Oral History Kosovo

INTERVIEW WITH CHRISTOPHER DELL

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Present:

1. Christopher Dell (Speaker)
2. Anna Di Lellio (Interviewer/ Camera)

Transcription notation symbols of nonverbal communication:
() – emotional communication
{} – the speaker explains something using gestures.

Other transcription conventions:
[ ] - addition to the text to facilitate comprehension
Footnotes are editorial additions to provide information on localities, names or expressions.

Part One

Anna Di Lellio: Okay, just start by telling me a little bit about yourself. First, your name, of course, where you were born and...

Christopher Dell: Okay, my name is Christopher Dell. I was born in New Jersey in 1956, and I am still legally a resident of the State of New Jersey. I have been all my life, despite the Foreign Service career. Ask me some questions, Anna (laughs).

Anna Di Lellio: Oh no, you should go ahead. Okay, and can you, okay, New Jersey, where? And can you tell me a little bit more about your family background, your father's, how many were in the family?

Christopher Dell: So I was born in Hackensack, which is very close to New York. My family was from Palisades Park, which you probably know being from New York. I grew up my whole life in a town called Holmdel, which is down near the Jersey Shore. You know we are recording this interview just a day or two after John McCain passed away. Almost every story about him begins with John McCain was the son and grandson of two Navy Admirals. Well, I am the son and grandson and brother of electricians. My father and brother and grandfather all belonged to the IBEW in New York, and the union actually helped to put me through college. I won a scholarship that the union sponsored to go, to go college at Columbia.

We lived in one of the first bedroom communities, you know, it was built in the 1950s, moved there in 1957, it was one of those early exoduses from the dense inner cores out more towards the suburbs. And Holmdel has since become one of the most sort of prosperous communities in the U.S. I think that more people from Holmdel died on 9/11 then anywhere else except New York city itself. A lot of the staff of Fitzgerald Cantor had settled in that town. Of course, the law firm suffered terrible losses on that day.

So I grew up there in a semi-rural semi-suburban setting. One of my earliest, my very first job was working on a farm. There was a farm that had been settled in the 17th century just behind the property that my, the housing development we lived in, and from fifth grade, through a couple of years in high school, I worked on the farm every summer with the local family. And it gave me a great sense of the place and the history and sort of feeling a rootedness to that place because that family had been the farmers on that land since the, since before the Republic, since the beginning of the 18th century. Sadly, all pushed over and gone now, developed into housing {points to the side with his right hand} sitting outside the window here a few beams from the original barn that was put up there by the English settlers. It had been settled originally by Dutch people, this part of the state, 1666.

And then, the English came later, when this barn was put up there were still Indians [Native Americans] living in the fields around the farm. The grammar school I went to was called Indian Hill because of the hill that the farm was on, there are Indian burial sites there, they used to come up with these things. So it's a real good sense I think of always a strong identity of where I am from, with New Jersey, and as a result, of course, the U.S.

Anna Di Lellio: Why didn't you become an electrician?

Christopher Dell: One in every generation is enough (laughs). They might, you know, it's a good career, especially for unionized people in New York, it's still a very good career. But I was always more inclined with reading and writing and learning and things, and I don't think my gifts were particularly using tools. Although my father did teach me, I can change all of you light bulbs for you {gestures with behind him} and all of your light switches and sockets, if you ever need somebody (laughs). I have been doing rewiring here, in this house, in the last few weeks, as part of getting it ready for us (smiles).

Anna Di Lellio: And what… you went to Columbia, so '56, in '76, '75?

Christopher Dell: I went in '74 and I graduated in '78, yeah.

Anna Di Lellio: So, you were pretty young.

Christopher Dell: Normal age, 18 for university.

Anna Di Lellio: What was your experience at Columbia University as a college student?

Christopher Dell: I really enjoyed it. Columbia, at that point, was sort, was a low point for Columbia. This was only six years after the '68 student demonstrations and rioting. The university was a little run-down, the physical plant, but the quality of education was still superb. And I think like, most people who go to Columbia, I came away thinking the most important aspect of it all was their Core Curriculum. You know, back in the '20s, I guess, Columbia had devised this curriculum built around the great books. You read, you know, philosophy beginning with Aristotle and Socrates and forward to Marx and Lenin. You read literature beginning with, you know, *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* and read forward. There was a little bit of diversity there, the teachers had a {moves both had back and forth} diversity about what they choose, but I think it gave you a basic, a really good grounding in bigger

ideas, and sort of the moral, political, philosophical issues that I think still define the world today. Despite the changes going on around us, some of the questions are eternal.

So that was the good thing about Columbia and then, of course, there was being exposed to New York. Because I was there in the era, the famous headline, you know, "Ford to New York: Drop Dead." So it was not New York's finest hour either but it was still a wonderful experience. It was still a world class city, even though today you go, it is much more prosperous. A bit more like Disneyland New York now, since so many ordinary people are being pushed out by the cost of living there.

But I enjoyed it tremendously, and it was, Columbia was good to me. They gave me a fellowship to go on to graduate school, which basically paid for two years at Oxford for me. And I think that in many respects, that really opened up the door to my career in the Foreign Service.

When I joined the Foreign Service in January of 1981, Jimmy Carter was still president for two weeks longer. There were 52 members of my entering class and there were 52 hostages in Tehran. It was pretty clear what our hiring purpose was, what our function was meant to be, in case those people didn't come home. Fortunately, they did. But every one of those 52 people in my entering class had lived overseas in some capacity or the other. I think if I hadn't been, gone to graduate school in England, I might not have gotten into the Foreign Service, despite passing all the exams and all of that. They were pretty clearly looking for that international experience as one of the hiring criteria.

Anna Di Lellio: So it was a big jump from Hackensack to Oxford? Or not?

Christopher Dell: A bit of a jump (laughs). And I was in England at the low point as well. This was the labor strike, the brownouts before Margaret Thatcher came along and began creating the modern Britain for whatever, {waves his hand in front of his face} we don't have to go into that, but whatever you think of it today, Sort of beginning of a turnaround there economically and socially. But it was a wonderful experience. Of course, it is better going back as you spend your days as you wish you could have as a student in the pubs and bookshops, although there are ever fewer bookshops, of course.

It was a hard experience because it is a completely different approach to education, a completely different approach to teaching. And there was really very little in the way of an American, who was used to a sort of very structured, semester-by-semester approach with courses and grades and feedback. You got none of that at Oxford. Everything came down to a roll of the dice on your final exam after two years. And if you didn't get basically an A on everything, you failed the entire course. It was also fairly stressful, as you could imagine, but a good experience.

And shortly after that, then I joined the Foreign Service about six months later, although I could have joined earlier. Some things constantly don't change with the U.S. Government, and even though I had told them I was leaving England and moving back to New Jersey, they mailed my letter of offer to the United Kingdom, and, of course, I never got it (laughs).

So the day after the elections in 1980, November of 1980, I actually went, a friend of mine was working at the White House and I went on the White House lawn and stand there and waved goodbye to Jimmy Carter after he lost the elections, in the Rose Garden. And then went over to the so-called Board of Examiners of the Foreign Service, and I, the next day, and said," I have my oral exam." And they said, "There's one too many of you, so somebody will come tomorrow. We are going to ask somebody to step aside." I said, "Well look I have an interview tomorrow about where my, what happened, my candidacy, my previous candidacy. And if I can meet with somebody today, I'm happy to come back and sit the oral exam tomorrow."

I went upstairs and the fellow there began with the usual, "Well, you know there is a register and a waiting list, and we can't predict," {mimics opening a folder} and he opens my folder and he says, "We offered you a place and you never responded." I said, "Let me guess, you mailed the letter to England." "Yes, exactly {looks down at his watch}. But I don't know how flexible you are, but you can go downstairs. We have a class beginning today." (laughs) I said, "Well, thank you," but I wasn't that flexible, "And could I come to the next class?" and that was January. And they had just, because of new legislation, renumbered the entering classes so the one I didn't join was the first class in the new system and so I'm proud to say that I've been second class my entire career (laughs).

Anna Di Lellio: I… just out of curiosity, when did you first know that you wanted to join the Foreign Service, you wanted to have a career or diplomatic career?

Christopher Dell: Yeah, I went off to college thinking I was going to go into law and maybe pursue a political career. And I guess it's part of my contrary nature, Anna, that in about, after the first two weeks of Columbia as an undergraduate, when I saw that forty-five percent of the class were pre-med and forty-five percent of the class were pre-law, I said, "I don't want to be like everybody else." And so it was really then, my junior year, my junior year, yeah, my junior year I did a class in Strategic Theory with a professor named Warner Schilling, and I found I really liked it. And at that point, with the Carter Administration, there were a number of Columbia professors who would come down and joined the administration. And they were able to arrange for me an internship at the State Department, an internship at the State Department in the autumn of my senior year so '77, and I found that I really liked it and then decided that I would, you know, pursue this degree at Oxford in International Relations and try and join the Foreign Service. Luckily, it all kind of worked out according to plan {nods head}.

Anna Di Lellio: So you joined and what happened? What was your first assignment?

Christopher Dell: Of course, I joined being a German speaker, so the first thing they did was assign me to a post in Mexico where I had to learn Spanish. So my first assignment, after about nine months of training, including five months of Spanish language training. In September of '81, I showed up at Matamoros, Mexico, which is a town on the border with Texas, opposite Brownsville, Texas. At that time it was a two-officer post, a consul and a vice consul. About as low down in the totem pole as you

can get in the Foreign Service, working at a border post, remote from the capital in Mexico City, basically issuing non-immigrant visas.

As you can imagine, there was a lot of movement back and forth across the border, most of quite legitimate, most… a system had developed in Mexico for years, they didn't really bother providing much to the border region. They just assumed everybody would go across the border to the U.S. and shop. I am talking about basics, you know, milk and bread, you know, often people just had to go to Brownsville to get it. So there were lots and lots and lots of people applying for visas every day and mostly, people you would give them to, even though in other circumstances, you might sort of say "I'm dubious because this person is a farmhand and you know, chances are they are going to go work on a farm in the U.S. or something." But, in fact, they had legitimate reasons to go.

The most interesting thing about that first tour, I suppose, well, there were lots of interesting things, but one of the good things, almost every Foreign Services officer begins, is supposed to do a consular tour at some point. And that entails a variety of responsibilities, but issuing visas is certainly one of the big ones. And the important skill I think you learn from that is saying no to people. In our society, in our lives, you are not often told, you are not often put in the position where you are encouraged to tell people, "No, you can't have something you really really want."

And being a visa officer you have to deny visas to a lot of people who really really really want to go to the U.S. and you have to learn to do it diplomatically, gently, but also firmly. Often people get very angry and push back on your face, you know, push back a lot. So, I think that was an important diplomatic skill, sort of learning it from the very bottom up, as it were, and sort of going from there. And of course, invariably, the vice consuls get the best language skills of anybody because they are using the language the most, speaking to ordinary people in whatever language it is. In this case, Mexicans, and using it eight hours a day every day, I think is really good for developing language skills as well.

Anna Di Lellio: So the next post was in a Spanish-language country?

Christopher Dell: No, I went to Portugal.

Anna Di Lellio: To learn another language?

Christopher Dell: To learn another language. I… I had a terrible car accident while I was there, and I hurt myself badly and...

Anna Di Lellio: There, in Mexico?

Christopher Dell: In Mexico, well actually it was on the U.S. side of the border 'cause (put up air quotes) it was safer, but It didn't turn out that way. And so the Department took care of me a little bit because I, they said, "You can leave Mexico, we understand." I said, "No, no, I am going to see this through." And so they pretty much let me go wherever I want to go on my next assignment. And from the time I was a kid, I knew I loved port wines, so I said, "Why don't I go to Portugal? I want to learn

more about port wine." (laughs) And it worked out I got assigned for one year to the , we no longer have it, but a consulate in Portel, and then a year at the Embassy in Lisbon, and it's probably still my favorite Foreign Service tour.

This was the Portugal of pre-EU Portugal, and my boss there described it, I thought the best. He said, "Portugal is like the ways Europe would have been in the 1950s if World War Two hadn't happened." Kind of very old-fashioned, very, I hesitate to use the word, but underdeveloped, less developed than the rest of Europe was. And it was fascinating to know that Portugal and to see the changes that have happened and the vast amount of catching up the country has done in the intervening thirty years.

Anna Di Lellio: When you are assigned to a post, how much does the State Department prepare you or how much do you prepare to, what did you know about Portugal, besides the fact that you liked the…

Christopher Dell: Right, I didn't know much about it at all. And so they generally try and give you language training if you don't have the language. And there was a conversion course to convert Spanish into Portuguese, it only lasted eight weeks. The two languages are so close, you know, you can, you can make the, at least learn enough to begin to make the transition. And then, every week, they do an area studies, a morning of area studies, where you read up on, learn more about the country. But I think one of the historic and valid criticisms of the State Department is they often didn't do much to train officers. You're just sort of expected to show up, get out there, and learn on the job.

And I think that works for many people, or for many it doesn't, and they made serious efforts since then to, I think, improve the quality of preparation for officers going out to new areas and new regions. But there is still, I think, a strong element of learning as you go with the Foreign Service. And the good thing about that is that people who are quick studies, I think, you get immersed in a culture and you really learn a lot very quickly in a way that I don't think you get out of an academic setting, where you are reading about it in books or attending lectures. I think getting out there and living in a society really is the best way to come to understand it.

