The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

AMBASSADOR PAUL TRIVELLI

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INTERVIEW

Q: Well, Paul, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

TRIVELLI: I was born on Staten Island, New York, in 1953. Staten Island, of course, being one of New York's five boroughs.

Q: All right, could you tell me a bit about your family? Let's talk on your father's side, first.

TRIVELLI: My dad, of course, was Italian-American. His grandparents, actually, came over from Italy in the late 19th century.

Q: You know where they came from in Italy?

TRIVELLI: Well, it's always a matter of some family controversy, but I believe Vasto, Abruzzo. My grandparents grew up in New York, on the Lower East Side, Brooklyn and then Staten Island. My dad grew up on Staten Island and was drafted into the Marine Corps during the Korean War and married my mom after he came back from boot camp.

After the war, although he never actually went to Korea, my father ended up finishing his college degree at night, finally graduated from Wagner College with a degree in engineering and mathematics, became an electrical engineer and eventually founded his own small company.

Q: Well, let's go back to your grandfather. First place, do you have any idea of what the Trivellis were up to before they came out of Italy?

TRIVELLI: Yes, again, this is family lore, that my great grandfather actually was publisher of a small newspaper.

Q: And what did your grandfather do, when he got to the States?

TRIVELLI: Well, my grandfather was a printer and actually had a print shop in New York, on Staten Island, for many, many years. This was in the days, of course, when people did printing on plates that had to be engraved and so forth.

Q: On your mother's side, what do you know about where her family came from?

TRIVELLI: Yes, her maiden is Anderson. Her father, Arthur Anderson, was the son of Norwegian immigrants. Her mom was of German and Austrian background. Again, both my grandparents on that side were born in New York and their parents came over from Europe, one side from Bergen, Norway and the other side from Baden-Baden, Germany.

Q: When your mother's parents got to the States, what sort of work were they doing?

TRIVELLI: My grandfather was a construction worker in New York, worked on some of the large buildings in New York that were built in the Thirties, on the Midtown Tunnel and towards the end of his life, in the Fifties, he was actually a State of New York employee, a safety inspector.

Q: Well then, are there any stories in the family, on either parent's side, about how the Depression during the Thirties hit them?

TRIVELLI: Both my parents were Depression kids. They were both born in 1931. Both of them ended up moving into their grandparents' house; the whole extended family had to live together. My grandmother and my grandmother on my mom's side used to tell stories about literally not knowing where their next meal was coming from.

Q: So, how did your parents meet?

TRIVELLI: They actually met as kids. My mother's family, during the Thirties, lived basically on the same street as my other grandfather's print shop, so they grew up in the same neighborhood.

Q: I realize you weren't around at the time, but do you have any feel for life in that area of Staten Island, particularly the immigrant families, were they divvied up into Italian, German, Irish, Jewish neighborhoods or something, or was it pretty much a mix?

TRIVELLI: I think it was more mixed. There were some small neighborhoods, for example, I know the Norwegians were down by Huguenot Avenue. But a lot of the folks in Staten Island in that era had moved over from the Lower East Side or from Brooklyn in the 1920s and Thirties and so they got away from those very, very ethnic neighborhoods to something that was mostly mixed.

Certainly, when I was growing up I kind of thought of Staten Island as Irish and Italian overwhelmingly, with some German and Northern European folks thrown in. But I don't recall very strong, small ethnic neighborhoods.

Q: Just to spell this out, I take it your mother was not a college graduate, but you father was?

TRIVELLI: My mother graduated from nursing school, in the days when you didn't actually get a B.A. for graduating from nursing school. She got an RN (registered nurse) from Brooklyn Hospital.

Q: So both your parents were working at pretty much a professional level when you came along?

TRIVELLI: My dad, when I was very small, was still going to night school to get his college degree. He didn't get it 'til I was I think I was about six years old, 'cause I remember going to his graduation. He was actually a draftsman at an engineering firm over in Jersey, just across the bridge.

And my mom worked off and on as an RN. I know she worked right until I was born and my brother was born and then through the years worked on and off, not in hospitals, so much, but other sort of nursing jobs.

Q: Well then, let's take kind of your early years. You grew up in Staten Island, is that right?

TRIVELLI: That's correct.

Q: What was life for a kid like then?

TRIVELLI: Well, for the first year and a half, of course I don't remember that exactly, but we actually lived with my grandparents, my mom's family, 'cause my dad had just come out of the marines.

Of Staten Island, my memories are quite good. I went to public school there. It was relatively suburban and in fact I remember going to farmers markets on Saturday; people would bring in truck farm vegetables and fruits from Jersey.

There were parts of Staten Island which really were not built up whatsoever. I know the street in front of my Anderson grandparents' house when I was very small was not even fully paved, it was gravel.

So it was an interesting place.

Q: Were you sort of turned loose after school, go out and play and come back for dinner?

TRIVELLI: Yes, when you think about it, it's so different than now. We actually lived right across the street from the public school and I would go home after school, change my clothes, go back to the schoolyard and play stickball and kickball and all that stuff and my mom would say, "Hey, be home by six" and if I wasn't, she'd scream out the front door and usually I heard her and I'd come running back.

So we had the run of the neighborhood. Our world was about five or six suburban blocks where we were free to roam and I remember even, really very young, first, second grade, trick or treating on my own.

Q: Today, everybody is so controlled. Well, now, were you Catholic and how important were religious matters for you all?

TRIVELLI: Interesting question. My mom was Lutheran. Dad grew up in a Catholic home. My Grandmother Trivelli was very Catholic, particularly in her later years.

But when they were married, they were actually married in a Lutheran church and my mom did not agree to raise us Catholic, so my dad was forced to leave the Church, although I think in the end he was pretty much an atheist.

But my mom and her family were very much involved in the Lutheran Church and I went through baptism, first communion, confirmation in the Lutheran Church, went to church every Sunday, essentially, from my earliest memories to when I left to go to college.

Q: Do you recall, during this period, really, we're talking about the Fifties, maybe into the Sixties, the political orientation?

TRIVELLI: Of Staten Island?

Q: No, of your family.

TRIVELLI: Oh, they're strongly Democratic. FDR was like a god and then JFK was like a god, on both sides of the family.

Q: Did your parents take any part in politics?

TRIVELLI: No, although my Grandmother Trivelli was a poll worker and would sit at the polling table on election day for years and years and I guess make a small amount of money to check people's names off the list. It was part of that party machinery they had in New York at that time, giving people small jobs.

Q: Playing in the schoolyard and all, first place, were there what we today would call minorities, Hispanics or African-Americans or others, were they part of the mix?

TRIVELLI: No and I've thought about this. There were a few housing projects on the Island which I'm sure housed African-Americans and Hispanics, probably Puerto Ricans, as most of the Hispanics in New York at that time were Puerto Rican. But certainly not in my neighborhood.

I remember, we could actually leave school early on Wednesday to go to religious instruction, you could walk to your church. And I remember, I was surprised, years later, because I honestly though for years that the United States was about seventy per cent Catholic, 25 per cent Protestant and five per cent or ten per cent Jewish, 'cause that was sort of the mix of people in my neighborhood. I was taken aback to find out those numbers were horribly wrong.

Q: In that whole area, there was a strong Jewish influence. Did you feel that?

TRIVELLI: No, not so much on Staten Island. There were certainly Jewish kids in my class and there were small synagogues, but nothing like you would have seen in other parts of New York.

Q: What was the background of the teachers?

TRIVELLI: Interesting, one of the most influential teachers I ever had was a woman named Miss Ranney, my second grade teacher, who was an African-American. That was extraordinarily unusual I think at the time to have a black woman teaching white kids on Staten Island. She was a very good teacher. She recommended that I actually skip third grade, which I did and was just really an enormous influence on my life.

Q: Did the outside world intrude much, I'm talking about elementary school? Were you aware of the Cold War, Israel, these things?

TRIVELLI: Well, certainly, again, in those days, we literally had nuclear bomb drills, "duck and cover," like the old newsreels that you see and would do that every week. I

remember the Cuban Missile Crisis quite well, being glued to the radio and TV for several days. So I think, yes, in that sense, the outside world got through to a kid in the fourth or fifth grade.

Q: As a student, in early years, were you much of a reader or much of a student?

TRIVELLI: Actually I was a good student. I entered kindergarten early, at four. I was "accelerated"; In those days, they could skip you, so I actually skipped third grade. So I was always a very good student in elementary school.

Q: In reading, do you recall any of the books that you early on latched on to, that you might say influenced you in later life?

TRIVELLI: As a kid, I actually read a bunch of books that had been read by my mom and her brother. I read things like Nancy Drew mysteries and Tom Swift adventures. And then I remember reading a whole bunch of sports books, these simplified biographies of guys like Babe Ruth and Gehrig and so forth. I'm talking as a young kid, through second, third, fourth, fifth grades.

Q: You much of a sports fan?

TRIVELLI: I was a big sports fan, but terrible at sports. At that time the Yankees were enormously popular, Maris and Mantle were in their heyday. As I young kid, my life goal was playing center field for the Yankees. And then after I joined my first Little League team and rode the bench, I had an epiphany and said, "I better think about something else to do with my life."

Q: I realize these are early years, but did the world outside of Staten Island interest you much?

TRIVELLI: Not so much. My family didn't really travel very much. I don't remember anyone going to Europe, or beyond Pennsylvania, for that matter. But my mom always had a subscription to National Geographic and that just fascinated me and I would read it voraciously every month when it came. And it just was something that really stuck with me, how fascinating it would be to really go and see those other places.

Q: I know it happened to me, I was wondering whether the maps in National Geographic grabbed you?

TRIVELLI: Absolutely, absolutely and of course they had great maps. And of course in those days, with the end of colonialism, there'd be articles about literally brand new countries, in Africa particularly, as they moved from colonies to independent nations and there'd be maps on demographics and all sorts of stuff. So I read it almost cover to cover, for years.

Q: Yeah, I think this had a tremendous influence on many of us and of course there was the major fact that this was your only chance to legitimately look at pictures of ladies with bare breasts.

TRIVELLI: Yes, of course. I remember one time, I was looking at *National Geographic* and there was an article about Paris and there was a shot of a model, obviously a very attractive woman in a powder blue dress standing in front of a fountain in small Paris courtyard and I looked at that and said, "Man, this is for me. If I have a dream, it's going to be go to Paris and meet some girl who looks just like that."

Q: Well, we all should have the right aspirations.

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: Well, then, there was no thought of sending you to parochial school, I take it?

TRIVELLI: No, because my mom was Lutheran, but when we lived in Great Kills, we lived literally next to a Catholic school, St. Clare's, which was basically across the street from the public school, but we always were filled with all these stories about how mean all the nuns were and how they hit kids with rulers and all this stuff, which probably didn't happen, but we recoiled from the thought of going to parochial school.

Q: You say you never got farther than Pennsylvania. Did you go anywhere for vacations? I'm not talking about something fancy, but going up to the Catskills or doing something of that nature?

TRIVELLI: Yes, on my mom's side, for several years, we went to a place in Pennsylvania called Twin Lakes, usually for a week and they had these incredibly rustic little cabins and the different pieces of the extended family each would rent one and we'd spend a week and fish in this little lake and adults would stay up late at night and play pinochle and I suppose drink beer and it was a great time, but it was nothing fancy at all, it was one of these cabins where you could almost see out from inside, sort of a clapboard arrangement.

We didn't go to the beach much. When did go, maybe once or twice a summer we'd go to a place called Cheesequake State Park in Jersey. Ironically, in New York, at that time, we lived in Great Kills, actually very close to the water, but you couldn't swim, it was so polluted, there were signs out there not to swim.

Q: What about the Big Apple itself? As a kid, did you get to New York and see the Great White Way and all that sort of thing?

TRIVELLI: Yes, you know, it's funny, 'cause of course when you grow up in places like that, in those days, if you went into Manhattan, it's, "Oh, you're going to the city." My dad never worked in Manhattan.

But, I would go in two or three times a year. My mom and dad would take me in, or my Aunt Erna, who was quite a character, would take us in and we'd have a little adventure and we'd go to Radio City Music Hall and see the Christmas show or the Easter show.

There was a place called the Automat, Horn and Hardart's Automat, which I just loved as a kid, because it actually gave you some control of what you could eat, 'cause you could pick it out of those little glass cubbyholes.

Q: Great pie!

TRIVELLI: Yeah, great pie and they even had a chocolate milk dispenser, which just fascinated me no end.

