UNPROFOR civilian and military missions, and a Jeep, and we sent them as soon as we could, which was, I think, one day after the end of the Croatian intervention, to keep an eye on the areas hit by the Croatian operation. They produced some excellent reporting. In fact, that was the only reporting produced at that time from inside the Krajina on the behavior of Croatian forces. I decided, in spite of being forbidden from doing so by Akashi, to distribute these reports to the key embassies in Zagreb. They were also used as a part of the background to the proceedings of The Hague on the events in the Krajina. I was invited twice to testify in The Hague, but, both

times, the invitations were withdrawn at the last minute. I honestly don't believe that these reports, which were extremely well presented and well done, and where the civilians involved suffered a lot of abuse, with dangerous people pointing weapons at them and threatening their lives. I don't think The Hague ever took them into account - because they were not convenient for their agenda.

Q: Is it fair to say that UNPROFOR did not have real support from the key international stakeholders? What was the reason behind this?

HARSTON: Well, I think it is not fair to say it didn't have support because it was a very large military mission made up of troops from all over the world, from Kenya to Britain, all countries were involved except the United States. But I think it didn't have political support because they had sent the wrong force with the wrong mandate into a war and there was no conviction amongst the key stakeholders. There was a real role for the UN apart from delivering a poorly armed protection force with a vague and limited mandate. There was no real political role for the UN. Akashi never got involved in serious political discussion and negotiation. It was all done by others. But we did have support, we got plenty of money, we got plenty of facilities, and we got plenty of troops. What we didn't get was political direction and support.

Q: Was there any conflict of jurisdiction between UNPROFOR and NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization]? Did NATO have any formal jurisdiction at the time?

HARSTON: Well, jurisdiction is, of course, an all-encompassing word. But did they have a role? The answer was given after the London conference, because then their role as providers of process support was formalized. And that was the beginning of the NATO takeover, to be more precise, of the operations in Croatia and in Bosnia.

Q: But they did have interventions in Bosnia even before the London conference, didn't they?

HARSTON: In Bosnia?

Q: Yes.

HARSTON: I don't remember that. Doing what?

Q: I thought that there were some interventions in 1994.

HARSTON: Well, you may be right. That was before I was there, but I suppose that's right, because there was a French helicopter crew that was taken hostage, wasn't it? I don't have a record of that, I'm sorry. But yes, you're probably right. I wasn't there in 1994, so I don't have any personal recollection of that. But I don't ever remember meeting NATO people until they arrived in large numbers.

Q: As you mentioned, an international conference was organized in London on July 21, 1995. Who initiated it?

HARSTON: It was the UK and US but there were, I think, 16 countries there. There was a whole series of London conferences, but at that one I think there were about 16 countries represented, and it was basically "What are we going to do about Bosnia?"

Q: The UN was not invited. Why?

HARSTON: There was no appetite to invite the UN any more than there was to invite them to Dayton [the Dayton Peace Agreement in 1995]. The Americans in particular were keen to keep this out of the Security Council for as long as possible. And there was not thought to be a need for either us or anybody else in the multilateral community, to be involved in those discussions. There was no appetite for dealing with the UN, which was widely regarded at that point, not least by the Americans, as having failed.

Q: What was the outcome of the London conference?

HARSTON: I'm trying to think. It was a week after I joined the UN. I think about the only tangible outcome apart from words, words, words, was that they did give NATO authority for airstrikes.

Q: Why did the London conference focus on Bosnia and Herzegovina only and not on all sectors under the UNPROFOR mandate? If it had, do you believe it would have prevented or minimized the tragic consequences of Operation Storm, which happened two weeks after the conference?

HARSTON: I'm not sure I have an answer, again, because it was so soon after I arrived. As to why it focused only on Bosnia and Herzegovina, I suspect actually it was because Tudjman was speaking with a loud voice on Croatia's behalf, never really recognizing that we had what you would call jurisdiction. I mean, we had a role to play, we had forces on the ground, but they were largely to counter what was regarded as Serb expansionism. So, we had what we called Sector North, Sector East, Sector West, and Sector South, but

they were all to do with perceived Serb ambitions. They were not there to enforce any sort of rules on the Croatian military or population. I mean, we never passed through Croatian checkpoints, for example. The checkpoints are all Serb. So, I think it wasn't thought that it was necessary to discuss Croatia at that stage.

Q: Do you believe that it was the NATO airstrikes that brought all parties closer to the idea of a peace conference in Dayton?

HARSTON: Yes, the key party in all that was, of course, Serbia, and Montenegro to a lesser extent. And it was quite clear that the overwhelming strength of NATO was in the air. The tragedy, I think, was that they weren't used the one moment that they should have been used, which was at Srebrenica. But I think that it was very, very telling to see pictures of NATO aircraft flying over Sarajevo, which was an extraordinary change in circumstances.

Q: Whose decision was it not to have the UN present in Dayton? Is this a usual practice in peace talks?

HARSTON: Dayton was a US invention, and there was no interest at all in the US in having what they regarded as a failure to be present in talks which they were organizing. I think there was also a reluctance at that stage to involve the UN, in other words, the Security Council, because of mistrust of Russian intentions, particularly. But no, there was never any chance. I mean, what was extraordinary was that we were not invited to Dayton, and we were given no role after Dayton, except that at the very last minute in Dayton the people there realized that Bosnia was going to need a police force. And there was nobody at that conference, the Americans in particular, prepared to take that on. So, we got a message very late in Zagreb, "You've got to come up with some kind of police service for Bosnia." Which we did. I can't remember whether UNTAES [United Nations Transitional Administration for Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium], the Eastern Slavonia operation, was mentioned at Dayton. I'm really not sure.

Q: After the Dayton Accords had been signed, UNPROFOR was replaced by NATO forces. What was your impression of IFOR and its subsequent mission SFOR?

HARSTON: Well, I mean, as I said to you earlier, the irony of this whole situation was that the UN forces, lightly armed, among others Kenyan soldiers in sports shoes and tropical uniforms, were sent, in fact, into the middle of a war. And then NATO, heavily armed, was sent to implement and stabilize peace.

NATO's arrival was horrific for us because they regarded us as failures. They came in enormous force. They were led by the Americans who regarded UNPROFOR and the UN as being a complete failure. The United States and NATO had no experience at that stage of dealing with a multilateral, multinational force like the UN. They were aggressive, unpleasant. But we learned to live with them. And I mean, the magic of those sorts of situations is that the first people who learn to get on with each other are the technical folks, the logisticians, the engineers, people who organize convoys, and so on, and that all began to work very quickly. But it was a terrible shock to most of the people who worked in UNPROFOR because they, too, were conditioned into believing that they had failed. As for all those NATO forces, as usual with Nato- far too many people, far too expensive. Very little comprehension of the need for a civil-military cooperation. The same attitude, if you like, particularly by the US, which they took with them into Iraq and Afghanistan: an ability to invade, to settle a peace, but not to manage it.

Q: That was the time when the new SRSG arrived in Zagreb. Were there any changes in the mission under the new SRSG?

HARSTON: Total change, total change overnight, and I think it was late October that he first arrived. So not much time with me. I left in the early days of the new year. But yes, a total change. I mean, [then Undersecretary-Secretary-General for Peacekeeping] Kofi Annan was sent there, it was widely believed, to get him out of the way in New York because [Secretary-General] Boutros [Boutros-Ghali] didn't want him to run for Secretary-General. It was widely believed by all of us that he would be the Secretary-General, which of course gave him a weight that he might not otherwise have had as a head of peacekeeping. But he was a professional peacekeeper. He was a UN man who had been managing peacekeeping for some time. And he was a breath of fresh air, who changed everything.

A good indication of the change was that within two days of arriving, he said to me, "Why is there a safe blocking the door between your office and mine?" And I said, "Because Akashi didn't want me wandering into his office." And within an hour or two, the safe was removed, the door was opened, and Kofi said, "Any meeting I'm having, at any time, please come in and take part. You are my political adviser." And so that changed. I was promoted, by the way, which, again, wasn't supposed to be possible, but he managed to get me promoted to director which I should have been all along.

For me personally it was a welcome change, as I am an African and I have an enormous ability to make friends with Africans. It was a stage in my life where I had more African friends than non-African. And he and I immediately picked up. We hadn't met before, and

he trusted me. And that made a big difference to me. His personality charmed. Already in a week or two weeks in that mission, people knew he was there, they felt comfortable with him. He was an extraordinary man. He had never done anything else but the UN, so he was not entirely worldly. Nonetheless, he had a management style which actually worked. He used to say, "I'm going to come to that meeting, but I'm not going to say anything. I'm going to come and sit at the back. And people behave much better when I'm there, and they come to decisions when I'm there." He was a remarkable man, and he made an immediate difference to the mission. He got rid of a lot of people, the little group of Akashi's children dispersed as he took over. He brought some very competent people with him from New York on a temporary basis.

As far as Croatia was concerned, in some ways it made the relationship more difficult because as the awful Vesna Škare Ožbolt, who was the chef de cabinet of [Croatian] President [Franjo] Tudjman, said to me, "First you send us a Japanese. Now, you send us an African. Surely, you know, you're not taking Croatia seriously." And Kofi suffered a lot of abuse in Zagreb. I warned him but I don't think he believed me. When we went to the ballet, for example, two or three people spat at him on their way past him. Now, you know, you could bet your money - take your choice, whether that was racism or anti-UN feeling. I suspect the former. So anyway, yes, Kofi made a big difference. He didn't stay that long. And then the mission split up and there was a new mission to deal entirely with Croatia and the rest of it eventually moved to Bosnia and to Eastern Slavonia. The relationship we had with Zagreb was very difficult. The Croatians did the minimum they had to do for the UN. They didn't like having the UN there. They made it difficult in terms of logistics, and in every other way. UN was regarded by Tudjman as being some kind of potential rival for power. And he really didn't enjoy that. He and the people under him and people in the petrol company, people at the airport, and so on, took pleasure quite often in making life as difficult as possible for the UN.

Q: Soon after Kofi Annan's arrival, you went together to a couple of regional visits. Were these your first visits to Belgrade and Podgorica? If so, what were your impressions? Who did you meet with?

HARSTON: Well, it was the irony of the times. We flew to Belgrade to meet with Milošević for two reasons. One, because Kofi felt that he should do that, because he was playing politics, as opposed to just running a military mission. And secondly, would you believe it or not, we had a check which had to be paid to him for the use of a base at Batajnica, outside Belgrade. Belgrade had been the original headquarters of UNPROFOR. When there was an Indian general running UNPROFOR, his office was in Belgrade. And other offices were in Batajnica, and in one or two other places. But

basically, we owed Serbia money. And so, we paid Milošević a check, which was very ironic if you think about it. But what was even more fun looking back on it was that the check was issued by an American bank. And the American bank said, "No, there are sanctions against Serbia. We're not going to cash it." But with the magic of the Swiss—a Swiss bank that had no such scruples - they cashed it and Milošević probably personally got the money.

My impression of Belgrade was of arriving at Belgrade Airport at Surčin, and there were no aircraft at the airport. I mean, there were no flights, since it was closed because of sanctions. We got out of our Russian executive jet, and we walked through dark, dark entrance halls, ending up at a press conference, after which we went into town. It was a very weird feeling to come across an international airport which was basically not functioning at all. Belgrade itself was an eye opener for me. I had never been to Belgrade and suddenly realized that this was a real city. It wasn't Zagreb. It wasn't Sarajevo. It was a real city. It was on its knees in many ways, but nonetheless it was a real city. It was a very, very interesting visit for me. And I had no idea at that stage that I was going to end up there for five, six, or seven years, and now ten, fifteen years of my life. Podgorica, on the other hand, was politicking by Kofi. He wanted to meet the leadership down there. Nothing much came out of it, it was just a courtesy call, if you like, and I remember very little. I met personally with Djukanović, and many times afterwards, but that was the first time.

Q: It was interesting that your travel to Podgorica took much longer than you anticipated. Why was that?

HARSTON: Well, because, again, the Croatians decided to make our life as difficult as possible, and their air traffic control would not give us a flight plan which went to Podgorica. Eventually, they gave us a flight plan to Brindisi in Italy, a big Italian Air Force Base, but also a UN base. And we sat around hoping to get permission to go from Brindisi to Podgorica. We failed to get that until one of the AWACS [Airborne Early Warning and Control] the NATO surveillance aircraft that we were flying on up and down the Adriatic, eventually sent a message to our pilots saying, "Just take off, keep below x-thousand feet, and go straight to Podgorica and nobody's gonna bother you." So that was what we did. And then coming back the Croatians said yes, you can have a flight plan, but you have to go down to Corfu, and then turn right, and cover the entire length of Italy, and Venice, and then down to Zagreb. So it was a very, very, very long day.

Q: What was your life like in Zagreb at that time?

HARSTON: It was strange because I had decided with the American who was running the information side of UNPROFOR at that time, a retired American diplomat, that we would go to the Esplanade, the best hotel in Zagreb near the railway station, and ask them if we could take a suite, in other words, a sitting room and two bedrooms and two bathrooms. I think the hotel had about 20% occupancy at the time. That was where I lived, actually, for the whole time I was in Zagreb, and it was a very comfortable, very, very well looked-after existence. But life in Zagreb… We never met Croatians. We met the people who worked in the hotel, the people who had apartments, met the landlords, and so on. But there was effectively no cross-cultural interaction, and what was interesting is, again, a reflection of Croatians' view on race. There were virtually no marriages between the enormous number of UNPROFOR soldiers that were in Croatia, virtually none, whereas there were plenty in every other peace mission in the world. There was virtually no serious mixing with the Croatians. But I had a very comfortable life.

Q: You didn't stay there for a long time. But did you have a chance to travel around the country a bit?

HARSTON: I went to Sector West. I went to all the sectors, yes. But it wasn't a real pleasure at that time. I mean, it was difficult and rather depressing. We seemed to end up in Split quite a lot because Akashi liked Split. And we would use Split as a base to go to other places by helicopter, we would fly direct to Split in a small aircraft and then we would go other places by a helicopter. I visited a number of places that way. I visited Knin more than once. And I was in Daruvar, which was Sector West, which was also taken by another Croatian operation. Daruvar, where there had been quite a significant Serb population before the war, is located at two-thirds of the way between Zagreb and Serbia. Most of the Serbs who had lived in Daruvar had been forced out by the Croatians by the time I got there. There was a small UN Office there, which was rather like a World Wildlife office keeping an eye on the last breeding pair of Serbs, you know, which was a hopeless task. They weren't going to stay anyway. But I did travel a lot.

Q: In early November 1995, you went to East Croatia, for the signing of the Erdut Agreement.

HARSTON: I did.

Q: Can you tell me more about it? What was the context and the idea behind the Agreement?

HARSTON: Well, for some time, you know, this was another Krajina we're talking about in Eastern Slavonia. It was an area where, in Vukovar, there had been a fierce and awful battle. I mean, in many ways, apart from Sarajevo, one of the worst times in Croatia and the former Yugoslavia. And it was decided that it had the potential, if there were to be an operation like Operation Storm there, to get rid of Serbs who were running the place, then it would end up in a clash for the first and only time between the military forces of Serbia, the Yugoslav National Army, and Croatian forces, and that everything should be done to avoid that. And so, again, [Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General Thorvald] Stoltenberg, the father of the present NATO Secretary-General [Jens Stoltenberg], and Kai Eide, both Norwegians, had endless journeys up into Eastern Slavonia, to Zagreb, to Belgrade, negotiating an agreement which would see the final handover of civilian and military authority in that place to the Croatians but with an interim period where Eastern Slavonia would be governed and organized and managed by a UN presence, which was known as UNTAES. And finally, that agreement was signed by the parties concerned in a place called Erdut in the middle of Eastern Slavonia. It was a triumph, actually. For me, it was one of the most important agreements signed in the whole of that time.
, because it, without doubt, prevented a direct clash between Croatian and Serbian armed forces.

Q: A few weeks later, the Dayton Peace Agreement was signed. Could you tell me more about the events that followed the signing of the Dayton Accords? And how did the role of the UN evolve?

HARSTON: You know, we were right to say that we were not invited to Dayton. So, the Dayton Agreement was presented as a package, and a part of the Agreement was that there would be a NATO force in Croatia and in Bosnia, and that it would replace the UN over as short a period of time as possible. And so, suddenly, we were supposed to go on with some of the civilian work that we were doing, and, in fact, stop our military presence and send everybody home. So, it was a very depressing time as NATO behaved incredibly badly. They were led by the Americans and treated the UN in an arrogant and aggressive fashion, because they regarded the UN as having failed. And, you know, why do we need to deal with these failures? Despite the fact that the UN had a significant number of forces from NATO countries, a lot of whom changed hats, including our commanding general, General Janvier, who was, at one stage, commanding both sets of troops. But it was a very uncomfortable period. And the Americans, really, of course, there are exceptions, but they were very difficult to deal with. And just unnecessarily unpleasant. And I remember one occasion when Kofi and I were sitting at a so-called VIP table in the UN cafeteria, and the American [Navy] Admiral [Leighton] Smith and his

group of officers came and impatiently stood next to us as if to say, "This is a VIP table, what are you people doing at it?" And finally, Kofi said to me, "These people obviously can't find a table. Let us go and have coffee in the office." But that was very typical. And it really was a difficult transition. What more can I say?

Q: You also took another trip to Sarajevo, after the Dayton Accords had been signed. What were your impressions during this trip?

HARSTON: Well, it was still quite dangerous to be in Sarajevo at that time. And well, awful was the answer. I mean, the state of Sarajevo was unbelievable. for somebody like me, And we knew that there had been a siege, we knew there had been snipers, and there wasn't a single building in the middle of Sarajevo that either hadn't been burnt or shelled or wasn't marked with bullets of some kind or another. I mean, we stayed in the hotel there, the Holiday Inn, and we had plastic over our windows, because there was no glass in them. So, it was quite an eye-opener for me. I mean, of course, we knew what had gone on in Sarajevo, but I had no idea of the present state it was in. We went there because, at the last minute in Dayton, although the UN was not represented, they realized that Bosnia would need a police force. If this new country, confederation, or federation was going to have a police force, somebody had to do it and suddenly they decided that it should be the UN, as “They do that sort of thing."

So, we got a message sitting in Zagreb, "We've got to run a police mission. You've got to tell them how many people we need, where they need to be, how it needs to be organized." But we were given only 48 hours to do it. So we did it. Thus was born UNMIBH [United Nations Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina], the mission for police in Bosnia, which was to be led initially by Iqbal Riza, the Pakistani who was Kofi Annan's chef de cabinet when he was the UN Secretary-General. I went with Riza to see what we were going to do. On the way back in the aircraft, he asked me to be his deputy. And I said, "No, thank you." I thought at that time that I was probably making a mistake, but I had been offered my own office in Zagreb at that stage, and I thought I would rather do that, so I refused his offer. But that was the reason I went to Sarajevo and that was how the UN police mission was born and how the UN kept up a residual presence, both in Bosnia and in Croatia at that time, as the UN mission in Eastern Slavonia was also getting on its feet.

Q: You mentioned that you were planning to stay in Zagreb as the head of office. Did you have other considerations? Was this your top choice or your only choice?

HARSTON: I didn't really have a choice. I mean, I was delighted to be offered the job. Like Kofi personally said, "You know, why don't you stay in Zagreb? You do a good job here." I said, "Okay. It's not going to be easy, but of course I will do it." And we had at that time a Russian running the office in Belgrade, Yuri Myakotnik, and he was to be left there. And I was to be in Zagreb. And then at Kofi's farewell party, in January '96, I was approached by our communications head with a piece of paper and it said, "Yuri Myakotnik has just died in a car crash. On his way to this party, he crashed into a barrier on the motorway outside Zagreb." So, I took Kofi to one side and said, "What do we do?" And he said, "You go downstairs, talk to the head of administration and take your number two with you, Karen Tchalian, a Russian, and discuss and come back to me with a proposal." So we discussed it. And I came back with a proposal that I should go to Belgrade, and I should take Karen Tchalian with me. And that my colleague on the political side, Jacque Grinberg, an Australian, should be left in Zagreb for the foreseeable future, until other arrangements can be made. Karen Tchailan said, "You do realize how upset the Russians are going to be," and Kofi said, "Never mind, I will deal with that." And surely enough, when my appointment was announced. the Russians said, "Our man wasn't cold in his grave before you replaced him with a Brit." Finally, it was sorted out because the Russians got Zagreb. So that's how I ended up there. It was my choice in the sense that we had to make a decision there and then and that was the decision that we made, and I have never regretted it. It was an absolute turning point in my life, in many, many ways.

Q: Before leaving for Belgrade, you paid another visit to Knin. What was the purpose of this trip?

HARSTON: The purpose of the trip was to find a solution for two or three hundred refugees from Operation Storm who found refuge in our headquarters in Knin. I had been negotiating with the Croatians to send them to Serbia because obviously they couldn't stay there. So, I went down to Knin with the good and bad news, that the Croatians had come up with a list of fifteen of these people who they believed were involved in what they described as war crimes of some kind. They will stay behind and be tried in a Croatian court, and the rest of the 290 or whatever, old ladies, children, men of all ages, will be permitted to go to Serbia by bus. And it was probably one of the more difficult meetings in my life, meeting the representatives of these Serb refugees to tell them that fifteen of them would have to stay behind. But having said that, we had a pretty good intelligence, that the Croatians hadn't just taken names at random, and that we had a guarantee from the Croatians that we would be represented in the court in Croatia when these people went to trial. And that actually happened later on. Anyway, that was a very uncomfortable journey. The Canadians, who had been looking after the Serbian refugees

in the camp, were very angry that we were making this deal with Croatians and giving up fifteen people so the rest could go. I was treated without much respect by the Canadians. While I understood it and was full of admiration for Canadian soldiers, I had very little admiration for their officers in Croatia and UNPROFOR. That was a personal view. So, it was not a happy trip to Knin.

Q: That was one of the last activities that you had in your Zagreb post.

HARSTON: Yes.

Q: Looking back, what would you say were your principal accomplishments at this post?

HARSTON: I think the biggest thing looking back on it was an ability to try to bring and frequently succeed in bringing the military and civilian leadership of that very large mission together. Akashi was incredibly ill-suited to that job. He simply did not understand the dimensions of a civil war in Europe. He had been quite good in Cambodia. He had understood the nation's scenario. He did not understand it in Zagreb and was incredibly uncomfortable there. And one of the difficulties was the fact that he never went down the one floor in the building to meet his Force Commander, General Janvier, and his staff. Janvier was always required to come to Akashi or to deal with his staff in his office. As I was a French speaker, and this was essentially a French headquarters, I got on very well with and am still in touch with General Janvier and a couple of his staff whom I would see more than once a day to bring the threads of that organization together. It was difficult, but I think it was a real achievement. I didn't have a military background. I had been a reservist in the Royal Marines many, many years before, but I was very proud of them. And also bringing together my own team in the face of opposition from Akashi, which I think I've mentioned before, to do a really valuable job, particularly when it came to operating human rights observers in Croatia after Operation Storm. That was something that I am proud of, and something that is now done in most UN missions. They have mixed military civilian police groups involved with protecting people from harm in the mission areas. So I think that's about it. I got to know the UN pretty well, which was good for me. And of course, I established a friendship with Kofi Annan, which lasted until his death two or three years ago.

Q: Was there anybody else in addition to Kofi Annan and General Janvier that you kept in touch with?

HARSTON: Oh, on and off, yes. By its very nature, working with the UN means that you are very rarely in the same place at the same time, again, and so you know, these sorts of

bonds dropped off a bit. I have constantly kept in touch with my deputy, Karen Tchalian, who is now the Russian ambassador in Rwanda. But apart from that, not really. A few. A few.

Q: Today is the 26th of April 2021. We are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, retired senior UK diplomat, and retired senior UN official.

Last time we talked briefly about the circumstances and how the decision on your next post was made. You left Zagreb for Belgrade right after the holidays in January 1996. What was your trip from Zagreb to Belgrade like?

HARSTON: My Christmas present turned out to be a brand-new Land Rover Discovery. It was a very comfortable but, at the same time, a strange trip, because ironically, the name of the highway from Zagreb to Belgrade is the Brotherhood and Unity Highway. It went right through the bottom end of Eastern Slavonia. Even today, you drive four hundred kilometers from Zagreb on that highway before you see a signpost for Belgrade. Which is really strange. I mean, in Zagreb, you can see the signs for motorways to Ljubljana and other cities. But the first mention of Belgrade on a signpost is now about more than a couple of hundred kilometers outside of Zagreb. And in those days, there were no signs to Belgrade at all, they were all to a small village located on the border on the Croatian side. The first thing you had to do was to leave Croatia and present a passport at the border crossing post. And then there was a sort of no man's land for about maybe thirty kilometers, which no vehicles were allowed on at all except United Nations vehicles. It was a very lonely thirty, forty kilometers before you came to the Serbian entry point, and there was nobody there, nobody to show anything to. There was a toll booth, which, of course, wasn't working. So, I then drove more than a hundred kilometers from the border to Belgrade. I got to the toll booth on the Belgrade end and the guy says, "Where's your ticket?" I tried to explain that I didn't have a ticket, because there was nobody, I had come from Zagreb. And he said, "Well, then you have to go all the way back and get a ticket from the machine." I said, "Well, it's not working." And I said, "Have you noticed that behind me now there are about ten cars, so I think it's better if you let me through." He did let me through, but my welcome greeting to Serbia was a rather vulgar Serbian expression, of “people are so stupid". I drove from there and got to Belgrade, I don't remember how I found the office or anything, but I did. My first impressions on arrival - well, Belgrade basically looked very rundown when I got there in the beginning of '96. You know, looking back to hyperinflation, sanctions, and a disastrous economy under Milošević, things were pretty rundown. I mean, of course, it was still a big city, and it took me quite a long time to get my bearings. But it was a city which clearly had been great but wasn't anymore. It's taken twenty-five years to even begin to look good, which it does now. The impression on arrival in terms of the people was really a state of depression. People had had enough by then. They didn't know what was coming. They didn't know that eventually they were going to be bombed and so on.