And, you know, Anna [addresses the interviewer], this reflects… the Foreign Service amongst other things, I mean it represents the United States, but it is also an intelligence service, in the sense that it collects information. When you sit down with a foreign contact, you are learning things about the country, and it;s not just for your benefit, I mean you are supposed to inform Washington about it. So using the word intelligence is nothing sinister or covert. It's very overt, everybody knows who you are and who you represent and what you are doing.

But what makes the Foreign Service unique among the U.S. Government intelligence service, besides the overt nature of it, is that we're the only service where the collector of the information is also the analyst who tells you what it means. Other agencies, the Defense Intelligence Agency, for example, they have attachés at embassies who collect information on local countries' military, and again, a lot of it is very overt, but the analysis of what it all means is always done by analysts sitting in Washington or somewhere in the United States or elsewhere.

So the Foreign Service brings a unique ability to understand the country from the experience of somebody living there, not, of course, as a native, but as that sort of man-in-the-street understanding of a country. A common thing is talking to the taxi drivers and getting the opinion of ordinary people, whether it's taxi drivers or people in the shops or the restaurants, or wherever you may be. So I think that adds a degree of, it adds something to the overall body of U.S. Government understanding of a country. The analysts are all doing their thing and they have a lot of resources to work with, but I think that first hand, on-the-ground feel is very important. I think that is probably the most important contribution the Foreign Service makes to the U.S. Government policy, understanding of the world.

Anna Di Lellio: Yeah. So you said one year in Portugal? And then?

Christopher Dell: I spent two years in Portugal.

Anna Di Lellio: Two years.

Christopher Dell: One year in Portel and then a second year in Lisboa.

Anna Di Lellio: And did, was, now try to take myself back to '83, '84. So, it's like almost ten years after the end of Salazar?

Christopher Dell: '75, '74 is the revolution.

Anna Di Lellio: Yeah, September, yeah.

Christopher Dell: Yeah, so almost ten years.

Anna Di Lellio: Almost ten years. How were you welcomed there as an American?

Christopher Dell: Very warmly…. The Portuguese were always fond of the U.S. I mean, there's a large immigrant community, of course, in the United States. There's a lot of, you know, personal level, people-to-people contact back and forth, and that's been historically true. I mean there were, the earliest Portuguese settlers were actually whalers who wound up in Hawaii, on the West Coast, in Long Beach. So people like, Devin Nunes,[1] who had become famous of late for other reasons, his family traces its descent back probably to the 19th century in the U.S. Other immigrants are more recent, from I'd say the 1960s on.

Warm welcome. By the time I was there, they had gone through the immediate aftermath of the changes. And if you recall, there was a period where it looked like the Communist Party of Portugal was going to come to power. And the U.S. Ambassador at the time, Frank Carlucci, who became more well known subsequently, was an activist. Henry Kissinger was reputedly sitting in Washington, wringing his hands and saying, "Oh my god, it's the end of the world as we know it. The Communists are taking power in Portugal. Soon it'll be Portugal, it'll be Angola, it'll be Mozambique, you know, we're losing the Cold War."

[1] High-ranking Republican Congressman from California, and a member of Donald Trump's transition team.

Carlucci, instead of wringing his hands, decided to do something about it. And USAID came into Portugal and invested a lot of money in building housing in parts of the country where the Socialists were strong. And the Socialist Party was led by Mário Soares. Now all of these labels are probably one degree, you know, off what they mean in the international context. So the Communists were, they were hardline communists but the Socialists, I think you would call democratic socialists. And the Conservatives were probably center right, they were kind of more clustered around the center.

Anyway Mário Soares, this worked, I mean, Mário Soares succeeded in winning elections, coming to power and the threat of the Communist Party becoming part of the government of Portugal receded. And that set the stage then for Portugal's transition, a few years later, into becoming a member of the European Union. When I was there still, the path had been laid out, but it hadn't happened. And there was still a discussion about whether, Portugal, whether democracy would really take root and survive in Portugal. You had a lot of cryptic characters like military officers who became politicians, and one of them was the president. Their politics were murky, what they really were and who they really were. But I think this all got settled down. This is where I think the European Union proved its value in, whether it's Portugal or Spain, who came in at the same time in really helping to consolidate the democracy of those two countries and consolidate it in a broader European framework, which I think was critical to the success of the projects in both countries. Would that retain that clarity of vision and sense of purpose in the Western Balkans today and in the intervening years?

Anna Di Lellio: We are going to get there.

Christopher Dell: I know (smiles).

Anna Di Lellio: From Lisbon, you, what was your next assignment?

Christopher Dell: I have to think. I went from Lisbon back to Washington. And then I spent the next six years in Washington doing a variety of assignments in the Bureau of Political-Military Affairs. I was the junior Spain-Portugal Desk Officer. Then I worked on the Greek base negotiations for a year and a half. Then I became the Special Assistant to the Undersecretary for International Security Affairs, before going out to Mozambique as the Deputy Chief of Mission in 1991. So from '85 'til '91, I was in Washington working in the State Department.

Anna Di Lellio: So Mozambique was coming out of the war, no? In '81.

Christopher Dell: When I went there, the civil war was still on. It was ended in October of 1992. This gets to one of the, the second thread that runs through a lot of my career. I said Portuguese language was one but also winding up in conflict zones is another one of the threads. When I first got to Maputo, it was isolated and cut off. It was a garrison city. The opposition guerrilla army, RENAMO, didn't control the surrounding countryside, but they moved freely through it. They could ambush, stage ambushes at any time, so there was a security perimeter, outside of which we couldn't travel. And the only way to get to, to South Africa, which is only ninety kilometers away, was to fly.

The road had been devastated, and a lot of these ambushes, the vehicles would catch on fire and the road just kind of melted. It was gone. After the war ended, we were able to travel a bit more, and you saw the level of devastation and destruction. It was extraordinary. I don't think I quite appreciated just how badly the country had suffered until I went back in 2014 and areas that I remembered from 1994 as having been bush, I mean, the bush creeping up to the side of the road were now open fields with villages and people and shops. I mean, the country was really on its knees by the time the civil war ended. And I think one of the reasons that hasn't been publicized enough and understood well enough, that the war ended when it did. I mean, there's all kinds of books out there about bringing peace to Mozambique and the role of Sant'Egidio and the Italian government and the Church and all of that.

But a natural factor that played its role was the devastating drought that hit southern Africa from '91, '90, '91 really through '94, '93 I guess it started to break. At that time, the U.S. Government was bringing in six hundred thousand tons of corn every year and keeping about ten million people alive. Because the security situation was what it was, you could only get it out to certain points where there was enough security that the aid workers could move, you know, International Red Cross, World Vision. And the people were so desperate they started coming out of the bush to these points where they could get access to the food. And what that essentially meant was neither the government nor RENAMO, the opposition, could control them any longer.

When they kind of used the people, and I saw this later in Angola, the same thing, keeping people locked into one place, by you know, basically killing them if they tried to leave. That strategy was broken by the desperation of people trying to get to the food, and they left and RENAMO found itself isolated and unable to control populis any longer, and, you know, every revolutionary (puts up air quotes) peasant movement depends on controlling the population. I think that was a very important factor in helping bring the war to an end at a terrible cost, which nobody would have wanted, but nature is, took its course. And, so, from, yes, that was Mozambique, quite an experience.

Anna Di Lellio: It was right at the time of the war in Yugoslavia. Were you, obviously you were too absorbed by what was happening in Mozambique to follow…

Christopher Dell: Did not follow it closely, it's true. I had no previous experience in that part of the world. The names were all an abstraction to me.

Anna Di Lellio: And your hands were full.

Christopher Dell: And we were plenty busy in Mozambique, yeah, first, trying to end the war and then negotiating the peace settlement, dealing with the demobilization of the RENAMO fighters. And it's funny because,, I've seen subsequently this whole theoretical literature has grown up around, how you end wars and demobilize the fighters, and it seems like everytime I dip back into it, they've added another D or an R to the Disarming, Demobilizing, Resettling, Reintroducing, DDRR, I think they've got up to DDDRR now or something.

Anna Di Lellio: DDR, Reintegration.

Christopher Dell: We were inventing as we went. I remember a couple of the aid staff in my office figured oh, yeah, we should get tin cups and we should get tin pots so these guys have something to cook and eat with. And then AID going out and buying and bringing, flying in tin pots and tin cups and blankets and sheeting and plastic, the blue plastic sheeting that the UNHCR uses in a lot of places as shelter. So we were really inventing all of this from the ground up. It may have been, I don't know if it was absolutely the very first, but it may have been one of the very first kind of armed conflicts of this nature to be ended through a negotiated settlement and trying to work out these things. So, yes, I wasn't following Yugoslavia very carefully (laughs) at that point.

Anna Di Lellio: I imagine. What's the role of the, you said you were also negotiating peace, with as, as an American diplomat?

Christopher Dell: Yeah, so there was a formal peace process. The ruling Frelimo Party, the government, and RENAMO, the opposition, were brought to the negotiating table I think largely through the efforts of the Italian government. The Italians had a big stake in Mozambique in those days, as the system worked in those days, you know, all of the Italian political parties had different countries that were kind of theirs, and from which they made money for their political party operations in Italy with construction companies and such things. And the Christian Democrats were Mozambique, that was their patch.

And, so, the Italians were able to bring the parties together, you know, and we were very fortunate, I think that Italy took this role on there. Portugal had too much colonial baggage and history, South Africa was, you know, not a valid interlocutor, and they were going through their own transition, which was taking place at the same time, next door. As you know, Mandela was, Mandela had been released from prison, and they began this constitutional discussion that led to the elections in '94, which I got to go over and observe actually.

So they began a negotiation, and they negotiated a partial ceasefire before my time in Mozambique and established two corridors: the Limpopo Corridor and the Beira Corridor as ceasefire zones. And so this is where I mentioned that the aid workers could actually get out and bring food and medicine to people in need. The Beira Corridor ran from the city of Beira on the Indian Ocean up to the Zimbabwe border, and it was a road, rail, and oil pipeline, and the Zimbabweans were guarding it, preventing any further conflict. And they were also guarding the Limpopo Corridor, which was a rail line, again, that went from Puto basically up to Zimbabwe. Mozambique had always served as a transit route for the African interior because of its position on the coast. And in colonial times the British really took lead in building routes into the interior to take care of then-Rhodesia, and even South Africa and Malawi, Zambia, etc.

It was a partial ceasefire and the parties had all asked others to participate in it, so It was the Italians, the Portuguese, the United States, and the UK, if I recall correctly. There were four members of something called the Joint Verification Commision, which kind of oversaw this process. And spinning

out of that then was a larger negotiation about resolving the entire conflict. And the same international players led by the Italians, the Portuguese, the UK, the U.S. Some of the African countries played a role too, but a bit more on the JVC side, so I think the Kenyans sat in on that. But anyway, we were participating at the request of the parties who wanted sort of honest brokers, outside observers, mediators to sort of sit between them and sort through issues and challenges and difficulties as they came up.

And the formal process took place in Rome under the auspices of the Italian government. And quietly in the background, the religious community, Sant'Egidio, which is, of course, based in Rome as well played an important role as an intermediary, sort of talking to both sides, and then they were regarded as an honest broker by both parties. And everybody sort of worked together then. We were fortunate for having the Italians take the lead. They had a very capable ambassador, Manfredo Incisa Di Camerana, if I remember, Incisa Di Camerana, who was very clever, very, very good diplomat. And of course the Italians could do things to sort of overcome obstacles in ways that the United States never could. I'm talking here about money, that they helped the parties meet certain needs they had that allowed them to continue in the process.

The RENAMO people, for example, when they came out of the bush, were wearing rags. And so on one of their first trips to Rome, they all got suits and clothing so that they could feel that they were proper, not quite diplomats, but proper negotiators in a formal international process. And it's easy to laugh and make fun of these things, and kind of roll your eyes about corruption, but I mean, but these are human requirements, I mean people have dignity and respect, and you know, they need to feel that they can fulfill their roles in a dignified fashion. It was very important. The U.S. could never do that, we would never be allowed to spend money like that. So it's very important that Italy played this role, and it was a success, most importantly, it was a success.

And although when I went back to Mozambique in 2014, it was all extremely, I always say half jokingly, as I say about Kosovo, it was like being away from your favorite soap opera for a decade, and coming back, and none of the players had changed, and none of the issues had changed, and just everybody, you know, somebody had gotten divorced, somebody had died, somebody had betrayed somebody, but it was the same plotline. And it was pretty easy to pick up. But the important thing about Mozambique is, despite the fact that RENAMO still maintained a small armed opposition in the center of the country, etc., the country was never really at any risk of going back to civil war. When the war ended, it ended {hits fist into his palm}.