So two or three times a year, as a special trip, we'd go in. I saw the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade a couple of times, we'd go up to the Bronx Zoo usually once a summer, that kind of stuff.

Q: Well then, in high school, where'd you go to high school?

TRIVELLI: Went to high school in Connecticut. We moved from Staten Island more than halfway through my fifth grade year. My dad had a job change and we moved to Cheshire, Connecticut, which is about ten miles north of New Haven.

Q: Well, how different was that?

TRIVELLI: It was I think rather different, 'cause it was a Connecticut suburb, although not really a suburb of New York, 'cause it's just too far away and actually had not many people. The town had under 20,000 people at that time.

So it was much different, much slower pace of life, much less cosmopolitan, of course, but a good place and one that was still dominated by Yankee culture.

Q: There's Cheshire Academy there, wasn't there?

TRIVELLI: I literally lived on Academy Road and lived about a quarter mile from Cheshire Academy, which still exists.

But it was the kind of place that had an old hardware store and you'd go there, there was not a lot of other shopping and you'd have to go there for just about everything.

I remember coming back about twenty years later, visiting my mom and going in to that hardware store and the clerk look down at my credit card and said, "Ah, Trivelli, that's that new Eyetalian family that moved in a few years ago." We'd been in town for more that twenty years, but we were still that "new Eyetalian family."

Q: You went to, what, the local high school?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I went to elementary school, finished fifth and sixth grade and then junior high and high school, all in public schools in Cheshire. A good school system, I thought I got really a pretty good education, they had some AP classes and I think they did quite well.

Q: What were sort of your favorite courses and least favorite courses?

TRIVELLI: I did well in high school, I was actually valedictorian of my class. I really liked my science courses, particularly biology. I had a couple of very good biology teachers.

I've always not been a big math fan. I got through math, but was not particularly good at it.

In junior high and a little later, every time I tried to take an art course or something similar, it would be a miserable failure. Just no creative art talent for me, I guess.

Q: In high school, were there any teachers that sort of stood out, that inspired you particularly?

TRIVELLI: Yes, my biology teacher really got me very interested in biology and when I went to college, I majored in biology, really because of him.

Q: You mentioned that you were "that Eyetalian family." Were there social distinctions in this sort of Yankee town, or not?

TRIVELLI: I think it was sort of fading away. The town went from an old selectmen town meeting kind of system to a more modern local government.

What happened, of course, was the demographics were changing. This for many years was a town of essentially small Yankee farms, small dairy farms, apple orchards, and as people bought up land and built houses and housing developments, it became a bedroom community for places like Waterbury and Meriden, New Haven and Hartford and the town changed.

I don't recall, though, any kind of sharp prejudice. I do know there were very few African-American families in the town. Most of the Latino kids were actually kids of migrant workers, because people, particularly Puerto Ricans, they'd sort of start of course in Florida and end up in Maine I guess at the end of the season, but they'd come through Connecticut and pick apples and so forth, in the Sixties.

Q: Did the fact that you were practically next door to the Cheshire Academy have any effect on your social life, or academic life, at all?

TRIVELLI: Not too much. My mom was actually an RN there for a while. She worked in their infirmary.

For whatever reason, I never was particularly interested in going there. My parents didn't have the money, I'm sure, but they offered a couple of scholarships to town kids every year and it just never really interested me, although I had a paper route and some of the customers were teachers at Cheshire Academy, so I used to ride my bike or walk through much of the campus for several years and it struck me as a snotty kind of place, my view at the time.

Q: What about Yale? Was there any influence? You were not too far from it.

TRIVELLI: Yale obviously dominates New Haven. Our family physicians were associated with Yale-New Haven Hospital. I remember, when our relatives would come up from New York, one of the things we would do very often was take them down to Yale and sort of do the campus tour down there. It's still a very, very impressive kind of old campus. But, again, I didn't have a lot of interest in going there, I thought it was too close to my parents.

Q: That's one of the big things about going away to college, a certain amount of distance is not a bad thing.

Did international events interest you much at that time, while you were in high school?

TRIVELLI: Well, of course, it was during the Vietnam War, so I remember very vividly, looking at the broadcast news every night and seeing those images and then of course the anti-war protests which coalesced with the civil rights movement in the late Sixties and seeing those images was quite remarkable.

Q: Well, you were in high school from when to when?

TRIVELLI: '66 to '70.

Q: Although you were in high school, did the Sixties and the various movements, feminism, civil rights, ant-war, sex, affect you at all?

TRIVELLI: Well, the Panther trials were in New Haven at that time and so that was a huge thing and all sorts of rumors that would float around town that this column of Black Panthers was going to march up Route 10 and try to do some harm to Cheshire. Of course nothing like that ever happened.

Actually, again, very impressive, there were actually tanks on the green at New Haven at one point. I remember those things very, very vividly.

I must say, I would read about sex and drugs and rock 'n roll and I'd kind of think, "Well, when am I going to get my share?" It was a very straight, conservative high school. I'm sure crazy things happened, but nothing as people might have imagined.

Q: Drugs, did they get at the school at all?

TRIVELLI: There were always rumors of some of the really cool kids smoking marijuana, but I didn't see that it was not very pervasive by any means. There were some kids who were hippies and some kids were jocks and some kids were rockers. I don't remember a strong kind of counterculture flare at that school at that time.

Q: How would you classify yourself in high school, were you an athlete, were you scholastic, or what?

TRIVELLI: Horribly nerdy, probably. I was a good student, was the valedictorian of my high school class. I was young, I graduated at 16, so I was just a little physically and emotionally behind some of the other kids. Never been a good enough athlete to make any organized sports team. Was a member of the Drama Club, was a member of the social studies club, and certainly not one of the cool kids.

Q: What were sort of the dating patterns at that point?

TRIVELLI: You mean, did I date?

Q: Yeah.

TRIVELLI: I dreamt about dating. I went on two dates in high school, the two proms and that was really it. In fact, I went to my high school reunion about a year ago and the woman I went to those proms with was there and we had a great time talking about that. That was it, those two proms, that was it.

Q: Well, then, so you're getting out of high school in '70. The draft was still going on, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: As I became 18 the draft lottery process began.

Q: Where you pointed, getting out of school with a good academic background?

TRIVELLI: My mother, more than anyone, thought very strongly that I should go to a small school and it should be within no more than two hours from the house, I guess so they could go up and grab me if they needed to.

We did look at a few schools, we went up to Amherst and U Mass, of course I'd seen Yale many, many times. And I settled on going to Williams, it had a good reputation, I had a great tour there and I ended up going early decision to Williams College.

Q: You were at Williams from when to when?

TRIVELLI: ’70-’74.

Q: I predate you. I was Class of ’50 at Williams. Not many of us in the Foreign Service went there.

Anyway, when you got there in ’70, what was it like?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I was in the last all male class at Williams. There were no women admitted with me, although there were a few transfer students admitted later. So it was still on the cusp of being as you probably remember it, that very traditional, very proper New England men’s school. One night a week you had a sit down dinner and had to wear a jacket and tie. Attendance at Thompson Chapel on Sunday evenings was heavily encouraged.

Q: When I was there, we had to hand in a card and you were only allowed three passes a semester.

TRIVELLI: I think they stopped making it absolutely compulsory, but just about everybody went. We still had mixers, college women would be bused in from Skidmore and Holyoke and other places. And then Williams became coed the next year and I think world events caught up with it and all of that was swept away fairly quickly.

Q: How did you feel your high school education stacked up as preparation? Many of the students came from prep schools.

TRIVELLI: Yeah, I thought really well. I think surprisingly well. I placed out of first year chemistry, went into second year chemistry. I placed out of first year biology, went into second year biology. So I felt I was really quite prepared for Williams.

Now, I didn’t take as much advantage of it as I probably should have and didn’t apply myself enough, but that certainly wasn’t my high school’s fault. I thought they did a very good job preparing me. I felt comfortable at the academic level.

Now, at that time, you go from a public school where you’re the valedictorian to a school where if I’m not mistaken one out of three kids in the entering class who’d been valedictorian or salutatorian of their high schools.

So, a very smart group of people. You’re no longer the smartest guy in the room. You are one among many very bright people. So that’s a bit intimidating.

Q: What was your major?

TRIVELLI: Biology.

Q: Did you see yourself pointed towards something?

TRIVELLI: I wanted to be a doctor and although Williams didn't have a formal pre-med program I went really with the full intention of taking all of the courses you needed to apply for medical school.

About halfway through it dawned on me I wasn't doing particularly well in my coursework and I didn't really like it as much as I thought I would. So I abandoned the idea of going to med school, although I continued to earn a degree in biology, 'cause it's hard to turn back, plus it's not that I didn't like biology. I started taking a lot of American history courses and some other courses that just interested me.

Q: Were there still fraternities there?

TRIVELLI: No. The frats I think were banned in the early Sixties, but Williams had bought the fraternity houses. So whenever you stick thirty young guys in a house, they're going to act like a fraternity, even though they're not a fraternity.

Q: I have to say that I went when there were fraternities and it was just a place we got together and these were people I knew better, but the actual sort of ritual and all was a very minor thing. No bonding fraternitywise, but there was a bonding by rooming together.

TRIVELLI: I never lived in one of the old frat houses. I lived in dorms my first three years and then the fourth year off campus.

Q: Again, were there movements on the campus that interested you?

TRIVELLI: I personally participated very, very little in non-curricular activities. I don't quite know why, but I didn't. But certainly at that time there was a certain amount of political effervescence on campus.

The spring before I came, of course, a lot of colleges were on strike, including Williams and then the big march on Washington during my freshman year and you saw the groups, anti-war groups, the first African-American student association, all of those kinds of things really began while I there.

So it was quite noticeable, even though Williamstown is an isolated place. It's a purple cocoon. But all of that stuff got through, as well.

Q: Williams later, from what I gather from the alumni network and all, got terribly politically correct and I think it still is. I got an email saying, "The most horrible thing happened on the campus." I thought, "Gee, where'd the bomb go off?" And somebody had scribbled on the walls of the dorm, "All niggers must die." Well, this is bad, but this is a bunch of kids and it just takes one jerk to do something like that and it was treated as though this was 9/11 or Pearl Harbor happening.

TRIVELLI: Of course when I was there it wasn't quite that way. And I think like a lot of colleges it's probably edged in that direction over the last couple of decades.

Q: And I think the influence of women on campus, too, probably accentuated the process.

TRIVELLI: When I was there it was a huge topic of debate and a lot of the alumni were against it. My sense certainly was that it was a good thing to have women on campus, 'cause I remember the behavior of the all-male student body and it's nothing to be proud of. People would do things you probably would never do if you were on a coed campus. So I think to have women there really changed the culture of the school and I think on balance certainly for the better.

Q: Yeah, my impression, I have no strong feelings about the elimination of the fraternities, which roused some wrath among certain groups and bringing women on, what the hell, it's civilizing and all.

Did you find, although you were a biology major, again, I keep coming back to the subject of the world beyond, because obviously of jobs you later took on. Did the world beyond interest you at all?

TRIVELLI: Yes. My junior year in high school, I actually traveled to Europe for three weeks with the YMCA, on one of those seven countries in eight days kind of trips and I was fascinated by it. So I got a really quick brush of Europe and I thought, "Wow, this is fantastic."

And then while at Williams I took a course on Latin American revolutions. Why I took that course, I'm not quite sure, but it was fascinating, taking a look at what had gone on in Mexico, what had gone on in Cuba and Bolivia and I just got very interested in Latin America, really from that one course.

Williams still is a liberal arts institution, so it did not have large think tank-like institutes for Latin America or any other part of the world to speak of, but that really interested me and I think that's one of the reasons that later on I pushed to be assigned to Latin America.

Q: As we're speaking today, there's a publication called U.S News & World Report which does a ranking of colleges and Williams comes up number one or two usually in the top liberal arts colleges.

Did you have any feeling that you were really involved in such an institution? I certainly didn't, but it probably was quite a different institution then,

TRIVELLI: I always had the impression that I was going to a good school, with good professors. I also had a sense that some of the kids of the nation's elite went there. There were kids whose parents would fly up by private plane to see them play ball.

So I had some sense of the elitist nature of the school at that time. Again, I certainly felt like I was going to a good institution, had a good education and I don't recall that the rankings existed at that time, in that way, but I certainly had a sense that I was going to one of those good, small New England colleges and I should take advantage of it.

Q: Did you have to work while you were there?

TRIVELLI: I worked part time 'cause I had some grant money and some loans and then some jobs. I worked in the chemistry lab, in a storeroom full of glassware and chemicals that chemistry students had to check out if they needed them for their lab work. So I worked there, usually a couple afternoons per week.