But there were the beginnings of dissent, the beginnings of feelings that Milošević wasn't there forever, but not yet strong enough to be taken into account by the regime.

Q: What did your portfolio comprise of?

HARSTON: It is important to know that Kofi Annan, when he sent me there, said, "I want you to report independently to New York. I want you to explain to New York what is going on in Yugoslavia." So, I had an independent brief, which turned out to be very important, because it had up to that time always been a liaison office. It was still called a liaison office, but its voice was much strengthened by the fact that Kofi had specifically said it must stay independent, although it was initially financed on the budget of what had been left of UNPROFOR, on the budget of the operation in Eastern Slavonia, and so on. But independent. Essentially, it was a UN embassy. My main job was to provide reporting to New York and to Eastern Slavonia and elsewhere, which was honest and readable. What I was trying to do, and I have always done with my reporting is to try to make people want to read it. It was slightly unusual, but after all, don't forget, there was twenty-five years of experience in the British Foreign Office there as well. But I was in a very privileged position.

Q: What was your official title? We never mentioned it.

HARSTON: I think it was just head of office, Head of the Belgrade Liaison Office, United Nations UNLOB (UN Liaison Office Belgrade). Later it changed, later it became Representative of the Secretary General.

Q: Could you tell me more about the UNTAES mission? Can it be described as a success, and why?

HARSTON: Yes, it was a success. A lot of people have forgotten about it if they ever knew about it. It was a success, in my opinion, because it had a very clear mandate, it had a limited time period, which was to be two years, and it had the right leadership. With that mixture, and with the right resources, military resources in particular, it couldn't fail. And it didn't. The objective we were given when that mission came as a result, as I explained earlier, of the agreement between Croatia and the UN. We wrote the mandate in Zagreb. We were pretty cynical about it in a way. We deliberately didn't put any numbers into that mandate. So, although we encouraged the migration of local Serbs to Serbia if they wanted to go and encouraged them to stay if they wanted to stay. We didn't put any numbers on that, because the moment you do that, if you've said it needs to be 30 percent or 50 percent, then you're looking to fail. So, it was a bit cynical, but it was a relatively simple mandate. It was essentially to govern that piece of territory for a period of two years and then hand it over the government to Croatia. And that's precisely what they did. And when I say govern, it was everything. It was from running the railways, the post office, the sewage, the roads, the electricity system, and so on.

Q: Were there any external influences that contributed to the success?

HARSTON: I suppose there were in the sense that there was an agreement, after all, between the Croatian and Yugoslav governments. It is a funny thing to say, but I think that Milošević didn't care. He made it quite clear right from the beginning that he didn't care about the people he served. I mean, one of the great ironies of the whole Milošević saga is that, if you analyze how he reacted to the fate of the Serbs in Knin, the Serbs in Vukovar, it is an extraordinary fact that he really didn't care. He didn't think that what happened to them would affect his hold on Yugoslavia, and later on Serbia. He was very cynical about how he treated them. And that lack of interest, lack of rhetoric out of Belgrade made the job much easier if you were sitting in Vukovar. The Croatians were very difficult to deal with, very aggressive, very nationalist, and so on. But, at the end of the day, they knew that they only had to wait two years, and they knew that they had avoided a military confrontation which they might have lost. So, there were all sorts of reasons why it was a success and not the least of which was the character of Jacques Klein.

Jacques Klein was an American general in the Air Force, who spent his entire career on the cusp between the military and diplomacy and never commanded anybody, wore more medals than a Soviet marshal. But he was able to persuade the people in Eastern Slavonia that he was somehow on their side. He was ecclesiastic in the sense that he loved the church. He went to a different church every Sunday, Catholic and Orthodox. Somehow his bluff character as a salesman - he was a tremendous salesman - worked. A lot of the success of that mission was that the UN managed to hit on the right person. I mean, he was very much the wrong person in some ways. He didn't believe in the UN. His arrival was a good example of that. I went to meet him on the motorway the first time he came to see Milošević. I got into his car, and, as we approached Belgrade, I said to him, "I presume you're going to change your jacket Mr. Klein, before you arrive at Milošević's office?" He replied, "No, why?" He was wearing brown suit trousers, a tie, a brown leather flying jacket with medals and the US Air Force general rank on it. And I said, "Well, I won't go with you if you wear that, because I'm here to represent the UN, not the United States." And whether he had already planned to do so or whatever, eventually we did stop. And he fetched out of the boot of the car his beautifully pressed suit jacket, and we went in to meet Milošević. But it was a funny beginning for me because I think he respected me for having brought it to his attention. As I say, I don't know whether he intended to change or not, but he certainly said he did not. And from then on, we sort of got on. My relationship with his mission was destined to be difficult because he was very reluctant to have an independent voice in Belgrade. He said, "after all, you're the liaison office of UNTAES ", and I said to him, "I'm not. I'm the liaison office of the UN". By then, I had already started reporting, and I think he realized that it was a battle he probably wouldn't win with Kofi Annan. So, he gave up and we remained perfectly independent for the rest of my time in Belgrade. He was a difficult man and one whom I had to work for later, and we'll come to that when I was his deputy in Bosnia.

Q: In your new capacity, you also paid several visits to Montenegro and met with their senior leadership. Can you describe your impressions of the environment in general and Milo Djukanović?

HARSTON: Strange place, I mean, Milo "the Blade", Milo Djukanović. Montenegro was going through difficult times. It had been very much identified with Serbia during the war. It was, after all, Montenegrin troops who attacked Dubrovnik not Serbian. So it was going through a transformation. He was perfectly easy to deal with as a politician. He wanted to listen to what was going on in New York. He was fascinated by impressions of what was going on in Belgrade. But [he was] very sure of himself. At that time, without any doubt, he was running a very sophisticated smuggling operation involving cigarettes, and almost everything else, and making a great deal of money. That, as far as I know, continues to this day. It's alleged, let us say it this way. But he was quite fun to deal with in the sense that he had a personality, and he didn't seem to bear any grudges one way or another. We were always welcome whenever I went down there, and there was no trouble at all getting time to speak to him for as long as I wanted to. So, I don't know what to say about Milo. He exudes self-confidence. He was not terribly likable, but not dislikable either.

Q: During one of your trips to Montenegro, you also witnessed the insurrection in neighboring Albania. What was your view of the situation?

HARSTON: Well, essentially, I went down to the river which forms the border between Albania and Montenegro. I thought it would be interesting to go down there. It was the only time I have ever actually put a UN flag flying on the back of my car, because we were within one hundred meters of the border. It was curiosity, really, I mean, I wasn't going to learn very much, except that you could hear gunfire, and there were a lot of people coming across the border, refugees, and so on. Not the least of which, over a period of about three weeks at that time, three or four hundred Americans who disappeared. What they were doing there was the government which felt it was a great friend of the United States. It was another failure of the US to understand the politics of the region. There was chaos in Albania at that time. From my point of view, I think the interesting effect must have been, although I have no evidence of this, that it frightened people like Milošević. Because it was the security forces and the security services in Albania which eventually turned on the leadership. I think if you were a leader like Milošević, that was pretty scary stuff. So, I think they were watching that very carefully.

Q: In the course of the assignments in the former Yugoslavia, you had numerous meetings with Milošević, Tudjman, and Izetbegović? You were once attacked by the Western press after these meetings. Why?

HARSTON: After meeting Milošević - always. Because meetings with Tudjman and Izetbegović were pretty dull, with Izetbegović because he was aggressive and mean, with Tudjman because he was boring and didn't really encourage any kind of discussion. But here was Milošević, for all his awfulness - a good Serbian host. Within five minutes,

there was a tray with whiskey, and anything else you might want. There was coffee and so on. He was a very good host. He was funny. He spoke passable English, he worked, after all, in the United States. The meetings with him, although they were very tough frequently, and there were some very difficult things said and there were very difficult responses from him, they were actually… Oh, and cigars, I forgot Cuban cigars, which people like. I don't smoke them, but people like Jacques Klein really appreciated them. So, when we came out to meet the press afterwards, which we always did, we didn't come out with glum faces. We came out looking perfectly normal and the Serbian press, let alone the international press, always used to say, "You enjoyed that meeting, didn't you? You like Milošević?" Well, I didn't like him, but I didn't find him a bad host.

Q: What was your overall impression of him?

HARSTON: Oh, goodness. Well, I wrote a piece for New York, shortly after he had died in The Hague. Looking back on it, my biggest regret about Milošević was the oxygen that we gave him. We treated him as an interlocutor. We treated him as though he were a statesman or whatever, as though he was a man who could solve problems, who would be prepared to compromise and so on. And he was none of those things. He was a small village politician caught in the glare of world publicity, and totally unsuited for dealing with and taking seriously the long line of serious people with briefcases, politicians, who came to see him. Seeing them really only as giving him status. And if I look back on that time, then I think what we should have done is starved him of that attention and ignored him. Now whether we could have done that or not, I simply don't know. But certainly, the oxygen we gave him, made him into a bigger figure than he actually was. Somebody once said, he was like a man who set fire to his neighbor's house, and then expected to get some credit for offering to help put the fire out. And that's essentially what he did. In the meetings with him, I got the impression that he was playing with the international community, and frequently he was winning. That was, more in retrospect, very depressing. He was a bad man. I don't think anybody should doubt that. He did more damage from his policies at that time, than you could possibly imagine, both to the spirit of the Serbian people and their image in the rest of the world. One of the questions that I'm always asked when I lecture here at the University of Belgrade, by young eighteen-year olds, somebody always puts their hand up and says, "How long do we have to suffer because of what Milošević did? It has nothing to do with us." An eighteen-year old here had nothing to do with Milošević or whatever their parents did. And my answer is pretty depressing, because I always say to them, "Well, it's going to take a lot longer than you hope." If you look at somebody like my son, who was born thirty years after the end of the Second World War, he grew up on books about Nazis and all the rest of it. That's still true of children in France and in the UK today. So, I think if I have one thing to be most critical about Milošević, it's the damage he did to Serbia and the Serbs. It's beginning to change now. But you still have a number of people around the world and in Europe, in particular, who basically are viscerally anti-Serb, and that's because of what Milošević did or what General Mladić did, it's because of that period of time. And it's a tragedy.

Q: You already mentioned that the meetings you had with Franjo Tudjman were somewhat different. Why?

HARSTON: Well, he was very boring for a start. He was a political general. He spent a lot of his time in Belgrade, actually. But he was a historian, and most of the sessions that we had when I went to see him with Akashi, in particular, were history lessons from a Croatian point of view, and very boring, and we got nowhere. He hated the idea of having to deal with the United Nations. He thought that somehow the presence of the United Nations forces in Croatia was an insult to him personally. He was a racist. He particularly disliked having black troops. I think he found it very uncomfortable dealing first with the Japanese representing the UN and then with a black man. So not much fun. He had an outstanding interpreter, that was the one pleasure of going to see Tudjman. He spoke no English, or he claimed he spoke no English. He had one of Tito's senior interpreters, if not the senior interpreter, who would regale us over a coffee before or afterwards with wonderful stories of sailing on board Tito's yacht to all sorts of places around the world and so a very interesting man and fun to be there with.

Q: Tudjman also had some moves that were questionable, yet there was no reaction to those moves. You mentioned once his so-called humanitarian move of people to Dalmatia. What was it about?

HARSTON: Well, I think he was playing with ethnic management, let's just call it. I mean, the refugees were coming anyway, but he made a deliberate decision to put people from Herzegovina into Southern Dalmatia. And in so doing has managed now to change the nature of Split and anywhere south of Split really. Because, as my wife who's a Dalmatinka (woman from Dalmatia) will tell you, when she was there as a child nobody offered you “ćevapi” in a restaurant or cafe there. It has totally changed and changed the language too. It is increasingly difficult to find people who really speak and use Dalmatian. Which as you know, is a separate dialect of Serbo-Croatian with many words, mostly influenced by Italian, which are different. When my wife goes to the green market in Trogir and uses words which are purely Dalmatian, the largely old ladies who work there are really appreciative and find it fun. I think he played with ethnic management. He made terrible misjudgments about what people really felt strongly about. I mean, he suddenly decided to change the name of the football team in Zagreb from Dinamo Zagreb, to Croatia Zagreb. It was totally unacceptable to the fans of that football team. I remember he arranged for us to go to some big match, it was probably with Split, and the crowd were chanting "Dinamo, Dinamo, Dinamo" while he was there in the presidential box, and he got up and left. And, of course, the first thing that happened after independence, and after his departure, was that they renamed the team Dinamo again. He made some really bad judgments about the nature of Croatian society, and very largely changed it for the worse.

Q: What was your view of Tudjman's relations with Milošević? There have been numerous speculations about this in the region?

HARSTON: Well, there's no secret of them drawing up a map together about partition of Bosnia and Herzegovina, doing their own ethnic management. I honestly didn't ever get a feel for that relationship. Don't forget that Tudjman had spent time in Belgrade. I can't imagine that he was ever really comfortable with Milošević. I mean, they had such different backgrounds, an establishment military background in Yugoslavia for Tudjman, and this trumped up, relatively junior banker who climbed on the express train of nationalism to create chaos. I cannot imagine that they got on well. I think they were both very cynical politicians. So, if they ever found that they had a common ground, something they could agree on, they probably would.

Q: During your post in Zagreb, you dealt with Tudjman's Chief of Staff Vesna Škare-Ožbolt on a daily basis. Can you tell me more about this interaction?

HARSTON: Well, it was awful. I mean, she is a bully and a loudmouth, and in my view, should perhaps have had serious consideration for appearing before the Criminal Court in The Hague because of her involvement in the mistreatment of Serbian refugees in Knin. She was impossible to deal with. I had the regular problem of dealing with her before the Erdut Agreement on Eastern Slavonia. She was an obstructionist and difficult. Then Akashi handed me as a present to deal with her over the two or three hundred refugees who had managed to get into our camp in Knin, into the UN military headquarters, and were still there as refugees. I had to try to negotiate with her to get them out, and to get them to Serbia. We came up with all sorts of plans to do it and she resisted. Finally, she said, "Okay, they can all go but we have a list of twenty or thirty of them who are definitely all war criminals, and they will stay, and they will be tried." I said, "Well, we'd think about it." and I said, "We'll go and discuss it, but any trial must be attended by and witnessed by representatives to the UN." So, I then had to go to Knin, and I met the leadership for the three hundred people. It became clear to me during my discussion that they had already made up their mind that the Croats were probably right about the list that they have given, so they weren't too reluctant to give up those people. Then they left. They were harassed by Croatian forces in the camp. They were firing guns across the top of the camp every night to eat them away. They fired victory guns when they left. And then the final insult, the final mistreatment was when they got to the border, the Croatians refused to allow Serbian buses to come right to the border to pick up the passengers and made everybody walk about a kilometer between the two buses, including little old ladies. She was personally there to witness and dare I say enjoy that scene. My relationship with her was not great. I wasn't frightened of her and that upset her. I think she was used to people being frightened of her. I think she's a Member of Parliament these days. She was a really unpleasant and difficult woman.

Q: What were your meetings with Alija Izetbegović like?

HARSTON: Well, there were far fewer meetings with him, I should say. To start with, he was not somebody - I don't think I ever met him during the war. I think it was only afterwards, when I was based in Sarajevo. I didn't see him at the most difficult times. Based in Sarajevo, we had quite a lot of meetings with Jacques Klein. Izetbegović was

difficult, humorless, bitter, always believing that he was the victim. But, funnily enough, there were those of us who believe that he actually quite enjoyed being a victim. If you look back at his history, it was always the story of the Muslims being the victims. But under no circumstances would you talk about meetings with Alija Izetbegović as being fun. They were difficult meetings, unpleasant, come back, get in the car and get on with it. You know, no real discussion afterwards. I went to a dinner one evening, where he invited Jacques Klein to dinner, and I was there. I was talking to Jacques Klein about something and his son who is now, of course, very important, leaned across the table and said, “I don't like you" to me. And I said, "Well isn't that nice, I don't like you either." And the first time I ever saw Izetbegović say something humorous and smile, he leaned across the table and said "Absolutely right. You tell him. Nobody ever tells him how unpleasant he is." So, I lost a lot of points with Izetbegović junior, but I think I probably gained some with Izetbegović senior.

Q: What was Izetbegovic's reaction to the Dayton Accords?

HARSTON: That I don't know, I wasn't there. I presume he was quite happy with it, wasn't he? It created this strange, largely fictional state of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it allowed the Serbs much more independence, much more autonomy than I suspect Izetbegović would have liked. He was, I think, very bitter about that. Even the name upset him, Republika Srpska. I think he was happy that the agreement had been signed, he was happy that the war was over. He was happy that NATO was coming. He was happy that Sarajevo was finally safe. But there were a lot of drawbacks in that agreement, and not the least of which was the status of Republika Srpska. If you have any real feel for Balkan history, it was quite clear right at the beginning that this simply wasn't ever going to work, because the whole essence of Dayton was ethnic identity. Since then, Bosnia has failed to progress, it's effectively a failed state these days. Because they kept the same politicians, they kept the same people, they kept the same nationalists, the same nationalists running the government, the same nationalist running Republika Srpska, and the same ones in Sarajevo. It was never going to boost themselves. It will be very interesting to see what will happen. I simply can't see it prospering until there is a major change. Europe in its great wisdom and the United States have resisted change. So, we'll see. I think that Republika Srpska has been very fortunate in having Dodik, who is not a very lovable character, but one of the smartest politicians in the Balkans, making all the right moves to make sure that Republika Srpska doesn't play a positive role in creating a real Bosnian state.

Q: We will talk more about Bosnia and Herzegovina when we move to your assignment of the deputy SRSG (Special Representative of the Secretary General) in Sarajevo. Let me just go back briefly to UNTAES. Who was Jacques Klein's successor there?

HARSTON: Oh, the lovely Mr. Walker, an American, State Department. Well, you've heard me talk just now about some people being viscerally anti-Serb. For some reason I never discovered he really hated the Serbs. It didn't matter that much in Eastern Slavonia because the deal was done by then. Everything was going fine, and the mission was going

to close. He had a strange Mexican deputy, who for some reason went with him, who knew nothing about the Balkans at all. He went on for glory, running the OSCE mission in Kosovo, and telling, I think, the biggest untruth about events in the Balkans of the last thirty years. And in my view, he bears enormous responsibility for what happened resulting in the bombing of Belgrade and so on, but we'll come to that.

Q: Let us go briefly to another situation. That is Belgrade in November 1996, when the opposition protests started. What was your assessment of the internal political dynamics in Serbia at the time?

HARSTON: Firstly, it was very interesting. I don't know how old you were at the time, but my wife was out on the streets at that time and demonstrating. I think it was quite clear at that stage that the opposition was - to me anyway, as an outside observer - no real threat to Milošević. It was quite a shock, and it required quite a lot of adjustment in the personnel and what was going on at the top, but I didn't really feel at that time that there was a real threat. But of course, it grew, and it grew, and it grew. But it took some time before those demonstrations actually got rid of Milošević.

Q: You started your assignment in the beginning of 1996. How long was it supposed to last?

HARSTON: The UN on the whole doesn't work that way. I mean, you work on one-year contracts. I suppose I could have expected to stay a couple of years, but there weren't liaison offices around the world. There was one in Zagreb, and there was one in Belgrade. I don't think we had similar offices at that stage anywhere. We do now. I had an uncertain future. I had no idea what I was going to be doing. After all, I was a very late comer to the UN. I was very lucky to have a job as a director in the UN at that time. So, I just sort of sat and waited to see what would happen.

Q: And then, all of a sudden, you received a call from the headquarters about your new assignment in the capacity of the SRSG and head of the UN mission in Haiti. When did this happen?

HARSTON: I guess it was in the winter of '97.

Q: Yes, you arrived in 1997. So, it was probably the beginning of the year?

HARSTON: Right, I remember, it was cold because I got a call in the middle of the night from Iqbal Riza, who was the man who offered me the job in Sarajevo and I turned it down, who by then had been for some time Kofi Annan's head of his office in New York, the office of the Secretary General. He didn't believe in time zones. So, when he wanted to call people, he picked up the phone and called them. So, there it was, it was the middle of the night in Belgrade, and it was cold. The first thing he said was after saying, “It's Iqbal”, was, "What's the weather like?" And I said, "Iqbal, first of all, it's the middle of the night. And secondly, it's very cold, it's January, or whatever it was." And he said,

"Well, you'll understand why I asked you when we finish this conversation." I said, "Oh, good. What can I do for you?" And he said, "Well, the Secretary General would like you to go to Haiti as his representative and run the police mission." And I said, "If that's what he wants me to do, I'll be very happy to do it." He said, "You do speak French, don't you?" And I said, "Yes, I do." And he said, "Okay, then we'd like you to be there in three weeks' time." And I said, "All right." And he said, "You can go directly there, you don't need to come to New York." And he said, "Now you'll understand because I will tell you that in Haiti, right now, the temperature is 28 degrees Celsius. So, it's a nice, warm evening." I said, "Thank you very much." And so there I was, on my way to Haiti, knowing nothing about it, never having been to the West Indies at all. I knew a little bit about managing police officers, not that much. I'd seen the way they operated the UN police in Eastern Slavonia at that time. So off I went. I took a flight to Vienna and then directly from Vienna to Miami, and from Miami to Haiti.

Q: Who succeeded you in the office in Belgrade?

HARSTON: I was trying to think of that this morning. I know that they didn't come while I was there. I honestly can't remember.

Q: We can come back to this later. Since you had such a short notice, I assume that you did not have any formal training before going to Haiti?

HARSTON: None at all. I mean, I didn't have any about Haiti or the culture or what the problems were in Haiti. I was able to read reports on it, buy a couple of history books. But no training on how to be an SRSG either except having watched Jacques Klein and watched Akashi very closely. So I knew the methodology, but it was amazing, if you think about it, there was not a single day or hour of training at all.

Q: What was the situation in Haiti, like when you arrived?

HARSTON: The situation in Haiti, not to put too fine a point on it, is always awful. There was a political stalemate in Haiti. They had taken some time to come around to elections. The law-and-order situation was pretty awful. That's not to say anything about the fact that Haiti was then and is now a failed state. Haiti produces children and cuts down forests, and if you do that for long enough, you fail. And if you have as Haiti does, a middle class, a political class, which doesn't care about Haitians or Haiti, then it makes it even worse. It's a very depressing place to be, if you're an ordinary Haitian, but also if you're an outsider with an objective point of view, and you can't see progress. It's a very destructive society. And it's a very difficult place to live if you are observing politically because there is no responsible political class. If you look at what's happening now, it's not very different from what was happening then. Now you have a prime minister who is on the run, because of the enormous demonstrations against him and his regime. A man who became president because he can sing. It was very difficult for me. It was an enormous cultural shock for me, because even though I'd spent years of my life in Africa, I had never seen poverty like there was in Haiti. I'd never seen the state of roads. It took

me an hour, an hour and a quarter to drive fifteen kilometers from my home into the center of Port au Prince. We had a relatively small police mission with the simple responsibility of creating and running a new police force for Haiti. There were no armed forces. The armed forces were disbanded when Papa Doc (François Duvalier) and Baby Doc (Jean-Claude Duvalier) , his son, left. So, there was no military, there was just police. We were responsible for creating, running, and training a new police service.

I also had what is called in the UN the Good Offices of the Secretary General. I was there to represent the Secretary General. Therefore, when talking about elections or talking about politics, I had direct access to the president and to other members of the establishment there. Regular access particularly to the president, whom I liked very much, a man called Preval. I used that access to persuade them to do things that they might not otherwise have done to make their lives easier. That was a challenge, and that was the fun part of the job. Running the police was done by a very competent French Gendarmerie Colonel, who was my deputy if you like, but he wasn't my deputy, he was the head of the police in the mission. Although I accompanied him when he needed accompanying to give him some prestige. I would do that. The police training was done by all French speaking police, by the way, which is an enormous bonus, because we have police from Canada, from France, from Senegal, from Mali, all of whom spoke French, and all of whom had been trained by the French Gendarmerie. So, they shared a common training and common standards. Which is simply not true of those places where we have sent English speaking police, such as Kosovo, for example, where you have no standardization of background at all. My experience of English-speaking police missions is that they're always - none of which I had, of course, in Bosnia, I'm going to talk about that later- very, very difficult to manage. We were trying to persuade them to have elections. I was very much involved in that. One of the advantages of the blue flag, the United Nations flag, is that whereas the political leaders refused to meet anywhere else, they were prepared to meet in my house because there was a blue flag, and it was guarded by French Gendarmerie and not by Argentine Gendarmerie. That was a service we could provide for Haiti. I spent all my life in diplomacy and then in peacekeeping and going to meetings- we were talking about meeting Milošević, or meeting people here or meeting people in Bosnia or whatever. There were always meetings where you came back to your office, or you went home afterwards, and there was adrenaline, you thought, “that guy I've just been talking to is really going to do something. He's going to make a difference. That woman is going to make a difference to whatever she's involved in.” It never happened to me once in Haiti. I never came home or went back to the office thinking, yeah, okay, that was a good meeting, those folks are actually going to do something. Never. And that's pretty depressing after a year or so. It was difficult not to become cynical.