And I have always maintained a lot of the internationals wanted the reconciliation process, a peace and reconciliation process, and the Mozambicans, including the Mozambican people themselves, didn't seem to feel the need for that. I always thought that the war was just so horrific, and their collective memories of it were so ghastly for everybody, they just wanted to put it behind them and move on, and everybody had suffered, everybody was destitute, and they didn't have the time to worry about settling past scores, or they just wanted, they had to get with getting with life, and so getting a crop in the ground, and getting to put their lives back together. And not perfectly, but by and

large that has worked in Mozambique. I think it also worked in Angola, which is a very different society, despite a common colonial heritage, if you will. But again, people just kind of wanted to move on at the end of the war and get on with life. We can talk about that later. It ended in a very different way with a very different kind of result.

But, so I think that Mozambique was a success story, and I credit a lot of this to the role played by another Italian, Aldo Aiello, who was appointed by the UN as the Special Representative there to lead the peace process, the UN mission called ONUMOZ And it's one of the most successful of these peace missions that the UN has ever mounted. And again I credit that to, a lot of that to Aldo and his personal capabilities. He was an Italian politician, I think he'd been a senator in Italy. But he lived a lot of his life in New York, and I found him to be that perfect combination of kind of Machiavellian Italian politician but a very pragmatic American as well, focused on the goal and never losing sight of what the objective was. I think it was a good balance, and of course he had a very close relationship to the Italian Embassy and the Italian Government, which continued that positive role Italy had played. But he was very capable, and every time the process would get stuck, he was able to kind of negotiate between the parties and call on the other countries who were supporting, like the United States or the Italians, very skillfully to sort of help them get past those obstacles, most of which I have long since forgotten the details of. I kind of remember the outlines of the process.

Part Two

Anna Di Lellio: Okay, so after Mozambique?

Christopher Dell: Yeah, after Mozambique I was assigned to the State Department to a job working on NATO affairs in the European Bureau. I mean, I had some background in Europe and NATO affairs, previously from my previous experience. So I became a deputy director of the office there, and I was in charge of the NATO piece of that office. And it was a very interesting time, you remember, this is was now five years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Big questions about the future of Europe and the security structures and where the countries that had formerly been a part of the Warsaw Pact were going to wind up.

And this was the summer of '94, I came back, and President Clinton had determined that he supported the idea of enlarging NATO, of bringing new members in, and hired Richard Holbrooke to be the Assistant Secretary for Europe to make this happen. And, I have to tell you, Anna, it was my worst professional experience working with Richard Holbrooke, who was an impossible man. That's not very popular in certain circles, I know, to say that, to speak the truth about it, but he was a brutal guy to work for. I have had tough bosses before, but Holbrooke sort of was enamored of his own brilliance and not shy about letting you know it, and also a bully by nature. And so he liked making people feel small, so it was not a good experience. The best thing that ever happened to me was the tragedy in Sarajevo, where the American Bob Frasure and a couple of other people were killed in an accident on Mount Igman.

Anna Di Lellio: Ron Brown?[2]

Christopher Dell: Right, and Holbrooke came back from that. In between Holbrooke had been told that he had to make peace in Yugoslavia. And it was fascinating to watch him trying to avoid getting tagged with this because he knew he was being set up to be the fall guy for a failed process, and he wanted no part of it. He was squirming and trying to get out of it. But dutifully, you know, did what he was told and got involved, and then this tragedy on Mount Igman happened and he came back transformed. I mean, I saw when I went out to the airport with a lot of my colleagues from the European Bureau to meet the plane where they brought the bodies back and Holbrooke came off the plane. And he was shaken, I mean you could see this.

And, I mean, to his credit, it had a deep psychological impact that he decided, despite the setup in Washington and the bad politics and the sheer difficulty of a problem, he was going to make it work. And out of this the Dayton Process was born. And I have to say, I mean, you know, for all of its limitations, it was a real success. And that is due I think to the personal drive and commitment of one guy. For me, the good news was that it got him off my back on a daily basis about NATO enlargement, which was the big issue on the NATO side. He just didn't have time to be worried about that anymore. It was a lot easier working on these issues without him parachuting in every six weeks and telling you're a fool, you didn't know what you were doing, and start over again.

One of the funniest things that happened was the UN General Assembly was going on in New York. This must have been, it had to have been the autumn of '96, I forget the dates now, either '95 or '96, must be '95. Yes, '95, and the phone rings and it's Dick Holbrooke {mimes a phone with his left and lowers the pitch of his voice} "Chris, I have a meeting this afternoon with Tuđman," and blah blah blah blah. "You need to come and take the Quint meeting," {drops the phone and returns to normal speaking voice.} Now the Quint was the, you know, the U.S., Germany, France, the UK. I guess it was the Quad meeting. It was held by political directors. Here I am a mid-level officer at the State Department.

I get on a plane and go to New York. And the political directors are the British Foreign Minister, the German Foreign Minister, all of these people, Pauline Neville-Jones and Wolfgang Ischinger, all of these very senior diplomats. And there is this nobody FSO too, sitting there representing Holbrooke and telling them what was going to happen and what it had to be. It was, I could see them all not, (shakes his head) not being very happy in what they considered to be a kind of slap in the face by Holbrooke, which I imagine it was meant to be.

Anyway, I spent, two years basically working on NATO enlargement. And I was the principal author, writing the U.S. Government instructions that went out to our NATO colleagues, negotiating this process. It was called the *NATO Enlargement Study*, and it was meant to be a study of whether or not the alliance should enlarge and under what circumstances and how. And, of course, a lot of opposition to it within the alliance. A lot of opposition to it coming from Moscow, which I think is fair to say, continues to this day. But, at the end of the day, the study was approved, and it set the stage then for

[2] Ron Brown, President Clinton's Secretary of Commerce, died in a separate accident in Croatia.

the first enlargement a couple of years later where Poland was brought in. And, gosh, I forget now who else. It was the start of a process of a succession of enlargements.

And a lot of revisionist historians talk about how the U.S. was wrong to lead this process, and NATO was wrong to expand, and this has left a bad taste, and this has lead Putin to be what he is today in seeking revenge for the humiliation. And what the revisionist always conveniently forget was the tremendous effort made to include Russia in this process, to find new ways to reach out to them and include them, not as an ally, but in a closer relationship to NATO. I think the U.S. even dallied with the idea a little bit of Russia as actually joining NATO, but the Europeans would have no part of it, which is something that is often forgotten.

Those who were closest wanted nothing to do with it. But, what the revisionists, I think, always, really, where their analysis always fails is, so what would you have done with all of these countries if you didn't offer them a path forward to the West? Poland, Hungry, Czechoslovakia, as it still then was I think, etc., all the rest of them. Where do you leave them? Trapped in a gray zone between angry, resentful Moscow, seeing its old empire disappear from it and an ever more prosperous and integrated West. I mean, there was no third choice. I mean they were going to be part of something, what was it going to be?

And I think the decision was the right one, to bring them closer to the West, and to do what, for them, what had been done for Portugal and Spain a decade earlier, of offering them a place in the Western structure. They had, of course, both been NATO allies all along, but the EU here. And I think that that was the right call, and it was a visionary decision to sort of offer them the stability and security of a big part of something bigger and something that was pro-Western and democratic, liberal democratic in its orientation. I think that the success of those countries post-1989 speaks for itself, by and large. Those that were brought in first have done the best, those that lagged behind have suffered the most and they are really, to this day are not doing as well as the countries that came in early.

Anna Di Lellio: And this was a time where you started also getting a little bit more acquainted with the situation...

Christopher Dell: In the region, yes.

Anna Di Lellio: ...Yugoslavia.

Christopher Dell: Yes, I mean I got involved in that. My job at the first, the first Dayton meeting was to be an errand boy who organized the sandwiches for the negotiators (laughs), but that is typical for a career diplomat to be involved at the level.

Anna Di Lellio: So you were at Dayton?

Christopher Dell: No, no, this was in Washington.

Anna Di Lellio: In Washington.

Christopher Dell: Before they moved. Holbrooke only realized he needed to isolate everybody away from distractions and the media glare, and so keep them holed up. Later, and that's when they found the air base to do it at. But I was always tangential to the Dayton process, I wasn't really deeply involved in it.

My real exposure to the region begins with my next assignment, which was to Bulgaria. I have had the good fortune of getting to know and work for, when I was on the Spain-Portugal desk, the office director was a woman named Avis Bohlen. She's the daughter of a very famous diplomat, Chip Bohlen, who was one of "The Wise Men", President of the Creation. And subsequently she was in a more senior position in the European Bureau and I was working on the NATO affairs.

And she then got nominated to be our Ambassador to Bulgaria and she asked me if I would go along and be her deputy. I said immediately yes. I thought it was a great opportunity because she was a very skillful diplomat and a good boss. I mean I really like her. We're friends to this day. And so that was my first exposure. Then my first time serving what we used to call Eastern Europe, now so it's called South Central Europe, I believe (laughs). I went off and did a year of Bulgarian language training and wound up in Sofia then in the summer of 1997.

Anna Di Lellio: Where things were starting, heating up in Kosovo?

Christopher Dell: Where things were heating up in Kosovo. Bulgaria was going through its own crisis. Their economy had collapsed in the winter of '96-'97. I mean, there were shortages of food and everything at that point. The country was only sort of coming out of its own economic implosion. We had our hands full there, again, doing a lot, helping them, kind of, sort of, recover from the low point that they had reached. So I became involved in Kosovo, pretty much, I mean there were issues early on about petrol smuggling into Yugoslavia from Bulgaria, you know, kind of black market stuff going around the edges. Really got involved though at the time of the NATO air campaign. I, to this day, maintain that I was, if not the only, one of the only American diplomats who came under fire during the air campaign.

Anna Di Lellio: Literally or metaphorically?

Christopher Dell: So I was… close to literally. Where I lived in Sofia was sort of towards the Western outskirts of town and one night I was at the gym that I belonged to, taking a shower, and there was this tremendous explosion, and one of our missiles had gone astray and gone through the roof of a house about a kilometer away from where I was standing. So I think that allows me to say that I came closer than anybody else to being shot at. It turns out that missiles, like fine wine, missile fuel ages and it burns more slowly. And during the air campaign, these anti-radar sight missiles that we had, you know, we would fire one at the Yugoslavs, who had learned to turn off their radars pretty quickly, and then the missile would go back into seeking mode, looking for a target.

And the Bulgarians were using the same radar sets and were curious and were watching what was going on with their radars, so the missiles would pick up the Bulgarian signal. And so we figured out

subsequently that there were a series of about six of these missiles that hit within a kilometer either side of a straight line at this radar sight in Bulgaria. We told Bulgarians that they really need to turn their radar off because sooner or later it was going to get hit. And it was beyond the range of these missiles, because the fuel was old, and they traveled more slowly but went longer distances. So that's how I came under fire in the Kosovo air war (laughs).

Anna Di Lellio: It's about, next year will be the 20th anniversary of the intervention.

Christopher Dell: Already.

Anna Di Lellio: Yeah, what do you think of the intervention? At the time, if you could tell me, at the time, did you think it was the right thing to do, or?

Christopher Dell: Very much so, I mean, I knew enough of what was going on at this point to understand the aggressive ethnic cleansing that was underway in Kosovo by the Serbs and I believed we needed to stop it, so I never had any qualms about the intervention. We had all already gone through Bosnia and Croatia and all of these wars. And we kinda, there was a track record there that you knew you couldn't stand idly by and hope that Milošević in Belgrade was suddenly going to, you know, just start behaving themselves. So, no, I have never had any qualms about the correctness of the decision to intervene and to stop Serbia in its tracks.

I think we did so pretty effectively, with a minimal loss of life on all sides. We can talk about some of the second-order consequences of that in places like Afghanistan later. But I'm not sure it would've if we hadn't adopted our tactics, adapted our tactics. It was pretty clear that airstrikes alone weren't working, so I think the need to partnership with people on the ground, i.e. the KLA. Something we learned in the course of it, and I think then it made our intervention much more effective. And of course Milošević changed his tactics, and then we started. I mean support for this was wavering in the West. But when the images started coming out of the entire population being expelled and, sort of, forced to walk down the railroad lines and refugees in Macedonia etc., I think he spelled his own doom at that point. His tactic failed, he didn't take into account Western public reaction to the images that came out. And I think that shored up support for the intervention at a time when it had been wavering and allowed us to push through to success.

Anna Di Lellio: When was the first time you went to Kosovo?

Christopher Dell: The very first time would have been February of 2000, maybe late January, but I think it was February. And, you will recall, that was a very tough winter, very bleak. And you would come up from, I drove from Sofia to Skopje, and was met there by a security team, who brought me up Kaçanik gorge to Pristina. I don't remember the gorge so clearly, I remember coming out of it, and these empty fields, kind of very bleak, everything was grey and brown, weeds sticking up, trash everywhere. And we were stuck behind a German tank transporter, moving 'til the turnoff to Prizren. And the only color I remember seeing was Albanian flags and the American flag. Everywhere you looked, these two flags. That was my first impression, and quite dramatic, and then getting to Pristina,

The first night I was there, we went to have dinner, it was the first one or two nights, we were living the same facility where the U.S. Embassy is still based today, but everybody was living in a room, kind of a dormitory situation. It was all pretty primitive. There were no services, so there were big Vietnam-era generators pounding all day and night for electricity on the compound.