And then the second two years I worked in the admissions office as a clerk, which was quite eye opening, 'cause you got to see all the files we're never supposed to divulge.

Q: Of course. How about dating? Was Bennington or Smith or Holyoke on your agenda?

TRIVELLI: When I first got there there were no women and they would actually have these mixers and women would be bused in from places like Skidmore and Holyoke.

But they would get off the bus and frankly the men were mean. The upperclassmen would come over and they would rate these girls from one to ten as they came off the bus and take them to their house parties.

And even I, at that age, said, "Wow, that's pretty demeaning, isn't it? I don't know if I'd like to be one of these women."

My friends and I, yes, we would make trips on weekends, sometimes, to Holyoke and other places, to Wellesley and they weren't particularly successful for me, in terms of actual dating. I did, however, meet a girl the summer between my junior and senior year at college that I dated, not a Williams student, someone I met on a summer job.

Q: Well, then, we're moving up to '74. What were you pointed towards?

TRIVELLI: I decided not to go to medical school and then about November of my senior year it dawned on me that I was going to graduate and I figured I better go to grad school, that was the safest thing to do. I had a very, very good American history professor, Ben Labaree and I told him, "I'm going to go get a PhD in American history and even colonial American history."

And as I talked to Professor Labaree he said, "Paul, I could probably get you into one of those programs. But you do know that there are now more books written on the Puritans than there actually were Puritans? This is not a growth industry. You better think about some other path, or think about something related."

And that's when I decided to get a degree in international studies, focusing on diplomatic history.

Q: So where would one look to do that?

TRIVELLI: I ended up at the University of Denver Graduate School of International Studies, now the Josef Korbel School and it was very attractive to me because even in those days you could pretty much design your master's program. I could choose from economics and diplomatic history and whatever I needed, to put together a program for two years.

Plus, it was in the West and I literally had never been west of Buffalo, New York, so I thought it would be fascinating to get out West. So I ended up going to DU for my master's degree.

Q: You were at DU from when to when?

TRIVELLI: From '74 to '76 and then I was procrastinating writing my final large paper and I didn't actually finish that until 1978, right before I came into the Foreign Service. But I was actually in class from '74 to '76, for two years.

Q: How'd you find being at a state university in the West?

TRIVELLI: It's a private school, DU is private. Denver, for me, was a great experience. It's more friendly and open than New York and the East.

The school itself was quite good. It's problem was it was hard for them to be an international studies program but be so geographically separated from Washington and New York. They always struggled with that.

But, again, good professors. Dr. Korbel of course is Madeleine Albright's dad and had really founded that school in the early Sixties. It was a good, small international studies program and I really enjoyed my two years.

Q: Had Williams prepared you for it?

TRIVELLI: Oh, yeah, indubitably, absolutely. You had to have two areas of concentration, so I chose to study diplomatic history, which I had some of at Williams and then quantitative analysis, because with my science background it was fairly straightforward for me, especially compared to most of those social science types, so I could do that fairly easily.

I concentrated on two areas and I did well, I graduated with honors and I didn't feel I was disadvantaged in any way.

Q: Taking diplomatic history, did the Foreign Service cross your radar at all, at any point?

TRIVELLI: Yes, it had. It actually, it crossed my radar first back at Williams, when I was looking at grad schools. I went into the guidance office and there on the bulletin board was one of these things where you could rip off a postcard and send it in to take the Foreign Service exam, to register.

And I thought, "Well, that sounds like a good idea," so I did that and I actually passed the written exam and then had to go in to Boston for the orals and did not pass them. But they said, "You probably could do this. You're only 20. Why don't you try this again in two or three years?"

And that's actually what I did. When I got out of DU, I took the test and passed it.

Q: Do you recall, in this initial oral exam, any of sort of the questions?

TRIVELLI: In those days the oral exam was basically three older Foreign Service Officers grilling you for an hour or so.

Q: Oh, you're talking about me!

TRIVELLI: I know that.

Q: I was doing that!

TRIVELLI: One question they asked me that really threw me was they asked me to explain the international treaties that control the fate and territory of Antarctica.

And then I remember they asked me, "Make believe you're an administrative officer and you've got $100,000 and you could either put a pool in the ambassador's house or get everyone in the embassy drapes. What would you do?"

It was literally that kind of question. I remember that question very, very well.

Q: You graduated in '78?

TRIVELLI: '78, actually, by the time I actually got the degree.

Q: And at that point, what was going to happen?

TRIVELLI: At that point, I had actually been accepted into the Foreign Service and I reported to the A-100 course in March of '78.

Q: Today is December 14, 2011. Paul, you came in to the Foreign Service in 1978?

TRIVELLI: That's correct, in early March, '78.

Q: And could you describe your A-100 course?

TRIVELLI: There was about 35 of us, actually pretty diverse. There was some African-American officers, one Asian-American woman. I would say a third of the class was female.

And it was a good group, a little bit older than I expected, I was actually one of the younger folks, but I found them really well educated, great interpersonal skills, we got along very, very well.

Q: Were there many people there that had military experience?

TRIVELLI: A handful, yes, there were a couple of guys who were ex-military officers, but generally not.

Q: You found the consular training to be pretty good?

TRIVELLI: As I understand it they had just reorganized it and created "ConGen Rosslyn." They had pretty good modules, you went from one part of this consulate to the other over the course of the two or three weeks, some interactive courses, some videos, some lectures.

So I really felt that at the end of that time I had a good idea at least what the rules were in terms of consular work and certainly had a good idea where to look, the FAM or somewhere else if one didn't know the answer.

Q: FAM being the Foreign Affairs Manual.

TRIVELLI: That's correct.

Q: Well, then, your first post was Mexico City?

TRIVELLI: That's right. I got there in September 1978, did rotations through the consulate, did non-immigrant visas, immigrant visas and I was the consul general's staff assistant.

Q: And you had very little contact with the ambassador?

TRIVELLI: Yea, Pat Lucey, who had been the governor of Wisconsin. He struck me as a very quiet, introverted fellow, unusual, given that he was a career politician.

About the only time I ran in to him, I was asked to escort him down from the front office to the auditorium for a consular awards ceremony and we were in the elevator and he

asked me about the ceremony and then he asked me about the awards and he said, "Well, when was this for?"

The actual events had actually happened six or eight months previously and he asked, "Why didn't we do those awards earlier?"

I had no idea. If I remember correctly, most of them were actually related to the Western Airlines crash in Mexico City, which a lot of us were involved.

Q: What happened there?

TRIVELLI: Well, a Western Airlines flight from the States crashed in Mexico City, at the airport, due to a miscommunication, actually, between the tower and the pilot. One of the runways was closed for repairs and the tower and the pilot didn't really understand each other.

In any case, the plane landed and hit a dump truck. Thankfully, there were actually survivors. But you can imagine, even in a large consular section, it was all hands on deck there for several days, trying to sort out who the Americans were and who had survived and who had passed away and communicating with relatives and communicating with the Department and disposition of the remains and everything else.

It was quite an eye opener for me, it was the first crisis that I'd been involved with at all, so it was a great learning experience.

Q: Talk a bit about the consul general.

TRIVELLI: Yeah, the consul general was Vern McAninch, who was really something, I think at that time an institution among consular specialists in the Foreign Service. He was almost a John Wayne-like character. He was married to a Colombian beauty queen much younger than himself. He liked to play poker at night, he liked to smoke cigars.

But a huge education for me, being in his office suite, listening to him on the phone and seeing how he dealt with people in the embassy and foreign officials, just a tremendous guy.

Q: Turning to your experience working as a non-immigrant visa officer, I would think that the people applying for visas in Mexico City would be somewhat different than the ones up in Ciudad Juarez and other places. In other words, they were more city folk.

TRIVELLI: A couple of thoughts on that. I think if you're in Juarez and I learned this later, when I served in Monterrey, if you actually live at the border, of course it doesn't really cost you anything to cross the border. So border cases are a lot harder to adjudicate, because you can be across the border for a two-dollar ride.

In Mexico City, you could at least have a pretty good idea, someone had to have enough money to take that plane or take that long bus trip to go up to the United States.

My sense is the refusal rate was only about 35 per cent and so I think a lot of the visa applicants we interviewed were a self-selecting group: they tended to be folks that at least had a reasonable chance of getting a visa.

I think that the common knowledge was, if you're a *campesino*, if you have absolutely nothing and half of your family lives in the States, probably it's just not worth applying for a visa, because you're not going to get it.

So an awful lot of the people we interviewed were government workers and teachers and professionals and white collar folks of one sort or another. So from that point of view, you're right.

Q: The people who were getting visas, what were they going to do in the States?

TRIVELLI: Well, a lot of it was just simply shopping. This is long before the days of the Free Trade Agreement, so consumer goods in Mexico were really quite expensive, because they had a lot of barriers against importing them.

If you went up to South Texas and just went to a large department store and filled two or three suitcases, you could pay for the trip, just by the savings on the clothes or items that you may have bought.

Q: What was it like, working as a non-immigrant visa officer in Mexico City?

TRIVELLI: We'd together do between one and two thousand cases a day and at that time. We had booths, there was no protection, there was no glass, there was nothing between us and the public we were interviewing.

People would put their babies on your counter and the babies would pee, or you'd have a doughnut on there and people would take your doughnut, as if you're giving out free doughnuts. It was quite the thing.

But we would do, each person would do, more than a hundred live interviews and then do travel agency adjudications, every day.

Q: Well, did you find it hard to get used to saying no?

TRIVELLI: Of course it's so much easier to say yes than say no and it can to be tough, but the refusal was maybe surprisingly low, about 35 per cent or so, and our bosses, while of course upholding the law, my NIV chief and the consul general would say, "Hey, look, we're in the visa issuing business, we're not necessarily in the visa denying business. So our job is to try to give visas to qualified folks."

And so in that way it was very positive and I know McAninch used to stress, "Look, even when you say no to somebody, you gotta leave that person with their dignity. You have to have at least a reasonable, respectful encounter." And I think that was the case most of the time.

Q: Yeah, it's very important to have both the right attitude and not feel that you're God.

Did you get a feel for the Mexican student population who were being educated in the States?

TRIVELLI: Well, we did a fair amount of F-1 visas, often for upper class kids, though, so they'd be going to a private school in the United States. When we got an F-1 application for a public school, we looked at it very, very closely, because we wanted to make sure that it was legitimate, it wasn't just somebody who was already in the States illegally trying to semi-legalize their status with an F-1.

Q: Was there much fraud that you were looking at?

TRIVELLI: Yeah, in fact, the whole concept of setting up specialized fraud units was just getting underway at that time. In fact. I was the boss of the fraud unit for a couple months at one point.

You would get a fair amount of things like fake job letters, fake bank accounts. In fact, there was a whole series of little shops right outside the embassy, right up the block, where for the right price you could go in and get any kind of document you wanted.

Now, it's a much bigger deal for immigrant visas, because those visas are really based on proper documentation to prove family relationships. A lot of our anti-fraud efforts were on the immigrant visa side.

Q: You moved over to the immigrant side?

TRIVELLI: I was on the immigrant visa side for about two or three months and that was actually much quieter, because by the time the case got to you, the petition had already been filed, it had already been approved by the Immigration Service, and some very experienced Foreign Service Nationals had looked over the paperwork many times. A lot of these applicants had actually waited for years, under certain kinds of preferences.

So by the time those cases got to you, they almost always were good cases. Every once in a while you'd get a case where there was a false relationship, where somebody was trying to sneak in a nephew as their child. But it was a much calmer, less pressured place than certainly the NIV section.

Q: Were they going to any specific places particularly, or was it pretty well spread across the country?

TRIVELLI: Well, at that time, of course, there was no real visa penalty for being illegal in the U.S. So the vast majority of people I gave IVs to were people who actually resided in the States without proper documentation for years. A lot of folks, it seemed were from L.A., which makes sense, and Chicago and to some degree Texas.

Q: How about American Citizen Services? Did you get involved in that?

TRIVELLI: I didn't work in the ACS office for any time, but one of the highs or the low points was when you had to be duty officer and Mexico City was so busy, there was actually a consular duty officer.

About every three or four months you'd pull that duty and I always kind of dreaded it, 'cause you almost didn't sleep, because it was so busy. There were so many Americans that visit Mexico City. Acapulco was in our consular district. Someone's going to get in trouble, or lose their passport, or get robbed, on a constant basis. So that was extraordinarily active, the ACS part of the business.