Q: When was this mission created?

HARSTON: A couple of years before I got there. There had been missions there, but the police mission was created a couple of years before I got there. While I was over there was an Argentine guy who was my predecessor. We just simply had, as I say, the

responsibility for creating and managing a police service and for political offices of the Secretary General. I mean, obviously, one of the other lessons I learned in Haiti, was that the UN at that time, and I don't know whether it's different now, but certainly at that time, we never asked the Haitians what they wanted. We never sent a mission to Haiti before that police mission started saying, "Look, we're going to start a police service, what sort of police service do you want?" No, no, we came along as the last great colonial organization in the world and said, "Here we are, we know how to run police, this is what you're going to have." We tried to give them a mixture between the Canadian RCMP soft community policing approach and a bit of Special Forces approach from the Argentine Gendarmerie. And they didn't want any of that. What they wanted in the countryside was uneducated, you know, not only educated, not policemen who had been to university, but policemen who would understand and care if somebody had stolen your chickens. Not people, who the moment they got into uniform behave badly. Which is what they got. What the people in town wanted was special police armed to the teeth to deal with criminals and to bring law and order into a society, parts of which in Port au Prince were totally lacking in law and order. We didn't give them that either. So, it was no surprise to me at all five years later to see the police service collapse, which it did. Disappointment, but not surprise.

Q: Were there any aspects of intercultural communication you had to learn to be effective? What was it like to socialize with the locals?

HARSTON: You know, there was this intellectual class, as you would call them, who were wonderful to meet; poets, musicians, historians, and so on. I mean, Haiti is not short of an intellectual class. Quite interestingly, a lot of the commerce at that time, and I imagine still, was done by Lebanese, and Syrians, particularly Syrians. The Syrians had a history of running businesses, they're rather like the Lebanese in West Africa. So, the supermarket owners, the owner of my house, for example, were Lebanese. So, I mixed with that community as well, who were Haitians, but Syrian. And that was interesting. You could have a really good evening with really interesting people but none of whom were interested in or prepared to sacrifice themselves to get involved with making Haiti a better place, getting involved with politics.

Q: Did you travel around the country? And if you did, what insights or context did this provide?

HARSTON: Well, I saw more of Haiti than any Haitian has ever seen, because I had at my disposal two Russian helicopters. I would try once a week to go somewhere in the country. Early on, to visit my police stations, particularly, which were scattered throughout the country. Early on, I made the decision on those trips to always take two or three Haitian intellectuals, politicians, or whatever, to show them, because most of them had never been there. And of course, flying in a helicopter, you get to know the country pretty well. It is a beautiful, beautiful place, just stunningly beautiful with mountains and very few trees, alas, but rivers, lakes, and, of course the most magic Caribbean coastline. It was a real eye opener for me and particularly for the Haitians that I took with me, to fly

over and to see. We went right to the north, we went right to the south, we went to the islands that are off the coast of Haiti, which all have a history of one kind or another. I was incredibly fortunate. I drew a map of all the journeys I made. Literally, there isn't a square meter of Haiti that I've not seen.

Q: Today is the 28 of April 2021. Who was your Deputy in Haiti?

HARSTON: Oscar Fernandez. Argentinian. The head of UNDP [United Nations Development Programme]. And it was the first time ever that a peacekeeping mission has had a UNDP Deputy. New York fought for quite a long time with the UNDP. And they were very reluctant to put one of their officers in a position where if the head of mission were away, he would be really in charge of the mission and in charge of an armed mission. And finally, they agreed. And I was very lucky because Oscar is Argentinian, he's one of the most impressive people I've met in the time I've been in the United Nations. And he's now an Undersecretary General. So, you know, he did as well as I expected that he would. He and I got on fine. He would invite me to meetings of all the agencies because he said, on the whole, the agencies behaved better when I was in charge of the meeting than they did when he was. You know, there's a lot of jealousy between the agencies and UNDP, particularly when UNDP is the resident coordinator of the agencies, wherever they are. So, we were innovation that actually worked, and it was really fun working with him.

Q: You had the good offices role in Haiti. What did this role entail?

HARSTON: Before I answer, just hold on a second, because you asked me earlier who took over from me in Belgrade. And the answer to that question was Igor Khalevinsky. The Russians finally got hold of the Belgrade office, which they had wanted to do when I was first sent there. And he stayed for I don't know how long, six, seven years maybe. He was there for a very long time. He was very well connected in Moscow. He had been involved in personnel. So, he probably knew a lot of secrets. He was quite close to a man called Vladimir Ivanov who was at the top of the Foreign Ministry at that time. And so, it meant that when the Russian Foreign Minister came to Belgrade, he would always come to Khalevinsky's office. So, he stayed in Belgrade for a long time. Then he was appointed Russian ambassador, but without any portfolio—he did okay. He was a great tennis player. And as far as I can make out, he did no work. He was in Belgrade during the whole bombing, but most of the staff were not. He stayed. I presume under instructions to stay from his ministry rather than from the UN [United Nations]. And anyway, that's something you asked me last time, and I couldn't tell you the answer. Going back to good offices. As we mentioned before, the good offices role is an important one, which comes

with representing the Secretary General because the Secretary General has an interest in all the places where the UN is and many other places where it's not. But if he can use his influence to make things better somewhere in the world, of course, he does. A perfect example of that was Kofi Annan, who I think probably spent, when he was in New York, upwards of three hours a day, talking to presidents, foreign ministers, and others around the world. Trying to make things better, trying to encourage dialogue, trying to encourage peace. Good offices essentially means the ability to intervene as Secretary General. And the Secretary General is viewed as a pretty important man in most of the world. Not all. And so, an intervention by him or his representative, it's a very useful ability to go to local politicians in a place like Haiti. And so, what can I do? I'm here this morning, representing the Secretary General. And if you're smart, occasionally, you can say things like "when I was talking to the Secretary General the other day," whether you were or weren't. So, for example, in Haiti, when I first got there, the local politicians were arguing about an upcoming election, which we had eventually. And, as I mentioned earlier, they wouldn't meet anywhere because they couldn't agree on a venue. The French Embassy had offered, the United States Embassy had offered, the Canadian Embassy had offered. But, when I offered my residence with a blue flag, they accepted. So, for some days, they visited my house for an hour or two to talk to each other. They knew it was protected by the Argentine Gendarmerie, and they knew that they could rely on me to be discreet. My only regret for doing that was that my phone bill went up to a point, which I could never have made myself. They took advantage of long-distance calls all over the world while they were in my residence. But anyway. So good offices, it's an added tool in the toolbox of representatives of the Secretary General, wherever they are. And in Haiti, it was useful, particularly for dealing with politicians who wouldn't talk to each other.

Q: There was also a group, Friends of Haiti, consisting of France, Venezuela, Canada, Argentina, and the U.S. [United States]. You had frequent meetings with the representatives of these countries. Did you have any tangible results out of these meetings?

HARSTON: Oh, I think we did. I don't think they held meetings without me. It's a mechanism “the Friends of…”, in most places where there is a UN presence mission. So, there is in New York a group of interested parties who meet under the auspices of the Department of Peacekeeping, but it's not a UN group. It's not chaired by the UN. The UN is simply used as a mechanism of somewhere to meet. And there is, of course, a UN presence meeting in New York, whether it's the deputy or the person running Peacekeeping, or the Department of Political Affairs, it doesn't matter. And it's a sort of clearinghouse of ideas, what can we do next, and so on. And it's not limited, anybody can join in. So, there is no selection process. If you did just declare an interest and say, I

would like to join, then you do. And from my point of view, the meetings in Haiti were incredibly useful. They were useful for getting information from people who were very largely well informed. Not frequently as well informed as I was, because, of course, I had policemen and my own offices all around the country, which they didn't. So yes, it was a very useful mechanism. Once or twice, we all went to the presidency together, which is actually quite, you know, if you look at who's on that committee, as far as Haiti is concerned, a pretty important group for the President to listen to, and hopefully to take action, whatever it might be.

Q: Did you interact frequently with the U.S. ambassador to Haiti?

HARSTON: Yes. We were great friends actually. He had a lovely swimming pool. I was there, you know, if not every weekend, certainly a lot of weekends. But business meetings, yes. I never really understood the American position on Haiti, it was quite clear, they needed to solve it. There was an increase in the number of boat people going to the U.S. from the north of Haiti as refugees. They obviously had a proprietary interest in Haiti in the sense that they had invaded it a number of times. Here they were faced yet again, with Haiti being a failed state. So, they were always trying to find things to do. The one thing that puzzled me about the Americans, Americans had their own presence in Haiti, they had a small number of forces there. And I never really understood what their mandate was. And what they didn't do, which I think they could have done, was to stop the drug trade. While I was there, or shortly before Haiti started to become an entrepreneur for drugs. So, drugs got to Haiti, by boat from Latin America, and they would then be sent on as it were from Haiti. The problem with that is that if you drop drugs into the sea, on a raft, or whatever, and you require local labor as you would in Haiti, to pick them up off the beaches and distribute them and do whatever needed to be done, if you're a drug dealer, you pay the people who work for you in drugs. So, for the first time, drugs began to be quite a serious problem in Haiti while I was there, and I never really understood why the Americans didn't do more to stop that. There was quite a serious effort while I was there by the Americans, using pretty senior officials from the State Department to straighten up the political process to force them into having an election and so on, which was eventually successful. So, there was an interest that it was a place of some considerable interest to them. But I was never sure they were doing enough.

Q: During that time, there was also a top level visit by Hillary Clinton to Haiti, what was the purpose of this visit?

HARSTON: You know, I was trying to think about that the other day. I've got a lovely picture of me shaking hands with her at the airport. I mean, just as an indication of the inability or the unwillingness of the U.S. to take the UN as seriously as it should. The first message I got was that this plane would arrive with Hillary Clinton, and that she was to be met. It was to arrive at that part of the airport, which was controlled by the UN, and she was to be met by UN police, but they should be Americans. And I went back to the ambassador who was a friend of mine, who had actually served in a UN mission and said, "Look, you know, you simply cannot ask me to do this." Of course, we have American police officers, quite a few of them actually, who are from the New York Police Department, particularly, but I'm not going to put a UN welcome in one uniform, so sorry. So eventually, they said, "All right, then." And I had my French and Senegalese and Malians and Americans and Canadians. And it all went very well. But it was, you know, it was another indicator to me of the fact at how reluctant a lot of U.S. diplomats and politicians are to take the UN as seriously as they should and to understand the nature of the UN and what makes it tick, why it has the faults that it has, why it has the strength that it has, and this was a small indicator. I can't for the life of me remember why she was there because, of course, I didn't take part in any of the conversations, but I don't think it was a very significant visit.

Q: In our earlier sessions you mentioned that the problem of peacebuilding missions is the attitude of local politicians towards the important democratic processes. And at the same time, frequently there are complaints about the lack of commitment of key international stakeholders. Can you please tell me more about this?

HARSTON: Well, that is a very good way of putting it. It's the standard conundrum, isn't it? Of peacekeeping. You involved the UN in something. You say, "Look, we're in a mess, we need to help." The UN Security Council says, "Okay, we'll help you." And along comes this mission, and sits on your territory, and it has white jeeps and people in different uniforms all dashing about doing something you're not quite sure of. And so, you build up, as it were, resentment for being helped. And that is a real problem. And it's a problem for the management of the mission as much as anything. But, you know, it's, I suppose in some countries, at least, it's a reminder of colonialism. Like, you know, "Here we are, we're supposed to be running our own affairs, we're quite happy. What are these people doing here? Why were they invited?" And on the other hand, you would normally have a political class, which says, "Well, okay, it's got its disadvantages, it brings with it all sorts of problems. But we clearly need somebody to hold the ring, while we sort out our problems." I didn't find that in Haiti. I think the problem in Haiti was that the UN was invited to come in to do a very specific job, which was to run the police service. We were not a military mission, we had armed Argentine Gendarmerie, but they were there to

protect us, not to protect the Haitians. So, we were given a limited function. But it was a big presence. You know, we had all our vehicles and so on, and my Gendarmeries had armored personnel carriers. So, we had a military force of a kind. But this is the dichotomy. This is the problem of peacekeeping, wherever you are, there is almost immediately a resentment and it's frequently over silly things. We replaced a lot of our vehicles for the very first time when I was there. And the Haitians lay down on the street to prevent us from taking away the old vehicles, because they said, "Oh, but they are ours. These were sent to Haiti for us." Well, no. You know, I think we could have handled it more sensitively. But the rules said, you have to ship them out. So, we did. It's, if you like, it's one of the key problems of peacekeeping, people don't actually like to be helped.

Q: How much of a problem is the lack of genuine commitment by the key international stakeholders?

HARSTON: Well, you know, I think that varies from place to place. But certainly, there was a commitment. I never had any trouble persuading the Security Council [United Nations Security Council] to let me do what I wanted. It was a very small mission. But I think, you know, the magic of the Security Council is that it works at all. And of course, right now, in 2021, 2020, it doesn't work, or it rarely works, as it should, because of the growing antagonism between Russia and the western permanent members and China's growing, flexing of its muscles on the Council. But occasionally, it works. They pass a resolution, there's occasionally a new peacekeeping mission or whatever. Ironically, in my experience, it's the Americans who have more frequently interfered in the running of those missions, once they are established by the Security Council, trying to make sure that missions fulfilling those parts of the mandate, which suit the United States. And we'll come on to that when we get around to East Timor. But certainly, you know, the Americans attempt to and frequently succeed in influencing the work of the UN, peacekeeping, and peacemaking operations, more than they should. And having said that, you then have to understand that up to a third of the money that goes into peacekeeping comes from the American taxpayer. So, you know, why not?

Q: What were your impressions of President Préval? Was it difficult to earn his trust?

HARSTON: I liked him very much. And then we became as close as you could to being friends. He didn't speak much English, but spoke perfect French. And he was an agronomist by training, and very committed to trying to solve Haiti's problems of cutting down trees and so on, and managing the country of Haiti as a countryside. He was relatively easy to deal with, relatively easy to explain, and I had very good access to him. I mean, I could go and see him anytime I wanted. But he was still very much under the

influence of his predecessor, who lived not that far away from the palace, and still had a lot of strength. And his political base was not strong enough for him to make very difficult decisions.

Q: You have already mentioned that the opposition meetings took place in your residence. How did he look at this?

HARSTON: Oh, no, he was quite happy with that. It wasn't just opposition. It was people. It was anybody involved in the Parliament that wanted to run an election. So no, no, there was no problem there.

Q: When we are talking about Haiti politics, can you tell me something about the wall, and its political allegory in Haiti?

HARSTON: That was a story that is in my memoirs. It wasn't so much the wall, it was the fact that somebody was prepared, not that far from my headquarters, to put up a wall to prevent his neighbor from taking over some of his land. And then the wall was knocked down. And sure enough, within a month or two, the wall was rebuilt. And so, it went on. It was an allegory, if you like, of an inability to compromise. In Haiti, they simply didn't seem to understand the need for compromise in politics or anything else. After all, they'd lived for some considerable time under dictatorships of one kind or another. And where there have been no compromises, there have been no discussions, have been no ability to change the course of events. So, I suppose they'd got out of the habit, but maybe it also has something to do with the background of nations. I don't know. But there was very, very small room for compromise in almost anything.

Q: Another event that provided some cultural insight was the total eclipse of the sun, which happened during your time in Haiti. What was this experience like?

HARSTON: Well, it was a very strange experience, actually, in some ways, very Haitian. It was the whole of that part of the hemisphere, which got a total eclipse. I started listening to the BBC World Service first thing in the morning and they were taking you from one Eclipse party to another in Trinidad and Tobago, in Jamaica and so on. In Haiti, there was a total silence. People stayed in their homes. They were afraid. Here is the overwhelming mysticism of the Haitian Vodou. Haiti is frequently described as 50% Catholic but 100% Vodou. They were very scared, very frightened, very superstitious, and nobody went out. There was complete silence, no traffic in the streets. Even half of my UN staff, Haitian staff, refused to go out of their offices during the period of the

eclipse. For an outsider, it was a very, very weird experience. And it really brought into sharp focus the superstitious nature of being a Haitian.

Q: We have already talked about your travel and interaction with the local contacts. Yet, Haiti was considered to be an environment with increased security risks. Did you have a lot of security detail?

HARSTON: No, I had two or three people. That's all. I mean, I had at any given time, I had two people. And I only ever had one incident where the cab driver got out of his cab and came towards us with a gun because we had been jumping the traffic with the blue light. The confrontation didn't last long, because my security officer, a two-meter tall Ghanaian ex-military officer, reached under the dashboard of my vehicle for a short barreled shotgun. And it was like that Crocodile Dundee scene, you know, “That's not a knife. THIS is a knife”, “That's not a gun. THIS is a gun”, and the guy backed off. So, there was only that one incident. But you know, for the Haitians, it was a totally insecure society. The large parts of Port-au-Prince were under the control of gangs of one kind or another. My police force, which was a very small police force, but even then had the hope of controlling gangs. Because it wasn't constituted to do that. So, I think for the average Haitian in the cities, life was nasty and brutish outside the cities. It was as much as it had been since the nineteenth century.

Q: What was the role of the Argentine Gendarmerie?

HARSTON: Specifically, according to the mandate, to protect UN personnel and property, that's all. Although they were trained, completely trained in riot control, they had no function to deal with the Haitian population, in terms of peacekeeping. They were very efficient, a lot of fun to work with. I was the first Brit to be in command of Army Argentine troops since the end of the Falklands War. So that created some nice protocol problems for the Argentines. But it was fun, I enjoyed it. They officially had no role in the maintenance of law and order in Haiti. We were talking about President Préval, and on one occasion I got a phone call from him early in the evening and it sounded very strange. So, I said to him, "Where are you, Your Excellency?" And he said, "I'm in a small room in the basement of my palace." And I said, "Why?" And he said, "Because I think there's been a military coup." And I said to him, "Well, first of all, you don't have a military, Mr. President. The only person who's got a military here in inverted commas is me." And he said, "Well, there are armored personnel carriers outside my palace." And I said, "Well, also I know for sure the only person on the island who has armored personnel carriers is me, and I assure you we are not mounting a coup against you." And he was more or less reassured, I think. And what I found out was the new commander – the

Argentine troops changed every three months - and a new commander had decided to take his armored personnel carriers on a trip around town to get the guys away from the airport, to give them a chance of seeing the town. Strictly against instructions. They were not supposed to leave the perimeter of the airport, ever. And so, you know, I was able to reassure the president, but it was a very strange call to get accused of mounting a military coup.

Q: Can you describe the events around the tragic helicopter crash on March 16, 1989?

HARSTON: We had two Russian helicopters with Russian crews. But under an American charter contract, a company in the United States, in Seattle. And so, the bosses on the ground in Haiti were American, the guys who were flying the helicopters were Russians. I got a message midafternoon saying that a Scandinavian girl aboard a cruise ship - which was off a beach in the north of Haiti, which was used by cruise ships - had been hit by one of those awful jet skis. Badly injured. The hospital onboard the ship thought that she was too badly injured, and she needed to be flown to a hospital in Port-au-Prince as soon as possible. And so, I authorized a flight of one of our helicopters to go up there with the Argentine Gendarmerie to protect the helicopter and a doctor. When they got there, the helicopter developed an engine failure. And so, later in the afternoon, early evening, I got a call saying, "Could the other helicopter go up there to pick up the girl?" And I said, "Yes, as long as they are confident that they can fly after dark." They practice doing that. And so, he took off and went up there. By which time the girl had recovered enough to be treated in the hospital on the ship. So, she no longer needed our help. The broken helicopter stayed where it was. The other helicopter came back carrying with it the doctor—and I can't remember how many—fifteen people?

Q: Twelve.

HARSTON: Twelve people including the American boss of the Seattle company. And the helicopter hit a mountain. Yes, mountain. So, they were three meters lower than they intended to be. And it took some while for us to know what had happened because it just disappeared and there were no messages during the night. So, it had, of course, beacons on it and so on, but nobody picked up a beacon. And finally, the next day, the United States Coast Guard sent two helicopters. One of them incidentally flown by a British pilot from the Royal Air Force on secondment. And he was incredibly useful, the Brit, because he had been with mountain rescue in the UK. And so, whereas the Coast Guard were used to just flying over the sea, he was able to fly over the mountains. And finally, we identified where the wrack was, and they were able to land. And then discovered that everybody had died in the crash. It was very grisly. It's, I think, in some ways, one of the

worst days of my life, because, inevitably, you know, you ask yourself the questions, "What if, what if, what if?" And we did what we could. We sent the bodies back to Argentina, the Argentine sent a special aircraft, with some very senior people. We had a memorial service with all twelve coffins sitting there with flags, United States flag, Argentine flag. Just traumatic.

Q: I read in your memoirs that it had a very deep impact on the mission as a whole. But you also had a grief counselor sent from the UN headquarters. Can you tell me more about that experience?

HARSTON: Oh, of course, it was awful. And it was particularly awful for those people who had to go up there and look after the remains. You know, before we were able to remove the bodies, there were animals in the night. It was a shock. It was a small mission, and everybody knew somebody. And so, yes, the UN in its wisdom flew down a Canadian grief counselor, and I thought that was a good idea. He came to my office, and we sat, and we discussed and finally, he was in tears. He was saying how awful his job was and how difficult it was dealing with people in these tragic circumstances. But actually, he turned out—when he got down to it—not bad at doing his job. But it did strike me as being ironic that he was in worse shape than I was. But we hadn't got into the habit of the UN of sending counselors to missions, although it was a very good thing to do at that time.

Q: This tragic accident happened as you were finishing your second year in Haiti. And soon afterwards, you received the call with an offer to go back to the Balkans. You were reluctant to accept it. Why?

HARSTON: Well, I mean, not to put too fine a point on it. The offer was the job of the deputy to Jacques Klein in Sarajevo in the police mission. Klein had by then finished in Eastern Slavonia and was settled in Sarajevo. I had some indication that he wasn't terribly happy for me to go. And I spoke to Kofi, and I said, "Of course, Kofi, if you want me to go, I will go, because, you know, I am a good boy and do what I am told. But you do realize that Jacques Klein doesn't want me to be there." He said, "yes." In fact, he has written to me to say that. "And I don't care about that. What I want, Julian, is that you steer Klein. He's not basically a UN man. He did a very good job in Eastern Slavonia, but I need somebody there who is from the UN. And I think what you've done in Haiti, and what you've done elsewhere, tells me that that's the case. We know each other so please go." So, I said, "Okay, I will." And so eventually, I got on a plane and came back to the Balkans as deputy. I was met by Jacques Klein, at the airport, and we rushed through the airport, and I stayed with him at his apartment for three or four nights. And then they

found me somewhere to live in what had been the south part of Sarajevo. And so began, I think, probably one of the most difficult jobs I've ever had in my life. And it was not difficult because the work in itself was difficult. After all, it was yet another police mission, and it was run by very senior police officers, German and French, while I was there. Excellent French, and German General equivalent. And so, we didn't have any problem running the police or creating a new police service across government and creating two police academies, one in Republika Srpska, and one in the Federation. And it all went reasonably well, and it wasn't hard work for me. What was hard work for me was being more or less excluded from the decision-making process in the mission. And having to deal on a day-to-day basis with Jacques Klein, who was not the boss anymore as he had been in Eastern Slavonia. He was a part of a police mission. But there were far more senior international players there, which made him uncomfortable. He would go to meetings and actually behaved badly because he didn't like being, I think, really the third most important international player there. He was not somebody I shared a great deal of common view with. I suppose the thing that separated us most was his view of the sexual misconduct of our police officers and his willingness to just say, which he did in my presence, "boys will be boys." And I simply couldn't deal with that. I went to the head of the police and said, "we've got to stop this." And later on, as you know, the whole thing was put into a Hollywood movie. I don't want to be too rude about Jacques. There was a very kind streak in Jacques so you could never be very angry with him. You'd come in on a Sunday and find he had been on the phone all morning to all nighters in the United States, arranging for a child who was in hospital in Sarajevo to go for extensive medical treatment and have their fare paid. And so, there was a kind streak in Jacques, which you couldn't ignore. He was somebody who just wasn't what he appeared to be.

Q: We'll talk in detail about your assignment in Sarajevo next time. But now let me just go back to your final days in Haiti. What was the most important lesson you took home from this assignment?