But going to have dinner at Bernard Kouchner's residence somewhere in town, and our big heavy armored SUV couldn't stop on the hill. We basically toboggan-sledded down this hill. I don't know how we weren't all killed.It was skillful driving by the guy at the wheel (laughs), but it was just so icy. Of course, nobody had cleared any snow or ice that winter. There was a complete breakdown of all services, no trash collection. KEK was, you know, to the extent it was operating at all , it was spewing out, when it snowed, it snowed red from the, whatever was coming out of the smoke stacks. And it was kind of my early visual memories of what Kosovo was.

Anna Di Lellio: Why were you there?

Christopher Dell: Well, November of '99, Bill Clinton came to Sofia. We organized a visit, a hugely successful visit by Clinton. First ever visit of an American President to Bulgaria and, during the course of that, several of the senior people in the European Bureau reached out to me and said, "We're looking for someone to run the U.S. Office in Pristina, would you be interested?" And I said, "Well, let me talk to my wife, but in principle, yes." And that's what happened.

In February, the guy who had set the office up, Larry Rossin, a colleague, was leaving, and they wanted me to go there and overlap with him for at least a week, just to get a feel for things and just kind of see what it was all about. So that's why I went. I was preparing to take over the U.S. Office. I went back to Sofia, wrapped up my affairs to a certain extent and then went back to Pristina, like a week or two later.

In the meantime, the gym had burned. You remember the big that big swooping building that was the old sports center from Yugoslav times, had burned to the ground in the two weeks I was gone. Wow, what a change, just in that time.

Anna Di Lellio: And what was your first big assignment in Kosovo? Or what was the thing you're remembering? How long was your tenure?

Christopher Dell: Well, I wound up being there for 18 months. It was supposed to be a year, but I, in the course of that, was nominated to become Ambassador in Angola, and I didn't need to leave at the one-year mark in February so I stayed on through the summer, when I got a chance to welcome George Bush there as President, so I got kind of the bookend with the two presidents.

The… I think the first big thing that happened, that at least I can recall now was actually negotiating the Preševo Valley ceasefire. You will recall that there was this guerrilla movement going on in Preševo and I remember going down to Gjakova, and again playing sort of the mediator role with the Albanians. They had to negotiate kind of an agreement between the Thaçi Albanians and the Preševo

Albanians to sort of try and control this and put an end to the struggle. And, boy, you know you do forget, but I forget all of the terms of the discussion, but that's what happend. And the leader of the Preševo Albanians was named, what was his name? Jonuz, he wound up in jail subsequently.

Anna Di Lellio: I don't remember, the UÇPMB [Liberation Army of Preševo, Medveđa and Bujanovac].

Christopher Dell: Sorry.

Anna Di Lellio: UÇPMB was the ...

Christopher Dell: UÇPMB was the organization.

Anna Di Lellio: And maybe you were in Gjilan, not in Gjakova.

Christopher Dell: Gjilan, sorry, sorry, Gjilan. Yeah, I forget the names too, Gjilan. And we spent a tough day there of negotiating, but Thaçi was able to eventually get these guys to agree that they needed a ceasefire. They shouldn't be shooting. And, of course, that remained a fragile situation long afterwards and is still a subject of, like I say, it's a soap opera, I mean these storylines go on. But the ceasefire largely held, there were occasional incidents.

I can recall the first time we went out to, there was a, I think it was called OP-63, where there was an overlook in the Preševo Valley, where the U.S. Army had established a watch post, and, sort of, peering through binoculars into this very troubled region. And to my suprise, realizing that in the distance I could see Bulgaria, the mountains of western Bulgaria. The shock of how just small of a geography we are talking about, I mean, it was a direct line, probably thirty to forty kilometers at most, southern Serbia at that point, is very narrow, maybe a little bigger than that, but anyway you can see the mountains of Bulgaria.

Anna Di Lellio: It's like the Golan Heights.

Christopher Dell: Yeah, exactly, or in fact, being in Maputo and not being able to drive to South Africa, which you can do in forty five minutes now. The other, well the thing that I really sort of was most pleased about being able to do, which I think, fairly or not, take personal credit for. In the run up to Yugoslav elections in, when was that? October of 2000.

Anna Di Lellio: One?

Christopher Dell: No, it must have been 2000. I was gone by then.

Anna Di Lellio: 2000, yeah.

Christopher Dell: You get instructions from Washington. The UN has to go and observe these elections inside of Kosovo. Not observe them in the sense of, you know, validating them or being in the polling places, but we wanted to ensure, we wanted to know how many people show up at the polling places that day. Because what everybody expected, Milošević was going to claim there were two hundred

thousand votes in Kosovo and ninety eight percent of them had supported him and steal the elections that way. And so the goal was to be able to say, "No, we know that X number of people entered the polling station that day. And X would be way below two hundred thousand. We don't know how they voted, we have no idea, but only, this is the maximum number of voters there could have been."

And going to, so with these instructions, going to see Bernard Kouchner, and saying, you know, "Bernard, here is what you've got to do for us." And there was, it was late in the afternoon, in his offices down there in the Government Building. And I remember he broke out a bottle of Johnnie Walker Red, and we sat around drinking whisky and me persuading him that the UN had to take on this role, which was, as you can imagine, controversial, because it comes close to putting the UN in the middle of the political process. Not all of the member states were supportive of this, but I had developed a pretty good personal rapport with Kouchner over time. And so I feel that, you know, this meeting was really, sort of led him to say, "Yes, it's the right thing to do, and we are going to support that."

Jock Covey, who was the deputy and an American, subsequently told me that, years later told me that, a lot of his staff were very resistant, and he basically said to them, "Look the U.S. is the biggest contributor to the UN. They are paying a third of your salaries. This is payback time. We are going to do this." And they did. And we all went around, and I went and watched the elections that day too. From afar, they had people monitoring each polling station, I mean, literally sitting several hundred yards away watching with binoculars, and counting the number of people who in and out the door that day.

So, before the election results were announced, we could put out a number. And I believe the number was, I don't remember now. I want to say it was twenty thousand. There were twenty thousand potential voters that day from Kosovo. And, of course, that prevented Milošević from claiming he had won a massive, you know, overwhelming majority and, therefore, was the, had won elections as the whole.

Anna Di Lellio: You mentioned your wife before. Is it, did you meet her in Bulgaria?

Christopher Dell: Yes, well, I met here at language training for Bulgaria.

Anna Di Lellio: Okay.

Christopher Dell: Yeah, she was a… her then-husband had won a Fulbright to come to the U.S. She was a young new mother, attending grad school at American University, and the Bulgarian Department at the Foreign Service Institute needed a, we had a larger than normal class, they needed an extra teacher. So she was hired for three months to be a Bulgarian language teacher. It was her first professional job in America. She is now an American diplomat herself and is serving in Pakistan with USAID.

We met then and then we stayed in touch in Bulgaria only because our children are the same age. Her son was three months younger than my daughter, and so summers in Bulgaria they would get together and play, and I got to know the family and stayed in touch. But, when I went on to first, Kosovo, and

then Angola, we had lost for many years until I was in Zimbabwe and we rediscovered each other. And by which point we were both divorced and had a different life, and one thing leads to another (chuckles).

Anna Di Lellio: Yes, in fact, you know, my question was also leading to, this kind of life… problematic to, to keep a family, I mean, if you travel a lot, you moved, just have a sense of …

Christopher Dell: It is very hard on families, especially in the modern age where, you know, spouses have their own careers. And it's very disruptive to the non-Foreign Service spouse. You know, you come back to Washington for a period of years, and every three or six years, you're forced to move to another country. What does that do to the spouses career?

The State Department has really wrestled with this, and not very successfully. So a lot of FSOs end up marrying other Foreign Services Officers and then you try and manage your careers. What works very well for some people is the trailing spouse, often these days is a man as much as a woman although historically women were the ones that were expected to follow, freelance career. You know, I had a colleague in Mozambique, for example, the second time around, she was a graphic designer. Modern technology, she could work from almost anywhere, but yes, it's one of the challenges that the Foreign Services faces, and it's hard on families.

It all sounds very romantic and nice, but, you know, uprooting every couple of years, having to deal with moving is a nightmare. Nut new situations, new friends, new bosses, new school for your kids, if that's, if you have children. People in the U.S. make a lot about the sacrifice that our military make, and they certainly do, but the Foreign Service isn't far behind in terms of the impact this career has on families. Most of the time we are not being sent to war zones and being shot at; but these days, and recently, that's the case too. So, yeah, it's a real challenge. It's like anything else, there are tradeoffs. There are wonderful rewards in the career. You get to go to places and meet people you never would have dreamed of. I never thought of going to Africa when I joined the Foreign Service, and opened up a whole part of the world for me that I never expected, but there's a cost too.

Anna Di Lellio: When you were in Kosovo, there was, immediately, this was really, really post-conflict…

Christopher Dell: Yes.

Anna Di Lellio: 'Cause the war ended a few months earlier. How did it compare to maybe someplace like Mozambique? I mean, you have been, how did you, did you feel safe, did you feel safer?

Christopher Dell: You know, when I first got to Kosovo, it was my first experience having my own security detail. It was the first country I had lived in where that was necessary, and these were very high-end professionals, military units that have gone on to become quite famous for other reasons. But I never felt unsafe, maybe because of their presence, I never felt unsafe. I think there was the potential risk that Milošević might try something, you know, so that's the reason they were there. But

as far as the Albanian people were concerned, they would have protected me long before my security detail needed to. I never felt unsafe at all in that way. There was a landmine risk, unexploded ordinance and all of that, so you knew you had to be careful where you walk and going out into unknown meadows was not something very advisable. No, but overall, I liked it from the very start. I felt good being there.

I felt we were welcomed, obviously, I felt the work was rewarding. God knows it was challenging, especially in the beginning. I was living in a single room. I won't shock your audience too much with the story of the rat that was on me, on my bed three times one night, including the last time, on my neck. Conditions were rough. I got a cat. That solved that problem, who only passed away just this year. The… but it was great, it was exciting, it mattered, it was front and center in Washington's attention. I mean, so for a professional career diplomat, it was not a better place to be, despite the personal difficulties of living in a place like that.

But, you know, we had electricity, we had water, which was something a lot of the population had. One of the big issues we were still dealing with was trying to create warm rooms for people so that they could survive the winter, that first winter when there was a complete breakdown of all systems and services. So you never felt like you had the right to complain, I mean, you know, for us, it was kind of like, it was kind of like living back in a college dorm room, while other people were struggling with a lot more difficult situations. And so it was really rewarding to go back ten years later, eleven years later, and see the recovery of the country.

I remember going out, and your perspective keeps changing, to one of the villages out there in the Dukagjin, where the Serbs had gone through the village and hammered it, and everything was was burned and shot up and flattened, and the mosque had collapsed, and the minaret was down, and I had never seen such destruction before. But subsequently I was assigned to Angola as I said, and I saw worse things there. I mean towns that had been the frontline in the civil war for twenty years (chuckles). Put everything in Kosovo back into a slightly different perspective again.

Kosovo was very fortunate that that phase of the struggle was as short as it was, and I can only imagine how, as bad as it was, how much worse it would have been if it had gone on for a couple of years. It would not have been this one village, it would have been, everything would have been shot up the way I saw Angola looking subsequently, which again reinforces my belief that we did the right thing, meaning we stopped that before it had gotten even worse than it already was.

Anna Di Lellio: So from Kosovo you jumped to, back to, sort of, from the winter of 2000, which I remember very well, you go to Africa again?

Christopher Dell: In the autumn of 2001, yeah, or, of course, the spring in Southern Hemisphere, but, yes, October of 2001. Yeah, I left Kosovo, so George Bush came for a visit. We met at Bondsteel. He spent very few hours on the ground. You remember he got elected on "The U.S. Army, the world's finest military, doesn't do nation-building," and Kosovo was a nation-building project. So he didn't come there convinced about all of this, this was his predecessor's war after all.

Anna Di Lellio: You were in Kosovo on 9/11?

Christopher Dell: No.

Anna Di Lellio: No.

Christopher Dell: I had just left. I mean I had left a few weeks off. I had left a week after Bush's visit.

Anna Di Lellio: Okay.

Christopher Dell: Came back, I had my leave and whatever. My, not my Senate hearings, on 9/11, I was actually in what I jokingly call "ambassadorial bootcamp" in the State Department, where they kinda run you through this course on what it, and they kind of try to bring career people and political appointees and try and help the political appointees understand what they're getting into, many of them have no prior government service. And we were sitting in a room in the State Department, and all these people started scurrying in and out, so something was going on.

At the break, one of our instructors sort of says, "Well, you know there's been a, a plane has gone into the," Was it the North Tower hit first? "The North Tower. And at the break, we turn on the TV, and just as we did, the second plane hit the other tower, and the instructors were like, "No, no, no, there's no problem here. If they were a real threat, DS, diplomatic security, would tell us." And I turned to one of my colleagues and said, "You know what? I am getting out of here, because, I don't, don't think, here is a lesson for you, Mr. Political Appointee, don't rely on DS to save your life" (chuckles); And you know, minutes later, of course, the plane went into the Pentagon. And I remember, at that point, everybody was leaving the State Department. It was pretty clear that something big was going on.