Q: You have any sort of cases, stories, about having to deal with helping people?

TRIVELLI: There were just so many. You'd get calls, I remember I got a call from a woman, it was over a weekend, who said, "My dad is an alcoholic and I think he's on a bender and I think he's in Mexico City. Can you find him?"

Well, not a lot I could do, but I actually called the Mexican AA and said, "Look, this is the guy. If you run into him, give me a call." Unbelievably, about three hours later they called me and said, "We know where this guy is. He's in a hotel bar in Zona Rosa."

I went down to get him and I contacted his daughter and made sure that she could take care of him.

Johnny Weissmuller's wife called me one weekend. They were living in Acapulco and she was very concerned about Johnny Weissmuller's health.

Just an infinite amount of war stories related to consular affairs in Mexico City.

Q: What was your impression of Mexican bureaucracy?

TRIVELLI: My sense is that the foreign ministry was almost reflexively very difficult with us at that time. They just had a culture of not being particularly cooperative., I didn't think, with the American Embassy, at least that I saw, on a regular basis.

Related to consular work, we did jail visits. Of course, you had to talk to local policemen. The rule of law was very difficult.

I got a lot of insight from my Mexican wife there and not only her, but her extended family. The rule at the time was if you're a victim of a crime or you're in a car accident,

about the last thing you wanted to do at that time was actually call a cop, on the theory that they would extort you. And I think that's how most Mexicans viewed their police force.

Q: One of the things that I've picked up over the years in interviewing is that the foreign ministry for the most part is the most anti-U.S. group, in a way it's the playground for people who don't like the United States, whereas most of the other parts of the Mexican government had pretty good relationships with their counterparts in the States and all.

TRIVELLI: Yes and today, of course, it's a different world. The bilateral relationship between the United States and Mexico is so much broader, so much more cooperative.

And also I noticed, again, when I served later in Monterrey, the consulate had a great relationship with the various federal offices that were in Monterrey: the ministry of commerce and others.

So, again, it changes over time, but I think you're right. I think that at least at that time it was pretty well known, the Foreign Ministry of Mexico was not particularly fond of the United States.

Q: Sort of on the social level, you say your wife is Mexican?

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: How'd you meet her and what's her background?

TRIVELLI: She actually was working at the embassy as a Foreign Service National. She was the name check operator for the visa section. In those days, there was a teletype.

She would have to type the data on an old, clunky teletype machine that cut a tape and then put it into a little machine and she'd run the name checks and several hours later, sometimes, she'd get answers.

But, in any case, she was working in the visa section and I asked her out and we were married several months later.

Q: You got to know her family and all. Was there a problem with an American marrying a Mexican? Was this considered not a good idea, or what?

TRIVELLI: No, the family was always very, very welcoming to me and of course I still have lots of contact with them. In fact, right now, my wife is actually coming back tonight from Mexico City, visiting her family.

But I think my wife was a little bit old by Mexican standards to marry, because she was in her late twenties. I think her mother was a bit relieved, actually, that she was finally getting married.

But I gained nothing but respect from them over time. My mother-in-law was a single mom. My wife's dad died when she was quite young and her mother raised her. She was a secretary at the Treasury Ministry for many years.

So it was a solid lower middle class working family with very, very decent folks.

Q: Did you get any feel, either through social contacts or work, about the political situation in Mexico at the time?

TRIVELLI: The government was still dominated by the PRI, the Institutional Revolutionary Party. There was no real doubt who was going to win elections. There was I think still a lot of dissatisfaction with the government, really stemming back to '68. Remember, there were major riots in Mexico City, hundreds of people were killed in '68.

So even ten years later there was a bubbling resentment against the PRI government. But it was pretty clear that the PRI was in power and they were going to stay in power. There were other political parties, but most of the other political parties the PRI actually financed. A sort of democratic dictatorship, almost.

Q: Did you, in your free time, go out in the country much? Could you travel?

TRIVELLI: The security situation in Mexico at that time really was quite good, so we traveled widely in central Mexico. I took public buses at times, took the train. Of course a lot of the time I was with my fiancée and then wife, so it's always great to travel in Mexico with Mexicans. So I got to see an enormous amount.

I had an apartment about a 15 minute walk from the embassy and I would walk home from a restaurant or a bar at midnight, one, two in the morning and no problems whatsoever.

Q: After this, what, about a two year exposure to the Foreign Service, who'd you feel about it?

TRIVELLI: I was very happy. First of all, I was just so happy to get a job and so happy to have a job that paid reasonably well. I found it exciting to be able to live overseas. I liked the people who I was working with.

I even enjoyed the work. A lot of people complained about consular work and I found it actually really interesting and also a lot of immediate gratification, you understood immediately the impact you were having, or not having, on a day to day basis. So I was really happy with it.

Q: I've talk to some people who served in Mexico City and said that really they had a lot of fun, looking back on it, in the consular section, because this was a team working together, they talked about things and really you felt much more part of an efficient team.

TRIVELLI: I think that's exactly right. The consular section was quite large. I think we had probably between 35 and 40 consular officers in the consulate on any given day and I think some really good, in general, mid-level managers.

You tended actually to socialize and so forth with the consular folks. And of course a lot of us were first tour or second tour officers, a lot of singles or young married couples who would socialize after work.

Of course, Mexico City's an unbelievably interesting place to be, hundreds of restaurants, great museums, good public transportation, and as I said, pretty safe. Mexico's a great country to travel in.

So I enjoyed my two years there enormously.

Q: Was there any problem with pollution at the time?

TRIVELLI: A bit, yes. I lived right on Reforma, the main avenue and most days you could not see up the street to Chapultepec Castle. Absolutely, there was quite a pollution issue.

Q: Now this was before or after the earthquake?

TRIVELLI: This was before the big earthquake.

Q: Then, when you left there, this would be, what,

TRIVELLI: 1980.

Q: Where'd you go?

TRIVELLI: Went back to Washington. It was an unwritten rule at the time that if you married a foreign spouse, the next tour would be in the U.S. I think there was an idea they wanted to Americanize foreign spouses somehow.

So I took a job in WHA, in those days ARA, in the Office of Andean Affairs.

Q: There's also an opportunity for your wife to become an American citizen.

TRIVELLI: That's right. I think that's one of the reasons they did it, although she ended up not becoming an American for about ten years. But I think that was part of the rationale.

Q: Well, what did your job consist of?

TRIVELLI: I was the back-up desk officer for Colombia and Venezuela. There was an officer for each of the Andean countries and then there were two second tour junior folks and one of them, me, backed up Venezuela and Colombia and the other guy backed up Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia.

Q: This morning I had a fairly long interview with Bill Luers.

TRIVELLI: Bill was the ambassador in Caracas when I was the back-up desk officer.

Q: He was saying it was a particularly good time. What were your main preoccupations?

TRIVELLI: Well, with both countries, we had really, really good relationships. I think Venezuela and I assume Ambassador Luers' account said this, but we had a tremendously cooperative relationship at that time.

Remember, we sold them F-16s. Our intelligence services had exchanges. We had a state visit from the Venezuelan president, Herrera Campins, while I was on the desk. So really a very kind of positive relationship.

About the only kind of fly in the ointment was this on-going issue over repayment after the nationalization of the oil companies. Super complicated, but in any case there were these old expropriation cases that hung over the relationship a bit. But in general, very, very positive.

Q: Was the Hickenlooper Amendment still in effect? The one where you don't give aid if properties were expropriated and not duly compensation for.

TRIVELLI: In this case, though, of course, we weren't giving a lot of aid to the Venezuelans, they're a wealthy nation. But in these nationalization cases, they had paid, they had adjudicated the cases and they were paying some, but it was the situation where they would say, "Okay, we agree, we owe you $300 million, but, by the way, now we see that you owe $298 million in back taxes. Going to take years for those cases to sort of move through the tax courts of Venezuela."

Q: Oh, boy! You have much contact with the embassies in Washington?

TRIVELLI: Yes, it was the oil boom, Venezuela had lots of money and they would have these really rather lavish receptions at the embassy.

Q: In the case of Colombia, I guess the drug war was still going on?

TRIVELLI: Very much so. We had a very large DEA and narcotics affairs section presence down there. I remember making a trip down there and flying into the jungle. The anti-drug war was in full swing by that time, even in the early Eighties.

Q: Were we concerned that the Venezuelan government might just plain because of the guerilla movement and all?

TRIVELLI: No. I don't recall that it was much of an issue. In fact, well, of course Bill Luers would know, but if I remember right, Teddy Petkoff had already come in from the cold by that point. So I don't think we had a great concern about guerillas in Venezuela.

In Colombia, I think, a different story. There were not only the FARC, but the ELN was very active, the M-19 in the major cities and you put on top of that the drug war, a very, very dicey situation.

Q: The Reagan Administration came in while you were there, is that right?

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: I was wondering, the Reagan Administration, Latin America seemed to be the place where they going to sort of exert most of their will and effort. Did you find the political process in the States a little intrusive, or were Colombia and Venezuela in their sights?

TRIVELLI: I don't there being particular issues with Colombia and Venezuela and like I said, we actually had a state visit by the Venezuelan president during the Reagan Administration.

Now, of course what that administration began to focus on was Central America and in fact my tour in Andean Affairs was cut short and I was put downstairs in CEN during the last six months to work Central American affairs, because that office expanded from a rather sleepy office of probably eight or nine people to 30, 35 people, almost overnight as it really ramped up.

Q: Yeah, I remember interviewing Curtin Winsor, who was our ambassador to Costa Rica and he said that the highest ranking official visitor to come to Costa Rica during his ambassadorship was a lieutenant governor of Mississippi and he gathered that he had come sort of accidentally, was not quite sure why he was there. Things certainly changed.

TRIVELLI: Absolutely.

Q: What were you doing in Central American Affairs?

TRIVELLI: Well, they decided that they needed to form something they called the "truth squad," which was a very early attempt to work on strategic communications.

They needed three people to do work like draft op eds. This was the time when word processing was just starting, so we were asked to develop standard replies for congressional letters and public inquiries on Central America, because it was starting to get very hot, a lot of public outcry about events like the nuns massacre in El Salvador, etc.

So we did that, did some speechwriting and did congressional testimony, did Qs and As back from the Hill after testimony. There were three of us, really three rather junior people, who were just thrown in to what had actually been a supply closet to work on some of this stuff.

Q: Did you feel any of you might say the political heat coming from Congress, at all, or were you pretty well removed from that?

TRIVELLI: We were too junior to feel any direct heat, but it was one of those times in your career when you could actually read the front page of the Post and know what kind of day you were going to have in the office because something had happened in Central America or someone had said something about it. So, a very, very interesting time.

Q: You did this, what, for

TRIVELLI: For about six months.

Q: How long were you in Washington, in this job?

TRIVELLI: Just two years.

Q: So we're moving up to about '82 now?

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: Then where?

TRIVELLI: I went to Quito, Ecuador, which made sense, because I had been in Andean Affairs and it was easy to insinuate myself into getting a job in Quito. I was an economic cone officer and that tour in Quito was my first economic job, so it was a really good match for me.

Q: It looks like you were really moving in to becoming a Latin American hand.

TRIVELLI: Yes, my entire career I only worked for WHA.

Q: Well, then, Quito. You were there from, what, '82 to

TRIVELLI: '82 to '84.

Q: What were our interests there, at that time?

TRIVELLI: Well, a lot of it was oil. Texaco was there and had the lease and management of many of Ecuador's oil fields. As the number two in the economic section, I was also the unofficial petroleum attaché.

I spent probably half my time doing petroleum issues, doing reporting on the industry, talking to Texaco on a regular basis. I got to travel down into the jungle to the Texaco operation. It was really very, very interesting,

Q: Last week I was interviewing Peter Romero about the Peruvian-Ecuadorian war, border war, over a piece of jungle. Was that controversy going on at the time you were there?

TRIVELLI: No, it was not the same time.

Q: You say oil, one doesn't think of Ecuador as being an oil-rich country.

TRIVELLI: Well Ecuador is actually one of the original OPEC members. They had some of the earliest wells in Latin America, from the 1920s, some wells on the Pacific in the Manta area.

Oil was discovered in the Amazon Basin sometime in the 1960s I believe and so they became a small but important producer. They produced a little over 200,000 barrels a day, at that time.

Q: What was the Ecuadorian government's attitude towards oil?

TRIVELL: Most of the fields were controlled by Texaco on a fee for service basis. However, the Ecuadorian government had established a national oil company called CEPE. They had actually started production in their own fields.