HARSTON: Suppose as far as peacekeeping is concerned, the most important message I got from it was how little preparation the UN did in those days before embarking on a mission of that kind. Now, nobody had ever asked the Haitians what sort of police force they wanted. Few of the people operating there, from the internationals operating there, in the mission had ever had one hour of training in the history or the culture of Haiti. We really did behave like the last of the colonial powers. And, of course, as far as creating a police service that the Haitians wanted—as I said to you before—I think it was no surprise to me at all that, five to ten years later, the police service we had created collapsed. And I suppose that was the most important lesson. There were plenty of others, and one of them, unfortunately, was a feeling that Haiti is just doomed as a country. I can

see no hope for Haiti because of the crucial elements that they produce too many children, they mistreat their land, and they have no responsible political class. So, I can't see Haiti ever being very much different from the way it is now. I mean, properly managed as a country. It has potential agriculturally; it has potential with it. It has a vast potential for tourism. It has one of the most beautiful coastlines in the world and the warm Caribbean Sea. It will never be rich, but it should never be poor. But it will be. And, you know, it is very depressing because I loved Haiti, and I still love it. And, as I said to you before, I saw more of Haiti than any Haitian actually. It is a stunningly beautiful country. but it is just doomed by history, by its past, and by the way it is right now.

Q: Is it possible at all to reach that fine balance between security and development in such missions?

HARSTON: Well, of course, it wasn't our responsibility. My responsibility was simply a security one. It was to form and manage a police service. But yes, of course, is the answer. And the tragedy is—if you follow LinkedIn, or whatever, you'll see that I'm constantly banging on about this—the fact is you can't solve problems, whether they be in Chad, or Mali, or by simply imposing force, whether it's French force, or whether it's UN force. The military cannot create societies. They can create a platform on which all the rest of these things can be done, but essentially the problems are political. And so even now, the UN talks about the problems in Mali, for example, and in Chad, and in Somalia as being problems of insurgency. Well, they're not. I mean, insurgency is a problem, but, actually, if you apply the right amount of force to it, you can stop it. Or you can certainly make things better. But you cannot do that, without a concomitant effort to solve the basic political issues, which create the lack of security in the first place. If you look at places like Haiti—you can also look at places like most of the places in Africa right now - there simply isn't enough being done politically. And if you decide you can't do it, then we shouldn't be there either. You know, I think it is wrong for the UN, for example, to be in the Sahel and in Chad, and so on, because we are making no effort to solve the political problem. And we think we are involved in insurgency, why? The French - I can understand. Europeans - I can understand, because they perceive it to be a threat to Europe, of instability in that region, a threat of immigration, a threat of terrorism, a threat of basis for terrorists and so on. They understand, that is their problem. I see no reason why a Bangladeshi should die in Chad. I go on saying that and eventually someone is going to tell me to shut up. But it just makes no sense for the UN to be involved in counterinsurgency, which is what it is.

Q: And what is your opinion, where can a solution be found if the development part of UN engagement is lacking at the moment?

HARSTON: Well, it's not just UN engagement, it's everybody else's. But the question is, you know, what you want to establish, if you can, is a sustainable state of security. I am not a Democrat. I don't believe that democracy, Westminster style democracy is a solution for anybody, not even the people in Westminster. But I do think that there is a basic minimum of delivery that people expect of their government. They expect their children to be educated, they expect there to be security, they expect there to be health, and so on. And so, you have to focus on a sustainable solution. And one of the problems that we've seen with the Americans and NATO being involved in Afghanistan and Iraq and so on, is that they haven't done that. And so now, the Americans are pulling out of Afghanistan, NATO is pulling out. And it will revert and by the end of 2021, Kabul will be in the hands of people that we regard as terrorists, and we will have achieved nothing in terms of creating the security that people are desperate for. One of the clever things that these organizations, these people, we class as terrorists do, of course, is begin to deliver those goods and services that people want. So, if you look at Somalia, and you look at the areas that are not under government control, most of those services to people are provided by the people that we refer to as terrorists. So, what people want is stability. When we first went into Somalia, many years ago, the first thing we did was to put up posters of a man who could actually have solved the problem. He was a terrorist, oh, he was a warlord, he was all the things that we call these people these days. It was a feudal society, of course he was a warlord. And, you know, Afghanistan has been a feudal society for 1000 years. You know, why do we go in there and say, "Well, actually, you're doing this all wrong." Instead of going out and saying, "Okay, it's not our kind of place. It's not our kind of democracy, but we want to help you deliver the things to the people that they want, in a sustainable way. So, education and health and so on, so forth. And we're not going to make judgments essentially, about how democratic you are. We're going to look at human rights, of course, we're going to look at the protection of civilians and sum." But, you know, as I think Putin said the other day, "Democracy is not like Coca Cola. The recipe is the same wherever you are in the world, and everybody drinks this stuff." And you know, I could go on like this for hours but I'm not going to.

Q: Today is May 3 and we are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, a retired UK [United Kingdom] diplomat and retired senior UN [United Nations] official.

It was April 1999, and you were on the flight to Sarajevo to your new assignment as the deputy SRSG [Special Representative of the Secretary General] in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What was the mandate of this UN mission?

HARSTON: Well, basically halfway through the meeting in the United States—which decided the fate of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Dayton—they suddenly realized that they were going to have to reform and restart the police service. They gave that job without really much consultation to the UN. We then had to dream up a mandate, which included over 1,000 UN police officers, to start a new police force from scratch. Of course, we took a lot of the existing police with no political connections, but basically from scratch, which meant setting up the police academies, one in Republika Srpska and one in Sarajevo, and also managing the border police and border control.

Q: You were about to spend two years in this position, were you able to choose your own team?

HARSTON: The only person I took with me was Dr. Abiodun Williams, who is an American citizen, but born and educated in Sierra Leone. We had worked together in Haiti. So, I said, "Would you like to come with me?" And we managed to do that. He was an enormous help to me and he went on to do great things. He is now in Washington doing, I can't remember what it is, but it's a pretty high-profile job. But other than that, no, nobody. I was never really in the habit of taking people. Some heads of mission, deputy heads of mission, managed somehow to bring people, I never did and I'm really rather glad I didn't. Only in my original mission in Zagreb, did I actually have a Brit on my staff. So, whereas the Americans and French and others tended to surround themselves with their own nationality, I never did.

Q: Do you ever vet someone who is about to be sent from the headquarters in New York?

HARSTON: Well, I think to work closely with you, they usually ask you and tell you about people. I never had to say, no I don't want him or her. So, I was lucky, I guess.

Q: The UN mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not the only international presence in the country at the time. Was there any overlapping with the other two? And did it create any problems?

HARSTON: Well, there was, of course, some overlapping, although nobody really wanted to have anything to do with the police service. But there were plenty of joint meetings. I think the main problem it caused was that Jacques Klein, who was very much used to being the king in Eastern Slavonia, suddenly found himself as head of the UN mission, but very much number three in the pecking order in Bosnia – and he didn't enjoy that very much. He wasn't easy to deal with from the point of view of the other two organizations, because he felt he ought to have a louder voice and he really didn't have one.

Q: You have briefly mentioned the issues tackled by the International Police Task Force. To what extent were you personally involved and, from this perspective, would you say that it was a successful mission?

HARSTON: Well, I was personally involved because I was a deputy and therefore, I was always involved. So, my voice was heard, it may not have been listened to very often, but it was heard. I think, on the whole, we didn't do a bad job, actually. I don't think we ever reached the number of international police officers that we were allocated or that were available to us through the Security Council resolution. But having said that, at that time—I'm not sure how much better it is now—policing was one of the things that the UN really didn't do terribly well. We were lucky in the sense that we had a good management team and the management team tended to be French, German, and Canadian. So, the important decisions and the important decision makers were from countries which understood and respected the nontechnical sides of policing, like the questions of human rights and the protection of civilians and injustice. But I frequently used to be really embarrassed by the fact that the UN is the last colonial organization in the world. I would visit police stations and I did it quite a lot. I would visit police stations in Republika Srpska or in the Federation, where the most senior local police officer was a man with 20–30 years of experience, frequently in the old Yugoslav police service, and had been dealing with—like most police officers—traffic, petty criminals and domestic violence and so on, and they were pretty damn good at it. And then here comes the UN and puts into his office a Bangladeshi and a Zimbabwean to give him advice. Well, you make up your mind, is that a good thing to do or not?

Q: One of the objectives of the task force was to establish a local, multi-ethnic police. Given that it was fairly early after the violent conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina, was it difficult to have a multi-ethnic police force in some parts of the country?

HARSTON: Yes, it was, and I don't think we were ever very successful at that. Police, and police in the areas that were ethnically dominated by one ethnicity or the other were police from that ethnicity. And I think, you know, we tried to make a multi-ethnic police force, but, on the whole, the service operated in Republika Srpska was governed by the local Serbs, the police service in the Federation was governed by the Croats and Bosnians. There were mixed teams, there were places where it worked, where we needed to make it work. But some places that were genuinely multi-ethnic were actually the two police academies where we could choose the students. So, the police academy in Sarajevo had--I'm not sure if it was 50 percent-- certainly a large percentage of Serb speaking police officers. The same was true in Banja Luka at the academy there. In fact, there was a really funny incident. I went to a football match that was being played between the two academies in Sarajevo. I was sitting there, and I saw all the locals in Sarajevo were supporting the Sarajevo Academy. It came as a terrible shock to them when the names of the team were read out and they discovered that more than half the Sarajevo team were Serbs. There was almost silence for the rest of the game. But it was never going to be a truly multi-ethnic police force except in the sense of mixed police stations in places where there were a large majority of the other ethnicities.

Q: Are these police academies still active?

HARSTON: Yes, I'm sure they are. How well managed they are, I don't know. I suspect there probably aren't any international police officers there anymore. But I honestly don't know. It was a long time ago, lifetime.

Q: In December 1999, you met with then German Foreign Minister Rudolf Scharping, at the Rajlovac military base near Sarajevo. What was the purpose of this meeting? Can you describe the circumstances?

HARSTON: I mean, it's a funny story in a way. I was not exactly woken up, but I suspect it was at seven or eight in the evening, and I got a call from the police commissioner, who was a German, saying, would I go to the German headquarters because the German Minister of Defense wanted to talk to me. I said, "I was acting head of mission and I didn't know where Jacques was." So, I finally got hold of my driver and we ended up there at nine o'clock in the evening, and it was dark. I was escorted through rather dark corridors into a large anteroom from the bar. There were people around the room and in the center was the German Defense Minister. And I said, "Good evening, sir. What can I do for you at this time of night?" He said, "Well, I've just been told that you're going to replace the German police commissioner, the head of the police, and I want to tell you that we want him to be replaced by another German." I thought, well, I'll plan an old trick. So, I said to him, "I suspect that you've been misinformed, Minister, by the Foreign Ministry", and I saw a poor guy from the German Foreign Ministry in the corner, hoping not to be noticed. "In fact, the decision has already been made, there is a French general coming from the Gendarmerie. But these posts are not allocated permanently to one member state, they will always move on. It's not a German position." And he said, "Well, is there nothing you can do to change it?" And I said, "No, even if I wanted to, which I don't particularly, I think we have an excellent police commissioner at the moment. He is going home. And I have no doubt that the Frenchman will be excellent, too, because he is from the Gendarmerie." So, he said, "Okay, you can go." He was very rude, a very arrogant man. And I said to him, "Well, Minister, don't you think if you were summoned out at nine o'clock in the evening and you were standing next to a bar, somebody might even offer you a drink?" He summoned some poor young man to go and have a drink with me. It was a very German experience. It is quite fun to be in the UN if you are not a UN person. I mean, I have only been in the UN for five, six years, so you don't care as much as UN folks care that I've had another good career. So, why should I be intimidated by a German Defense Minister? Anyway, that was a nice story. And it shows the misunderstanding, which is prevalent in a lot of leading countries, leading member states, who believe somehow they can corner a job and keep it, which they can't.

Q: Did it happen frequently that you would have a minister intervening, trying to change the decision of the senior leadership of the mission?

HARSTON: Well, no. It used to happen in New York quite a lot. You would get the ambassador from Denmark or the ambassador from somewhere coming to see the head of peacekeeping and saying, "We really do not believe that job should go to X or Y." On the ground, ambassadors would tend to want to influence but not in the police mission. In a

mission which had a political mandate, or even in Haiti, the ambassadors had quite a lot of leeway in persuading me to do one thing or another. Presenting the views of the Canadian government or the United States government, whatever it was. In New York, the Americans, in particular, were very aggressive depending on who was the permanent representative. For example, Bolton, I'll give you a story about Mr. Bolton, when we are talking about his team.

Q: Did you have a good cooperation with SFOR?

HARSTON: Yes, I think on the whole, we did. I think they found Jacques Klein very difficult to deal with. He very much emphasized in his dealings with the military that somehow he was military. Even for the police medal ceremonies, the UN police medal, our people get medals every three months. He would turn up in an American Air Force uniform, which is totally unacceptable. So, the military treated him relatively seriously, they treated it seriously that they had to deal with us. They actually were very helpful in developing a mission implementation plan because the military said, "Well, wait a minute, how can you have a mission if you don't know where you're going? You need a mission plan." So in fact, it was being pushed by SFOR that made the first mission in the world to come up with a mission implementation plan. And in that sense, they were pretty helpful. I got on very well with them because the deputies were British and French. Mike Wilcox, who was there when I first went there, became a personal friend. I was talking to him only yesterday. In fact, he ended up managing the House of Lords as Black Rod. And two French generals, with whom I got on very well. I would have dinner with them at least once a month and we would discuss a little bit of business. But they were very, very high quality at that time, the generals in SFOR. I don't know what they went on to but certainly, General Trousdell, who took over from Wilcox, was a very high-quality officer from the royal Irish regiment. And he also is still a friend. Those were good days from my point of view with the military.

Q: How would you describe your cooperation with the high representative at that time, it was Wolfgang Petritsch?

HARSTON: Well, it was again colored by the fact that he found Klein very difficult to deal with. Petritsch is a quiet, self-effacing Austrian diplomat. And you couldn't think of two people more opposite than Petritsch and Klein. I used to go see Petritsch and he was very careful because it was quite clear that he sympathized with me for having to work with Jacques Klein. We actually got on very well and we kept in touch. I've seen him in Belgrade in the last couple of years and we keep in touch on email. I liked him very much, very high quality in many ways and we're still friends. I enjoyed those excursions into the real world very much more than the job I was doing with Klein.

Q: In your opinion, what were the main obstacles to a more sustainable progress in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

HARSTON: Well, the short answer to that, of course, is Dayton [Dayton Accord]. Dayton was a sort of internationally supervised ethnic cleansing. By the creation of the Republika of Srpska, even giving it the name Republika of Srpska, what was that all about? By not ensuring that the people who had held power during the war, gave it up, and you've got a new set of politicians has meant that Bosnia has been buried in nationalist politics ever since. I think Dayton was a way to end the war, but my goodness, it hasn't done Bosnia any favors. My impression of Bosnia now is to live there is not that much better than it was at the end of the war. So, anything sustainable was left at the whim of nationalist politicians who had no real interest in working together with their opposite numbers. Dayton, from my point of view, was a disaster for Bosnia.

Q: We already talked about your meetings with Alija Izetbegović, but you also met with other political leaders from both the Federation and Republika of Srpska including Haris Silajdžić, Momčilo Krajišnik, and Milorad Dodik. What were your impressions from these meetings?

HARSTON: Well, it was difficult times. I liked Haris Silajdžić. I thought he was a man who understood that maybe there was a need for reconciliation and for peace. He was a very pleasant company and spoke beautiful English. He had a very beautiful daughter, as I recall. I think I've said this before, but the real king of all this is Dodik. He wasn't at the level that he is now when I was there, but it was quite clear to me that he was the smartest. I don't use that word in a flattering way, really the smartest politician in Bosnia, possibly in the Balkans and still is and is an incredible survivor. Dodik played a trick on me, which taught me a lesson that I hadn't learned before. We had a private meeting and he promised that there would be no press. Of course, I believed him, which I have never done since, not him, but people who tell me there is no press. The doors opened at the end of the meeting and, of course, there were twenty plus cameras pointing at Dodik, not at me. And he then went on to say, “the Deputy Special Representative has agreed this, has agreed that, he agreed with me when I said…” It was a lesson from Dodik.

I met Krajišnik in Pale. Pale is strange—I mean a village really—and an easy drive from Sarajevo. I met him there two or three times. I tended to go to see him when we needed to discuss technical issues. For example, I went to show him the new number plates, which we had developed. They had computer generated numbers, which did not indicate where the owner of the car came from. Whereas before you could tell which town it came from looking at number plates. We did that really to benefit the Serbs more than anybody else, the Serbs who are traveling across from one side to the other particularly going up to Republika Srpska. He took one look at the number plates and said, "They will not hang anywhere except on the wall of the museum in Pale." I said to him, "Well, we will introduce them next Monday. We're not asking for permission. We were just showing you before we did it." We had a competition to design a new flag for the new Bosnia and Herzegovina. We ended up with three designs. We took them to the Parliament and we said to the members of the B-H parliament, "Do you like flag number one?" and they said, "No." And we said, "Do you like flag number two?" and they said, "No." I think it was Jacques Klein who said to them, "Well, congratulations ladies and gentlemen, you

have chosen design number three." They were so angry, but design three is what you see flying today as the flag of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's a stylized map of the country and a lot of stars, which don't mean anything. They were just Hollywood. But you've never seen a group of people quite as angry than when we told them their chosen flag was number three.

Q: You traveled a lot in Bosnia and Herzegovina during this assignment. What insights did you get from these travels?

HARSTON: Well, if you want rather corny insight, I think the thing—I don't know why it would surprise me but it did, was what really nice people the Bosnians are. You always got the feeling that if your car broke down, they would take you in, they would help you mend it, and so on. I felt very comfortable with the Bosnians, not uncomfortable with the Serbs but it was essentially a very kind country, which is a contradiction. It makes it even worse that those people have been taken advantage of by all those nationalist politicians in the way they are. You will remember that Sarajevo, for example, was the home of the best music in Yugoslavia. It was essentially a good place. And I don't know, I was disappointed. I think I was disappointed because I constantly felt that the people were being let down. The main reason for my travels was to open new border posts, the thing I seemed to do most often. So, I did get to see quite a lot of the country and quite a lot of the border and get a sense of where there was tension and where there was not. My favorite trip was down to that tiny little part of the coastline, which the Bosnians have and there we had built a border post for the first time. There was a bit of resentment locally, and the Croats didn't like it. I think they're going to find a way around it. But you know, I did get to see a lot of Bosnia. I was very privileged in that way. Banja Luka, by the way, I love. And, you know, there are all sorts of contradictions in what's happened in the former Yugoslavia. One of them is that Banja Luka is a very nice city. If you were a student in Banja Luka, the chances are, if you went to university, you would go to Zagreb. Zagreb was your center, not Belgrade. So, if you're an outsider coming here, there are all those contradictions and changes, which are very interesting.

Q: You already talked about it, but when you wrap things up, what was it like to work with Jacques Klein in Sarajevo?

HARSTON: Awful. Oh God, I know we have talked about it. I mean, the fact is, Jacques was ideal for Slavonia. He was the king. He is ecclesiastical, he liked dealing with the church. He was larger than life. He had enough troops to be serious. He had a good mandate. He managed to get on okay with the Croats, which was very important. The Serbs didn't take him terribly seriously. Milošević, as I said before, had lost interest in the Serbs in East Slavonia and so he was not going to create problems. But in Bosnia, he was a fish out of water. I had been there a year and I said to him, "It really is time you went to visit the police academy in Banja Luka." [Klein said] "No, I don't want to do that." "Why?" "I don't care about the police." Well, he was the head of a police mission for God's sake! It wasn't important enough for him. He went off to Liberia after that, where again, he treated himself as the King. It was an uncomfortable time for him. And as a

result of that, I think it was particularly uncomfortable for the rest of us, apart from his administration officer who was prepared to do anything for him or ended up taking over from me, which is what Klein wanted in the first place. So, it was an unhappy time for Klein and it's not easy to work for an unhappy boss.

Q: In your memoirs I read an anecdote about taking Chinese police officers to lunch. Can you tell us more about that?

HARSTON: That was typical Klein—and he was a thoughtful man. He liked to try to make people comfortable. We got our first group of Chinese police officers from Beijing—very smart, there were ten of them. And he decided the best thing to do with them was to take them to a Chinese restaurant, the only Chinese restaurant in Sarajevo at that time. Of course, what he hadn't counted on—because he never asked anybody's opinion, and I'm not sure I would have been any wiser—was that the people running this restaurant came from Taiwan. So, when they saw a whole bunch of police officers from Beijing, half of them ran away. So, we had a very long lunch waiting for food because they really thought that the police had come to get them. Not a great piece of diplomacy.

Q: The international presence in Bosnia and Herzegovina following the signing of the Dayton accord was marked by a few controversies. Can you tell me more about this?

HARSTON: Meaning?

Q: Well, you talked about non transparency. You talked about the personnel issues with junior staff and some serious accusations or indications when it comes to sexual abuse and trafficking left unchallenged. We will go back to this particular part in more detail in my next question, but overall, would you say that it was an efficient and well-run mission?

HARSTON: Well, I think, bear in mind that we're talking about 20 years or more than 20 years ago. After UNTAES, a new mission, most of the same people came from UNTAES straight to Sarajevo. But the system had not grown with the amount of peacekeeping we were having to do. So, a lot of the old faults which had been present in UNTAES, were still there in Sarajevo. The personnel side--from my point of view--was disastrous, because at that stage--it's changed now--everybody, including myself, was on a contract, which expired at the end of the Security Council mandate or less, so people were on at most six to nine to twelve month contracts. The extension of those contracts was almost entirely up to the person who was their boss, which gave an enormous amount of power to some pretty awful people. So, if you were a Kenyan woman serving in Eastern Slavonia or Sarajevo with four children in school in Kenya, your future, in terms of international work for the international community, was in the hands of one person, and of course, it was abused. So, it was a very, very nasty system. I believe that it has changed a lot since then. It gave a lot of power over people to some pretty bad people. Not the least of which, in my view, was the chief of administration, officer. The head of personnel, chief of administration, and so on, were part of a group of people with far too

much power over people's future lives. I know that people were abused. They were abused in terms of the way they were treated, but also sexually abused and so on. When made aware of it, I would try to do something about it. But it was a very difficult time. The UN was not really setting any kind of standards, which you would be proud of at that time.

Q: You said that things have changed since. Do you have any knowledge about the current policies in this regard?

HARSTON: I think they're much, much better. I think one of the things that has gotten worse is the recruitment process. But I think there is much, much more awareness now of the need to monitor the way people are treated, particularly women. So, no, I have no doubt at all that it's a great deal better. I don't suppose for one minute that it's perfect. But think how difficult it is to impose or to introduce standards of behavior in a company that is monocultural—like a French, British, or German company—and suddenly you have to try to do that in a mission or in an organization with 100—whatever it is— member states. It's much, much more difficult. And you know what I was saying about the police? Why would a policeman from Zimbabwe be any use as an international monitor? The police in Zimbabwe have been abusing civil rights and human rights for 30 years. But there they are, and it wasn't that different on the civilian side either.

Q: Your work also involved the human rights portfolio, and you worked closely with the head of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights Madeleine Rees. What were the issues you tried to address jointly?

HARSTON: Well, I had no authority over Madeleine. She didn't in fact work for me, but she's British--which helps--and we got on very well. I don't think she was that far away from me--physically--on the mission, so I saw quite a lot of her. She was very hardworking, very aggressive. She and Jacques Klein were not on speaking terms at all. He didn't like women who wore boots and were masculine in their attitude and aggressive. So that was it, he didn't speak to Madeleine. I tried to find out what she was doing--which again, is slightly difficult, because a lot of what she was doing she couldn't talk about. So we had a very good relationship and I liked her very much. And I did try to help, that's for sure. The thing where our interests coincided, of course, was the behavior of our police service and their ability to protect the people they were supposed to be protecting and serving. She was able to point out to me a number of cases where it was quite clear our police were not only just involved in--for example, visiting brothels and so on--but actively involved in making sure that those places were protected. Even in one case with the Ukrainians, actually bringing girls from Ukraine to work in Bosnia. So, she brought that to me, and I would report to Klein. It's wrong to say that he wasn't interested, but his attitude was not uncommon, which was, 'boys will be boys, what do you want me to do about it?' So, it was quite difficult. And he allowed a process against an American police officer, Kathryn Bolkovac, to go to a point where she was dismissed by the American organization, which had recruited her. The United States doesn't send police

officers, they're sent by a commercial organization. And so, she was eventually told she was to go.

Q: She was the whistleblower, right?

HARSTON: Yes, absolutely. She and Madeleine worked together to try to reverse that. Madeline gave her very good advice, which was that the company she worked for was actually a British company owned by the American company, for some reason. And the employment law in Britain is much, much tougher than it is in the United States. She took them to court and won for illegally removing her from her post. It was later made into a film called The Whistleblower, which wasn't bad. It was a scandal which, of course, should never have happened and it should have been dealt with better. It was, I think, the worst example while I was there of the fact that the leadership of the mission--and I suppose to an extent, I should be included in that-- didn't do enough. There was an inquiry into the Ukrainian police in the northeast of Bosnia and I was not permitted by Klein to see the inquiry because he knew that if I saw it, it would all blow up in his face - very uncomfortable times. I look back on it and I try to work out whether I could have done more. But I think this was a police matter and it should have been a question between Klein and his head of police—but it wasn't for some reason and that I never really understood.