So I could remember walking up the street and hearing explosions in the background and seeing the column of smoke coming out of the Pentagon. And meanwhile Washington was, everybody was trying to leave town. Huge traffic jam, nobody could go, I was staying in a place close by, I could walk. But later that afternoon, the town was eerie. I went out for a walk and I was looking for a pay phone so I could call my mother in New Jersey. This was pre-everybody having cellphones, but the cellphone network was down, and how eerily silent Washington was. It was a ghost city, it was a strange day.

Anna Di Lellio: And so from there?

Christopher Dell: To Angola.

Anna Di Lellio: To Angola.

Christopher Dell: To Angola.

Anna Di Lellio: Which is an interesting place.

Christopher Dell: Where there was another African civil war underway. Jonas Savimbi and UNITA were still in the closing phases of their struggle against the MPLA government in Rwanda. The U.S. had a

much more complicated history there than in Mozambique. In Mozambique, we never supported RENAMO, although Jesse Helms[3] tried to drag us into that war the way we were involved in Angola. The State Department always resisted, and very cleverly published a report in the early 90's, the Gersony Report, about the RENAMO atrocities, which then made them untouchable. And so we never did get dragged in. But we had had this history in Angola, of course, although by the time I had came there in 2001, we had distanced ourselves from UNITA for nine years. Because they refused to accept the results of the '92 elections, went back to war. At that point, we cut them off, and it became much more of a real guerrilla movement at that point.

So I got there in October of 2001, and the war was still going on, you know, it felt very much like Mozambique in that Luanda was somewhat isolated. The only way to get around the country was to fly. And because we were providing a lot of aid and a lot of food, we had, you know, a charter aircraft service that we could call on to make trips. So that is when I went to Huambo and I saw this town that had been the frontline in the civil war for years and years. Literally one side of the street versus the other, and the buildings all shot up and bombed.

And then in February of 2002, of course, Savimbi gets killed and UNITA collapsed almost instantly. And there was a lot of lingering doubt in Washington that they really had collapsed, because there were a number of people who had these long-standing relationships, they kind of found it hard to let go and to accept the idea that UNITA had, in fact, stopped functioning as a guerrilla movement, as a resistance army. And I had quite a lot of tension with the State Department about this, saying, "Guys, it's over. You don't understand, this is not a negotiated settlement. The government won, UNITA has been defeated." And the survivors from UNITA, they'd been living out in the remote eastern provinces of Angola for years. There was no food, they were surviving on wild honey they would find in the bush.

It's a famous story: Savimbi was well-fed, and he actually shot his cook for stealing food that was meant for him. Another cook, therefore, died of starvation, rather than risking getting caught stealing food, right? So they were in desperate shape. Savimbi goes, the whole thing collapses. I then find myself doing very familiar things, working with AID to get tin cups and pots and pans and things out to the demobilizing UNITA forces, who were being brought in to… I forget the name now, but you had this, but the demobilization camps. And subsequently one of the senior leaders in the Africa Bureau at State sort of said, you know, "Gosh, Chris, you were really on top of things. You really did a good job all on your own despite us." It was kind of that kind of thing, trying to get things done without Washington, overcoming Washington's resistance.

And they launched the formal peace negotiation. And again it was very much like Mozambique, the two parties, you know, in Angola, there was the Troika, the three countries that had been asked by the parties to be involved were Portugal, the United States, and at this point Russia. And so we were the three international mediator partners. But it didn't really work out like Mozambique because it really was a different ending. And UNITA halfheartedly was participating in this process and not really putting

[3] Long-time influential conversative U.S. senator from North Carolina who was influential in foreign policy.

up much of a fight. And there was nothing any of us could do to sort of make them negotiate harder to get more, you know, to get more democratic norms accepted and let a more level playing field for the first elections.

And then one day we had called them to a meeting and they basically signed surrender documents. They just gave everything away, and I was furious, I called in the name was… the *nom de guerre* was Goto, and I forget his real name right now. Everybody, everybody in Angola has a *nom de guerre*, he was Goto, he was the surviving leader of UNITA. And he came to my office and he was staring at his shoe caps. I said, "I got one question, how much do you cost?" He kind of stared more deeply at his shoe caps.

The truth is the Government of Angola bought peace. Although it wasn't a democratic outcome, it didn't build democratic norms in the system, it's safeguards and the things that we were all hoping to sort of see in the result for this. The truth is it was a more definitive end to their war than the one in Mozambique ever had. They paid money to the UNITA guys. They wanted houses and cars and medical treatment. And Goto was grateful to the government. They actually, he was starving to death. And they had, I sent him to South Africa and, you know, and take care of him for six months and feed him, you know, nutrition regimes, to survive.

José Eduardo Dos Santos, for whatever his many many faults as a leader, understood that he had the resources to secure a lasting peace in Angola, and he did. It didn't lead the kind of democratic government you want, but the country has never looked back; and, yeah, there has never been any hint that the war would re-erupt in Angola the way there's kind of this lingering, slow burning embers of that in Mozambique to this day, 24 years later, almost a quarter for a century later. So very different outcomes.

Once again the international crowd were all running around, peace and reconciliation process, you know, because we just had Bishop Tutu doing reconciliation in South Africa, so this was the flavor of the day. And again the Angolans wanted no part of it, and I mean ordinary Angolans, most ordinary Angolans just wanted it to be over and forgotten, and move on, and spend their efforts and have us spend our efforts on helping them get back on their feet and rebuild their lives, rather than settling scores on who did what to who when.

So that was Angola, it was quite an exciting time because you really did see this kind of recovery begin, and people coming out of the bush in terrible states. And I like to take pictures as a hobby, and one of the most haunting pictures I have ever taken are of these people, stick figures really, coming, emerging from the bush in the central highlands of Angola. And this one picture was very, kind of effecting, is this young women lying with her head in her daughter's lap, and the daughter picking nits out of her hair, because it as all she, the mother was clearly dying of starvation, and all the daughter could to help her was trying to get the lice out of her hair. The woman was probably dead a few hours later, because it was too late even for therapeutic feeding.

Another of an old man wearing rags that have turned the color of earth, kind of reddish yellow, squatting, picking up fallen grains of corn. There had been a food distribution, you know, American corn being distributed by the World Food Program, and this guy getting there too late or not qualifying in some way, sitting there picking individual kernels of corn out of the, out of the dirt. That is the kind of country it was at that point. Meanwhile, of course, diamonds and oil are making people in Luanda vastly rich.

And one of my takeaway lessons from that was the unintended consequences of well-meaning intervention, which probably applies in some senses to Kosovo. But one of them was, over forty years of civil war, first, the colonial struggle, but mostly the civil war. Twenty years of civil war, the government in Luanda, the lesson they had drawn was, the wellbeing of those people in the interior, where the guerrillas were operating, they're not our problem, that's for the internationals to deal with. Now this reflects ethnic tensions and things in the country too, but there was a real lack of commitment to do anything to help these people who were in desperate straits, and that kind of remains a challenge in Angola, to this day, I think, although I haven't spent much time there subsequently, where you see Luanda become this cancerous, monstrously big city, where lots of people are going because there is still more going on there, however desperate life is and terrible conditions they are living. Nonetheless it is better there than out in the countryside, where things are still struggling to get back on their feet.

Part Three

Anna Di Lellio: How much latitude do you have as an ambassador from Washington, when you disagree with the policies? And also because you know better being there?

Christopher Dell: That's one of the real tricks, I think, of the trade, and there's no single answer. I think it goes, it depends on the time and the place. In some places, you know, I mean Madeleine Albright, it didn't happen to me, but when Larry Rossin first got to Kosovo, and Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State was on the phone to him six times a day, including three in the middle of the night. He could hardly breathe. I always worked to establish a little space and try to create more latitude. One of the things I learned from Ambassador Bohlen, who is as close as anyone comes in America to being part of our natural aristocracy, I mean, she came from a Foreign Service family with a great heritage, and she knew her, she knew her role and she knew her rights, as well as her responsibilities, and she acted accordingly.

And I think if you act that way you create a little bit of that space for yourself. But you have to know how to be clever, how to tell Washington what it needs to know, and not tell them what they don't need to know. And again, it depends on how much in focus it is, the less the country is in focus, the more latitude you more naturally have. And there was a big distinction between my first and second time in Kosovo. But quite honestly, I'll tell you this for the record, the perception in Washington was, in some circles of Washington, I was too independent when I was in Kosovo the second time. Wasn't

toeing the line, or whatever the line happened to be, that was never particularly clear to me, because people weren't paying attention.

Anna Di Lellio: It was different in 2000.

Christopher Dell: It was different in 2000, when they were clearly paying a lot of attention. By 2009, it was yesterday's news, you know, the parade had moved on in Washington. I think that's ever more true. Kosovo is sort of {sweeps right hand away}, the whole region is ever less a focus of attention at the moment. Washington reacts to the crisis of the day and the headlines. And it's a good news-bad news story, Kosovo is not in the headlines today so it doesn't get a lot of attention. It's good news that it is not in the headlines, by and large. And so you have to sort of, it's an art, it's not a science. It's your reputation, it's the trust people have in you, it's whether you're getting it right. I mean if you are acting independently and making mistakes and getting it wrong, they will get you pretty quickly on that. If you're acting independently and doing the right things, and it turns out well, even though Washington may not have thought it was the right thing to do in the beginning; well success builds on success. And so as I say it's an art, it's the practice of diplomacy with your own capital, as much as diplomacy with other capitals. Yeah, so that's…

Anna Di Lellio: So after… so was Angola a success for you?

Christopher Dell: I…

Anna Di Lellio: In your career?

Christopher Dell: Yeah, in career terms, yes. I mean I was offered another embassy after that, to go to Zimbabwe.

Anna Di Lellio: Which is important.

Christopher Dell: Which was very much the center of attention in Washington at that point, because things with Mugabe had heated up and the white farmers being pushed out of their land, off their farms was a big issue. Generally considered one of the more important posts, Angola has never been regarded as particularly favorably by Washington. I think the entire Portuguese-speaking world suffers from this a little bit, just because there aren't that many Portuguese speakers and experts, and so it kind of gets overlooked a bit. I think that's true of Mozambique today, for example, even though these massive discoveries of offshore gas, I mean, it's strategically going to be very important very soon. But Zimbabwe was regarded as a big important country. It was a sign of favor, to put it that way, that I was asked to go there.

And the role of the American Ambassador there, unlike Angola, where I was sort of part of the process, and we were trying to develop better relations with the government, and we worked really hard at it. You know, I was one of the people that signed the final, I call it the "peace treaty," the final settlement of the war in Angola, you know, as a witness to it and the formal ceremony. So we had a very, sort of, not warm, because Angolans were historically suspicious of us for obvious reasons, having supported

UNITA for all of those years. But an improving relationship, and, of course, the country depended on the skill and abilities of the American oil companies that were producing this wealth that the country benefited from.

In Zimbabwe, it was a completely different role. My role there was to be public enemy number one. Mugabe was repressing the opposition, repressing his people, taking the farms away in the name of righting historic, you know, racial injustice, fair enough. But the economy was collapsing because the farms weren't being kept up, the irrigation system they depended on to produce in a dry country. So the people who were suffering were the majority black population of Zimbabwe. So our role there was to really support the opposition criticism of Mugabe. And I only ever had one meeting with him in three years, when I presented my credentials. I mean we all got summoned to the airport, anytime we had to go shake his hand and, but I had nothing to say to him, and he had nothing to say to me, so I never sought another meeting with him.

Nonetheless, I had kept a relatively low profile. I wasn't publically trying to sort of be aggressive or assertive for about a year. And then, about a year into it, they came after me publically in this ridiculous scenario where I had gone for, it was in October, because it was I remember it was the holiday weekend for Columbus Day, and there is a botanical garden in the middle of Harare, and a friend of mine had told me about this bird to go see there. It had a pale blue breast, as many times as I have told the story I always forget the name of the bird, might be the, this is going to sound terrible, it might have been the Blue Breasted Tit, but I forget now (laughs). Yeah, I know.

Anyway I saw the bird, and I am wandering around in this park, I stumble in the middle of an unmarked anti-aircraft installation. These antique pom-pom guns had been put there to defend the Presidential Palace, which was nearby, against whom I don't know, South African incursion, I don't know. So they detained me for about an hour until we sorted all of this out, right? You know. What was I doing there? What was I taking pictures of? Like these were deep-state secrets, right? The sergeant who first stopped me had to pass me to the lieutenant, to the capitan, to the, eventually it goes to the Colonel of the Presidential Guard. They escort me to the Palace to see the presidential guard colonel, and I'm, he is very apologetic. He said, "Oh sorry, please don't take this amiss. It was all a misunderstanding. Can we hang somebody for your trouble?" I said, "No (laughs), not necessary, you know, no harm, no foul."

Two days later, I'm actually back in Angola for the inauguration of the new embassy, and the headline comes out saying "Dell Arrested for Spying on the Government of Zimbabwe." From then on the story evolved, either I was prowling the bush looking for gay sex, or I was prowling the bush looking for the young prostitutes who worked there, or I was spying. It went on and on for like a week. It's just nonsense and on and on. All right, that's how we're going to play the game. I gave a speech out in the eastern part of the country in Mutare at the American University. It was a very dry academic speech in which I basically just cited the research of this American academic who said the storyline that, the storyline of the speech was the government's excuses over the caps of the agricultural economy are nonsense. Here is this data that show the old days, when there were droughts, production in

Mozambique[4] actually went up, because the irrigation systems were maintained and functioned. So the collapse of the economy had nothing to do with sanctions or the drought or any other excuses. It's failed government policy.