While I was there it was a public/private system. Texaco was there and the national oil company and a fair amount of other oil service companies were active there.

There were a lot of these wildcat guys from Texas, real characters, who were in the oil business in Ecuador at that time.

Q: What were some of the other sources of income for Ecuador? They had a lot of cattle, didn't they?

TRIVELLI: Actually, it was bananas. They were one of the largest banana producers in the world at that time. Also, other kinds of agricultural commodities. Fishing, they had a fairly large fishing industry and a fishmeal industry for fertilizer. So it was a borderline middle income kind of nation when I was there.

But a fascinating nation, because you had the Andean indigenous culture in the highlands, a much different kind of culture in the lowlands, in Guayaquil and along the Pacific coast and then a third of the country in the Amazon.

A great place to travel around in, really nice people. I detected virtually no anti-Americanism while I was there.

Q: Had the tuna wars been resolved by this time?

TRIVELLI: I think so, yes.

Q: In what manner had they been resolved?

TRIVELLI: I just can't give you an answer, I just don't know enough.

Q: This was a little bit of a game for a while. How was income distributed in Ecuador?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think, like a lot of places in Latin America, I'm sure the Gini coefficient was not particularly good at that time. There were some very wealthy people, but I must say I did not sense a very wealthy, conspicuous consumption class.

Obviously there were wealthy folks, obviously there were desperately poor people, particularly up in the Andes, but I don't think you had a situation where you had multibillionaires.

Q: Who was the ambassador while you were there?

TRIVELLI: Sam Hart was the ambassador. He had actually been my office director in Andean Affairs.

Q: He was an economist, wasn't he?

TRIVELLI: He was an econ officer as well, that's right.

Q: I've interviewed him. He had been in Israel, too, at one point.

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think he was econ counselor or DCM in Tel Aviv at one point.

Q: How were relations between the Ecuadorian government and the Amerindian indigenous population?

TRIVELLI: I don't remember that being a particular issue. I know our political section did reporting about indigenous populations, about the Catholic Church and embassy officers did a fair amount of traveling in the country and would write about it on a regular basis. But the indigenous rights and indigenous voice issues I think really were still not the focus at that time.

Q: As I recall, there was no particular guerilla movement, either inspired by drug traffickers or dispossessed groups fighting the government, was there?

TRIVELLI: No, Ecuador was a very kind of peaceful place at that time. There must have been some drug trafficking, but a lot of that had not spilled over from Colombia. There was a couple of small groups that purported to be anti-government, but I don't think ever really amounted to anything.

In terms of kind of social and political tranquility, it was in pretty good shape. Now, right before I got there, the president, Jaime Roldós, had been killed in a helicopter accident and President Hurtado took over, the vice president.

One of his ideas was a debt forgiveness movement. So there was some tension on that issue, 'cause there was, remember, at that time, several countries in Latin America were trying to renounce their sovereign debt.

Q: Well, this was a time when there was a lot of activity on sort of the North-South income disparity within the world: the North was wealthy, the South was poor and something should be done about it.

TRIVELLI: I think that's exactly right. The Non-Aligned Movement was on the upswing. Of course, if you start renouncing your debt, people aren't going to lend to you and so if you don't have cash, you can't trade. And, remember, people were moving into a barter system.

In fact, one of the things I did in the economic section was to look at this issue. Ecuador had started actually bartering oil for goods from Europe and other places.

Q: Did you have much contact with other embassies there?

TRIVELLI: To some extent. The Canadians were there, we had a great relationship with them. The Israeli Embassy was right across the circle from us and it was bombed. I remember it because I was sitting at my desk, with my back to my window, when that happened and when that bomb went off, I felt the concussion. The windows behind me vibrated and I knew a bomb had gone off fairly close to us and it was in front of the Israeli Embassy, across the little plaza.

Q: Did they know who had set it off?

TRIVELLI: I honestly don't remember. I think what ended up happening is that the bombed was detonated outside, right outside, on the sidewalk, so there was some miscue somewhere. But it was pretty powerful.

Q: Well, of course, in that whole area, there are quite a few Lebanese traders, aren't there?

TRIVELLI: Well, there's a Lebanese population on the coast, but really very Ecuadorianzied, no, so I don't remember any issues.

Q: Was there any elections while you were there?

TRIVELLI: I'm trying to remember how this went. I was there for the election of Febres Cordero.

Ecuador had perhaps 18 registered political parties, so very complex politics and party politics, but Febres Cordero was a wealthy businessman from Guayaquil, a conservative, so the government shifted from left of center to right of center while I was there.

Q: Given the fact that later you had not too friendly a government come in, was there any sense that this was in the offing?

TRIVELLI: No, I didn't really feel that. I thought we had a positive bilateral relationship with Ecuador. In U.S.-Ecuador relations, there's not a lot of historical baggage.

There was a close economic relationship, obviously. But we were not viewed as a dominant semi-colonial power, like perhaps in other places in Latin America. So we had a good, respectful, relationship.

Q: How about the drug business? This is a spillover from Colombia, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we had a very small anti-narcotics program. In fact I helped administer it a while. The anti-narcotics program was, oddly enough, in the economics section, so we had one officer spend a small amount of his or her time on this and a relatively small amount of money. There was DEA there and so we did give modest amounts of support to the Ecuadorian counter-drug police.

But it was not a major issue. Certainly trafficking went on. Of course Ecuador and Colombia are neighbors. Some of that border's in very remote areas. But I don't recall it being a terribly huge issue at the time.

Q: Well then, where'd you go next?

TRIVELLI: After that I went to Panama.

Q: You were in Panama from, what

TRIVELLI: It would have been '85-'86.

Q: Today is the Third of February, 2012, with Paul Trivelli and Paul, last time I had you going to Panama and it was '83?

TRIVELLI: No, it would have been '85.

Q: Okay, what was the job and how did you get it?

TRIVELLI: It was number two in the economic/commercial section.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

TRIVELLI: Ted Briggs.

Q: Now, what was the situation in Panama at that particular time?

TRIVELLI: Well, there were really two things going on. One, we were in the middle of the Canal transition, slowly moving over services and land to the Panamanians, based on the treaty.

But secondly, really the beginning of political issues surrounded Noriega and the military. While I was there President Barletta was forced to resign, the presidency was taken over by Arturo Delvalle, who was widely seen as something of a puppet for Noriega.

And as I was departing the civil society demonstrations were just picking up.

Q: Okay, well, let's pick up right when you got there. How did you see the situation?

TRIVELLI: Panama, to me, in many ways was a surprise. It was an economy that was doing well, because the Canal was doing well, it was a huge banking center, more than 130 banks located there, some of them basically store front kind of operations, but doing very, very well overall. High rise buildings, construction going on all over, really, to me, a surprisingly vibrant and modern place.

Q: How would you describe sort of relations between the embassy and Noriega?

TRIVELLI: Well, Noriega hadn't taken over at that time overtly. He was a power behind the throne, a nebulous situation.

I think we've always had quite frankly a love-hate relationship with Panama during that time period and before. On one hand, there's the importance of the relationship, because of the Canal, because of treaty implementation. On the other hand, an underlying resentment that comes from still in essence owning part of that nation.

So it was always a rather testy situation, although on balance the relationship with the government was pretty good. I remember working with the foreign ministry, not always easy. There was a North American desk and we did a lot of business, but it was a courteous and cool relationship, not one of total friendship and cooperation.

I remember at one point the foreign Ministry North American desk people decided that if anyone in the U.S. government wanted to meet with anyone in the Panamanian government, they had to go through them.

Well, that didn't last very long, because of course they got overwhelmed by the requests for meetings, 'cause we met with the Panamanians on a whole range of issues always, because of the complexity of the relationship.

The other sort of interesting element about Panama at that time was that the U.S. government there was really represented by three separate power centers. The ambassador, head of the Panama Canal Commission and head of Southern Command were essentially co-equal government entities.

Q: Well, now, the treaty had been signed and what was the period of implementation?

TRIVELLI: '79 to '99.

Q: So, had implementation begun?

TRIVELLI: Yes, the treaty was very complex in that regard, but essentially something like one third of the old Panama Canal Zone was immediately turned over to the Panamanian government and then there were areas that were designated joint control and even some exclusive control of the United States, but it provided for a series of steps over twenty years for the final assumption of by Panama of both the Canal Commission and all the territory occupied by U.S. military installations.

A lot of complex relationships, some of the bases and access roads were guarded by Panamanians, others by joint patrols, others by Americans. So it's fairly complicated.

I worked on economic issues, because the treaty also provided for: what do you do about the banks that were in the old Canal Zone, what do you do about the PX and the commissary treaty?

One issue I worked on with IRS and Treasury was the treaty provided for the taxation of American contractors in the Zone for the first time. Well, how do you implement that? How do you even develop the U.S. tax forms to have them fill out?

So there's a whole host of issues.

Q: Anyone who's looked at this issue over the years know that you have that Zonian hunk of people. During the time you were there, how did you find it? These people must have been seething.

TRIVELLI: I remember going to a couple of meetings with the contractors, for example, to tell them, "Remember, you're going to be taxed. This is how IRS is going to do it." Very angry with us.

I think that there was in the Zonian community underlying anger at the U.S. government. Obviously there were some folks who accepted the transition and understood it and there were some that were really quite resentful.

Q: Was reason an implement, or was this more emotional than anything else?

TRIVELLI: That's a good question. I think people understood that the treaty was done and had to be implemented and one of the reasons there was a twenty year implementation period was for exactly this kind of issue, how to be fair to the Canal Zone residents, how to be fair to the Panamanians and the Panamanian government.

But I think there was among some people a deep seated emotional reaction, because basically you are slowly sweeping away a culture and a life style that in many ways was extraordinarily unique and what do you say to people who wanted to still send their kids to Balboa High School, because they'd graduated there, their parents had graduated there?

In the end, I think the transition went really about as well as anyone could have expected, but certainly among that population, they harbored resentment towards the United States, no doubt about it.

Remember, the Zone itself was very well maintained, I don't want to say idyllic, but a safe, pleasant place to be and going in there was almost like going back into some idyllic imagined neighborhood in the U.S. in the 1940s or the 1950s. All the grass was cut, all the houses were maintained, very safe to walk around, etc, etc, etc.

So I could understand that. People really saw their lives and their life styles and their culture threatened.

Q: What about on the military side? What was your impression of the Southern Command at that time?

TRIVELLI: Well, I actually worked fairly closely with their treaty implementation folks. They had an office in J-5 that did that, always enormously professional and hard working.

The headquarters itself was in Quarry Heights, in a bunker, actually. When you went in to the inner sanctum of the general's office and the conference rooms, you literally walked into the side of a hill, a fascinating place.

You're talking about folks who knew what was down the road, had planned for it. My impression was that they were not totally displeased with having to leave Panama and locate somewhere else and of course they ended up here in the Miami area.

I thought that they understood, and they in typical U.S. military fashion were able to plan this thing out over a period of years and move forward from there.

Q: Well, of course, the military in a way didn't have quite the same stake. If you're a military man or woman, you're used to being moved somewhere and each place you

move to has got a different culture and all and so you don't feel you have a generational commitment to a particular place.

TRIVELLI: I think that's right. I think the U.S. military perhaps was a bit dismayed, they lost some training facilities, relatively unique things, like their jungle training facility. But adjustments were generally made.

The other thing is and I think I saw this here, in my job at Southern Command and talking to some of the former commanders is that one of the problems with SOUTHCOM having been located in Panama is that the general would spend a significant chunk of time worrying about the U.S.-Panama relationship and all those inevitable frictions that would happen when you've got a base in a foreign country, or a series of bases.

When you leave there and you go back to the U.S., well, you're freed up to think more strategically about the whole region. So I think on balance it probably was a positive development for the U.S. military.

Q: For both the Zonians and the military, as a representative of the embassy, were you considered part of the apparatus that sold them out?

TRIVELLI: That's an interesting question. I don't think I was treated particularly rudely by anybody. Certainly the relationship we had with Southern Command and the relationship we had with the Panama Canal Commission, which was headed, actually, by a former U.S. general, at that time, was good and cooperative.

As an economist, for example, I had very fluid conversations with the economists over at the Panama Canal Commission, thinking about what's the traffic going to be for the Canal, who were the users, how much money does it generate. They were always very, very open with sharing that information. So I think in that sense the relationship was good.

And I think that the personal relationship between the ambassador and the Southern Command and the Canal Commission, at that time, anyway, was really pretty positive.