Q: Was it, to some effect, the consequence of the fact that you had so many national contingents within the police force coming from different countries? And then those countries also had a say in this scandal and they tried to protect their own reputation?

HARSTON: No, I really don't think so. I think the Americans were pushing Klein. Klein never worked for the UN; Klein was essentially a child of the State Department. He took his orders from the State Department, he was never a UN man. I think there was no appetite in Washington for some major scandal involving American police officers.

Q: To your knowledge, has there ever been some kind of legal outcome of these criminal activities that took place in Bosnia, involving some of the members of the international staff?

HARSTON: Not that I'm aware of. Well, apart from the Bolkovac thing, she went to court in the UK. But otherwise not that I'm aware of. One of the problems of the UN, as you know, is that police officers, when they're on duty, are protected by the UN. They have a slightly different status from military officers. But nonetheless, the UN would have been hard pressed to hand over a French policeman to Bosnian authorities. They would have sent him or her home to be dealt with in disciplinary terms in their own country.

Q: So, after two years in Sarajevo in April 2001, you received another call from Kofi Annan, and you left Bosnia and Herzegovina for a new post. As you were on your way to

New York, what did you believe was your greatest achievement during this particular assignment?

HARSTON: I think surviving Jacques Klein. I was just talking with my wife at lunch, I could have picked a knock down, dragg it out row with Klein a number of times. I backed off because I thought on the whole, it was better for me to be there than to be asked to go. I think if the crunch had really come, then Kofi would have had no choice but to support him rather than me—I mean, that's the way these things go in big organizations. I think surviving, being a voice of calm from time to time, a voice of good sense—in a very difficult working environment. It was a strange place because, on the whole, the job we did wasn't that bad, actually, but the atmosphere of the mission was absolutely awful. It was a very difficult place to work--not just for me, but you know, I had a few friends there. Everybody was scared to death of Klein and particularly his chief of administration.

Q: How does it work in the UN once you have completed your mission? Do you have to submit some report with your impressions and your findings? Or is it a done deal when you leave a mission that's it, you just move on to the next mission?

HARSTON: The heads of mission—I don't think it's a sort of formal process, but no head of mission is going to resist being able to write valedictory pointing out how good they were and what a tremendous success they are. So yes, the heads of mission do that—I did it in Haiti, Western Sahara, and so on. As you've seen from my memos, I tend to write these things down—I don't keep a diary, unfortunately. You've seen my valedictories from Belgrade, Western Sahara, Haiti, and so on. I liked writing them, though I say it myself, I was quite good at it.

Q: These reports of the heads of missions, are they looked into by the Security Council in depth?

HARSTON: I don't think the Council sees them at all. I suppose you could send them to your own representative, which I never did. No, I don't think the council sees them. I think the only thing that the Council sees is the regular reporting to the Council. The Secretary General's reports to the Council, which are written by the heads of mission--not by the Secretary General. It is possible they are circulated privately. But no, the Council gets no oversight of those. Given that they are in coded cables, I don't think they are distributed widely outside the Department of Peacekeeping and the various departments which feed into Peacekeeping.

Q: It's the 7th of May 2021 and we are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, retired UK diplomat and retired senior UN official. In April 2001, you left Sarajevo for your next mission, this time in East Timor. What was the objective of your assignment?

HARSTON: Well, for the first time ever, when faced with the fact that one mission was closing down - the new mission would be, we hoped, agreed by the Security Council - the Department of Peacekeeping in New York decided to send a senior official from New York to plan for the new mission. I wasn't sent to East Timor, I was sent to New York, and I did this by running backwards and forwards between New York and the country concerned. They gave me a small staff of two people and an office. I was a director in the existing mission and planned for the new mission from there. It was a very good idea because, you know, to plan a mission sitting in New York or sitting somewhere else doesn't make any sense. It was much better to do it in the place where the mission was going.

Q: What were the issues the UNTAET (United Nations Transitional Administration in East Timor) mission, which was led by Sergio de Mello, dealt with?

HARSTON: Essentially, it moved into devastated East Timor after the final pull-out of the Indonesian occupation there. Indonesians destroyed everything that they could before they left, they behaved appallingly badly throughout the occupation, but also when they left. So we put in Sergio de Mello initially with a fairly large military mission, with Australians and New Zealanders largely, but then much more mixed after that, to take over and run the territory before having elections and handing it over to a new East Timorese government.

Q: Actually, this was a fairly short transition from this referendum on independence that they had in 1999 to the first presidential elections, it was around two years, maybe even less.

HARSTON: I suppose we organized those elections in order to get some East Timorese ownership of the processes as it were. But the presence of UNTAET, well, the presence of the UNTAET mission was a bit longer than that.

Q: Who were the principal international stakeholders in East Timor and what was their position?

HARSTON: Well, I think the Security Council as a whole, but the people who had the biggest interest in East Timor were, of course, the Australians, and the United States. It was never quite clear to me why the United States was so involved except as an ally. It was a strange time for Australia, because Australia had taken on this new role as it were or thought it had taken on this role as the deputy sheriff in the Pacific, and they were very proud of the fact they were working with the United States in the Pacific. Actually, as a result, they were rather difficult to deal with, but they provided the bulk of the forces in East Timor. And for New Zealand, little New Zealand, it was the biggest deployment of New Zealand forces, air forces and land forces, since the Second World War. So, it was a pretty big deal for those Pacific countries.

Q: Would you say that the Australian and the US support was solid and unconditional?

HARSTON: Well, I don't know what unconditional means in these circumstances. I mean, I'm a firm believer that foreign policy is about perceived national interests. So the Australians were interested in a stable and hopefully economically viable, sustainable East Timor, the Americans the same, but without the proximity. After all, it was only an hour's flight, I think, from East Timor to Darwin in the northern territories of Australia.

But it was all about national interest. I think the Australians also had an eye, you know, as usually, oil comes into this. Astonishingly, we talk about Afghanistan, we talk about Iraq, we talk about Libya, and so on, always say, well, it was all about oil. Well, it wasn't all about oil, but certainly oil, and the drilling rights and so on in the sea, between East Timor and Australia did form a relatively important part of the Australian interest in the problem. But I also think, actually, the Australians had a rather bad conscience, about what had gone on in East Timor under the Indonesian invasion and occupation of East Timor. They haven't done enough; they were consistently weak and actually pushing for any solution there. So, I think they had a bad conscience about East Timor as well. It was a funny mixture of motivation. There was not much interest from the other Security Council permanent members. None from or very little from the UK, although the UK did deploy forces, they deployed Gurkhas from Brunei, where we had and still have a Gurkha battalion. They came with vehicles and equipment from Brunei, but they didn't stay that long. France did not have much interest. Largely, the process in New York was led by Australia.

Q: You interacted on the issue of East Timor with a number of senior foreign officials and diplomats, including US Ambassador John Bolton. What were your impressions about working with him?

HARSTON: I didn't work with him, I found myself very largely working against him actually. You know, he doesn't have a reputation for being a very easy person to deal with. He was the U.S. Permanent Representative to the UN at the time. He was aggressive and a bully. When we got to the stage where we were looking for a Security Council resolution for this new mission - my task was to develop a Security Council resolution - virtually every paragraph was questioned by the United States who wanted the UN to take over, to have a mission there, but they got stuck on two particular issues. One was that we said that we wanted to retain an executive police force, that is a police force with police powers in an independent state, which we've never done before. And we also, more controversially - and it was the most difficult part of my planning, the biggest effort in the planning for this mission - went to ask every single ministry in the new Timorese government whether they could function without the UN, because the UN had been running the Ministry of Justice, had been running the Ministry of Finance and so on. It was quite clear to us after we had done a proper, detailed and very competent and professional survey, that they could not work a government without at least 200 or 250 internationals. And our view was that since these people were absolutely essential, they should come under the peacekeeping budget, assessed contributions, they should not be

subject to voluntary contributions, because we knew that otherwise there wouldn't be the money, they wouldn't be recruited, and they wouldn't have the stability that was required.

The Americans in particular were really aggressively against this because they didn't want people paid on the peacekeeping budget. They thought it was a bad precedent. And, you know, diplomats in New York have amazing access in that headquarters building and I found myself face to face with John Bolton one afternoon in my office. He said, amongst other things, "you do understand that if you put those 232 people" - I can't remember how many it was - "into the Security Council resolution, we'll veto it." There was always, for me, a great advantage in not being a UN official, if you like. I had been parachuted into the UN, I had already had a career in the foreign ministry, so I had much more self-confidence than the average UN person. If you looked at Peacekeeping, two or three of the senior members of Peacekeeping had never done anything else but the UN. They joined as P-1s and went through to being directors. But here was I - I was self-confident. And I said to Mr. Bolton, "Look, what you're trying to do, Ambassador, is to veto this in my office. You want to use the threat of the veto to make me change the draft resolution." And I said, "I'm not going to do that. I firmly believe - and I have the right evidence for it - that we desperately need these people, and if you want to veto it, veto it in the Council." He was very angry. He went to Hedi Annabi, who, thank God, backed me up and said, “Do it in the Council. We believe it's right, we'll put it in the draft resolution.” So, we did. And, of course, the Americans didn't veto.

But that was part of the campaign which was waged by the Australians and the Americans. I went to Washington a couple of times and was treated very roughly in Washington. I don't remember such an undiplomatic, if you like, approach to, after all, a relatively senior UN official. At that stage, I suppose I was a one star, possibly even two-star general in military terms. So, I was very disappointed because of my previous career, I had always worked very closely with the Americans and wasn't expecting to be rough handled in that way. Australia, even worse. The Australian ambassador regularly telephoned me or came into my office and said we were doing it all wrong, and that they would not support etc., etc., etc. They were in an aggressive mode. As I have said, they were the deputy sheriffs and actually the Prime Minister of Australia described Australia in that way, as the deputy sheriff of the Pacific. Australians did put a lot of effort into East Timor and we were incredibly grateful to them for their military contribution. But, you know, in a way it was fun, because we won. Had we lost I think I would have been very disappointed.

Q: You also worked with a number of outstanding East Timorese leaders; how would you describe your cooperation with them?

HARSTON: It always struck me as being quite extraordinary that this little country, a little ex-Portuguese colony, could produce three or four men of world class, in political terms, Nobel Prize winners and so on. For me, it was extraordinary dealing with them. Unfortunately, I saw very little of Bishop Belo because I really didn't have much business with him, but I got on incredibly well with Ramos-Horta and enjoyed dealing with him

on a daily basis. He was an extraordinary mixture: full of confidence, full of bravado, full of his own self-importance, but actually a very easy man to get on with. Same with Gusmão, Xanana Gusmão, also a very extraordinary man. He had an office that he deliberately established in a building that had been burnt out by the Indonesians. It was like having a meeting in a bombed building and he did that because, as he said, "I want people to understand this is what was done to us and we have to recover from here." I was very impressed, I have to say, by those people. I think East Timor was very lucky to have them.

The drawback was, of course, that they had been out of the country so long that they had very little hands-on feel for the people of East Timor. They insisted that Portuguese became the national language, although in the countryside, and even in Dili itself, Portuguese was not a majority language. Their own national language was Indonesian. More people inadvertently spoke Indonesian than spoke Portuguese. There was one point at which they were almost persuaded by the Portuguese, who had just been considering going to the euro or had just gone to the euro, to take up all their used escudos currency, so that they could actually use the old Portuguese currency and save themselves some money by not having to print a new currency. They chose, in fact, the U.S. dollar eventually, but it was a strange mismatch between extraordinary competent, very worldly-wise leadership in many ways and a growing gap between them and the population, because they had been in exile so long, because they had become, in many ways, Portuguese.

Q: What was your life like daily? How big was the mission?

HARSTON: I mean the mission, of course, the UNTAET mission, the one which ran East Timor, was very large, it was in the biggest building in Dili. I can't tell you the numbers, but they wouldn't be difficult to find. The mission which I started was, of course, considerably smaller because it had virtually no military component. So, my life was actually pretty easy. I was visiting, I wasn't a resident, but when I was a resident there for three, four or five weeks at a time, I first stayed on a cruise ship which the UN had arranged to be moored in Dili. It was an air conditioned, luxurious, not very small cabin, it was very comfortable. I was given a new Land Rover Discovery and I had a very good life there. There were some very interesting people there, both Timorese and in the international community. I made one or two friends there who I still have a very firm friendship with. So, when I was there, it was a good life. When I moved out of the cruise ship, I stayed in a small hotel on a beach maybe 10 kilometers from the center, where I could wake up in the morning and see whales and dolphins and all sorts of good things. So, I certainly didn't suffer in East Timor.

Q: Did you have a chance to travel in East Timor during this assignment?

HARSTON: I did, although East Timor is very small. I went to a small part of East Timor, which is totally cut off from the main part of East Timor, and that was very interesting. I flew in there a couple of times just to see what it was like. It was a bit

different. But my biggest surprise there was to bump into the Chief of Security. Having met him—and he accompanied me driving around there—I suddenly realized that it was the man who was in Princess Diana's car when she crashed and died in Paris. He was a metropolitan police officer from London and her security officer. There was a small deal between the UK and Kofi Annan to take him on as a security officer and get him as far away from the international press as we could. So there he was, in this little part of East Timor. Fascinating, charming, interesting, man.

Q: Your assignment lasted from April through October 2001. From this perspective, would you say that the mission was successful? Because a bit more than four years later, a new conflict erupted in East Timor. What were the reasons behind it?

HARSTON: In a sense, I gave you a hint of this, I think. One of the biggest ironies was, of course, that the Australians had said that there was no need for any troops and eventually ended up having to send in troops who I think, I may be wrong, are still there. So there were mistakes that Australia made in trying to make the new mission as weak as possible, which was one of the reasons. The other reason was the one I hinted at already. I think there was a mismatch between the people who set up the new independent East Timor, and the local, real local politicians. I wasn't invited to independence, which would've been a long way to go, but I suspect it was more, as much as anything else, a feeling that, somehow, the leadership was not in touch with the people.

Q: In October 2001, after five months in East Timor, you returned to New York to spend two and a half years as a Director for Asia and Middle East in the department of Peacekeeping Operations. What were the circumstances around this assignment? You were originally considered for another post?

HARSTON: It's a funny story, actually. The Director of Peacekeeping for Asia and Middle East was a German who had been there for some time and there was a fight with the Israelis, who accused him and the UN of keeping back evidence— a video tape—of the capturing of an Israeli soldier by Hezbollah in Lebanon. There was an inquiry and finally that videotape was discovered in the possession of the Director of Asia, Middle East, in New York. The Israelis in particular, but others also said that he simply can't stay in that job having been involved in a scandal of this kind. And so typically of the UN, of course, they moved him to the Europe division. So, suddenly, there was a vacancy. It came at exactly the right time for me and they asked me if I would take it on as Acting Director for Asia-Middle East. I did and had a very, very interesting time. It was a very interesting time to be there, as you might imagine. Well, I suspect that a Middle East job has always been interesting, but I found myself there unexpectedly. I was promoted to D-2. I already had an apartment in New York because the last job had not been Timor-based, but New York-based, and there I was. You asked me whether I thought the East Timor mission was a success. I think it was. I mean, we ended up with more or less the shape of the mission we wanted after having battled with the U.S. and the Australians. So, I was quite happy to hand over to the new mission.

Q: This was the time the peacekeeping was getting busier, and the resources scarcer. Would you say that the UN was up to the task of dealing with so many challenges? And if it was not, why?

HARSTON: That's the question you could take all afternoon over but, you know, if you look at the way that peacekeeping is, and certainly the way it was organized, it was always an absolute mystery to serious people—in the permanent members of the Council, the British, the French, whatever—that we were able to do such an amazing job with so few people. The military staff in New York was absolutely tiny compared to any UK or French, or certainly U.S. military staff that would have been deployed to deal with the number of troops that we had deployed around the world. But we did manage, and the resources were getting a bit thin. I think Jean-Marie Guéhenno was extraordinary—the right man at the right time. Jean-Marie's, typical, from France, a graduate of the École Nationale d'Administration. He was a thinker, he set about saying, well, we can't stop everything, but let's look at exactly what we are doing and why we are doing it, and he was exactly right to do that at that time. So I think, well, we muddled through and, for an Englishman, it was a strange beast, because the department of peacekeeping was full of people, many of them had been in New York too long, many of them had never been on a mission. It was a mixture of very smart, very talented people and a lot of people who simply were not as smart, nor very talented. I think those of us who had been members of - you might say - world class diplomatic services, were troubled because it didn't, it didn't look as though it should work at all, but it actually did. We - I count myself among the latter - were very lucky, we had always worked in very able and talented environments, so the French or the British or the Americans or the Russians. And it was a little bit worrying to come across sudden really amateur decisions being made without being properly thought through. So, I think Department of Peacekeeping
was lucky. I think there could have been worse catastrophes, and there were, but it muddled through. I was frequently fascinated by how it did, but it did.

Q: How many missions did you oversee as a director for Asia and the Middle East? Can you describe briefly the specifics of each of these missions?

HARSTON: Oh, my goodness. Well, when I first started, you had one on the Kuwait-Iraq border. You had UNIFIL (United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon) in Lebanon, you had UNTSO (United Nations Truce Supervision Organization) in Jerusalem, which made its observers available to the mission in Lebanon. You had UNDOF (United Nations Disengagement Observer Force), the mission now in Syria and the Golan. And I had one on the India-Pakistan border. So, let me think, I think that's about it.

I visited them all more than once, except in Kashmir. Kashmir was an interesting mission. It was for observers on the border to stop, essentially, to prevent a conflict between two nuclear armed states in Pakistan and India. It's still there, it's been there for a long time, I think it actually may be the oldest mission now. But I could never get there because the Indians would never give me a visa in time for me to take out one of the very few needed two or three weeks, and I couldn't spare that amount of time, so I never got to the mission

in Kashmir. The Indians didn't believe there should be a mission there at all, they felt that the Simla agreement they'd come to some years before with Pakistan should have got rid of the mission. Pakistanis love the mission, and so I had very mixed relations in New York with the Indian and Pakistani missions. But otherwise, I got to the Middle East, I suppose three or four times during the time I was there.

Q: You started your tour in the office with the successful closure of a major peacekeeping operation. Can you tell me more about it?

HARSTON: Yes, I was asked only today by a guy in one of the African missions what the most important or most memorable or most successful thing was that I did when I was in the UN, and, I suppose, looking back on it - that was a success. There we had quite a substantial mission on the border between Iraq and Kuwait, which had been there since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and when they pulled out a UN mission was put on the border. The border actually straddled the mission, we had part of our mission headquarters on one side of the border, part on the other. And it had been very successful—there were patrols, regular patrols right along the border as far as Saudi Arabia. We had Bangladeshi helicopters there, we had a whole mixture of nationalities as our military observers - unarmed military observers - and suddenly we were faced with a situation where it became quite clear to us that the Americans were going to invade Iraq. This was the first Gulf War, and we had a limited time to get out of the way because we just simply didn't know what was going to happen. So we got permission from the Security Council to close down the mission.

And we did, we had the benefit of quite an extraordinarily competent Force Commander, head of mission, Polish General Franciszek Gagor, who became a very good friend. Charming, efficient, tough Pole. And he with his logistics staff managed an absolutely flawless departure. We left on the day we said we were going to, we had every single helicopter and bits of helicopter track for armored personnel carriers etc etc out and in Kuwait City or on their way home. A week before, I can't remember how long before, the Americans and the Brits and others rolled across the border. The Brits took the time to destroy our beautiful headquarters, on the grounds that they believed there were snipers there. It looked like pure vandalism to me by the Parachute Regiment of the British Army but there you go. And I think if I look back on it, that was probably, as a set piece, if you like. If you would set it to students how, if you were faced with this problem, how would you deal with it, we dealt with it in the best possible way. And it actually worked and nobody was injured. We lost a Polish officer who disappeared - I had a phone call in New York from General Gagor saying that there had been in the old Polish Army a stipulation that a commanding officer could execute one member of his staff every month for disciplinary reasons. He said, "Did the same thing apply to the UN?" And I said, "It really doesn't." And I said "Why?" And he said, "Well, we lost a Polish major. He disappeared and we discovered that he had gone to retrieve some whiskey that he had buried near the border." He was actually selling whiskey to the Iraqis by burying it just close to the border fence and he decided that he couldn't leave it there. So that was, I think the one guy, the only guy we nearly lost. That was a success, and it was very well managed by a

desk officer Mary Eliza Kimbal in New York. And nobody ever actually said anything, but we thought we had done a good job.

Q: You also had to deal with a few incidents during this tour of duty in which you directly opposed the Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping. Can you describe what happened?

HARSTON: As I said before, like in many organizations, people want to say yes to the boss, and Kofi was a busy man, he had a Pakistani chef de cabinet, who wanted to say yes. And, in my case, a Tunisian Assistant Secretary General of Peacekeeping Operations who also wanted to say yes. There was an unworldly amateurism that would creep into the decision making if you didn't stop it. There are two incidents that I can recollect: I was at a theater performance up in Connecticut and I got a phone call from Hédi Annabi, Assistant Secretary General, who said, "You are leaving, the mission is leaving Kuwait-Iraq border. The Secretary General's been approached by the Americans because there are three oil men from an American company who are stuck in Basra," which was the biggest city on the Iraqi side of the border, but some few hours drive away. “He wondered”, and I don't believe it was the Secretary General, “whether we could send a vehicle with our military observers to go and pick them up and bring them across the border.” And I said, "First of all, we are on the last day of our evacuation from there, everything has been perfectly planned. But secondly, let me get this straight, you are actually suggesting that we put an unarmed group of UN officers in a truck, send them across the border into Iraq - which is basically hostile now – to drive for three hours or more, pick up some Americans and bring them back? The answer is absolutely no. You know, if you have to pass that message on to the chef de cabinet, or even to the Secretary General himself, it is simply not going to happen on my watch." And I never heard any more about it, except of course, that the Americans found themselves some boat or ship or yacht and found themselves in Kuwait unharmed and probably would have done that anyway.

You know, on the face of it to somebody like me, it looks incredibly amateurish and stupid. A similar occasion, with a group of refugees stranded in the sort of no man's land between Israel and Lebanon on the border with Israel. I think they were Kurds, who got stuck there because the Israelis had let them through and the Lebanese hadn't let them in. They had been kept camping there, thirty, forty, fifty of them, I don't remember, in whatever shelter they could get for some time, and the UNIFIL mission had been gently considering what to do with them. They weren't under any threat and, for some reason, there was a Ghanaian soldier on the border next to these refugees, the refugees were demonstrating, and the Ghanaian soldier was shot. I got a message in New York, again from Hédi Annabi saying "The head of UNIFIL mission, the Indian general, wants to send a group of armored personnel carriers down to the border, put all the refugees into those armored personnel carriers, bring them up to Beirut, and hand them over to the Lebanese to put them in a refugee camp of some kind." And I said, "Hédi, first of all, there has been no inquiry of any kind into how this Ghanaian got shot, so we don't know that it was by one of the refugees. Secondly, have you thought of what one might call the

CNN factor? Are you prepared to have the international press and television have pictures of UN soldiers forcibly moving refugees against their will, into armored personnel carriers to take them, to put them in the hands of a government which has already said it doesn't want them?" "Oh, alright, well, we'll have to think about it." Anyway, what happened, ironically, was when they did have an inquiry they found the Ghanaian had been shot by one of his own soldiers who was cleaning their rifle, so it had nothing to do with the refugees. Finally, we were able to move the refugees and they were quite well looked after by the Lebanese, but not for some weeks or months after that incident. But again, it was a knee-jerk amateur, unworldly reaction to a problem. And you know that—if you're running the sorts of operations the UN is running across the world—it was pretty scary.

Q: You had an interesting meeting with Israeli officials at the UN headquarters in the office of Hédi Annabi that you had already mentioned. And this is a very informative meeting, that also describes both their attitude towards the UN, and the attitude of the Assistant Secretary General for Peacekeeping. What happened in the meeting?

HARSTON: This was a group of military from Israel, accompanied by the members of the Israeli mission to the UN, who came just before the publication of the Secretary General's report on Lebanon, which I think was seven, six months, to say that we should not mention in the report—because we couldn't support it, as we didn't have the radar and the technical equipment to make it a certainty—that the overflights that were taking place by jet fighters over Beirut and over the headquarters of the UN and in the south of Lebanon, were Israeli. Hédi, Tunisian, who hated dealing with Israelis anyway, said, "Oh, well, you must understand and blah blah blah, and, you know, I will try to see whether…" And I was fascinated. I didn't say anything, I was at the meeting for the obvious reason, and I went down in the elevator with the Israeli military afterwards and I said to them, "You know, I imagine you were slightly surprised by the answer that you got, if you got an answer at all, at the meeting we were at, but let me tell you what I would have said, if you had come to see me. And that is that you really can't have it both ways, Israel. I know that, at some point in the past three years, four years, or whatever it was ago, there was a meeting in the Ministry of Defense in Tel Aviv. You decided that for reasons of self-interest, Israel would conduct reconnaissance flights over Lebanon. Whether it was genuinely reconnaissance, or whether it was just to piss off the Lebanese or whatever, you decided to do it. And I imagine there was probably one voice of the meeting from the Foreign Ministry who said, 'You do realize that, if you do that, you will be breaking a number of Security Council resolutions' and you said, “we don't care”. I accept that, I think that's fine. What I don't accept is that having done that you then come to us and complain. I can not have your cake and eat it. Do you want to be able to do it and not get blamed for it? And I would have said absolutely not. You know, it may be in Israel's interest and I perfectly understand that, but I'm not going to stand by and let you do it without being criticized." And they said, "Yeah, that's what we thought the guy would say, but he didn't say it." Not for the first time, probably not the last I will say to you, what a wonderful advantage it was for me not to be from the UN system.