Well this caused, you would think that's kind of A fairly dry topic, but a huge ruckus and big headlines. My favorite of which is, and it hasn't come back yet from Mozambique, but it's only it's way. I framed it, it was on the front page of *The Daily Herald*, the government paper, "The President Says Dell Can Go To Hell" (laughs). So I kept that proudly in my office throughout the rest of my tenure in Zimbabwe, and I think even in Kosovo when I went back eventually. It is still one of my proudest, it's like being on Nixon's enemies list, you know to be on Mugabe's enemies list.

Well, from that point on, it was sort of open warfare. I quickly realized though that they were more afraid of me than I would have ever been of them. A lot of countries suffer from this syndrome that they're the center of the universe and the central concern of American foreign policy. And the president, Mugabe, really believed the United States might send the Marines in or something, you know. That was never going to happen, but as long as they believed that, I knew that I had a lot of latitude, back to your other question, about what I can say and do publicly. And it wasn't doing it just for the sake of doing it, it wasn't just fun and games. My objective, in a very bleak time for Mozambicans who didn't seek, were feeling hopeless.

The economy was collapsing, I mean inflation hit a million percent per year. You know, I mean, I was giving friends hundred thousand dollar Zimbabwean banknotes to light cigars because they're worth like half a penny. And soon the numbers were a trillion dollar notes, I mean, you can't even count the number of zeros in a trillion. Was to offer people some hope that somebody was standing up and saying no. Somebody could push back on Mugabe when nobody else could. The opposition leader was beaten and thrown in jail and left there to die for several days and I, the night he was taken, I went around to the jails with the British Ambassador looking for him, just so they knew we were on this. That was the situation. And so again, it wasn't just twisting his tail to twist it. It was to show people that they're not all powerful, that there is this little spark of hope out there.

I would say the lesson I learned though was the limit, the limits of what the Ambassador can do on his own. I didn't really have a lot of support in Washington. Condi Rice was the Secretary of State. You recall this was the era of the Axis of Evil and then… what was, what was the other term they had, but they defined the… the trilogy of non-democratic countries were Iran, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe. This was one of her speeches, there was a phrase for it, it wasn't Axis of Evil, but, I wish I could remember it right now. You forget the important things and I was, I wrote back a message saying, "Okay, well the low-hanging fruit on this list, the easiest one to deal with was North Korea, Iran, Venezuela, and Zimbabwe."

Well, on that list, the country that is most susceptible to, you know, change, and most fragile, and we could make a difference is Zimbabwe. I got no support. Basically a policy speech every five months

[4] The speaker means Zimbabwe.

saying, or four months saying, “Mugabe bad” was all Washington wanted to invest in Zimbabwe. And so I realized without more help than that, there is only so much you can do. And, you know, I left there and the situation didn’t change. It hasn’t changed. Despite the changes it hasn’t changed. You know, it still has a long way to go.

Anna Di Lellio: And the post was…

Christopher Dell: And then another reversal of roles to go to Afghanistan, where we were the best friends of the government of the country of all time, and you know.

Anna Di Lellio: For some.

Christopher Dell: For some, for the government. Well, you know, initially for the government, although Hamid Karzai was a complex man and increasingly hard to deal with for the two years that I was there. He came to see the United States not as the solution, but as part of the problem, and I could understand where he was coming from, that point of view. Again it goes back to my Angola experience, the unintended consequences of long-term intervention, you know, sometimes go in directions you don’t anticipate and expect. We could spend hours just talking about Afghanistan. Big complex problem, big complex country.

Anna Di Lellio: Did you do something? What is the thing you would say, “Well, I have done this in Afghanistan?”

Christopher Dell: (takes a long pause) I believe that our aid program there really has done a lot of good. We cited these statistics all the time, but in September of 2001, Afghanistan had something like seventy phone lines to the outside world. When I was there, already at that point, ten or twenty millions Afghans had cell phones, and so their connection to the world. But that’s kind of okay, you can argue over whether that makes any difference, I think education for girl children where they’ve been deprived of education. And now there’s a generation of Afghans girls, many of whom are now women, who’ve received a decent education. I think that is something you can be proud of. Where our efforts have come up short in Afghanistan, I think, you know, my takeaway lesson comes down to the limits of one's own culture in dealing with a foreign culture.

Anna Di Lellio: Yeah, but can you give me an example that is about you? What you did or…

Christopher Dell: All right, well.

Anna Di Lellio: For instance this cultural gap or that in Afghanistan maybe you suffered from more than in Portugal or Kosovo?

Christopher Dell: Okay, yes, well, in early 2009, after Obama’s Inauguration, you know, George Bush had a very close relationship with Hamid Karzai, and that was one of the strengths of our policy, it was the way they could deal with each other (chuckles). I should have probably put this on the record. I will. Come back to the time Obama came as a candidate. No, I’ll tell you right now. So Obama,

remember the trip that Obama made in July of 2008, he went to Afghanistan and then to Berlin, where he gave the big speech and was received by an adoring mob of two hundred thousand. Senator Obama comes to Kabul, and we have a meeting with Karzai, which is not warm. You could see they didn't know each other, they were trying to see who the other guy was. I mean, at that point it was pretty clear that Obama was going to be the Democratic candidate, so he was one of two men likely to be the next president, so Karzai had a big interest in trying to understand him and vis-a-versa.

After the meeting ends, Karzai takes him for a stroll around the courtyard of the old king's palace, where the presidency was set up in this garden. So it's a chance for them to chat a little bit more one on one. Of course, there's this entourage of all of their followers and myself and all of the American Western media out there. And at the end of this little walk around the gardens, Karzai turns to say goodbye to Senator Obama and hands him an Astrakhan hat, which is a luxury good there, you know, it's made from the skin of an unborn lamb, and it's a very prestige object. Only the most, sort of, you know, upper class people wear them, can afford them, and Obama, clearly looking nervous, says, "Oh thank you very much!"

And he tries to hand it to his aide, and Karzai was like, "No, no, no, you got to try it on." And you see Barack Hussein Obama thinking, "There's no way on God's green earth that I'm putting on a Muslim hat in front of all the American media." Right? "It would be the end of my campaign." And that was the moment their relationship never recovered from. Karzai was deeply offended that Obama didn't welcome this and try the hat on. Obama is thinking to himself, "Why did you just try to blindside me in front of everybody in the world and, you know, undercut my campaign?" Neither one of them intended that, right, that wasn't {moved palms in a back and forth over each other}, but clearly their relationship never recovered from that moment (chuckles), and it was never warm or close, the way it had been with Bush or understanding.

So in February of 2009, Obama's first big foreign policy decision, against his instincts apparently, but let himself be convinced to have a mini surge. He is going to send an additional thirty thousand Americans troops into Afghanistan. Meanwhile, there are elections looming in the background. Karzai is supposed to have elections, he is not supposed to run and stand and win the presidency again. And low and behold, who appears in the scene as the senior American in charge of all things Afghan? The aforementioned Richard Holbrooke, who at this point was even larger in life, in his own mind at least, but clearly disappointed that he's not Secretary of State, clearly looking for a role, clearly looking for a Dayton moment, where he is going to be sort of, once again, be the only person who can negotiate an end to this long-running conflict. And it was terrible dealing with him again.

The Ambassador was away, I was chargé and some démarche about elections had to be delivered. I am at a dinner with Kai Eide, the UN Special Representative, and Holbrooke is phoning me during dinner. I don't answer the phone, and he is screaming at me, "Don't you ever not answer the phone when I call you. I don't care where you are, what you're doing." So we basically, we're getting ourselves into a very conflictual relationship very quickly with Karzai, who Holbrooke didn't know how to handle. Dick only had one trick, he would grab you by the throat, throw you on the ground, and stomp on you until you

surrender. That worked with a Balkans thug like Milošević. It didn't work with Karzai. Karzai once said to me something that I think is very profound that explained it all. He says {lowers tone of voice}, "Ambassador Dell, politics in my country is like writing on water." And Holbrooke could never get his hand around Karzai's throat and throw him on the ground, right? He always just got away, like writing on water.

So this is early days and it's clearly going badly already. Karzai is not responding as we expected him to on election stuff. So I asked to go and see him and I said, "Let me explain to you, Mr.President. I don't know if anybody has told you this, but you are Barack Obama's biggest problem right now." "Well, what do you mean, my friend, Barack?" "No, no, no, he thinks he has just taken, he has risked his presidency gone way out on a limb for you by agreeing to this increase in the number of American soldiers here, and he is not sure it's the right thing. He thinks he has bet his presidency on it and yet, you are not coming through and following up on your promises about the elections." And it was kind of like, he sat back on his chair and thought about it quietly for a second, and said, "Thank you for explaining it to me, I didn't understand." Now to be honest, it did not lead to any better behavior. I mean he had his own interests to follow. But I think it at least helped him, I mean, you know, be less outrageous. It calmed the waters for a while. Ultimately, the election was difficult and problematic and nothing I think wasn't going to change that.

In the long run, our shortcomings in Afghanistan I believe come down to we cannot deal with Afghanistan on its own terms, within its own terms. Because the way Afghanistan was run historically, I won't go so far in saying successfully, because you know, it's one of the world's most backward countries, you know, historically, and all that. But the Pashtun King basically had a relationship with every leader in the country, down to the lowest sub-chief of every tribe amongst the Pashtuns and everybody else. And it was a very simple system of reward and punishment. If you did what was expected, you were rewarded. If you didn't then you were punished. First, we kill you goats and sheep. Then, we kill your women and then we kill you. Brutal but effective.

What Hamid Karzai needed to make that system work was the resources to make it work. He needed walking-around money, and we can't give that to him. We can only give him project money, but then we expect an accounting trail. You know, we want to see that every penny is accounted for and that the school was built for the girl children and not that the money wound up in some guy's pocket because they needed to keep him on side for the week. And it's just we couldn't deal with Afghanistan on its terms, and it can't deal with us on our terms. We are just too different from each other, and that's always going to make it hard to succeed there. To this day, we have struggled.

I think we were doing better under the Bush years. I thought that we were really getting some traction, even though we didn't have half the military force, and we had sort of been forgotten in the struggle over Iraq. But it was also typical Dick that, when you come on, everything your predecessor did was stupid and wrong, and you're going to do the exact opposite. So the Bush people had tried all of these things, they didn't work. They tried something else. Holbrooke went back to the first set of mistakes

and tried to reinvent all of these mistakes once again, and I don't think it produced any better result. But that ended mercifully after slightly under two years, and I got to go to Kosovo.

Anna Di Lellio: Did you ask to go to Kosovo, or were you sent there?

Christopher Dell: On 9/11/2009, I'd been in the country all of two months, Deputy Secretary of State John Negroponte came on a trip and I escorted him around. And we were riding around, I think, in Jalalabad, in an armored vehicle. I had met him in Angola when he was at the UN as our ambassador.

Anna Di Lellio: You were two years, not two months.

Christopher Dell: No, I had been two years into it. And we are riding around and he is asking me a little bit what I have been done since Angola and Zimbabwe, what I had done before. And I said, "I had been, you know, in Kosovo right after the war." He said, "Oh, would you ever consider going back?" I said, "In a heartbeat." He basically said, "Done." So I knew from that moment on that he was going to, I was going to be nominated to be ambassador. A year and a half, two years hence and that's what worked out. I didn't quite volunteer but certainly went very willingly. I viewed it as, kind of, an unfinished project. It was something I had been involved in the beginning, and wanted to go back and after, and now independent.

I will say one of the things that I am proudest of having actually achieved in Afghanistan, a place where we achieved a limited number of things, was to persuade Karzai to recognize Kosovo. And basically the argument was, you know, "Islamic country helped by NATO {extends hands away from body}, Islamic country helped by NATO and the United States {moves hand across his body}, you owe us this much!" And, so, Afghanistan was the second country to recognize, I think Honduras was first and then Afghanistan. I mean, a matter of hours of difference of timing but… before us, before the United States even, but I think that was deliberate. We didn't want to be the first for optical reasons.

Anna Di Lellio: Now, did you feel you knew Kosovo better than Afghanistan? Although, I mean, the culture, I mean. When you went back, it felt like, "Okay, I am not going to have the same problem that I had with Karzai."

Christopher Dell: Very much so, I mean, I certainly felt like I knew the players. I mean, it's a smaller country so it's easier to sort of learn a lot about it very quickly 'cause there is just less of it. Not to say the politics aren't just as complex, and the history as deep, but it was just less material. But, also because it was essentially the same people, at least on the Albanian side, as I dealt with previously. The only Albanian leader who was no longer there and in place, of course, was Ibrahim Rugova, who had passed away. President Sejdiu was a name I hadn't been familiar with before. But otherwise, you know, Hashim Thaçi, Ramush Haradinaj, all these people were individuals I had dealt with previously and knew pretty well, and had always had good working relationships with. And the issues, while they had evolved were, you know, largely the same.

