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Faith in Diplomacy

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Throughout the highs and lows of a long diplomatic career, Archie Mackenzie has always striven to put service ahead of ambition. Campbell Leggat and Kenneth Noble tell his story.

If former British ambassador Archie Mackenzie told you that he had seen the Loch Ness monster as a boy, you would believe him, for he has made honesty a hallmark of his distinguished career. But he confines himself to a bare account of the fishing trip as a 14-year-old when 'the loch's surface was like glass. Suddenly, at a distance of about 25 yards, I saw a large grey glistening back breaking the water's surface. I suppose I saw at least four feet of it.' Diplomatically he refuses to speculate as to what it was.

Now retired, Mackenzie, and his wife, Ruth, live on the banks of Loch Lomond in a modest house with 'a million dollar view', in the words of a builder who worked on an extension for them. They shared the diplomatic life on four continents, until Archie retired as the British representative on the UN's Economic and Social Council in 1975.

Becoming a diplomat was not Mackenzie's intention when he left school in 1933. As he relates in his new autobiography, *Faith in diplomacy**, he entered Glasgow University to study English Literature with a view to becoming a teacher or a journalist. But, at the end of his first year, he came out top in Moral Philosophy and the professor advised him to switch to his department. This would involve some hard work to make up for the time spent on a different course. But a potentially greater challenge was the lack of any obvious job opportunity at the end of his studies.

By this time Mackenzie had already embraced the philosophy of MRA (now renamed Initiatives of Change) and committed himself to 'consciously seek God's will in each new choice that I faced. I naturally consulted with family and friends but I knew that the decision must be mine and the inner conviction steadily grew that I should take the risk and switch courses.'

After graduating he went on to further studies in Oxford and then won a Harkness Commonwealth Fellowship to research 'the ethical implications of democracy with special reference to the work of Moral Re-Armament' in the University of Chicago in 1939 and Harvard University the following year. Thus it was that Mackenzie was in the US as the Second World War got under way.

The British Embassy in Washington were soon looking for extra staff and so, 'at short notice and without any prior planning', he was offered a temporary diplomatic post 'to make use of the very knowledge about America and her policies that I had been acquiring under my Fellowship'. Although he didn't know it at the time, this was the beginning of a 32-year distinguished career with the diplomatic service that took him to, among other countries, Thailand, Cyprus, France, Burma, Yugoslavia and Tunisia.

He says that those years were 'thoroughly enjoyable' and 'when asked by the younger

generation about choosing a diplomatic career, I invariably give an encouraging response'. He admits, however, to not having been 'a wholly orthodox member of the service'.

Apart from his unshakable religious convictions, Mackenzie's unorthodoxy showed itself in the fact that he never declared any preference as to where he should be posted - a common practice - believing that his role was to be 'ready for anything, ready to serve'. He was sufficiently humble to believe that his bosses would know where his best contribution would lie.

His daily practice of seeking God's direction also led him to take unexpected steps. In 1965 he was appointed British Consul-General in Zagreb accredited to Croatia and Slovenia. 'From a career point of view, Zagreb was not a prize posting,' he dryly comments. 'It was then a provincial capital in a Communist country.' The greyness of the surroundings and the fact that the Mackenzies knew nobody there reduced Ruth to tears to begin with. But 'the first unexpected break in the clouds came less than three weeks later'.

Arriving at the office Mackenzie saw a group of Africans having an altercation with one of his staff. His secretary advised him to have nothing to do with them: 'They are always causing problems. Your predecessor said they should never be allowed to go beyond the outer office.' But Mackenzie had 'an immediate inner sense' that he should get to know more about them. Next time they turned up at the consulate he met them and discovered that they were Commonwealth students who, having failed to get into British universities, had accepted scholarships to study in Zagreb. But they did not speak Serbo-Croat and were unprepared for the cold winters. Having no embassies of their own countries in Yugoslavia they were looking for help as Commonwealth citizens from the British consulate.