Q: Taking part in the Security Council sessions was included in your regular duties. You were also present in the Security Council when the then-Secretary of State Powell presented U.S. arguments on the Iraqi weapons of mass destruction. What was the reaction of other members of the Security Council?

HARSTON: I'm trying to remember when that was. Yes, I was there, I got a seat at the back, and it was a pretty crowded meeting. A lot of people are in the public part of the Security Council. And for the first time ever, I think, a screen was put up for projection of slides in the Security Council. Pretty important turnout, with Powell and a number of others. They believed that they had made a case by showing pictures and showing maps and so on that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction, and that's a long, long story, but it was a fascinating time to be in the Council. I used to spend, I suppose, a couple of hours—three hours, four hours a week—in the Council one way or another. I don't think people realize, but certainly when I was there, more than 70% of the papers discussed by the Council came from the Department of Peacekeeping. And there always had to be a director there when it was being discussed so I spent a lot of time there. But that meeting was in some ways, the highlight. It was also unique, and it was the first time that I've seen the public gallery bursting into applause. That was not for Colin Powell, but for the French ambassador, who made an impassioned speech, saying how much he thought the Americans and the British were wrong, that there were no weapons of mass destruction, and so on. So it was pretty lively stuff. And of course, it wasn't just that meeting, but it was the attitude - particularly of France - which resulted in a very anti French feeling being deliberately set loose in, particularly in New York, but also elsewhere in the United States. Horrific headlines and newspaper pictures and so on in New York.

Q: Why did Kofi Annan react so quickly to take a robust, full scale UN mission back to Iraq? Within the UN structures, the prevailing position was that the UN should remain in Jordan, with a limited presence in Iraq.

HARSTON: I think he was under a lot of American pressure. I mean, I took part in a regular meeting at that time—which is very high level indeed—and it was chaired by Louise Fréchette, the Deputy Secretary General. This question was, for most of the meetings I went to, the lead question. A very good case was made by a number of people at that meeting, including the head of the Department of Political Affairs, Peacekeeping also, that we should maintain as small a presence as possible in Iraq, that there was actually nothing for us to do there at that time, and we didn't have a particular mandate to be there. Louise Fréchette, representing Kofi Annan, spoke with great passion to say that we should show that we were doing something serious and that this was, after all, somewhere where we needed to be seen to be etc., etc. with quite strong positions taken. The British head of the Department of Political Affairs at that time, said to her "You do realize that if you go ahead and make a recommendation as though it comes from this meeting, that we should increase the size of our representation in Iraq and reduce the size in Jordan, I will not be party to that." So one or two other voices saying the same thing, it was tough, tough stuff. And it was, I think, very largely American pressure that we should be implicated in the international presence as strongly as possible.

Q: But then in 2003, there was the tragic consequence, the bombing of the headquarters of the mission in Baghdad, with 22 UN officers losing their lives, including Sergio de Mello, and 100 officers were injured. This was one of the worst tragedies in the UN peacekeeping operations history. Was there an internal investigation of the shortcomings that led to this tragedy? Could it have been avoided?

HARSTON: Well, yes, short answer. The place where we had headquarters was not as secure a place as it should be. The head of the mission, Sergio de Mello, should not have been in that part of the building that he was, which was the corner of the building overlooking the street. First of all, going back to the previous question, I don't think they should have been there at all, but given that we did have a number of people there, I think the headquarters was in the wrong place, and Sergio was certainly in the wrong part of the building. So yes, there were proper inquiries held afterwards, and yes, a number of people were found to have been deficient in making the security arrangements that should have been made. It was an extraordinary feeling. We were all in the office in the New York headquarters and suddenly on the TV screens came these direct pictures from Baghdad. We watched as smoke came out of mission headquarters, and the first reports were that they had been injured. It soon became clear that Sergio was one of those who were alive but stuck in the building, and finally, that he had lost his life. And Sergio, after—particularly after what had happened in East Timor, where he was an enormous success—was something of a hero to all of us. I liked him. I had worked alongside him very closely. We spoke Portuguese together. It was a tremendous blow to everybody in the UN at the time. A really awful reminder that in the business we were in—a blue flag was no longer enough. We have lived through a period when, from the 1950s, when you put a blue flag on a vehicle or whatever, it was regarded as sacrosanct. And suddenly, we had become a target. And it has happened more and more ever since. So, it was a breakdown in that international understanding, if you like, that peacekeeping forces—that humanitarian workers—should be protected.

Q: Why do you think that's the case? Has it been the consequence of different compromises made in the work of the UN?

HARSTON: That’s a difficult question. I think I would rather say that it is a change in the nature of the conflicts with which the UN has been involved, which, increasingly over the years from the 1950s since the first involvement in peacekeeping, became intrastate conflicts instead of interstate conflicts, became civil wars. They became wars against people who were called freedom fighters by one side and terrorists by the others, and so on. So, in a sense, our subjects, the people we were supposed to deal with, were not playing by the same rules anymore. Of course, there were deficiencies. If you look back to UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Force) even, we weren't used to operating in that kind of hostile environment. You know, there is no point in - what a lot of people said, and what I said for many years - being a peacekeeper unless there is a peace to keep. And increasingly, we have become involved - and we look at places like the Congo, and Chad and Mali and so on – as a part of the battle. With part of the conflict in the Congo,

we are operating alongside Congolese forces. So, yes, I think we have changed, the UN has changed, and as part of the deal, part of that change, all of which has been agreed by the Security Council, we have lost the immunity we had. We have lost the nature of protection that the blue flag gave us and I think that is something we now have to live with.

Q: What was your life in New York like?

HARSTON: I'm one of the few people I know who doesn't like New York. The job was fascinating and working in that 40 story building on the 38th floor was fascinating. For me, it was not something I had ever expected to do. I was very lucky and I enjoyed the work because it was so different, because it was so irritating, because it was so frustrating, because because, because… I think that I was very privileged to be a director of a department which was doing a very significant work for the world. I mean, let us not underestimate. My life in New York was fairly simple. I lived in an apartment about 20 blocks from the headquarters that my son found me. So, on a good day, I could walk. On a less good day, I could get one of the wonderful buses in New York. Life was comfortable, well paid, and fascinating, I looked forward to every day. Having said that, I was extremely ill at one point and that was a terrible shock to the system. I ended up in hospital having a number of very serious operations on cancer. During that time, I was offered a job by Kofi, saying would I like to go and be the Deputy Special Representative in Ethiopia-Eritrea. Since I was in Ethiopia as a child, and I was essentially an African, I thought, well, that's not a bad place to be. So I had said, yes, if it comes up, I would like it. I also met the ex-Botswana representative in the council, who was the head of mission and he said he would like me to go and that was it. I was lying in bed in a hospital full of tubes and things when I got a phone call, and they said, “the Secretary General would like to talk to you”. It was Kofi who said very typically "How are you?" and "I hope you’re doing ok" and so on and so forth. And I said, "Yes" and he said "I expect you are angry with me" because, by then, he had been bullied by a women's agenda group in New York to offer the job to a very competent, very interesting woman. I said, "No, no, no, I'm not angry with you. I understand the pressure you were under anyway." And he said, "Well, I've got some good news for you" and I said, "What's that?" He said, "Well, the hospitals in New York are a lot better than the hospitals in Eritrea" and I said, "Thank you Kofi." That was a very typical gesture of his and I am quite certain it was his idea to call me when I was on my hospital bed. When he died three years ago, I lost a very good friend.

So, there we were, I was in hospital, I had two major operations. Thank God for UN health insurance, the cost of my hospital stays and operations was over $200,000, so I was lucky. Knock on wood, that was more than 20 years ago and no return of that particular problem since then. It was the time that focused my attention on the lack of human contact in the UN, in that enormous building, a lack of communication. First of all, virtually no entertaining done by anybody at home, which is unusual for that sort of organization I would have thought. So no or very little out of hours contact. You know, I hate to keep drawing attention to the lovely Hédi Annabi, he was a nice man, but, again,

typical, you know, my office was 10 meters from his. I had other things in between my two operations—I had a colostomy and was not comfortable—I was doing a lot of Chemotherapy, drugs being poured into me once a week. Being a good middle class Englishman, I had the chemotherapy, of course, on a Friday lunchtime so that I could be back in the office on Monday, having been sick all weekend—and Hédi, who was a man of habit, would pass my office about quarter to ten, ten o'clock every morning, as there was a daily ten o'clock meeting, he would disappear down the corridor come back five, ten minutes later. Not once in that period of time did he stop in my office and ask me how I was. In fact, I said to him later in passing, as they were talking about something else, "Oh, by the way, that was the time I had a colostomy," and he said, "I didn't know you had that" and I said, "but, Hédi, you never asked."

I used to turn the lights on in the offices on the 38th floor every morning because I could walk from home so I was there early. And then people would come in and I would say good morning and I'd walk around—it was possible to walk around the central part of this and see everybody so I would—but I think half of them thought I was mad. I was asking everyday "How are you? Did you have a good journey," whatever, the normal things. Nobody did that and I don't know why that is. Whether it was a cross cultures, whether, you know, people thought, well, I'll just keep to myself, I honestly don't know, but it was a very strange atmosphere to work in.

Q: During this assignment, as you mentioned, you attended numerous Security Council sessions. What were your impressions of the diplomats representing the permanent Security Council members and their interactions?

HARSTON: Well, it was a time, actually, when the Council was working a lot better than it is now. You know, the Council has collapsed in many ways over the last few years. But then, first of all, there was very high quality in the Council—in terms of the ambassadors, the permanent representatives. They all, at that time, got on well and they were all of very high quality, so it was a pleasure to be in the Council. You had people like Sergei Lavrov, Jeremy Greenstock, and so on, and it was a privilege to sit there and listen to them. Those were good times, in many ways. Where you really got to know them was in the sessions in the room next door to the Council, which were private unofficial sessions of the Council, with no record kept of what's being said, and there was room sitting at the side of the meeting, very crowded little room for one or two UN officials as well. It was a really privileged place. I never got tired of walking into the Security Council chamber. It is, first of all, a very lovely and impressive room. I have a very strong feeling for history, and there is so much history, going back to when the building first opened. It was difficult not to be happy in there because you were part of history, if you like. I enjoyed particularly Sergei Lavrov who was very highly regarded by his contemporaries at that time. He was a master of dealing with the Council; he had an encyclopedic memory of the Council resolutions that had gone for existing language. He was funny, he was aggressive. He was - certainly appeared to be - very much his own man. Beautifully dressed, very expensive suits, I suspect from London. But on the weekend, a T-shirt and jeans in the office.

I liked him, we got on well. Actually, if I was in the council, I sat in a seat which was just behind his, just behind the Russian delegation, so I could see when his shoulders began to move up and down and he was laughing. When he was doing that, he had to leave, and he would come to the cafe next door to the Council coffee room and have a cigarette. Although smoking had been banned in the building, he refused to give up smoking, and he said it was not Kofi Annan's building, it belonged to the international community. I followed him one day and I said to him, "What was making you laugh, Ambassador?" And he said, "Well, did you hear what the Botswana representative,"—Botswana was a member of the Council at that time—"said?" I said, "No, I didn't. I was busy writing something down." And he said, "Well, what he said was that the people of Botswana were tired of the behavior of the politicians in the Balkans." And he said, "I had in my mind a picture of a man standing, looking after his cattle on one leg with a stick, shouting to his nearest neighbor half a kilometer away, "My friend. I am now tired of the behavior of the politicians in the Balkans." And he said, "I'm sorry, I could not stop myself laughing. I had to get up and come outside." Which was very typical. I mean, first of all, it was typical of the sort of innate racism of the Russians, but it was also very funny. He was a pleasure to deal with. I met him of course, since here in Belgrade a number of times, last time a year or so ago. I said to him, "Ambassador, what are you going to do next to irritate the international community, the Brits and others?" And he said, "Well, we're thinking of recognizing Northern Cyprus, and putting a constant channel in Northern Cyprus. It would cost us $100,000, it's worth doing." And I said, "Well, I know you're not going to do that because of the number of Russians and the amount of Russian money that is in Nicosia and in southern Cyprus," and he said, "No, no, no, of course we won't do it but please pass it around." And I said, "I will, I will." Funny man and a man for whom I have enormous respect.

Q: Did you get to know the UK delegation to the UN?

HARSTON: Yes, got to know the deputy very well, he is now Her Majesty's Marshal of the Diplomatic Corps in London. It is an honorary job based in Buckingham Palace, basically he goes around saying hello and goodbye to ambassadors. Very calm, very competent, very hard-working delegation. Hardest working mission we have in the world because it never has enough people. If you're a permanent member of the Council, you have to be interested in everything, so you have to have members of the mission at meetings—bilateral, multilateral—all day and everywhere, every day, with inexorable timetable. I felt very sorry for them with the amount of work they had to do. I liked best of all when I was there Jeremy Greenstock who was a very high quality Middle Eastern diplomat—actually, he was Arabic speaking. He had been to what was known as a school for spies through the Middle East Center for Arabic studies in Shemlan, Lebanon, a school run by the Foreign Office for years. He managed to, as he said, escape the Middle East and ended up sitting in New York, which was a very good job for him. Now, I was very impressed with them. I saw them, I was entertained by them, I was a relatively frequent visitor to particularly Jeremy Greenstock's not palatial apartment, just around the corner from the UN, but they weren't really interested in me as a Brit. They find it

difficult to know what to do with Brits at the UN—The British Mission—because they don't know how to deal with us. Nevertheless, I enjoyed my own dealings in New York with them very much. They never supported me, as missions tend to do, for appointments. They didn't—I never asked them for support and they never gave it to me. When I moved on from one appointment to another—I think maybe Kofi Annan may have asked the Brits what they thought - they didn't step in and say yes, we support him for that job, but I didn't lose anything by that.

Karen Pierce—you asked me about—of course Karen was a long time after I was there but Karen Pierce—who's now been appointed ambassador in Washington—was perm-rep in New York. Karen Pierce and I do not like each other at all because of my links with Serbia in particular—she was vehemently anti-Serb. She was the head of the Eastern Adriatic Department in the Foreign Office - they never call it the Balkans department and she was involved with them for many years, but she really, for some reason, finds Serbia unacceptable. The irony is that the older she gets, the more she begins to look like Mrs. Milošević.

Q: What was it like to work with your boss, Jean-Marie Guéhenno?

HARSTON: Well, as I said already, I think Jean-Marie was the right man at the right time. He was a thinker. He wanted to take the peacekeeping path and say, "Why do we do this? Why do we do that? Why are we doing that?" He was a Cartesian. I mean, the logic he used—he wrote very well, he spoke very well, at length. In many ways it was banishment by monologue. I mean, in the morning meetings, he would take up two thirds of the time at the table with 20 people. But I think he was the right man at the right time. He found me a little bit difficult because, of course, the French don't have the same sense of irony that we do. He found my sense of humor a bit hard to take. But, when I left, he said, "Well Julian, I admire you very much. I am very happy with your political input into this department. I think you're probably the best political advisor that I have had. But of course, I find your humor a little bit hard to live with." And I said, "Well, I understand that, and the admiration is mutual." As he was, I think he was the right man at the right time.

Q: You stayed in this position for two and a half years until April 2004, and I keep asking you the same question after every step in your biography. When you look back, what do you see as your greatest achievement during this time?

HARSTON: Well, as I have already said, that I was able to evacuate an entire mission - boots and all - without losing anyone or without any catastrophe from the border between Iraq and Kuwait. Otherwise, I suppose, I don't know. I think to create a team, to initiate a system of having mixed civilian-military teams responsible for each mission, which still exists. But I suppose the biggest achievement was actually to survive. It was very hard work and very tense situations. By definition, if you're peacekeeping, there is a danger of war and I think we kept it together. I think it really wasn't a bad place to be and I think, in a way, that the way that I do things, which is very much a sort of British way, I suppose,

of taking a real interest in people, made it a better place for other people to be, so, yes, I enjoyed it. I didn't, as I said to you, I didn't enjoy New York as a city to live in, but I loved the job.

Q: Today is the 10th of May 2021. We are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, retired British diplomat and retired senior UN [United Nations] official.

In April 2004, you returned to Belgrade in the capacity of the director of the UN Office in the then State Union of Serbia and Montenegro. How much did Belgrade change since mid-'90s, when you had headed the UN liaison office there?

HARSTON: Of course, it was changing, and it was changing for the better. Physically, particularly, you know, the streets were cleaner, the buildings were being cleaned up. There were more shops, more hotels. And slowly, things were getting back to a sort of normal. And the people were, I found, more relaxed, of course, than they had been when I first arrived in '95. So, it was a much easier place to live.

Q: What were the objectives of your mission?

HARSTON: Well, they haven't changed that much. I mean, Serbia, the Balkans, still very much a point of interest to the Security Council and to the Secretary General and to the big players. And it was so important to have an independent UN voice, speaking from Belgrade, not just reporting events in Belgrade, but reporting opinions and reactions to the actions of the UN and others. So, it was very much a slightly interventionist, if you like, diplomatic role, and it was very, very challenging and a lot of fun.

Q: How big was the mission when you arrived? Was it bigger?

HARSTON: Not that big. I mean, I guess, all told, twenty-five people, but that's including the administrative staff. I mean, the key element of the mission was the political side. And that was, I think, three or four of us. So, you know, not exactly big, but big enough.

Q: Did you have an opportunity to choose your staff?

HARSTON: Nope. I inherited a really, almost grotesque group of local staff, most have been there far too long. A number of whom, incidentally, are still there. They didn't like the UN, were grumpy and difficult, and so on. And all of whom I knew, because, of course, I'd been there before. I had a very good political staff and not one I had chosen. So, I had to fit in.

Q: Did you have adequate support from the headquarters?

HARSTON: Yes, I think so. I mean, you know, by now, things are rather different in New York. Less, of course, concentration of the Department of Peacekeeping [The Department of Peacekeeping Operations] on former Yugoslavia, because by then, only the mission in Kosovo was active. And the Liaison Office in Belgrade and I think that was it. I don't think there was anything left in Zagreb by that time. But the support we got was excellent. I was very lucky to have David Harland as the desk officer in New York. David Harland, one of the brightest officers I met in the whole time I was in the UN, New Zealander, Chinese speaker. Now running the Dunant Center [Henry Dunant Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue], has been for some time in Geneva, working on reconciliation and so on around the world, doing an excellent job. He had been in Sarajevo for the whole of the siege of Sarajevo. He's married to a Serb from Bosnia. And he is a very, very intelligent interlocutor, who determined that the UN should have a policy on what was going on in the Balkans, and particularly in Serbia, and of course, in Kosovo. So, yes, very good, very sensible, very intellectually sound support from New York.

Q: You arrived in Belgrade shortly after the events of March 17, 2004, in Kosovo and the level of confidence among the Serbs in Kosovo and Belgrade authorities in both the UN and a NATO [North Atlantic Treaty Organization] presence hit rock bottom. Was it difficult to build trust with your interlocutors in Belgrade?

HARSTON: Well, it was a very bad time, quite clearly. Let me get my dates right. You're talking about the attack on churches and so on?

Q: Yes.

HARSTON: It was seen in Belgrade, from my interlocutors, as much more of a failure by NATO than it was of the UN. Because NATO had discovered, very late, the caveats that they had on the various member states with troops down there, so that half of them stood back and did absolutely nothing, because there was a caveat that they did not aid the civil powers. So, you had the Germans and the Danes and others—not the French, saying, "Sorry, even if we wanted to intervene, we can't." The French were very robust. I mean, they were using snipers at one stage. But it was seen here in Belgrade, from my memory, as being very much a failure of NATO. There were a couple of—first time ever—a couple of marches on my office, in Dedinje part of Belgrade. It didn't amount to much, but we were well protected by the police. And I ended up with an armored car for the first time, which we kept. So no, I mean, from my interlocutors, who were at a very high level in Belgrade, in the government, and the president's office, and the Prime Minister's office and so on, there wasn't much loss of contact with me or my office.

Q: Actually, that was what my next question was going to be about: your daily routine and your access to the country's senior leadership.

HARSTON: We had amazing access, looking back on it. It was access that we had worked on. Access, as you know, really, is a product of both sides feeling it would be worthwhile to talk to the other. You know, there's access if you are, for instance, the

ambassador of Sudan. Of course, you get to see the foreign minister once a year or a couple of times a year, and maybe even the president, because they have really got nothing to discuss with you. Whereas they did have stuff to discuss with us. They knew that the people were reading our material in New York, and they wanted to keep us informed. And that was an open door to influence, as well, you know, and I know one of the things you are interested in is this question of the influence of the Secretary General and using the good offices of the Secretary General. In this case, it was the good offices of the UN, if you like. Secretary General, of course, at the top of the list. I was, at one stage when there was a crisis, or just before the meeting with Ahtisaari, which we'll talk about, I was in the office of the president once or twice a week. It was not unusual for me to have dinner there with two or three other people from the president's office. And so we had a very privileged access, and I was a critical friend, and they knew that. They knew that I wouldn't hold back if I thought that what they were doing was unhelpful. But they also knew instinctively that I was a friend. That made a big difference.

Q: That was the time when the president's and the prime minister's office did not have a unified voice on Kosovo. Did it make your work more difficult?

HARSTON: Yes, in a sense, although they were both content that I was reflecting what they were saying to me back to New York. So that was a privilege, particularly, I think, for the prime minister. And, you know, it was at that time, that the whole question of Montenegro, as far as I remember, also came up and the question of whether Montenegro would separate or not. And, of course, there was a different view there, too, that the prime minister was obsessed with that subject and however often, I said to him, "You know, prime minister, I know that it's at the top of your agenda. But, you know, I haven't found a single Serb in Belgrade who could care less". You know, but anyway… But I was able to say things like that, and it was a great privilege.

Q: You dealt with the senior officials on the republic level mainly, not on the state union level?

HARSTON: Well, the state union level… I mean, I went to see—I can't remember who the president was at that time. But, as far as I was concerned, it was not a player.

Q: What were the main shortcomings of the UN engagement in Kosovo, when you think about those years?

HARSTON: Well, they're still there, of course. The UN had been originally brought into Kosovo to govern an ungoverned piece of territory. And so, you know, we came into the wreckage of much of the province. So I think, to begin with, that we did not do a bad job. I think our problem in Kosovo stemmed from the fact of the attitude, which was generated by being first on the ground, and seeing the Albanian Kosovars as victims. And so it really very quickly became currency in the mission in Kosovo that the purpose of that mission was to prepare Kosovo for independence, which had nothing to do with Resolution 1244 [United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244] and was a piece of

mythology, if you like. But it was espoused by virtually every member of that UN mission who had arrived immediately after the departure of Serbian forces and at the beginning of the return of refugees from Albania and from Macedonia. So, the attitude of the mission was wrong from the start if what you believed in was 1244. And that, in the words of 1244, Kosovo will remain the sovereign territory of Yugoslavia, Serbia being the successor nation. And that went right up to the top. The heads of that mission—the Special Representative, the Secretary General—without exception, took it for granted that Kosovo would become independent. In my view, the whole nature of the mission was tainted by that. You know, they get on with doing the things they had to do. They ran the police force, they did this, they set up that, but at the bottom of it all, was this conviction that the reason they were there was to prepare Kosovo for independence.

Q: One of the arguments that Belgrade has, even today, is that the worst crimes against the then-Serbian minority in Kosovo, took place after the UN and NATO had arrived in Kosovo. So that is one of their main arguments. And they also claim that there were absolutely no returns and that was one of the main objectives of the international presence in Kosovo. In more than two decades since the arrival of international presence in Kosovo, I think that a symbolic percentage, 1 or 2 percent, of people who wanted to go back home actually managed to go back home. Was this intentional or do you think that it was simply too difficult an issue to be dealt with by the UN and NATO on the ground?

HARSTON: Well, there are two things there. The first is the question of atrocities and I simply don't know the answer to that. Since there were definitely atrocities being committed up to the day X, then I have no reason to suppose that they stopped after the arrival because it takes a long time for a UN mission to settle in, particularly the one with the responsibilities that that UN mission had. I don't doubt for a moment that there were serious atrocities committed after the arrival of the UN and NATO. NATO didn't really have the will to do certain things. I mean, if you remember NATO going into Sarajevo, I firmly believe that had Admiral Smith [Admiral Leighton W. Smith Jr.], the commander of NATO, behaved differently, things would have been very different in Sarajevo. There was no willingness on his part to allow NATO troops to go into what he called "mission creep", or going into a quagmire. So he stood back. NATO stood back and watched the destruction of Serb Sarajevo, first by Bosniak people and secondly by the Serbs themselves. And I think that that failure by NATO, at that point in Sarajevo, meant effectively, that Sarajevo would not ever again be the capital city of a united Bosnia. And it was deliberate. It was a deliberate failure to use the forces that NATO already had at its disposal to stop a cleansing of Serb Sarajevo.