Q: Sort of on the financial side, what were the banks doing?

TRIVELLI: Well, the Panamanian banks, in downtown Panama, had very loose deposit and transfer rules, so they were heavily involved in international transactions and movement of money.

Some of them had concrete buildings and were real banks, others were literally just an office. But it allowed people to move money from Europe, the United States there and out to the Cayman Islands or to wherever they wanted to move it.

The regulation on that system was probably not as strong as it could be, but they did it for a reason, in order to attract that activity to Panama.

Q: Well, as an economic officer, were you working with the banks or with the government, our government or the Panamanian government, to keep the banking system from becoming a repository for illegal money?

TRIVELLI: The Department of the Treasury and State economic folks were very interested, for example, in negotiating a tax information exchange agreement with Panama to get at some of those issues and the Panamanian government, at that time, anyway, was not particularly interested in doing that.

Q: Later things really turned nasty with sort of the Panamanian National Guard and Noriega and all, but during the time you were there things hadn't reached that point, had they?

TRIVELLI: They hadn't really reached that point. I think that there was at least a nominal civilian leadership of the government. I think everybody had a sense that Noriega was the power behind the throne, but, as I say, civil society ferment was just starting. But it still was in a manageable situation during my time there.

Q: You mentioned that there was a change at the top in the Panamanian government. What was this?

TRIVELLI: Well, President Barletta, who actually had been a World Bank economist and a very thoughtful, intelligent guy, was forced to resign, for whatever reason, the Guard didn't like him and he was out and I believe Delvalle was his vice president at the time, was elevated and become the nominal civilian head of state.

Q: Did the country team feel that the government was a tool of the head of the National Guard, Manuel Noriega?

TRIVELLI: I'm sure that we believed that, I don't know if "tool" is the right word, but I'm sure we believed Noriega had influence on the running of the government.

I must say, though, one thing that really surprised me when I was there was we did not seem to know very well the inner workings of the National Guard. In other words, our insight into the Panamanian military was not nearly as great as I guessed it would have been, given the depth of the relationship. The *comandancia* was still something of a black box to people, which I found rather odd.

That wasn't my portfolio, but I remember hearing these conversations and I was surprised how little we seemed to know about the dynamic of the National Guard at its highest levels.

Q: Was this a matter of not really focusing our attention or seeing it as a problem?

TRIVELLI: I don't know. I just remember, even the military intelligence folks, 'cause there was a very robust unit over at Fort Clayton, would say, "Hey, the *comandancia's* still basically a black box to us."

They had a lot of interest in it, I'm sure, but, again, I'm just surprised how little we seemed to know about exactly how things worked.

Q: Where did you live?

TRIVELLI: In Punta Paitilla, in a very nice apartment. Most embassy people lived in that area. Most embassy people were in apartments by that time, because houses were much less secure and there'd been, I think because of the financial center boom, a large amount of construction of large apartment buildings.

The embassy at that time was right on the water, right on Balboa Avenue and we lived a short cab ride sort of up the hill, behind the Holiday Inn.

Q: Were you and other members of the embassy staff much connected to Panamanian society?

TRIVELLI: Yes, because we lived in Panama City, so we shopped and walked and had Panamanian friends and went to restaurants and all the kinds of things that you do if you live in any fairly large city.

Again, one thing that surprised me is the Panama Canal folks, the Americans and the U.S. military, generally stayed in the old Canal Zone. They spent most of their time, even non-working hours, in the old Panama Canal Zone.

Q: I was an enlisted man in the air force and I remember almost having to drag some friends out of the base when I was in Japan and when I was consul general in Naples hearing people at the commissary saying they never went through the tunnel. The tunnel led to the city of Naples and they didn't go to Naples. And I'm sure at Fort Apache there was the same attitude. I'm not going to fault it, because this is army life. But it does create a disconnect.

TRIVELLI: I think that's absolutely right. I think many people were genuinely wary about leaving the old Zone. They heard stories about crime, or whatever.

And they didn't need to, because the bases themselves, even though we were going through the transition, had really robust PXs and commissaries and officers' clubs and NCO clubs and sports fields and all the kinds of things that you would need.

So people didn't really feel a need to go down to Panama City.

Q: Did you sense a feeling of almost apprehension about what's going to happen?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think that there was a lot of speculation about the Panamanians' ability to take over all of this. There were a lot of fears that all of these facilities that had been so carefully constructed and tended, from the housing to the military installations, would fall into massive disrepair. There were worries that Panama somehow would not be financially and technologically able to keep the Canal running in an efficient manner.

And all those fears really were not realized. The fact is that Panama did a very good job in utilizing the facilities and the Canal itself continued to run well. In fact, right now it's being expanded.

Q: How about the turmoil, unrest, whatever you want to call it, in the rest of Central America? How did that translate?

TRIVELLI: Panama was something of a safe haven, if you will. So we didn't really much of a spillover. One of the things about Panama, too, is that they had a very liberal policy related to accepting disgraced officials or guerillas from other countries and letting them live there. So it almost had a safe haven mentality about it and I think was relatively unaffected by the turmoil in the rest of Central America.

Q: Well, of course, Panama had been part of Colombia and this was the height of the reign of the Colombian drug lords and all. How was it, the drug situation, playing out, while you were there?

TRIVELLI: Not a lot. I suspect that their banking system probably benefited some from all the money laundering you have to do in the drug business, but because of the geography, the Pan American Highway was never completed linking Panama to Colombia, a lot of formidable jungle down in that area. So you did not get, at that time, drug routes through Panama to any great extent.

Who knows, perhaps the FARC and the ELN would cross the border to do a little R&R. But, again, an isolated situation.

Q: Was our embassy particularly focused on drugs at the time?

TRIVELLI: Yes, in the sense that there was a DEA office. I don't recall that being a huge focus of embassy activity, but, again, I may be wrong, because that wasn't part of my portfolio.

Q: From your perspective, how stood the embassy? Were there currents running in it opposed to the policy, for the policy, or what have you, towards Noriega? Was there turmoil within the embassy?

TRIVELLI: That's an interesting question. I think in terms of the canal treaty issues, because the treaty had been signed several years previously and we were in the implementation phase, I think that ship had already sailed and I think the embassy spent a lot of time trying to make that transition work.

I don't recall a lot of debate about Noriega. I don't recall hearing people having disagreeing views about where that government was. I think there were fears about the general stability of the government and so forth, but I don't remember any huge disagreement.

Q: Did you meet Noriega, or not?

TRIVELLI: No, certainly not one on one. I don't recall ever meeting him. We may have seen each other at social events, like large receptions or cocktail parties, I got a glimpse of him. But I don't recall ever being in a room with him except on those occasions and chatting with him in any way.

Q: How was he viewed, by you and fellow officers, would you say?

TRIVELLI: Oh, I think he was viewed as this authoritarian military figure, almost a caricature of a Central American military dictator. He wasn't viewed very positively by the embassy, that's for sure.

Q: This was the Reagan Administration, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: And of course the Central American war was going on. I assume people would come to Panama as a rare tranquil spot in the region. Did you get a lot of visitors?

TRIVELLI: We did get some. We did have congressional delegations. There was a fair amount of interest on the Panama Canal transition itself and how it was working.

There was some interest, as I said, in the money laundering, tax information sharing stuff, so occasionally we'd get someone down from that committee who wanted to encourage the Panamanian government to better regulate its financial sector.

But I honestly don't recall huge numbers of Washington visitors.

Q: You left there, what, in '87?

TRIVELLI: Uh huh, yes.

Q: Where'd you go?

TRIVELLI: El Salvador.

Q: Well, now, this was a real change, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, a very different situation.

Q: You were in El Salvador from when to when?

TRIVELLI: ’87 to ’89.

Q: And what were you doing?

TRIVELLI: I was the number two in the economic/commercial section.

Q: Okay, ’87, what was the situation there?

TRIVELLI: Well, we were able to go with our family and I think that was a change, I think that we had recently been allowed, to bring in families. Every morning we were picked up at our homes in an armored van, with a follow car filled with National Police with automatic weapons. You could, in the evenings, often hear bombs going off, because the guerillas were trying to blow up electrical towers and other pieces of the infrastructure.

There was some kind of security force on almost every street corner in San Salvador at that time. Salvador had a plethora of security forces. There was the National Guard, there was the regular army, there was the treasury police and others.

So it was a rather dangerous place, although there was not heavy guerilla fighting that much in the city itself, although of course later that happened.

I remember one of the elections. We were in the Sheraton, on the top floor, with some people from Congress, very, very early in the morning and we were having juice and bagels and doughnuts before we went out to monitor the elections and we could actually see Salvadoran Army helicopter gun ships firing on guerilla positions a few hundred yards away. So it was at times rather dicey.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you were there?

TRIVELLI: Ed Corr was there when I got there.

Q: In your impression, how did he get along in that situation?

TRIVELLI: I think very well. He had a very good relationship with the Duarte government. It was obviously a tricky situation to be an ambassador there at that time, because there were a lot of questions in the U.S. about our policy and Congress wasn’t always united on what we should be doing in Central America. But I found him to be a very sensible, hard working, smart, decent guy who really did a very good job.

Q: Well, now, you were the number two in the economic section. What were your responsibilities?

TRIVELLI: Actually, that's interesting, because there'd been a fairly major earthquake several months before I got there and so part of the embassy building was destroyed or had been structurally weakened, so the economic section was taken out of the embassy and we actually sat in the AID offices.

There were some town houses that had been built to house embassy families and those became the AID offices, because the AID offices and economic section had been damaged. So we actually sat over in the AID mission and when they moved to another building we moved with them as well.

I think the kind of work that I did was typical of what a section number two would do: I wrote a lot of macro analysis, wrote the economic trends reports every year and those major reports that had to be done.

We also did a surprising amount of business promotion, because even though Salvador was at war, the entrepreneurial class stayed and the economy kept going. So my section, the commercial guys, we actually had a booth in the trade show and we did catalogue shows for different industries at that time. There was actually still a surprising amount of commercial activity.

Q: What would inspire American businessmen to go there?

TRIVELLI: Because there was money to be made. I think Salvador itself has a very vibrant entrepreneurial class. Salvadorans love to own small businesses, they are extremely hard workers and that economy just kept going.

In fact, when I was there, there was still American investment in El Salvador. There was a factory that made surgical gloves, there were all sorts of small operations that went on. We did a surprising amount of that kind of work.

Q: You mentioned that the guerillas were going after electric installations and all. How effective did you find this campaign against the infrastructure, trying to destroy it?

TRIVELLI: It's effective, because it can be very disruptive. On the other hand, the Salvadoran power company got extremely good at repairing things very quickly. They had helicopters and they had these replacement towers ready to go and they could move out very quickly and repair a lot of the damage, very remarkable.

I had the pleasure to actually go out several times on those helicopters, the company would fly us around and we'd look at the things they were able to do and it was really quite remarkable.

Q: In your estimate, what were the guerillas after?

TRIVELLI: They were after power, taking over the government and building it to their liking. I don't think there was any doubt about that.

Q: Did you see this as an indigenous movement, or was this something that was being run out of Nicaragua or Cuba or what?

TRIVELLI: Obviously the guerilla fighter were Salvadorans themselves, but obviously the FMLN could not have been at all effective without assistance from others.

Q: During the time you were there, how was that war going?

TRIVELLI: That's a good question. Again, this is not exactly what I focused on, but when I was there the western part of the country was relatively safe. I could drive there and I used to visit every few months. I would also drive with my family on the highway to go up to Guatemala and spend some time in Guatemala City.

At that time Guatemala City was actually a rather safe and very pleasant place. So to take a break, we would drive to Guatemala.

In the eastern part of the country, pockets of it were essentially guerilla territory. In some of the border areas, near the Honduran border, the guerillas held sway.

But it was not as if the entire nation was controlled by the FMLN. Essentially the army and the National Guard had gotten better and better, they'd fought the guerillas to a standstill and right after I left there was the so-called final offensive, where the FMLN systematically attacked San Salvador, the government was able to beat them back. That was the beginning of the end, in terms of that's when I think both sides realized this thing had been fought to a stalemate, that neither side would achieve a decisive victory, so it was probably time to talk.

Q: How did you find sort of the war fighting part of our embassy? Was it divided between you sort of going about you might say almost your regular duties and other guys were out there in camouflage? What sort of atmosphere was it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, well, the number of U.S. military personnel that could be there was actually limited by Congress. I think it was something like 130 uniformed military trainers in country at any given time.