Mackenzie gave them what advice he could and then, at his wife's prompting, invited them to come to their home for tea the following Sunday. This was a start of warm friendships. Some of them eventually visited the MRA centre in Caux, Switzerland, where, says Mackenzie, their 'moral and spiritual roots were deepened'. One, Ben Markin, a Ghanaian medical student, eventually spent his working life in Bosnia. During the 1990s' civil war, after a long silence, he wrote to Mackenzie saying, 'The wounds I am treating up here in the mountains are terrible: but the hatred is even worse. Could I come back to Caux?' Despite having only refugee status at that time, Markin did visit Caux twice. Later he was unexpectedly appointed Bosnian Ambassador to Japan.

Mackenzie's book gives many fascinating glimpses into the world of diplomacy, and also some of the personalities he worked with - Isaiah Berlin, Sir Alexander Cadogan, Lord Halifax and former Prime Minister Edward Heath among others. We are also taken behind the scenes of historic events. Mackenzie was involved in the key negotiations that led to the setting up of the UN.

The book contains some timely historical reminders. While tensions are running high in the Middle East, it is not always remembered in Britain that our hasty withdrawal from Palestine - and the dumping of the problem on a fledgling UN - lay at the root of many of today's tragic events.

Mackenzie's involvement with MRA was not without cost. Some elements in the Foreign Office and the security services were suspicious of his association with the movement. It seems likely that it was this that resulted in his unexpected posting to Zagreb after two other jobs had been offered and then withdrawn. When faced with calls for his resignation from the diplomatic service he exercised his

right to argue his case in front of one of his accusers before the then Foreign Secretary, Sir Alec Douglas-Home. The future Prime Minister sided with Mackenzie, saying, 'I think you will probably be in the Foreign Office longer than I shall.'

It is ironic that Mackenzie should fall under suspicion because of his association with a movement that advocates the highest standards of probity in public and private life during an era when the moral lapses of some who turned out to be traitors were no bar to promotion.

'There is no doubt that moral weakness played a part in the extraordinary duplicity of men like Maclean, Burgess and Philby,' comments Mackenzie, whose encounters with the first two are related in his autobiography. 'Cleverness is not enough: character is also vital.'

He has no doubt that 'my links with MRA strengthened my character. This is not a boast; it is just the result of honest reflection on my own nature, strong points and weak points, over the last 80 years. MRA introduced me to the concept of a daily time of moral and spiritual meditation which changed my life-style and has remained my regular habit early every morning for the past 68 years.'

He likens his daily 'quiet time' to 'a moral vaccine which stops bugs on the spot', and explains how this works. After a bad day at the office, where he felt tempted to be bitter or wounded by a colleague's actions, he often repaired the damage with a swift apology. Within two years of leaving the UN he was appointed assistant to Edward Heath in his role as one of 18 members of the Brandt Commission - or the Independent Commission on International Development Issues, to give the full title. After two years' work, Mackenzie found himself part of a five-person drafting committee charged with producing the final report to a tight schedule. He became impatient with another of the committee who seemed to be slowing their work down, and made sarcastic remarks about him which amused the others. At the end of their session, Mackenzie thought, 'You made an enemy today.' The next morning he apologized to the man for his attitude - and made a lifelong friend. Shortly afterwards they finalized the draft of the highly influential *Brandt Report*.

Since then Mackenzie has constantly pursued any opportunity that he could see to play a constructive role in affairs. As the *Scottish Field* revealed this year, he 'had just been asked to travel to Istanbul in April on an important mission which could have far-reaching consequences on international affairs'. He was 'still very much involved in "track two diplomacy", where he can be called upon to work with the influential contacts he has built up over his career'. Not that he underestimates the importance of official diplomacy, which he says is 'more important than ever' after such tragic events as 11 September.

Looking back over his long life of service, the phlegmatic Scot with a warm twinkle in his eye comments, 'When I awake in the morning and look across Loch Lomond from our home on the eastern shore, my first thought is very often one of gratitude. Not achievement; not failure; not frustration; and certainly not boredom. Just gratitude.' Because of Archie Mackenzie's efforts, many have cause to share that feeling of gratitude.

* *'Faith in diplomacy'*, Grosvenor Books, London, and Caux Books, Switzerland, 2002, ISBN 1-85239-030-1.

Campbell Leggat and Kenneth Noble

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