I guess there were a few changes in the international institutional structure. I mean, the ICO existed, which of course hadn't been the previous time around and the role of the UN was much reduced. You know, it was kind of a pale figment of what it had once been there in terms of, the influence they had and the decision-making capability, and because of the way the situation had evolved. And whereas before the SRSG [Special Representative of the Secretary General] was really calling the shots that wasn't the case when we went back the second time. But on the Albanian side, it was largely the same characters. Many of the same Serbian characters, I mean, Ivanović was still a player. Bishop Artemije, Father Sava, all these people were still individually I had known the first time around. Rada Trajković, although she had become less active and more marginalized.

There was a new class of Serbian leaders, a new group of Serbian leaders, who seemed more willing to work with the situation that had been handed to them in the interest of trying to find, you know, have a better life for their communities, more freedom to breathe. People like Slobodan Petrović, but it was pretty easy to step back into the place, even some of the same restaurants, you know, Tiffany (laughs) was there, you know, it is nice to go back and see places. It's always nice to go back to a place you've been. Not so often do you get a chance to go back and carry on working there.

Anna Di Lellio: So you knew the person, all these leaders personally well, but did you feel like you knew the culture?

Christopher Dell: Yeah.

Anna Di Lellio: Or the place, the people?

Christopher Dell: I felt yes, yes, maybe deceiving myself, but I felt like I knew it, and I knew the place and the people. I understood, you know, the thing that Albanians always, the code. I knew the history of the rivalries. I knew about the history of the feud, the blood feuds, the history, the religion. I felt, again, any diplomat who thinks he goes to, or she goes to a foreign country and really understands the way the people do is deceiving themselves. The trick is to always understand enough. You may not see very deep below the surface, but you have to be able to read what is going on below the surface from the signals that make it to the top to be able to say, "Okay, if this is happening it must be an indication of this," without being party to all of those secret deals that go down in the back rooms. And, you know, who knows whom, who did what to whom, whose relationship is what, you're never going to understand all of that.

It's funny that was one of our problems in Afghanistan, when these famous British frontier agents would go and live for twenty years in a district and I saw this, we had some people do research in the British archives. And one of these agents is leaving in the 1920s from his district in one of eastern provinces, and it's sixty pages of the names of people that he is paying off to keep the peace. This is one district of one province. There are about thirty districts in a province and about thirty provinces, right? Unless you are willing to invest an awful lot more than the U.S. government does in understanding, you're never going to understand it at that level. And the way the Albanian Kosovars

understand their country the way we never will, so the trick is learning to read from the surface well enough that you understand what's going on, even though you don't have perfect clarity and vision.

Anna Di Lellio: What kind of relationship did you have with people? Because in Kosovo you were both as an American Ambassador, you were very much loved but also a little scared because you had an enormous power. The American Ambassador is the most influential foreigner or public figure in Kosovo. So how did that kind of influence your relationship with people?

Christopher Dell: You know I always, I understood the authority that came with the position, and I will come back to that piece in a moment. In my dealings with individual Kosovars, I always, whether I succeeded or not is not for me to judge, I was always consciously open and humble. I don't like to use that word, people use it far too much, modest. I always tried to deal with them just as people. And you know, I was recognized and a lot of people would come up to me in the street and say something. I always tried to give them time. If they wanted to have their picture taken, I would always agree.

I remember one family, I was walking out of, I was with a friend, a Portuguese friend who was just visiting the country, driven in his motorcycle. And we were walking down that street in Gjilan, where all the old stores, not Gjilan, Gjakova, where all the storefronts were rebuilt after the war, all of the wooden storefronts. And we are walking around these streets and this couple comes up, oh you know, my people could translate for me. "Would you cut our daughter's hair? Would you cut the first lock of hair?" So this is a big part of the, the {waves his hand in a circular motion}, so yes I agreed, you know. I tried to deal with people as people, always be friendly and open, always have time to talk to them and trying to listen to their stories and learn something from them. Because I knew I was also the big *macher*[5] there who was looking to make things happen. And this was one of the real tensions of that job in Kosovo, and I know I struggled with it that whole time. I am certain my predecessor did and my successors too, I fear.

America plays, the American Ambassador plays a little bit of the role of a parent in Kosovo, right. Our job is to help Kosovo grow from newborn, like the big sign said, to an independent adult making its own way in the world. And like anyone who has raised a child, you know that your job is to make your child let go of your hand and walk for them, take those first steps on their own. You know, it is always a question of when and how fast you push them and how far do you go, but ultimately they're not going to be successful in life if they're too dependent on you. Therefore, you need to encourage them to take more steps on their own.

I used to jokingly say, only not joking in Kosovo, the problem is everytime you did they ran for the damn window immediately like they were going to jump out of it. The minute you let go of their hands, problems started, and then they would come running back to you, you know, "Save us, save us! Find the solution. Help us, you know, only you can pull this together and make us play together nicely." And they say it, that was a constant struggle. How much to sort of to respond to that and how much to say, "Nope, this time you gotta do it on your own."

[5] Yiddish for an important person.

And you may recall the incident, it was fairly on, early on, when I got back in 2009. I am thinking November 2009, December, where Thaçi suddenly announces one day that he is breaking up the coalition government. And it was in the evening, and the phone starts ringing, and Skënder Hyseni is calling me, "You got to talk to Thaçi, this is…." And I was like, "No, guys, this is coalition politics, you don't need me to work this out between yourselves." I actually refused to help, and then they did work it out. I mean, they all thought better of it in the morning and they didn't break up the government for a few more months, and things went on. When they were demarcating the boundary with Macedonia and, you know, Fletcher Burton, an American diplomat, had done the Lord's work, these very detailed discussions.

I mean, in some cases, literally centimeters of territory between Macedonia and Kosovo, old maps and villages, working it all out. Macedonians finally agreed, the government agrees, and I am driving out somewhere near Peja, the phone rings. I forget now who called me, "We are all waiting for the parliament to approve this and the President is not here." "What do you mean the President is not there?" I said, "Sejdiu is not here." I call him and say, you know, "Mr. President, what's going on? "Oh, nobody told me." "Mr. President, you've got to go to school today. You've got to go to the classroom, and you've got to do what you've got to do." It was that sort of thing.

It was harder than that still because I don't feel that I really had the kind of committed partners from the rest of international community that was, that we needed there to succeed, which, therefore, only magnified the role of the American in ways that I didn't want to see happening, but I was powerless to stop it from happening because there was nobody else to turn to. And at different times and different places, different people were more supportive or less supportive. But there was never, it was always a challenge to maintain that coalition of the people committed to moving Kosovo forward.

Anna Di Lellio: There was no point anymore?

Christopher Dell: Well, there was, there absolutely was. But, you know, the European Union had its own perspective and its own set of issues. The ICO had its own perspective and issues and all of these things overlapped in very complex ways that meant that there was no, that meant it was difficult to maintain consensus about the way forward. And when these issues flared up about what to do in the North. It was always the perennial problem of what to do in the North. But, I, early one, so I discovered this new group of Serbs, who were willing to be supportive of the changes that had happened, in the name of looking for a better deal from their own community. And, Lord forgive me because I don't remember the details, so that the elections in the fall of '09, was it '09, when the municipal elections were held? Yes, I believe so. And I say to my aid director, borrowing a page from Frank Carlucci's book, "We are going to go and spend money in those Serb communities and show them there is value in the Kosovo state."

Trash can, trash collection, putting out trash containers, which they didn't have, trash was being thrown out in the streets. And there was a lot of pushback, not on the trash cans, but from the whole election from the British and from the ICO. I don't remember now the reasons why they were opposed

to this, doing it. Oh, we couldn't do it if they weren't going to hold them in the North at the same time. I think that was the argument. "So can we be sure? If we try to hold them in the North and they don't work?" I said, "Well, create the conditions, if people don't vote that is their choice, but we can create the conditions." So, eventually, we go to have elections, and it was maybe my best day in Kosovo when tens of thousands of Serbs actually showed up and voted in these elections and it worked. I mean, people decided, "Okay, Belgrade is doing nothing for us. We have some of our own leaders. Let's get them in positions of power and maybe they can deliver things to the community. And, look, things have already started to happen. We have a trash collection now."

I think that was kind of the high-water moment. I knew that it was going to go well, but things had changed in some deep way. I went with Hashim Thaçi at some point. He wanted to go and meet in a Serb community, which itself was a remarkable shift from nine years earlier. Sitting in the living room of some poor farm's, some Serb farmer, I think this was around Gjakova, no, it was like Lipjan, the Lipjan area. Him being welcomed into the Serb guy's living room, sitting down, being offered *rakija*.[6] The two of them were talking about his issues as a farmer, and Thaçi, when we left, said "Get him a tractor."

Retail politics at its most basic, kind of, the job of mayors is to make sure the lights are on, and the trach gets collected, and the schools are open. This is real retail, they were doing retail politics. It wasn't about ethnicity. It was about how you get guys to come out and vote, and I thought this was a remarkable shift in the underlying dynamics between the two ethnic groups. And then the elections happened and there were enough Serbs who voted that it was a legitimate outcome. They elected people and that was legitimate, and they could form part of the government. They formed their own municipal councils, and I think that was kind of a high-water mark in the relationship between the two communities and the hope that we could improve those.

I haven't followed it in the last few years closely at all, but it seems things have slipped quite a bit since then. Belgrade has managed to reassert itself and stirred up all the old arguments again. And the progress we made has probably largely slipped away. I fear the net result is Serb communities again are more isolated then they were, and probably struggling more for jobs and municipal services and all those things that they were, say 2009 to '12.

Anna Di Lellio: What is the best thing you have done in Kosovo in your estimation? For Kosovo.

Christopher Dell: (deep sigh) I haven't thought of this in a long time. So many things that went on. We fought a long hard fight (pause) to keep control of the borders, especially in the North. When EULEX, to a lesser extent NATO, KFOR, most international community, you know, were prepared to let the Serbs get away with pushing the Albanians out, the Kosovars out altogether, and having no presence at the border posts. Remember there was this period of boycotts with the trucks? I guess Serbia had said, "No trucks from Kosovo are allowed into Serbia", so they said, "No trucks from Serbia can come into Kosovo." And, so the Kosovo government retaliated this way.

[6] *Rakija* is a very common alcoholic drink made from distillation of fermented fruit.

And I remember calling Thaçi and saying, “Hashim, you have no control over your borders. Did you know that five hundred trucks from Serbia came in today,” or maybe it was fifty, I forget the number. “What?” And then he went a little ballistic and took some fairly rash actions that I wouldn’t have counseled, but I didn’t, I was letting him take his own responsibility. It led to the loss of life, but ultimately it forced EULEX to reestablish a presence, start flying the Kosovar customs and immigration people up to the border post, keeping them there, protecting them. So I think, at that point, the country was very much on the brink of losing control entirely of the North. That may still happen, you know, years later the issues haven’t gone away. So I think that was very important. I know what you want to ask me about.

Anna Di Lellio: I didn’t ask.

Christopher Dell: You didn’t, but I know it’s on the, you know. Everyone wants to talk about how Atifete became president. And before I address that, I need to make clear something that has never been understood by the nattering classes of Kosovo.

Anna Di Lellio: The nattering?

Christopher Dell: Yeah, that’s a step down from chattering. All the people time and again who say, “Oh, you internationals, the only thing you about is stability here. You’ll put up with Thaçi or you’ll put up with this or anything in the name of stability.” And I always said, “That so misunderstands what our objectives are.” It goes back to the parent who wants a child who’s successful. Our goal here is viability, you have, if you’re going to succeed, if you are going to be an independent country, you have to be viable. You have to have the ability to create jobs, have an economy, run your own politics, and find your way in the world.

Part Four

Christopher Dell: You’ll recall there was a period where Kosovo lost two presidents in the space of a couple of months, removed from office by decisions of the constitutional court, Sejdiu and Pacolli had elections. They were inconclusive in the way that Kosovo elections are always inconclusive, the votes sort of divided in thirds, and nobody has a clear majority. The elections take place, Behgjet Pacolli's price for supporting a coalition government was that he was going to be president. Not an outcome I welcomed, but it’s democratic politics, he held the power in his hands. He could bring the system to a grinding halt, or he could play along. So he was elected president. I think everybody kind of felt that they did the necessary. Shortly after taking office, he is, the election is, the Constitutional Court decides the election is not, wasn’t proper and the procedures weren’t correct. Back into crisis mode. Now what?

Weeks are spent where Thaçi and Isa Mustafa and Pacolli are negotiating with each other, trying to find a solution, they don’t have a solution. I hosted many meetings at my residence for a chance for them

to talk to each other and try to negotiate. Finally, it comes down to Mustafa says, “All right, Behgjet, I’ll go, I’ll go back to the LDK, to my leadership, and I’ll ask them to support you in the name of getting out of this crisis, moving the country along, but I can’t promise I am going to be able to deliver.” These are not the words he used, of course. And I say, “Look, guys, I’m all in favor of you guys giving it one more try. But if it doesn’t work, we need to think about alternatives. We need another name that we all can agree on. I don’t have preference for who that is, so put on your thinking caps.”