So the U.S. military presence, although obviously it was there at the embassy and there were advisors out there when you went out to Salvadoran military bases, there would be some U.S. advisors at the bases, but it certainly was not overwhelming. We did have choppers there at Ilopango.

But I got along fine with the military group people, I had friends among them, it was not as if there was a wall between what the civilian side of the embassy was doing and the U.S. military side was doing.

The house right next to my residence was the so-called "helo house," that's where all the helicopter pilots lived when they were running missions out of Ilopango Air Base, so that was some times a bit rowdy, but in general the civilian-military relationship at the embassy was really quite good.

And I think we all thought we were doing the right thing and it was great to be part of a positive effort. When Eva and I look back on our Foreign Service career, we really treasure out time in El Salvador, because, one, the Salvadoran people are enormously warm and friendly and welcoming and funny and all the kinds of things that you want a people to be.

And secondly, you felt that you were actually working hand in hand with the local government in a cooperative way towards the right ends, towards the right goals, whether it's economic development or whether it's military success.

So those two things made for a really, really exciting tour for us.

Q: Well, did you feel that the efforts of the United States, because, obviously, we had long fingers in that situation, to do something about the problem that's endemic throughout the world, practically, of the divide between the rich and the poor? We had at that time a lot of economic émigrés to the United States from El Salvador. What were we doing about this and how did you feel we were doing whatever it was?

TRIVELLI: Well, Salvador's overarching problem is that it's a very small country with way too many people and it views itself as an agricultural society, or certainly did in the Eighties.

So there simply was not enough land to go around for everybody. At its core that was really the issue.

But I must say, I worked side by side with the AID mission and we had a very robust economic programs, encouraging entrepreneurship and private sector solutions, we had a large agricultural program, we had health and education, they had economic support funds that were actually given in some cases to prop up their ability to import goods like fuel.

So we had a very, very robust program. The U.S. government spent a lot of money on Salvador, but about half of it was on economic development.

And if you look at Salvador now, 15 years later, it's actually a pretty prosperous place. It's been okay, it's had solid economic growth and better socioeconomic indicators over the last 15, 20 years.

So I think the case could be made that not only did we work hard on the security aspects, but really made some inroads on economic development. That said, as you said, one out of every four or one out of every five Salvadorans actually lives outside Salvador and

even at the time I was there the amount of remittances sent back by Salvadorans living overseas and sending money back was a significant part of the economy.

Q: I live in Arlington and we have a large number of Central American, mainly Salvadoran and others, living in this area and, boy, they're hard workers and very nice people.

TRIVELLI: Absolutely. In Salvador, the guerillas would periodically call what they called a general strike and tell people not to go to work and if people tried to go to work or get on buses the guerillas would kill them.

And people went to work anyway. They wanted to go to work, they needed to go to work and damn it, they went.

Q: Did you feel the hand of Ollie North and his crew and that sort of subterranean movement on the part of the U.S. government of carrying on a war against Nicaragua and in El Salvador and all?

TRIVELLI: At that time, in El Salvador, I wasn't a part of that and of course North's involvement was more in the contra situation, which was run out of southern Honduras and northern Costa Rica.

So I did not see that at that time in El Salvador. I just didn't really see it. But, again, that's not something I focused on as part of my job.

Q: Well, did you find yourself dealing with congressional staff people and just the general media there, visiting the place?

TRIVELLI: Yes, again, that's not the focus of what I did and people were not particularly interested in the economic/commercial side of the house, but congressional delegations were almost a full time job for the ambassador and DCM. And Vice President Quayle visited while I was there as well.

So I remember very vividly being invited to the ambassador's or DCM's house on a regular basis, where we would do a little buffet lunch and go through the country team briefing for a visiting congressional delegation, etc, etc. Several times a month that would happen.

Q: How did you find relations with the people who lived there? You were there with your family and all. Were you able to sort of mix and mingle?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we made great friends. In fact, my wife still gets emails from our neighbors, the people that lived across the street from us. When we moved into that house, the Salvadoran neighbors all came over to the house to welcome us and they'd say, "And we're going to have you over" and you thought, well, maybe, they're just being polite but within 48 hours they'd come to your door again and say, "Okay, you're

coming over to dinner" and drag us to their house for dinner and drinks. Just fantastically hospitable people.

Q: Napoleón Duarte was the president at that time?

TRIVELLI: Yes and then I was there for the election of Cristiani. Most of the time I was there, it was Duarte government.

Q: How did you feel about the government? Was this a government that we were propping up, or that wouldn't make it otherwise, or was this a pretty good government, would you say?

TRIVELLI: I thought it was a good government. I think people forget the history of Salvador. This whole thing started, the Salvadoran wars really started because of a military coup by reformist military officers, who threw out the military dictator, 'cause they knew that unless something was done Salvador was going to go down the tubes.

And then they turned power over to a constituent assembly which wrote a new constitution, which put in a new president and then held subsequent elections and elected Duarte, who was a long time committed Christian Democrat. He actually had been tortured by the military government years prior.

So this was a guy who was committed to reform, committed to democracy, committed to a good relationship with the United States. So I had a lot of respect for that government, I must say.

And I think that's one of the reasons that made it pleasant to work there, because you felt you were working in partnership with people who got it, who really tried to do the right thing for their own nation.

Q: What was your attitude towards the Sandinistas in Nicaragua?

TRIVELLI: Of course I thought about it years later, when I was in Nicaragua. Remember what happened in Managua. They were able to defeat Somoza, he left, they formed a junta, which had civilians on it and non-Sandinistas, a lot of promises about moving towards real democracy and then they slowly consolidated power and turned into a popular socialist regime -- whatever you want to call it, essentially a dictatorship. So I think by that time the Sandinistas had really revealed themselves for what they were.

Q: Did you feel that service in, I guess in those days it was ARA, particularly in Central America, was good or bad for your career? Sometimes one feels one is almost tied to a policy.

TRIVELLI: I thought it was good for my career. I think serving in Central America at that time was almost like service in Iraq and Afghanistan today, you kind of have to do it,

somebody's got to do it and if you step forward to do it, because of the danger and so forth, it was the right thing to do.

I think it helped me and I can say it provided me with perhaps two and a half of my most interesting years in the Service.

Q: Things that you're saying reminds me a bit of my time as consul general in Saigon in the late Sixties. I was doing my job and it wasn't particularly policy oriented, but stuff was going on all the time around me.

By the way, how was life, particularly for your wife and family there? You had to make certain adjustments because of the situation.

TRIVELLI: Yes, we occasionally had curfews when things got bad, and they would say, "Hey, you basically can't be out after dark." But of course the Salvadorans responded to that by holding parties they used to call "curfew to curfew," they'd hold parties and keep everyone in their house partying the entire night until dawn.

It was actually kind of ironic. I was sped to the office every day in armored vans and my wife tools around in this little Toyota Corolla station wagon with two small children and went shopping and went to the movies and visited girl friends and did all the sorts of things she had to do.

I think our feeling was and I think the embassy's feeling was that the FMLN really did not want to attack American diplomats and their families. Remember, their war was strategic communications as much as it was a military operation. They essentially had offices in the United States and I think that they did not want to enrage the American people by killing American diplomats. So although we probably could have been targeted by accident or just be in the wrong place at the wrong time, I don't think the FMLN went out to attack civilians.

Now of course they did target the U.S. military. In 1985, guerillas opened fire on a group of unarmed, off duty marine security guards from the embassy dining in a restaurant in the Zona Rosa entertainment district in San Salvador; four marines, as well as nine Salvadoran civilians and one of the guerillas, died in the shoot-out. And then a navy commander was killed at the university. So they saw uniformed military, although it is not clear that any of these victims was wearing uniform when attacked, as legitimate targets.

Q: Did you have any contact with, the term is the "sandalistas," sort of the kids or the left wing fringe from Hollywood or elsewhere, did they come to El Salvador?

TRIVELLI: Yes, they did. I didn't have a lot of contact with them. First of all, they always wanted to travel to guerilla territory, no, which the government did not want people to do and they had actually set up road blocks, so this was always a bone of

contention, because the government said, "Hey, we can't protect you if you cross this line.

And these groups would come and they would have a truck full of beach balls and tee shirts and so forth and drive up to guerilla territory and try to donate these items. I remember there were church groups that would try to go into refugee camps and meet guerillas and try to hold services with them. They would do this witness for peace thing, where people would tell their story about atrocities or about the war.

So there was a fair amount of that going on, unfortunately in a very dangerous situation.

Q: Yeah, I heard an account from Tony Quainton, when he was in Nicaragua, getting caught with a bunch of Maryknoll sisters, who said, "Let's pray" and they all clasped hands and all of a sudden Tony found them praying against the President of the United States, which made it a little bit difficult for him.

TRIVELLI: I think people forget how difficult and contentious this was. The murders of the American nuns in Salvador, the murders of the Jesuit priests, massacres, which did happen, on both sides, a very contentious, tragic situation.

Q: Well, then, after El Salvador, where did you go?

TRIVELLI: Monterrey.

Q: How did you feel about Monterrey?

TRIVELLI: It was kind of funny, because when I went up there people told me I was destroying my career, 'cause I was going to be an economic officer at a consulate, a shop of one.

Q: But a major city.

TRIVELLI: Yes, exactly. And, again, I found it to be really interesting and I think actually a boost to my career, because we had one economic officer, one political officer, one commercial officer, together with twenty or so consular folks.

Q: You were there from when to when?

TRIVELLI: '89 to '92.

Q: What was the situation in Monterrey at that time?

TRIVELLI: The security situation was extremely good. In fact, I lived in a little suburb of Monterrey and you could literally leave your door open, a place called San Pedro Garza Garcia, a very efficiently run place.

It was like living in a suburb in the United States. The garbage was picked up twice a week and the streets were swept and the police were responsive and it was a great situation.

Monterrey was booming. The steel mills had been shut down, but they were able to reinvent themselves. The group of ten companies got into new products, expanded, very vibrant, exciting economic times for northern Mexico.

And the U.S. government was beginning to think about NAFTA. So the USTR folks would come down and probe the business community about what they would think about a free trade agreement with the United States.

Q: Was the business community open to you going around and asking questions?

TRIVELLI: Yes, absolutely, in fact, you'd just love it, 'cause you'd go into Alfa or one of the others, beautiful large offices, they had these guides, young women who were paid to escort visitors into the corporate suites and the company officers would talk endlessly about their companies and offer to take us on factory tours, which I did many, many times. I thought the business community there was extremely open to us.

Q: How stood Monterrey, in its connection to the United States? We're talking about NAFTA, weren't we, at the time?

TRIVELLI: Yes, just starting those preliminary feelers.

Q: Did you think anything would come of it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I did, because the business community in Monterrey was already thinking along those lines. In fact, Grupo Vitro, the glass folks, had actually started buying small U.S. glass companies. CEMEX, the cement folks, were expanding globally.

So that community already had in its mind what the future would bring, in terms of globalization and a stronger relationship with the United States. So I thought that it would happen.

Q: What was your impression of the work effort, the planning and all in this hotbed of Mexican industrialization?

TRIVELLI: To me, Monterrey was one of those places that ran well. You could just tell, the business community and that work force, very sophisticated folks, they saw their future as being tied to the United States. Many of the wealthier people in Monterrey actually had apartments on Padre Island in Texas. Many of them were educated in the United States, particularly at the University of Texas and Texas A&M. And, again, Monterrey had the reputation and I think it's right, of being a hard working, no nonsense kind of city and I think they lived up to that.

Q: I guess in Mexico at that time the PRI was running things, weren't they?

TRIVELLI: They were pretty dominant, yes.

Q: And was this a detriment, or a positive thing, from a business point of view.

TRIVELLI: That's a good question. I think, from what I saw and the consular district was basically a quarter of Mexico, the northeast quadrant of Mexico, so I was also able to do a lot of traveling.

When we went to see the governors' offices in the states of northern Mexico, they were all PRIistas, but they were pro-business, they were pro-tourism, they wanted to have a great relationship with the U.S. consulate in Monterrey and the consul general.

We were treated very well, we could go in to see mayors and governors without any problem. And certainly the business community in Monterrey thought it could work with the government and they had a close relationship.

Q: I think it's in the oil business where they talk about the dinosaurs and the system, the old party hacks and all. Were they still evident, or were they being forced out?

TRIVELLI: Remember, Salinas de Gotari really changed the face of the PRI. His election skipped a generation of PRIistas and that's really why the PRD was formed. Those dinosaurs said, "Hey, it was supposed to be my turn and it's not, so I'm leaving."