So, if we move on a few years to what happened in Kosovo, I think you had many of the same failings by NATO. A failure to understand the need to intervene. Don't forget that this was the middle of or towards the end of, maybe, the biggest intervention by NATO since 1947. They didn't know how to behave, their command and control structure was not up to making the decisions that needed to be made. And in particular, the political support at NATO headquarters wasn't strong enough. So yes, it was a failure. I think it

was particularly, a failure by NATO. And that came to a head, really, in the pogrom that you talked about when NATO simply failed to act.

Q: Return of refugees was also another thing.

HARSTON: Return of refugees was, you know, something that we consistently sent reports to New York, particularly when the Secretary General's reports, the reports from UNMIK [United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo] were to go to the Council. Those reports, I have no hesitation in saying, over a period of years were some of the most dishonest reporting that I have seen come from any UN mission anywhere. And one of the indicators of that, if you look at it, is the constant reference in those reports to percentage increases in returns. So, if two families are returned in one six-month period and four families return in the next, UNMIK reported a 100 percent increase in the number of returns. It didn't give the figures. So, they were consistently saying, "There's been a 20 percent, there's been a 30 percent," and so on. Whereas we all knew that the real figures were in their low hundreds. And return was—I had, in my office in Belgrade, somebody from that side of the UNMIK operation, trying to arrange returns with very, very difficult to what was either an actively hostile environment, such as Sarajevo, where virtually, as far as I know, no Serbs returned at all, not least because most of their property had been taken. Either sold for ridiculously low amounts of money or just simply taken. But in the countryside, where it was more difficult to survive, where there was a concentrated decision to help return, where concrete measures were taken to protect those who'd return, then it worked. But even now, in 2021, I would be surprised if more than a couple of thousand people have—I don't know the figures, but I would be surprised if more than a couple of thousand people have returned to Kosovo. Why would you?

Q: Over the years, there have been a number of different plans or agreements on how to normalize the situation in Kosovo and build interethnic confidence. However, almost as a general rule, the international community has not shown any consistency in seeing these plans or agreements go through. Why do you believe this has been the case?

HARSTON: Well, you know, Kosovo, as I said earlier, I think the overwhelming feeling, at the end of the bombing, when the Serbian military left Kosovo, when there were agreements made on the border, and so on—was that Kosovo would be independent and that very largely, the international community didn't feel any responsibility for the Serbs, because they had already characterized the Serbs and Serbia in the Hague and elsewhere as being the main perpetrators of the bad behavior and the atrocities and so on in the Balkans. And therefore, there was no sympathy for Serbs and Serbia anywhere that I could find. I mean, apart, of course, from Russia and from traditional friends of Serbia. And so, these things went—they were hypocritical. And I found myself in Belgrade. The most difficult interlocutors that I had were the Europeans. France, in particular, because they had a very strong and a very nice ambassador, actually. But France, in particular, the United States as well, going along with Europe, trying to tell me and to insist that the UN had no role in Kosovo. That we were irrelevant and that the sooner we stopped thinking

that we were important, the better. And I mean, at one stage, the United States ambassador went to see President Tadić, and said, "You're seeing too much of the UN." It was a very, very strange place to be when the overwhelming view in Europe, in the United States, and elsewhere, apart from China and Russia, was that Serbia was to blame for the war in the Balkans, and so they should be punished. And so going against everything that was at the basis of the International Criminal Tribunal, which was that it was about individuals, not people. So, it filtered down to just about every conversation you had here with the Western international community, and it was very difficult, and it hasn't changed a lot up to this day.

Q: You mentioned already that you use the UN good offices in your job in Belgrade. How successful were you in having your voice heard in the UN headquarters, particularly in the periodic reports, by the UN secretary general, that were generally based on the reports received from UNMIK in Priština?

HARSTON: Well, yes, you have to understand the system, which is still the same today. Reports of the Secretary General are drafted and written in the mission. So, those were drafted and written and finalized in the mission and then sent to New York. It's very unusual for there to be any negotiation about them from the New York side, although, in this case, as you mentioned, it was possible occasionally for us to intervene because we did get a draft copy of the report. But essentially, that report of the Secretary General on Kosovo or on the Congo or on Mali is a piece of fiction. I mean, it's actually a record by the SRSG [UN Special Representative of the Secretary-General] by the head of the mission. So, I don't think we were able to necessarily change very much. But I was in constant contact with a desk officer in New York, with David Harland, on a daily basis frequently. So, that what we were saying certainly was understood and in many ways sympathized with in New York. So, I do think we had some influence on the reporting but certainly a quite a lot of influence on the day-to-day discussion in New York of what the UN should be doing. And we, together with Harland, developed a policy on Kosovo which would have been different had we not been there.

Q: In the second half of your tour in the office, you focused largely on providing the support to the Ahtisaari Process [Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement]. Why was this process launched? And what were the reasons behind the selection of Martti Ahtisaari?

HARSTON: Well, Ahtisaari, you know, was a very credible figure. He had run a very successful UN operation. He had been involved in all sorts of negotiations. He was president of a not unimportant country in Europe. And he was seen by many, I think, as an ideal choice. And by me included. I have very mixed feelings about Martti because I like him and still have him as a very good friend. And I admire him enormously, I admire a lot of the work he's done but not just in the international community. He was, for a long time, an employee of the UN, by the way. But, you know, as an interlocutor of our lab in world politics, there were very few people with as much prestige as Martti had. I think he was wrong about the Ahtisaari Process on Kosovo. He was misled and by, not just the

gilded chancelleries of Europe, but by the intelligence services who were providing him with information. And he just simply, I think, got it wrong. And, you know, fortunately, I think, although a lot of people see the Nobel Prize that he got as being a result of the work he did on Kosovo, I think it was much more an overall look at what he had done in the world of peace and security, and he certainly deserved it. A lot more than, one might say, President Obama, for example.

So, you know, I have very mixed feelings about Martti. I liked him. I was very much involved in that process in Vienna. I was at almost all the meetings. I had endless opportunities for discussions with Martti himself. The access I had to Martti was very much valued by the Serbs, who knew that I would be putting across, as much as I could, the view of the Serbs and Belgrade on that process, and I was very much part of the process. And I think that we, this office here, made a difference. And we lost nothing by taking, as it were, the Serb position on all that. I had very big arguments with Martti Ahtisaari in Vienna. We used to have lunch regularly at the lovely Central Cafe in Vienna, and if somebody witnessed one of those lunches, you know, we had very strong conversations. I think that the penultimate was one where he said that he believed that the Ahtisaari Plan would be accepted in the Security Council. And I said to him in a voice which turned a few heads, "Martti, what have you been smoking? There is absolutely no chance whatsoever that your plan will be accepted by the Russians and by the Chinese." And he said, "But I've been told—." I said, "I don't care what you've been told. It's simply not going to happen."

It was very strange. I mean, Martti, very experienced, very worldly, wise, in some ways, bearing in mind that he was a product of little Finland. For example, he came to Belgrade first to present his plan here in Belgrade and then went on to Priština and to Mitrovica. He said he was going to have confidential talks. And again, I said to him—this was at Belgrade airport in the VIP lounge—I said, "Martti, you're insane. You are going to have confidential talks with a bunch of garage mechanics in Mitrovica, and you are going to expect them to keep them secret? It's simply not going to happen. I see that you have to go and talk to them, but, in any event, don't believe anything they say, and don't believe that what you say will be kept secret." So, there was a slight naivety in all that, and that was, I think, just because, you know, he or none of his team had spent any time in the Balkans.

Q: In your memoirs, you mentioned that one of the main shortcomings of the Ahtisaari Process was that the key parties in the negotiations were given contradicting messages from the principal international stakeholders. Can you elaborate that?

HARSTON: Well, I think, yes. It became clear to those of us who were involved in not just that process, but what was going on in Kosovo itself, that certain members of the international community—the United States, France, Great Britain, Germany—had all decided that Kosovo was going to be independent, come hell or high water, and really didn't actually matter what Ahtisaari Plan was and all the rest of it. The sooner they get on with it, the better. And so, the key issue in all this, and it remains the key issue to this

day, is that the Albanians have never been given any reason to negotiate. And this is another thing I said to Marty Ahtisaari, I said to him, "Look, if you want your children to behave, you say, 'Look, if you behave, I will take you to the circus on Saturday.' What you don't do is then give them tickets for the circus in their top pocket straight away. So, why, if you are an Albanian, Martti, would you negotiate anything? Because you are being told consistently by the French, by the British, by the Germans, and by the United States, that you're going to get what you want anyway."

And really, not much has changed. If you look at the so-called Brussels Agreement, made ten years ago, on the question of Serb representation in Kosovo, signed by the Albanians at that time, never implemented to this day. Now, what the hell is the point of having an internationally convened meeting, sitting down and signing agreements, if then the parties—the people who convened the meeting, the Europeans or the influence of the Americans—tell you, "Actually, it doesn't matter if you keep to what you've signed." The whole issue has been dishonest at its base from start to finish, going back to Rambouillet. the meetings in Rambouillet, where it was quite clear that the intention was to make sure that the Serbs did not sign any agreement. And I think that has become clear subsequently, but it was clear to a lot of us at the time. So, you know, it has been a game, which the Serbs were meant to lose as the result of the game was predetermined.

There are so many indicators of this that one of my main premises in dealing with international relations is that international relations are based on the perceived national interest of those people involved. So, diplomacy is about national interest. It isn't about the greater good. But what I have never understood is why members of the Security Council, in this case, who signed on as permanent members of the Council to the Resolution 1244, then the same members of that Council within a few years, encouraged and agreed to Kosovo independence. And that can only be explained by what I have told you. That there was a conviction amongst those, not just in the politicians, but the people—don't forget the people at the top of the diplomatic services in those countries when it came to 1244 and beyond—were the same ones that had been there during Srebrenica. So, this view that it was okay to victimize the Serbs was widely held in the golden gilded chancelleries of Europe and in the State Department and elsewhere. Now, I sound like an apologist for Serbia. I apologize for nothing that Milošević did. I apologize for nothing that the Serbs did or the Bosnian Serbs or whoever it was, and Montenegrins, by the way, did at that time. What I am an apologist for is the fact that the uphill battle that Serbia has fought in the last ten years to gain any kind of feeling that it's a valid partner in the Balkans. And, you know, when I look at 200 first year or third year economic students at the University of Belgrade, it's nothing to do with them. And yet they are still being penalized for what happened at that time. And that's unforgivable.

Q: The Ahtisaari Plan served as the basis for a favorable reaction of the general international community to the supervised self-proclaimed independence of Kosovo Albanians in 2008. It also provided the framework for the first constitution of Kosovo. Thirteen years later, it has not been fully implemented yet and some of the key provisions have been breached directly. Has there been any awareness in the international

community, particularly among the key international stakeholders, the heavy hitters in the international community, that it would have a negative impact on the development of the society in Kosovo as a whole?

HARSTON: I do not think the key players see it as a negative impact on the development of the society in Kosovo as a whole, but I think that's right. I mean, the key players are well aware, and have been for ten years, of the fact that a number of the provisions in that agreement and in other agreements in Brussels have not been kept to, and that, on the whole, the important agreements that might have led to an improvement in the relations between communities in Kosovo simply haven't happened and have been allowed to be ignored. I got a feeling maybe a year ago, that some of the international players were getting tired of being played by the Albanians. And I think, in the last year, some of the international community, the Germans and the Americans, have been a bit tougher on the Kosovars. But, you know, it has always been difficult for me, and it is still difficult for me to foresee a point at which, whether there's an agreement with the Serbs or not, Kosovo becomes a viable nation state. It's a state which is still, to this day, based on corruption, and it hasn't changed. If you look at quite well documented facts, the drug traffic in Europe, from as far from Oslo to Lisbon, is dominated in a lot of areas by Kosovars and Albanians. And the trafficking of people and so on. And that is the way that Kosovo exists, and I can't see that changing. It has very few natural resources and it has a population which grows. Unlike the rest of the Balkans, its population is growing. And it is not self-sustaining. So, good luck to the Europeans and others who have taken Kosovo under their wing. It's going to be there for a very long time.

Q: Have you had a chance to address these issues with Ahtisaari since?

HARSTON: Yes, we talk about it. I went to Helsinki two years ago, it was the last time we could travel. We met and reminisced. He had just written a very good book, by the way. You know, he is very stubborn. He is quite a lot older than I am and I'm 78. Yes, he sees that he got it wrong. But I think he probably wouldn't admit it to very many people. He is disappointed in himself, but I do not think it's something that occupies a great deal of his time.

Q: This was an important time in your personal life, too, you made some important steps in regard to establishing your new family.

HARSTON: Oh, I did, but I didn't get married until I was in Morocco. I got to know Marina pretty well, but I had already done that before I went to Bosnia. That was all good and still is. I don't have much to say about that, apart from it being the best decision I ever made.

Q: That's great to hear. In February 2007, you left Belgrade to be appointed the assistant secretary general of the UN and soon moved to a new mission that we will talk more about next time. As we always talk about your perception of the greatest achievement

during an assignment, what do you see as your greatest achievement during these three years in Belgrade?

HARSTON: First of all, it was a lot of fun. And secondly, I think we, in that office, that small group of people, made a significant difference to the understanding in New York, in particular, and to a certain degree in the Security Council, of the position of Belgrade and Serbia, on the key issues at the time. And also, perhaps even encouraged people to look at things slightly differently in terms of Belgrade and to understand that it was not the Belgrade of Milošević anymore. That it was essentially now a country that was looking towards Europe. Whatever you thought about Serbia and the Serbs, it was and would continue to be an absolute key to the future of the Balkans, by dint of its size, by dint of its geography, and by dint of its history.

Q: Today is the 14th of May 2021, and we are continuing the interview with Julian Harston, retired UK diplomat and retired senior UN official.

In March 2007, you were on your way from Serbia to Morocco as the newly appointed Assistant Secretary General, and the new special representative of the Secretary General for Western Sahara, as the first Special Representative ever appointed by the new UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Did you ever think when you started your UN career in 1995, that you would reach the level of Assistant Secretary General 12 years later? What were the circumstances of this appointment?

HARSTON: Of course, I never thought I would reach the rank of Assistant Secretary General (ASG), which has a military equivalent rank of a two-star general. It was, as usual in these things, a mixture of luck, good judgment, and being in the right place at the right time. But no, I never thought I'd get to ASG. Although, funnily enough, I had a friend whom I mentioned before, an Icelander called Björnsson who was head of administration in the last days that I was in Zagreb, and he said to me one evening, "I bet you get to ASG before I do." I said, "Well, I think that's very unlikely." He said, "No, I think that's where you will go." He was a lifetime UN member of staff. In fact, he beat me to it by a few months and went on to be an Undersecretary general and head of the UN in Vienna before he retired. So maybe he was a good judge? I don't know. But no, I certainly didn't expect to get that far. I was, quite by chance, the first SRSG appointed by Ban Ki-moon. I laughed because I was in New York to meet him before I left for Morocco, and there was a big noticeboard just before you get into the cafeteria on the ground floor of the building. They put up official pictures there, and they put up my picture with Ban Ki-moon and at the bottom it said, "The Secretary General meets Julian Harston, new special representative for Western Sahara." And then because I guess Ban Ki-moon was so new, it said, “Secretary General on the right”. So that's a treasured memory. When I was director of peacekeeping for Asia and the Middle East, it was sort of suggested then that I might go on to Western Sahara. It didn't happen. They appointed an Italian. But it didn't come as a total surprise, I must say.

Q: Can you briefly describe the situation in Western Sahara and the UN engagement?

HARSTON: Well, it's a long story but, essentially, at the time when Spain and Portugal had enough of being colonial powers, Spain gave up the rear door or whatever it was called and decided that it should be split between Morocco and Mauritania; Mauritania because the Sahrawi have more in common with the Mauritanian people than they do with the Moroccans, that was the Spanish theory. First of all, Mauritania said "no, thank you" eventually, because the Polisario people from the Sahrawi side were moving towards the Mauritanian capital. So, they said okay, we've got enough, we don't want to do this anymore. It turned into a real battle between Morocco and the Sahrawi Republic, based in Algeria. The UN stepped in with a Security Council resolution saying that there should be a referendum for the Sahrawi people, they should decide themselves what they wanted to do. In the meanwhile, the UN unarmed military observer mission would take its place along the thousand-kilometer wall the Moroccans had built between themselves and the Sahrawi side of what they would call Morocco. That's why the MINURSO (United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara) was there. There was never a real chance of that formula succeeding because the Moroccans were always going to make it difficult for the referendum to take place. In fact, there were very real difficulties in identifying those people who should vote and those who should not. Finally, after spending quite a lot of money, and with quite a lot of staff sent to manage this process, the UN gave up. So, this little mission of military observers just went on in the hope that something or nothing was going to happen. It was a successful mission up to the time I was there - I mean, it could be described as successful, not because the referendum had taken place, but because there was no fighting across that demarcation line. The UN could pat itself on the back. It was a very cheap mission, compared to many others, but it was doing fine.

Q: You have already tackled that in your previous response, but what were the objectives of your mission?

HARSTON: The objectives were pretty simple in fact. They were to simply maintain a military observation of the behavior of the two sides along the line of demarcation. In order to do that we had - I can't honestly remember- five, six, or more posts along the demarcation line, some on the Moroccan side, some on the Sahrawi side, making patrols on a daily basis to see what was going on.

Q: How big was the mission when you arrived? And what were the most difficult issues within the nation that you had to deal with?

HARSTON: I think it wasn't that big. I honestly can't remember, a hundred and fifty sounds about right for the military observers and another hundred staff one way or another, probably three hundred all together. The biggest problem was lack of discipline in the mission itself. There were a lot of things that had not been done, which should have been done. Not least in protecting our soldiers who were out in the desert. I went to visit one of our posts out in the desert and discovered that, if a soldier wanted to go to the

toilet in the middle of the night, he had to go out of the main gate, and to the other side of the defensive wall, and nothing had been fixed. There was no discipline because a lot of people had been there too long. It had previously had a reputation for bad discipline and being badly administered, even corruptly administered. A lot of that was better by the time I got there. There were also very tricky relations with the Moroccans when I arrived because the mission had been run in the interim between me and the Italian by the Force Commander, a Danish brigadier who'd been made up to Major General to take the job. He was not the most politically sensitive of souls. One of the issues that came up fairly regularly prior to that was the fact that we flew on the top of our tallest building both the United Nations flag and the Moroccan flag. The General made a decision that he would take down the Moroccan flag because this was a United Nations base, and therefore, we had no reason to fly the Moroccan flag. The Moroccans were absolutely incensed. Within 48 hours, the whole mission was surrounded by Moroccan flags on every wall on the outside of our compound with fifteen, twenty, thirty new flag poles. We were buried in Moroccan flags. That's how it was when I arrived. So, relations were not great. It was characterized for me later because I got to know very well the local governor for the region who had a lovely house on the coast, and who got to know my wife and me very well. We would dine there once every two or three weeks. He described that whole issue of them putting up flags and us taking down flags by saying, "*la bêtise encourage la bêtise*" (silliness encourages silliness). That was him summing it up, and he was right.

There were lots of things to do when I first got there. A lot of the people on the mission had been there far too long. Some of them had been there since the beginning of the mission and trying to get them moved was a nightmare. One of the first things I did in the first couple of weeks was to say, "Look, we've got all these UN vehicles, can somebody please give me the mileage record for them for the last two or three months? How many kilometers has each vehicle done?" I discovered, some of the vehicles were doing fifty or sixty kilometers a week. They were simply being used by staff who were “entitled”, to take them to and from the hotels in which they were living. So, I had to try slowly to put a stop to that. But undoing problems like that in the UN is very, very difficult. I was successful, but it took a long time. The daily running of the military side of the mission was extremely good. The Danish Force Commander was excellent. He was a very good soldier. He just wasn't a very good politician.

Q: You happened to have the first Chinese armed force commander in the UN peacekeeping as part of your mission. What were your impressions? What kind of experience did you have with him?

HARSTON: It was very good. First of all, it was a surprise. Then, of course, I looked at his CV and he had been an observer in MINURSO some years before, one of the first to be out in the bush. He spoke fluent French because he had been military attaché in Algiers. If you're a two-star general in a two million, three-million-man army, you don't get there by accident. He was a very competent, very nice, very funny colleague. My only problem with him was- a lot of people will find it unexpected- that he found it very difficult to make decisions without consultation. I suppose that came from a career in a

military where the political advisors in the military were present at all levels. I would say at the end of the morning meeting, "General, I'd like you to do this, this and this." And he would say, "Well, I need to consult." And I think he met with the other Chinese officers - he brought with him a Chinese staff - but also with the French Chief of Operations to protect his back, which was a little irritating, but it was otherwise a very, very pleasant experience. And we are still in touch, believe it or not, on email.

Q: What was your daily routine like during this assignment? Did you live in a hotel or in a residence?

HARSTON: I didn't tell you the end of the flag thing, by the way. I asked the legal office in New York where we stood legally, and they found in the original Status of Forces Agreement, which we signed with every country in which we operate, the phrase, "The headquarters remains the property of the government of Morocco." So, they said, well, in fact, no reason at all not to fly the Moroccan flag. Which I didn't do, actually. But I knew that we could if we wanted to, if they made a big issue of it. They forgot all about it. Although, I don't think the flags ever came down around our buildings. So that was the end of that saga.

There was a very weird deal done at the beginning, because of the nature of Morocco, and the power of the king and the importance of making sure that the king is seen as being the major benefactor. If you ask a Moroccan who built the railway, who built the roads, they will always say the king. With the new king, they certainly have gained an enormous advantage in the way that the country is run. But the original deal done by the UN was that they were guests of the king. So, everybody there lived in four or five different hotels in the town, with three meals a day, paid for by the Moroccan government. I lived in what had been the best hotel in Laayoune. It was a bit down in the dumps by the time I got there, but I had a lovely, self-contained cottage in the grounds of the hotel. There was a lovely swimming pool at the hotel, which was a great luxury. And I was very, very well looked after. That all changed about four or five years ago, when the Moroccans said, “no, no, no, no, these people would all get a cost-of-living allowance. They should find apartments.” To be fair, right in the beginning, it was a question of control as well. I mean, the Moroccans knew where everybody was at any time of the day. But they finally came around to saying no, find your own apartments, and it became a more normal mission. I think the SRSG still lives in the hotel, but I'm not sure.

Q: I was not aware that it was legally possible or acceptable for the UN mission to live in the accommodation paid for by the host country. Was this a unique example?

HARSTON: Absolutely unique. I wasn't aware of it either. Of course, it's perfectly feasible for people to say, “wait a minute, you're supposed to not be taking sides in this dispute, and yet you're living at the expense of the head of state of one of the people involved in the dispute”. And a lot of people did say that, but we just kept on doing it. I must say, from my point of view, it was no hardship. It, of course, didn't change my mind one way or the other about what I thought about the dispute in Western Sahara.

Q: What do you, from this perspective, see as the main shortcomings of the UN engagement in Western Sahara?

HARSTON: Well, it's fashionable to blame the Security Council, the people who drew up the original mandate for that mission. It's still called the United Nations mission for a referendum in Western Sahara. It should have been clear to anybody right at the beginning of that process that that referendum simply was Alice in Wonderland. It was never going to take place, because, practically, it was virtually impossible, and politically it would have been unacceptable. It was fine to put in an unarmed force of military observers and police. We had civilian police for a specific reason. With the wisdom of hindsight, it was never going to be a mission for a referendum. That was, in a sense, the main difficulty. The other overwhelming problem was the involvement of Algeria, who were hosts to the Polisario headquarters and to a number of refugee camps full of Sahrawi people, but consistently said they were not a player in the game. So even when we got to the stage of negotiating, the Algerians came, but refused to negotiate. They said, “no, no, no, no, we're not the principals in this, the principals are Morocco and the Polisario”. So, it was the disingenuous position of Algeria, which, by any standards, was a player in the game, having made it over the years almost impossible to conceive of a solution to the problem.

Q: You were not the only senior UN official dealing with the Western Sahara issue at the time. There was also the UN Secretary General personal envoy for Western Sahara, Dutch diplomat, Peter van Walsum. Can you provide more details on the differences between the two mandates?

HARSTON: Well, he had a mandate to negotiate. That's it, to persuade the principals to negotiate. It's certainly been the case elsewhere. I mean, if you look at the Middle East, there's been a number of missions there, but also a special envoy. Same thing with Cyprus, for example, where there's a mission, but there's also a special envoy. So, it's not unusual. There's been one or two quite distinguished predecessors to van Walsum, but it certainly didn't make it easier from my point of view. In the end, it was responsible for the Moroccans deciding that I should leave. So, I didn't have that much to thank Peter for, except that he took the decision to include me in the negotiations, which he arranged in the United States. So, there were four or even five meetings in New York that I was invited to. That certainly increased my prestige in Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania, because it meant that I got to know some very senior Algerians and Mauritanians, as well as the Moroccans whom I already knew. And I was able to meet them for dinner and so on in the lovely house in Manhasset. That was a real favor, which I don't think van Walsum needed to have done, but he did, and I was very grateful for that.

Q: The problem that you mentioned is actually what I was about to ask you in my next question. When he left in August 2008, the Moroccan government asked for your removal. Was it the consequence of a bad rapport with the Moroccan senior officials or the reasons were different than that?