Well, not surprisingly, given the state of affairs of that time, Mustafa comes back the next day and says, “My leadership hasn’t agreed, we can’t support you, Behgjet.” And I say, “All right, well, like I told you we are going to propose names then.” And I think it was the same day or it might’ve been the following day, but we didn’t really have a clear idea of who it might be either. But my deputy said, “You know, Atifete Jahjaga, she’s competent, she’s capable, she’s nonpartisan. She is the kind of person that the writers of the Constitution had in mind when they created the Office of the President. Somebody who would represent the nation and is above political fray.” And I said, “Michael, that’s a brilliant idea and I am going to propose her.”

So the next morning, when we met with all of them, that’s what I did. I said, “Okay, well, you know, I said I am going to give you a name.” And Thaçi said, “Okay, but as long as it's not a journalist.” We all knew who he meant. And I said, “No, it’s not.” And then I said, “How about the Deputy Commander of the National Police Force?” And they were kind of like, “Who’s that?” Well, I said, “It's Atifete Jahjaga.” “Oh, yeah, Okay.” Thaçi and Mustafa looked at each other and said, “I don’t have a problem with that, do you?” “No, I don’t have a problem with that.” Behgjet sat there scowling, but at that point he couldn’t say no, he couldn’t say much. So I understand where the whole legend of “the envelope” comes from.

You know this was Behgjet making mischief, trying to delegitimize Atifete from the very beginning, because he was resentful that he wasn’t President. And I can understand that, but I don’t respect him for it because I think it was disrespectful to the country and to the viability of Kosovo’s political system. So to an extent, yes, we proposed a name that much in the legend is true, but the leaders of the country who said, “You know what? This is a good solution. She’s not LDK, she’s not PDK, she’s not anything. She is a person that can fill the role of the presidency the way it was designed and sort of be above the fray.” Unspoken in their minds, of course, I’m sure was “And she’s not a threat to my political future,” which I think made her the ideal candidate in the sense that she was nonpartisan, and she was going to be the kind of president the presidency was supposed to be in Kosovo. And that was a real opportunity.

They all agreed the system didn’t work, that with these elections always winding up divided as they were, going to parliament, trying to let the president, and we should have direct elections of the President, thereafter, but, of course that doesn’t really serve the interest of anybody who’s in power running these parties. So when I left, that whole project was dropped as well. And so Kosovo is still stuck with this system, where the presidency is essentially just another piece on the chessboard in the unending, intramural chess match they play amongst the leading parties there.

Anna Di Lellio: What is your favorite part of Kosovo?

Christopher Dell: I really loved … Oh I know, Dragaš, down in the deep south. I love the Rugova gorge, it's beautiful. Prizren is, of course, special, but my connection to Dragaš is personal. My father-in-law comes from the same ethnic group as those people. He was born in what today is Serbia, but was then western Bulgaria, and they speak, their dialect is the same. So I went down there, I could actually speak to people down there in Bulgarian and they understood, they understood each other. And it's spectacular mountain scenery. I have never had better fresh yogurt, you know, just off the mountain side and out of the sheep in my life. I think it is a magical special part of the country.

Anna Di Lellio: The Gorani?

Christopher Dell: The Gorani, right, the Gorani.

Anna Di Lellio: And what was your best memory of Kosovo?

Christopher Dell: That is hard to say because there were so many good ones, you know, so many exciting times, so many satisfying times, fun times. You know, when you're a diplomat it's hard sometimes to feel that you're making a difference. I mean, diplomacy is by its nature slow and patient and indirect. And, in a place like Kosovo where America has an outsized role, you get a chance to make so many things better and a big part of that, if you're the Ambassador, is empowering your staff. But this is, this is, what I was describing is especially true for the more junior officers, who often spend years either issuing visas or writing cables that nobody reads.

Well, for them to go out and be interacting with senior politicians, negotiating, helping to move the ball forward, it was a great experience for them, and it's satisfying as a manager, because you've really done something to help them learn and get to foster their professional growth. I don't know, I really couldn't put my finger [on it], I'd have to think longer than you would want the tape to run of what was my absolute favorite experience there.

I've already mentioned a few of the things that were very satisfying, you know, seeing that the Serbs could be brought back into the process, if you, if you treated this as retail politics, not ethnic politics. Saving the system from paralysis was very important to me.

Anna Di Lellio: I was asking for something more personal.

Christopher Dell: Yeah.

Anna Di Lellio: If you got a good memory personally?

Christopher Dell: I know and I am thinking, there are so many, all of these things are personal as well as professional, you know. (pauses) I don't want to tell you that. That just sounds egotistical. You know, I guess the kind of visual memory that is best for me there is… well two things. I remember

going up to, what is the name of the pass between, on the way to Prizren if you go through the mountains in the south?

Anna Di Lellio: Gorina?

Christopher Dell: The high point, the pass there, there's this hotel that has been set up there.

Anna Di Lellio: Oh in Prizren, the Sharri Mountains

Christopher Dell: Yeah, the Sharri Mountains.

Anna Di Lellio: The Sharri Mountains.

Christopher Dell: Right where it reaches its peak and you start going down towards Prizren, there's this mountain, I mean just beautiful, the sunset. I remember standing up there in the very North, north of Peja, up against the Serb border there, there is a village on the high point and you could see almost the entire sweep of the country. I mean you could see the Sharri Mountains down in the south. You could see the Cursed Mountains off in the west. That's kind of dramatic, but you can take in the whole scope of Kosovo like that.

I had a fond memory of Eliza Dushku showing up. Fadil Berisha calls me at ten o'clock at night and said, "What are you doing?" I said, "I am actually getting ready for bed." "Well, look I am here with Eliza Dushku" and {whispers} I don't know who she was, but okay. "Why don't you come down and see us?" And then wind up going to a disco with her and her husband, her boyfriend at the time, who was a former LA Lakers guard, nice man. And going to this discotheque and just like the enthusiasm of the Albanians there because she was better known to them than she was to me at the time. Very exciting, then again, there is so much energy in the room. All those young people, and all of that excitement that this famous Albanian who had done well in the world and had come back. This was all pre, you know, I'm forgetting the name right now. I am trying to sound culturally hip, but I'm not.

Anna Di Lellio: Rita Ora.

Christopher Dell: Diya, Diya, Lia Dupa. Yeah, right. Rita Ora, Dua Lipa really hit the big time. She was one of the big Albanian names in the West. That was, that is a very fun memory. I supported, you know, this idea, and I got grant money from the State Department to do it, this movie about ethnic reconciliation in Kosovo. It's called *The Wall*. And it was about, or *The Walls*, but about, it was meant to be a soap opera, designed to get people talking about the conversation. So it's *Romeo and Juliet* set in Kosovo, where an Albanian boy falls in love with a Serb girl, whose families were divided by the war, and, you know, it was this kind of story. Getting that made and seeing it aired was really a satisfying personal moment, because I was sort of deeply involved in the project. Unfortunately, I think it aired during the European Football Championships, so it never got as much attention. I thought it was well done, as it deserved, so I don't know, I don't know. So there are so many good memories. I think it was my most, it may not be my favorite tour of the nine or ten that I did in the Foreign Service. It was certainly the most satisfying.

Anna Di Lellio: After, now we are coming to the post-Kosovo, you left Kosovo, you went to do something else completely, or?

Christopher Dell: When I left Kosovo, I went on to another Foreign Service assignment, I went on to be the Deputy Commander of the U.S. Africa Command, which is based in Stuttgart. Now, it's part of the anti-Dell legend there that, you know, Bechtel built the highway and Dell had a bribe from Bechtel by going to work for them. That reflects, what can I say, profound ignorance of my country, and the way the United States works. It is true that, you know, facts are facts, Bechtel did build a highway in Kosovo and the approval of that was given while I was the ambassador there. We did advocate on their behalf, but that requires a formal decision from the U.S. Department of Commerce to do advocacy. It has nothing to do with my role or my input to that, I mean they, there was only one American company competing, so of course ultimately…

What I… and Bechtel won that competition not by my role, but Hashim Thaçi had seen what Bechtel had done in Albania and what they had done in Croatia, and he wanted the quality of infrastructure for his country. But, you know, you can't blame him for that. He saw what good looks like and wanted good for Kosovo. But of course any project of that scale in a country like Kosovo, where trading in rumors is always, you know, the national pastime, it had to be something else that has to be explained. You know the fact that Bechtel had lower, the lowest bid, can't explain why they won the contract. It has to be something more, so of course, who is the most important person in the country? The American Ambassador, "Well, he must have made it happen." In fact, I didn't have to do anything.

To this day, I don't know how much that contract was worth because they never showed me the contract. Pieter Feith was furious that I wouldn't give him the contract for him to read. Well, it's actually against American law to share proprietary corporate information. I was told by Hashim Thaçi that Feith had taken money from the Austrian competitor Strabag to advocate on their behalf. "Hashim, that's not true." I was naive, I think. "Hashim, that's not true. He's the European Union representative, it's a European company, he is advocating for them the way the American advocates for an American company. It's what diplomats do. It's commerce and trade."

I subsequently came to find out I was naive. And I think that is part of the storytelling that has fed the storytelling since those days. Strabag was indeed spreading money around Kosovo trying to win the contract. And my job wasn't to persuade Hashim to go with an American company. My job was to keep all the people who were trying to get a piece of the action away from the money. And there were many in the Ministry of Transport and elsewhere in Kosovo, who were busily trying to make money out of this deal, including all of the people who had bought land along the original route, the tunnel through the mountains. And Bechtel came with this proposal to build around the mountains and save them five hundred million dollars, their investments suddenly weren't worth very much.

What happened in the course of this was the senior manager at Bechtel, several of them said, "Wait a minute, they just discovered natural gas in Mozambique. It's a country we don't know anything about. We know someone that knows something about Mozambique. And we are not going into a country like

Mozambique blind to what is going on there and the politics. We have to understand it before we start taking risks there." So they came to me about a week before I left the country, before I left Kosovo and asked me if I would ever consider working for a company like Bechtel. And I said, "Well, sure, I mean, you know, come back to me, give me a description, make me an offer." Well, that didn't happen for a year. I mean, I never know why it didn't happen faster, what was going on. But anyway, I went off to Germany for a year, and spent my last year in the Foreign Service working on African affairs again, which of course, was important because I still knew things about Africa, and I knew more about Africa than when I started that, and I think I had some value to offer to Bechtel at that point in terms of my Africa experience.

But the idea, of course, that has been promoted by Peter in his writings and others, the haters were going to hate in Kosovo. I mean this was a *quid pro quo*, "I get you the highway. You give me a job." I know what they are all thinking, and you can't disprove a negative. But it reveals a profound misunderstanding of how the American government works, about how seriously American companies take the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act, which can ruin a company, I mean, can be devastating, and about, ultimately, once again, about Kosovo's place in the world. The contract in Kosovo, whatever it was, I don't know, ultimately a billion dollars, spread over four years, to a company like Bechtel is small change, and it's not worth risking the company, it's not worth risking going to to jail under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act to do some kind of a deal just to build a highway in Kosovo. I mean Bechtel has forty billion dollars a year in revenues. It doesn't need to, you know, engage in dirty practices to win a small highway job in a place like Kosovo.

Nothing I say is ever going to convince those people. I know it is all going to be excuse making, but I've never worried about it so much because, you know, I know what happened and my conscience is clear about it. And, you know, anybody that wants to go talk to the Bechtel lawyers can look at the investigation of the whole thing that they did, just to be sure that everything was on the up and up.

Anna Di Lellio: So it was Stuttgart and Mozambique again?

Christopher Dell: So I went back to Mozambique for Bechtel as their country manager.

Anna Di Lellio: So you have a foreign office?

Christopher Dell: So I left, I retired from the State Department. And one of the things you have to do, the minute they came to me and asked me if I would ever think of working for them, I had to recuse myself from any further involvement in anything to do with Bechtel, in my, you know, in my official capacity as a government official. So I did that, you know, you formally say, "They've approached me, they have made me a job offer, and I am therefore deferring, recusing myself and delegating to my deputy," just like Jeff Sessions and the Russian Investigation, right, I can no longer be involved in this because, I have, I have an ultimate set of interests. You know, I mean I left within the week or two anyway, so nothing ever came up. At that point the highway was well under construction. It didn't matter in the least but...

Anna Di Lellio: And from Mozambique, you are back here?

Christopher Dell: And from Mozambique, I am back here.

Anna Di Lellio: And so you are not retired?

Christopher Dell: No, not entirely, I am doing a couple of things part time. I work with a small boutique investment bank that invests in power projects in Africa, representing them here in Washington. But the thing that excites me the most is that I'm writing a history, what I intend to be a popular history of Portuguese navigation, the Age of Discovery. I love Portugal. I love going there. I love the history involved, and it's an under, it's a little-known aspect of history, where the Portuguese role was monstrously outsized compared to the country and the impact it had that's largely been forgotten in the non-Portuguese world. And so I want to write a popular history that kind of sells a few copies and brings some of that story back into the light of day.

Anna Di Lellio: That's interesting. Okay, is there anything you want to add?

Christopher Dell: No, that's fine.

Anna Di Lellio: Well, thank you so much.

Christopher Dell: Thank you, Anna!