HARSTON: Well, my rapport with the senior Moroccan officials was better than anybody who had done the job before. I had extremely good relations with local officials in the sense of the governor of the Wali and also with the governor rank in Morocco, appointed to look after the United Nations in Western Sahara. He and I are lifelong friends now. I was not the first SRSG to be asked to leave. I think I was the third or fourth. The Moroccans were very unhappy with van Walsum. They didn't like his style. They didn't like the fact that he made it clear that he was just as happy to listen to Sahrawi as he was to them. Although, I think that, instinctively, he supported the Moroccan position. But they decided that they wanted to get rid of him. They needed another one and since the appointment has to have their approval, as does the SRSG appointment, they said "Oh, no, thanks very much van Walsum, we'd like you to go and by the way, we're so pissed off with the United Nations that this man Harston has to go as well." So, I was collateral damage for them falling out with van Walsum. He was a very didactic and very patronizing figure. Surrounded by senior people from Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania in the negotiations in the United States, he would stop the proceedings and lecture them on the finer points of international law. Well, the Algerian representative was a distinguished international lawyer and there were at least two international lawyers on the Moroccan delegation. So, they were not impressed by being lectured at by van Walsum. He had a very didactic personality. So, what can I say? I was collateral damage. But it was very interesting.

The Secretary General behaved in exactly the way that you do in the diplomatic world. He withdrew me for consultations in New York, I sat around in New York for two or three weeks. He then sent me back and said to the Moroccans that I would leave when it was convenient for me and for him. The Moroccans said okay in fact, but I had to go. But what was strange, in a way very Moroccan, was when I left, I went to Rabat, and I had meetings with the Foreign Minister, with the Ministry of Internal Affairs. I was given a lunch by twelve governors, and it was as if I were not persona non grata at all. They clearly regretted that it did happen, they would have been happy for me to stay. I would have been very happy to stay, by the way. The Minister of Foreign Affairs was a very distinguished and impressive man. He took me into his garden, and said he was sorry I was leaving, but of course didn't say it in his office.

Q: Did you travel a lot in the region during this assignment? I assume that you did. What were the impressions that you came back from these trips with?

HARSTON: Funnily enough, I didn't get to see very much of Morocco at all. I saw Rabat. I flew once to the north of Morocco, because I thought, just once in my tenure, I would attend the King's birthday party. That was at one of his palaces in the north of Morocco. I did visit Mauritania in Nouakchott and I visited Algiers, I think three times. For me, that was absolutely fascinating. I'm an African, I was born in Africa, and I remember standing at the top of the steps of my Antonov aircraft in Nouakchott when we arrived at the airport and breathing air and saying, "Now, this is Africa." Because for

those of us born south of the Sahara, the Maghreb is really not Africa for us. I enjoyed my visits to Nouakchott, and also to Algiers for different reasons.

The first time I arrived in Mauritania, the government had changed two days or three days before I arrived, and I was ushered in to see the Minister of Defense to talk about MINURSO. I said the usual pleasantries and then I noticed that my interpreter went on for ten minutes, and I couldn't understand why. Then the Minister got plugged in, and we had a nice little talk and shook hands and off I went. I said to the interpreter, "What on earth were you talking about?" And he said, "The Minister hadn't a clue who you were. He arrived in the job today. He had not the slightest idea. He had no brief. So basically, after you'd spoken for a couple of minutes, I had to tell him who you were, what you were, what MINURSO was doing and so on and so forth." I said, "Well thank you very much for that." That was a first. I went to see the President, who was better informed, in a Chinese-built presidential building with a lift which carried two people only. So, if you came with a delegation, which I did, with four or five people, it took up two or three lifts. Which, incidentally, is exactly the same in the federal building in Belgrade. It is a beautiful building, built by Tito to celebrate the Federation, but has a lift for three or four people. I think lifts were regarded as a luxury by the socialists. Anyways, Algeria was fascinating. First of all, Algiers itself is a stunning city. I mean, it's totally ruined by traffic now, but it must have been an extraordinary colonial city. Well, it wasn't even a colony, it was regarded as part of France. Just breathtaking as a city.

My interlocutors were totally different from the Moroccans. Eventually I put it down to the fact that, first of all, this was a ruling party that had been there forever. So, they all knew each other, and they had all made up their minds quite early in their careers, who was going to get to the top and who wasn’t and were quite comfortable with it. They were experienced. They were self-confident. They all spoke the most beautiful French, as do the Moroccan leadership, by the way. But it was a totally different atmosphere there. The reason I believe is because of the omnipresence in Morocco of the shadow of the King. Not that it's a malign influence, but the fact is the people don't owe their loyalty to each other. They don't owe their positions to each other. They owe them to the King. So almost by definition, they are less self-confident and less easy to really have an honest discussion with. I love Morocco. I love the Moroccans. But it was, in some ways, an enormous pleasure to deal with the Algerians.

Q: You also had an anecdote with the media waiting after the meeting with Lamamra, can you tell something about that?

HARSTON: Yes, it was a lesson that I should have learned from the President of the Republic of Srpska, who also promised me that there would be no media. But I didn't learn it. So, I was told at the airport that I would have a meeting with the officials in the VIP lounge, and there would be no press. And of course, as soon as we finished our meeting, the door opened and there were twenty cameras outside, TV and others. A young man asked"What do you feel about being here?" And I said, "Well, I feel old." And there was an intake of breath from those present. And I said, "I'll tell you why. When

you start arriving at airports that are named after people that you've met, you realize that you're getting old. Here is the Houari Boumediene airport, named after your past president and foreign minister, whom I met in Hanoi in 1972. So, it really makes me feel old." And then, “Thank you very much, ladies, gentlemen”, and I moved on. It got enormous press coverage, but not because I said I felt old, but because here was a representative of the Secretary General of the United Nations who had met Houari Boumediene. So, it turned out to be a really good thing to say and it was totally off the cuff and not practiced beforehand.

Q: You already mentioned that you were involved in the Manhasset negotiations. How many rounds were there?

HARSTON: As I recall four over a period of more than a year. They all took place in this lovely house, which had alongside it a newly built convention center on Long Island, so not too far from New York. I was blessed to have been invited.

Q: Who were the participants?

HARSTON: Well, it was our friend van Walsum representing the United Nations with a small and remarkably inefficient team from the Department of Political Affairs, and Foreign Minister of Morocco, the Foreign Minister leading the delegation from Algeria, the Foreign Minister of Mauritania, and not the President, but the Secretary General of the so called Sahrawi Republic. And that stayed more or less the same throughout. It was a big round table, and it proceeded as most of those kinds of negotiations proceed. Although, I think at the second one, van Walsum said, "Well, why don't we put aside the main political issue and deal with some practical issues." So, they tried to do that. And they did come to one or two small agreements on practical issues. It gave me a wonderful opportunity to get to know people like Lamamra, who then went on to be, I think, foreign minister, and then one of the most important officials in the African Union, responsible for peace and security. And is now Foreign Minister again. I enjoyed the Algerian, as I said to you before.

Q: This was not the first attempt to reach a peaceful solution for this dispute. Can you briefly describe earlier initiatives?

HARSTON: Baker was the most important, let's deal with him. He was for about two years in the late 1990s, early 2000s. He tried to come up with a new plan for registration and to get the referendum going, amongst other things. That was the last thing that was actually accepted by the Polisario, but the Moroccans turned it down saying that it was not going to be possible because of the census that was taken when the Spanish were there, and therefore didn't represent the population of Western Sahara as it was in the year 2000. Of course, by then Morocco had a new young king, and there was certainly no question of him so early on in his reign coming to any kind of agreement on what was happening in Western Sahara. Although, since that time, he and his advisors have pushed that process in a positive way, in terms of offering a kind of autonomy, which he said he

would be prepared to expand, if necessary, which had never really been offered before. So, when he settled in, I think the new king has done extremely well.

Q: Can you make a parallel between the negotiation patterns and policies used in this particular case and in another peace process that you also participated in, the Kosovo process?

HARSTON: There's of course a lot of irony in that question, because I have always said that foreign policy is about perceived national interest. It really doesn't have much to do with international law or any humanitarian issues or whatever. It's about what a government thinks is good for its country. Which has resulted in - if you compare those two, and very few people do - a totally opposite stance by the major powers. Major powers, apart from Russia and China, who all passed Resolution 1244, saying that Kosovo remained a constituent part of Yugoslavia, and then went on to support the independence of Kosovo. It's exactly the opposite in Morocco, where the French, the British and the Americans have consistently refused to accept or recognize the so-called government of the Sahrawi Arab Republic. So, there's a lot of irony in that. If you are in international politics, you get used to that sort of contradiction. But funnily enough, in the question of Morocco, that stance of France, the U.S. and the UK has now got to a point where it is actually, I think, making a solution just a little bit more possible by supporting the plan for autonomy put forward by the Moroccan government. Which is, by any standards, a generous plan in which the king has promised could be more generous if it came, finally, to an agreement. The Americans went even further, not so long ago under Trump. One of the last things Trump did was making it clear that he would fully support an integrated autonomous Western Sahara. Algeria has been a mess the last two or three years economically, politically, so it has not been a stronger voice in these matters as it had been before. Morocco taking advantage of that, in international forums, taking advantage of it, rejoining the African Union, which it had not been a member of, and encouraging, particularly Middle Eastern countries, to step into Western Sahara. In the last six months, about five or six consulates have been opened in Laayoune and in Dakhla in Western Sahara, by Middle Eastern countries. So, a recognition of Morocco's territorial integrity, because there's consulates over there, embassies in Rabat. So, things are moving in a way, although I think it will take a while yet.

Q: Do you think that the Polisario Front has a future, given its detachment from tens of thousands of young people born in the refugee camps in Algeria?

HARSTON: Well, of course, it's not just young people who have been born in those camps, because they're now getting second and third generations there. I have to say I don't have enough intelligence or information to prove what I feel. But I feel that the younger part of that Polisario dominated mass of refugees who have been abused and have had civil rights taken away from them and had a semi-Stalinist regime for the last 25 years, I think they may well have had enough. The problem, of course, will be getting across the message to those people- who I think probably are now in a majority in the camps in Algeria - that life by the sea in a prosperous Western Sahara, Southern Morocco

is an infinitely better prospect than another generation being born in refugee camps. I mean, you have to understand that the conditions suffered by those people up there on the Algeria Moroccan border are atrocious. There are temperatures of up to fifty, fifty-five degrees Celsius month after month, there is a lack of water, they are in mud-built housing. They really have not had a real improvement in their conditions for twenty years. They are just pawns in a game being played by Algeria, largely for its own ends. If you look at the relationship between Algeria and Morocco, you have to go back to colonial times, to the colonial war, to the different status of Morocco and Algeria as far as trials were concerned, and so on. So, it is a long story. But tragically, one of the things that goes unnoticed is that the border between Morocco and Algeria has been closed now for twenty years. Which is lunacy, in terms of trade, in terms of the movement of people, and so on, so forth. So, I don't know, I am an optimist in the sense that I think there can be a solution. I'm an optimist in that I think the king would be prepared to offer an acceptable level of autonomy and allow the Sahrawi officials who would then leave the Sahrawi people back into southern Morocco. The opportunity to take those positions of governor, of running the businesses - ironically, the main business of phosphate in Western Sahara is run by Sahrawi. And, of course, the fishing too. The two major industries of that area are actually run by Sahrawi already. But I do think there is a possibility. I think it might still take some years. But I do think that there is a possibility, and the key to all that is Algeria.

Q: Do you think that the role of the UN mission should evolve in the future?

HARSTON: People have consistently tried to attach a human rights mandate to that mission. I did not accept that when I was there, not because I believe that there shouldn't be monitoring of human rights, but because I don't think it would be possible. Therefore, there's no point in the Security Council passing a resolution which right from the start will fail. It will just make the mission less acceptable to the Moroccans and make the important part of that mission, which is still the border, and it has become more important in the last two years, because the Sahrawi have been pushing down on the border with Mauritania.

Q: Were you happy with what you had achieved in the two years you spent having this mission?

HARSTON: I was happy personally. I had, in many ways, regarded Morocco as the most successful mission, but largely from a personal point of view. I think the relationships I established with the leaders in Morocco and the people I dealt with in Morocco were better than they ever have been before or since. There wasn't a major drama when I was there. Nobody was shot across the border. It's a nice, comfortable little mission to work in and I made it better. I made the security in particular better. I made the working conditions there better, which I always do wherever I am. I left a very happy mission. My farewell party was the first that anybody could remember having. I think there were a hundred people there in the hotel. It was a very jolly occasion and one which I think

reflected the fact that I was leaving behind a happy, well managed, and well-resourced mission.

Q: After you had abruptly brought your tour of duty in Western Sahara to completion in March 2009, you were asked to fill a gap as a representative of the Secretary General in Belgrade again. As you were getting ready to leave New York for Belgrade, this appointment was almost canceled. What happened?

HARSTON: Well, it was what we call in England a "grace and favor appointment". I think the Secretary General felt he owed me because of my abrupt departure from Morocco. There was this position, which is not Assistant Secretary General, by the way, it was a rank lower, it doesn't make any money difference, as what was now called Representative of the Secretary General in Belgrade. He asked if I would like it, because they were going to take upwards of a year to fill it, as they had already chosen somebody who worked in his office to take it over. So, I said, “Yes, I'd love to go back to Belgrade and do it”. As I was leaving, I was actually in the office of the Deputy Head of the Peacekeeping Operations in New York, and there was a phone call from the Korean ambassador who was the Secretary General’s chef de cabinet saying, "You're sixty", or whatever I was. And I said, "Yes." He said, "Well, the Secretary General is not appointing people at that age anymore." Although, as Assistant Secretary General, there's no leaving age. And I said, "I am leaving today, are you seriously suggesting that I shouldn't leave? And in any event, I am not sure you are aware of the fact that I am only two years older than the Secretary General." And anyway, nothing happened. I bumped into the SG in the delegate's dining room the next day, and he said, "You are very naughty." And I said, "Why?" He said, "You are talking about how old I am?" I said, "No, you are talking about how old I am." And he loved that. You don't find very many people who speak well of Ban Ki-moon. I do, not because I particularly admire the way he ran the UN, but I had a very good personal relationship with him. Whenever I went to the 38th floor, whatever I was doing there, he would always grab me and take me into his office and ask me how I was and what was happening, and what I was doing in Belgrade or wherever it was. I liked him. I teased him, which I think very few people did. It was a funny relationship, because I didn't really admire him as an operator, but I did like him very much.

Q: This time, your third tour of duty in Belgrade was different from the earlier ones, since in the meantime, Kosovo self-declared independence in 2008. It was recognized by the three permanent members of the UN Security Council, the US, France, and Great Britain. Yet, the Resolution 1244, which did not foresee such an outcome and provided for the UN Mission in Kosovo was still in force. Did this make your work as the head of the UN Office in Belgrade more challenging than before? And who was the most difficult to deal with?

HARSTON: That's a very good question. Yes, all that you say is true. The situation changed totally. Of course, we as an Office of the United Nations did not recognize the independence of Kosovo because we were the guardians of 1244. We were seen by the government in Belgrade as being vitally important in Kosovo. UNMIK (United Nation

Mission in Kosovo) as the guardian of 1244, as an organization which did not regard Kosovo as an independent state. It made life quite difficult for our officials in Kosovo, because how do you go about dealing with a government that you do not recognize. But they sort of made the right compromises. If I found anybody difficult to deal with, not on a personal level but on a professional level, it was the ambassadors of France, Germany, and the United States, who basically did not want the UN to be there.

It was not a surprise to me that, this week, the United States has indicated in the Security Council that it would like to close the UNMIK mission, and also remove the NATO mission, and leave the European Union as the only international mission in Kosovo. It won't happen because the Russians will not allow it to happen, but, nonetheless, it does not surprise me that the Americans are flying that kite again. We had a disadvantage because we were less relevant than we had been. But we had an enormous advantage, as far as access to the government was concerned, because we were seen, as I said, as the guardians of 1244. It was that perception of us as the personification of 1244, that irritated the Germans, the Americans, the Brits, and the French, because they wanted this to be a European Union initiative, and they didn't see any role for the UN at all. So, it wasn't easy, actually. Because this was the third time I had been in Belgrade, I had a set of people that I could see come hell or high water. So, it wasn't difficult from that point of view. I had a relatively good staff. I had a Ukrainian deputy, who was very well connected in areas of government and in opposition, where I wasn't. He was very useful in maintaining links with a number of people whom I didn't know, and I didn't particularly want to know, actually. It was okay. We were not as well plugged in as we had been before, but it was okay.

Q: Most of the Serbian officials strongly believe that diminishing the role of the UN and its mission in Kosovo and introducing the stronger EU presence instead has had a very negative impact on the process as a whole. How do you see this transition?

HARSTON: Well, I think the one advantage the UN has in these situations is an ability to say, "We are the UN, we don't take sides in these issues. We haven't recognized the government of Kosovo." Whereas, if you're dealing with the EU, you're dealing with the majority of the member states of the EU who recognize the government, who have embassies in Kosovo. Now, if that is an advantage in terms of managing the EU's presence there, it certainly isn't an advantage if you are trying to act as an intermediary between Serbia and the Kosovo Albanians. The EU has been very useful in terms of the resources that it has been able to put into Kosovo, all of which in the end will be wasted in my view. But I think it is not an interlocutor I love. If you look at the way the system has gone in terms of the courts in Kosovo, you have got to a stage where the internationals were slowly being pulled out of the court system, to a point that witnesses were in danger because their names were in files that were being passed to the Kosovo police service, which was not under control of the EU. You are right, there is an enormous amount of suspicion. But then try and think of an area where the EU has had a successful intervention. It is very hard to find. If you look at the non-elected leadership of

the European Union, they have gone from bad to worse. So, why would you put your faith in that if you were in the Serbian leadership?

Q: From this perspective, what do you think the future of the Kosovo process will be? Is it really possible to have a truly generous solution in today's world?

HARSTON: Well, I am an optimist in the sense that I was involved in negotiations for the independence of Zimbabwe, for the changes in South Africa, and for the changes in Northern Ireland. All those problems were thought to be unsolvable. You are never going to get rid of the Afrikaner leadership in South Africa. You're never going to get rid of the white supremacist leadership in Rhodesia. You're certainly never going to get the Protestants and the Catholics to agree in Northern Ireland. And yet, in those negotiations, there was always a point at which it became possible for a solution to be found. You look at somewhere like Cyprus, and there has just recently been another set of negotiations on Cyprus. It is quite clear to me that they weren't going to reach any kind of solution, but they keep trying. I think something will change in Cyprus. There will be some change in the makeup of the population, there will be a drought, there will be a famine, there will be a plague, whatever it is, something will eventually bring two people to that table representing the Greek and the Turkish Cypriots who want to come to an agreement. And you will have one eventually, I have no doubt about it at all. And so, what are the most difficult situations? History? Religion? Well, we have got all that in Serbia. I simply don't know, but I don't believe that any problem like this has no solution. There will come a time, in - who knows - ten, twenty, thirty years, when the leadership in Serbia decides that for a membership in the European Union, they are prepared to pay a higher price than they are prepared to pay now. There will come a time, I suspect, when it has become clear that Kosovo will not play any kind of leading role. But what about an Albanian union? I don't know. It is not my problem anymore. I'm comfortable here in Belgrade. A country which by the month is becoming a better place to live for Serbs, and I should say for foreigners. So, who knows? I have been involved in three sets of negotiations which never stood a chance of success, and yet they succeeded. So, who knows?

Q: Well, let's hope. It's very optimistic. In late November 2009, you retired from the UN having been part of the UN system for more than 14 years. What were your feelings about the organization, its strengths and shortcomings, and the relevance of its role in the evolving geopolitical conditions in the world of the 21st century?

HARSTON: Oh, my goodness, how can I answer that in a few words. I remained an optimist. I firmly believe that I and many, many others concentrate far too much on the role of the Security Council, the peace and security aspects of the UN. And then you look over your shoulder and see the incredible work that has been done by the World Health Organization, by UNICEF, by UNESCO, by the UNHCR, by WIPO, by all those agencies day after day after day. UNHCR is feeding 3 million people today, the 14th of May 2021. So, as a powerful good in the world, I have absolutely no doubt that the UN does an amazing job. As far as peace and security are concerned, I think the balance shows in the last forty or fifty years that UN intervention has had more successes than

failures, and that it is certainly cheaper than any other kind of intervention. The problem is that the international security situation has changed to the point that the old bandages do not work anymore. So, you have the UN facing, on a peace and security side in places like Mali, the Congo, and so on, internal security situations that it shouldn't be involved in. The thought for me, an old school UN official, of the UN being involved in "counterterrorism" is a contradiction in terms. What the UN should be involved in is politics. In none of those places will you solve an insurgency, an internal problem, which in some places like Mali has been going on for two or three hundred years, without coming up with a political solution to make it happen. The UN is wasting an enormous amount of resources on involving itself in military solutions when it should be involving itself in political solutions. If there is a problem in Mali, then it is the threat of terrorist bases evolving there which threaten Europe, or the refugee problem which threatens Europe. So why should a Bangladeshi soldier die in Mali?

If there should be a military action there, it should be a coalition of the willing led by France, probably, from Europe, or including the United States or Canada, if you want to, but the people who are threatened. So, I think, if you believe, as I do, very largely in those very large peacekeeping missions, like the Congo, the UN is doing the wrong job. Then it is very depressing, because there does not seem to be a general realization that what is important is politics, not the military. Military can hold the ring, and let the politicians solve things, that's for sure. But they need to be politicians doing it at the end of the day. If we are involved too much in that, then the UN is failing in peace and security. Of course, the other major reason that it has become less relevant has been the situation in the Security Council, where the permanent five members find it almost impossible to agree on anything. In the last five, six years, the different balance in the Security Council between China and Russia, a U.S. which seemed to have lost interest, and a Europe which is not powerful enough to make a difference, has meant that a lot of the peace and security issues which are supposed to be being dealt with in New York simply aren't. What is the UN doing right now to stop people dying in Gaza or in Israel? What is the UN actually doing on the ground to stop the war in Syria? What is the UN doing in the Security Council to stop the war in Yemen, and so on? All those things should be being regularly addressed by the Council, the Council should be coming up with, if not solutions, certainly offering a road to solutions. But it is not. And it is not because of the contrary views of sovereignty held by China, Russia, and the other permanent members. It is a depressing place to work right now, but, when I was there, it was full of hope, full of success in the agencies, certainly, and some successes in peacekeeping, too.

Q: Well, we are hopeful that things will, in time, evolve in the positive direction. Mr. Harston, thank you very much for taking part in our program.

HARSTON: There's one thing I meant to say, which we haven't included. After I left the UN formally, I was asked to lead a mission to Lebanon to do a report to the Security Council on UNIFIL, the mission in Lebanon, which I did. I went to New York a couple of times. I visited Lebanon two or three times with an excellent team of people from New

York. We reported to the Council on UNIFIL, a very large military and political mission, led by military, reinforced a few years ago by a very large input from NATO nations, France in particular, but also Spain and Italy, and others. We had a naval presence for the second time in peacekeeping, German naval ships and so on. So, a very busy, very strong mission. I was asked to report to the Council on how it was doing basically. It was the first of a series of reports being done on missions. It fits in with what I have just been saying. I concluded that, in military terms, it was okay. It had done its job. It was actually too large and too heavy. But nonetheless, in military terms, the military occupation of southern Lebanon had been a success. But everything we had gained on the military side, could be lost in a few days by a failure to move forward on the political side. So, in a sense, this fits in with what I have just been saying. The mandate for UNIFIL and for the UN presence in southern Lebanon says that the mission should work towards a permanent ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon. And we are no closer to that today than we were ten years ago. So, my message to the Council was, you have to work much harder on the political side, because, of course, the military will do their job, and they don't do it too badly. In fact, they have made too many compromises in Lebanon to do it as well as they should, by saying they won't patrol at night, and there are a number of other issues which I managed to get into my report against strong opposition from certain quarters in New York. But, I suppose the parting glory was that I was asked to go and see the Israeli ambassador, who was not a diplomat, he was a businessman at that time, who said to me, "Julian, I want you to listen very carefully because I am going to say something which you very rarely hear an Israeli ambassador say, and that is thank you."

Q: That's wonderful. And I apologize for not including this UNIFIL assignment in the original questions, it was not part of your formal CV.

HARSTON: It was in my memoirs, but I think not, as you said, part of the CV. But it is important because it was an illustration of the fact that unless you work on the political side of solving problems, you simply cannot leave it to the military.

Q: This is a very important point, and I hope that it will be appreciated by the readers of this recollection on your career. Once again, thank you very much for your valuable insight and all the best in your future work, because you remain active.

HARSTON: I do, I do. I found myself this morning sending an email to a young Congolese political officer in Mali, who had asked me a question. I produced two teaching books for an organization called POTI, the Peace Operations Training Institute, based in Virginia, and they sell courses to serving people in the UN and elsewhere about peacekeeping. I did two for them, one about the UN, how does the UN work, and the other about protection of civilians. One of the deals is that they go on paying me if I go on answering questions from people who have taken their courses. The majority of their courses are free because they are very smart, they have gotten governments to pay for them. So, a very successful organization, POTI in Virginia. So, I go on answering questions and that's fun.

End of interview