So the PRI had renewed itself, or at least had skipped a generation and had some younger people in power.

The other thing with politics in Monterrey, it's something of a PAN stronghold. Some of those mayors at that time, even when I was there, were PANista, usually young, forward looking people.

So it was a very, very interesting mix.

Q: Did you get many American business people coming down to Monterrey?

TRIVELLI: Yes, absolutely.

Q: Were they looking ahead, too?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think that they were. Actually, the Foreign Commercial Service had a person there, but about half the time I was there that slot was unfilled, so I'd try to do two jobs at the same time and we did a lot of Gold Key services for people who came down to look for trade and investment opportunities, big participation in trade shows. So I think the answer is yes, I think a lot of American business sought opportunity in Mexico.

Remember, too, the *maquilla* industry was booming. GM had a factory about an hour away from Monterrey, a large car factory. So American businesses were there.

Maquillas are factories that are designed to take raw input and components from the U.S., assemble them and ship them back to the U.S. And it's everything from textiles, in Mexico's case, where I was, at that time, a lot of it was things like wire harnesses for cars and stuff like that.

Q: As we talk, crime had really taken over in places in Mexico, particularly drug related, but how stood things when you were there.

TRIVELLI: Again, when I was there, it was really a very safe city. You could walk the streets. Murders were a rare thing. It was really a remarkably peaceful place when I was there.

Q: You had your family with you, I assume?

TRIVELLI: Yes, fact is, I liked Monterrey more than my wife did, because my wife's from Mexico City and Monterrey and Mexico City have a long time rivalry and resentment.

In fact, we had trouble renting a house, because when my wife went around to look at houses, when she opened her mouth they realized she had an accent from Mexico City, and they just didn't want to rent to her. So I had to go with the real estate agent. They had to send the *gringo* in order to rent a house.

Q: What was the cause of resentment, would you say?

TRIVELLI: Monterrey had the belief that they're the ones that did all the work and earned all the revenue and Mexico City just took it from them and spent it on themselves. But some of this goes back to the Mexican Revolution, the folks in northern Mexico versus the folks in central Mexico.

But one good thing, 'cause my wife's family's all from Mexico City, so she and I would visit fairly often and you could actually take a train, an overnight train with sleeper cars from Monterrey to Mexico City and these were like sleeper cars that I'm sure were built in the United States in the Forties and Fifties, everything of solid steel, even the bunk bed out of heavy gauge steel, wonderful, what a wonderful way to travel.

Q: How did the hand of the embassy rest on the consulate general in Monterrey?

TRIVELLI: A good question. Largely they pretty much left us alone, thank God, 'cause as an economic officer my EER was reviewed by the economic minister/counselor in Mexico City. But as I recall, I think they came up maybe twice in the three years I was there.

When I was acting consul general, there'd be conversations sometimes on issues with the supervisory consul general at the time, but in general the embassy trusted us to do our job.

Q: Who was the ambassador at the time?

TRIVELLI: Negroponte. He came up, because he had taken a pledge to visit every state in Mexico during his tenure as ambassador, so he came up and visited our states and we actually had a good time taking him around.

Q: Was tourism important in your consular district, or was it more industrial?

TRIVELLI: Tourism in the Monterrey area at that time was not big. There just were not a lot of tourist sites. Monterrey and those cities were only really founded in the 1880s, or attained any size in that era. So there's no colonial buildings, there's no ancient Indian artifacts.

Q: Was the divide between, I don't know whether I'm using the right terms, but the indigenous population versus the Spanish-origin population, was that fairly pronounced?

TRIVELLI: You didn't see it up there, because that's the north. I'm sure there were indigenous peoples there, but not large concentrations of indigenous people and I don't really remember that being a big issue.

Q: Maybe it was the border consulates, but were there ties between American states and Monterrey?

TRIVELLI: Yes, Governor Richards would come over on a regular basis.

Q: Ann Richards of Texas.

TRIVELLI: Yes, she was almost running a Texas state foreign policy. She did a lot of work and had personal relationships with the governors on the Mexican side, those states that bordered Texas. She did some business promotion work.

She would show up on a fairly regular basis and thankfully always include consulate personnel in anything she was doing, so that was a big positive.

Q: What was your impression of her work?

TRIVELLI: I thought she was just tremendous, smart, vibrant, very personable, very energetic and I thought she did good work, I always enjoyed spending time with her.

Q: Did our involvement in Central America impact at all there?

TRIVELLI: No, I don't remember that it was an issue. Monterrey was pretty pro-American, I don't know if pro-American is the right term, but their views of the United States are pretty positive, so I don't remember that really coming up as much of an issue.

Q: What about Cuba and I might include El Salvador, too, was Cuba a concern, because the Mexicans have closer ties to Cuba than we do?

TRIVELLI: They do, Mexico's tended to have closer ties I think in order to placate a bit their left, 'cause they have a fairly strong leftist wing in the PRI.

Q: The Canadians have the same thing.

TRIVELLI: Whoever's running the government in Mexico almost feels obligated to have some relationship with the Castros. Again, I don't recall that it was a particularly big thing.

One issue, though, with Mexico, the Russian Embassy was huge, the Cuban Embassy was big, they had a lot of those folks running around Mexico.

Q: Although it wasn't quite in your area of responsibility, I assume there were an awful lot of Mexicans going to the United States from Monterrey to American colleges.

TRIVELLI: Yes and even high schools.

Yes, when I was there, Monterrey was the fourth or fifth largest visa issuing post in the world at that time, so it was big business.

And because I was at a consulate, I actually had a consular commission, so every once in a while I'd go down and help out the visa line. So it was always fascinating to see that.

But we did a lot of F-1s

Q: Student visas.

TRIVELLI: A lot of H-1s, a lot of people would come down, I guess it's also H-2s. Say someone needed workers temporarily to harvest Christmas trees or shuck oysters or whatever, these guys would come down and then these H-2A cases would flow through. A lot of concern there about fraud.

But one of the things that I found, adjudication of cases I thought was quite difficult, 'cause we were close to the border, so you didn't have to be a wealthy person in order to go to the United States.

If you're interviewing someone in South Africa, you know someone's got to at least have several thousand dollars to buy the plane ticket. When you're in Monterrey, you could go up on a bus for ten dollars and be on the other side of the border. You didn't have to be a

wealthy person in order to have a reasonable reason to visit the United States. So to me that made adjudication very difficult.

Q: Were there any major developments while you were there, things that impacted on you?

TRIVELLI: No, I don't remember anything particularly dramatic while I was there.

Q: Where did you go afterwards?

TRIVELLI: Nicaragua.

Q: Boy, they didn't let you go home!

TRIVELLI: No.

Q: Today is the Eighth of February, 2012 and Paul, you're off to Nicaragua.

TRIVELLI: Yes, I am.

Q: You were there from when to when?

TRIVELLI: '92 to '95.

Q: What was the situation in Nicaragua when you went there in '92?

TRIVELLI: Violeta Chamorro had been elected president about a year previously, defeating Daniel Ortega. I was the economic counselor at the embassy and the country was in really, really serious economic trouble, after a decade of Sandinista government.

I remember very distinctly, my wife and I, we landed with our kids, we got in a car, we started looking out the window and we sat there looking at each other and said, "What have we gotten ourselves into?"

Because the place was so run down, buildings were crumbling, stuff hadn't been painted, giant pot holes in the street. When you went into downtown Managua, there were still piles of rubble from the big earthquake of the 1970s that had never been cleared. So just the physical aspects of the city were so much more depressing and daunting than any other place we'd ever been in Central America by a long shot. So it took us a bit by surprise.

Q: Sort of stripping away our ideological preconceptions, as an economist and looking at this practically, the Ortega Administration, did they have responsibility for this?

TRIVELLI: Well, the numbers are pretty clear. If you take a look at what happened in the Eighties, gross domestic product fell by 25 per cent, GDP per capita fell by fifty per cent,

inflation had gotten up to something like 11,000 per cent and there were massive currency devaluations.

And there just weren't any goods. When we first got to Managua there was almost nothing like a store of any size. People were still selling stuff out of their garages, which they'd done in the Sandinista era, they'd set up these little stores that were probably illegal.

There was still actually a diplomatic store, where only diplomats could go and you needed dollars, they still had that in place, so at least the diplomatic corps could go buy some stuff, because the economy had not recovered. No one had opened really new businesses.

Q: Was this because of the government, or was this what we were doing? What was causing this?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think it's a combination of a lot of things. Obviously we had an economic embargo of Nicaragua for a part of the Eighties. There was war, the contra war, which, when I got there, was over.

But the incredibly bad economic policies, related to nationalization of massive amounts of the economy, massive mismanagement, willy-nilly devaluations of the currency, nationalization of the entire banking sector, so there were no private banks.

So a combination of all of those things put Nicaragua in an extremely had situation economically.

Q: In contrast, how stood things in the rest of Central America?

TRIVELLI: Well, the rest of Central America had come through the 1980s, the economies were working, anyway, a huge contrast.

In fact some of us would drive down to Costa Rica once in a while to go shopping, because there was so little to buy and it was you cross the border it was like literally night and day, between the roads and the buildings and the cars and the stores, it was an extremely stark contrast.

Even driving into Honduras, which I did, the contrast was clean, and at one point Eva and I, drove all the way up to southern Mexico to shop, to buy some Mexican goods.

So it was difficult for us and of course it was enormously difficult for the Nicaraguan people, they're the real victims.

Q: Who was the ambassador when you went there?

TRIVELLI: The first year we had a chargé, because of course we didn't have full relations at the beginning. Ron Godard, a tremendous guy, was the long term chargé, altogether I think he was chargé for more than two years. And then after I'd been there a year John Maisto came.

Q: What were the areas that you were working on particularly?

TRIVELLI: I think several principal areas. One, working with AID to figure out how to get the new government the kind of assistance that it needed to get itself back on track, including ESF quick disbursing assistance.

Q: ESF?

TRIVELLI: Economic Support Funds, in other words, the U.S. gave Nicaragua, once Chamorro became president, several hundred million dollars, essentially in cash. For example, just to have dollars to be able to make basic imports of things like petroleum products.

When the Chamorro government took office, essentially not only were the government coffers bare, but the Sandinistas had actually stripped the buildings, government offices, they took everything with them, including office furniture, computers, typewriters. In some cases, they even pulled out the wiring and the copper pipes and the toilets.

So we gave her financial support so she could try to begin to set up the kind of basic government infrastructure that a country needs.

The other thing I worked on a lot was debt rescheduling. Under the Sandinistas the external debt of Nicaragua had grown from one to about eleven billion dollars. So the government embarked on a very active campaign to get their debt rescheduled or forgiven and I was very involved in helping put together a Paris Club agreement, for example, so we could forgive and then reschedule much of our bilateral debt.

And the other issue that was very big was the confiscation of properties of American citizens. The Sandinistas had seized during their government, I think the number overall is about 15 to 20 thousand properties, businesses, bank accounts.

A significant chunk of those belonged to American citizens, particularly Nicaraguan-Americans, people who had naturalized during the 1980s, after they had come to the States. So there were something like four or five thousand properties that had been confiscated from something like 1500 or 2000 Americans. I don't remember the exact numbers, but that's the order of magnitude.

So the process of trying to work through that with the government was a tough one, as of course under international law you're supposed to, if you confiscate something, give expeditious and effective compensation.

Well, what was the new government going to do? It didn't have piles of cash to pay people off. So to help that government work out a system where they could go through these cases, perhaps return some of the properties, perhaps do trades on some of the properties, in some cases return some cash, in some cases they finally came up with a long term bond scheme, where they would settle cases by the issuance of long term bonds.

So, you can imagine, just a lot of work on that, because it involved American citizens who were understandably very vocal and very upset about the fact that their properties had been confiscated.

Q: I understand that many of the more expensive properties had been taken over by the Sandinista leadership. And what happened there?

TRIVELLI: That's exactly right. The so-called *piñata* was really legalization of those expropriations by the Sandinistas, at the very end of their government and in many cases you saw high ranking officials of the government sitting in houses, living on farms, that had been confiscated, not only from Americans but from Nicaraguans and other nationalities as well. So there was a lot of personal benefit involved, in terms of the individuals.

These cases were extremely difficult. For example, we found that the attorney general's office was in a confiscated property. So you can't give that back right away, obviously. The government had to work through trying to figure out where to put the attorney general's office before they could return the property. And case after case of that type.

Or, say, the government had turned a property into an elementary school. Okay, how do you figure out how to work through that case?

On the other side of the ledger, some of these cases were actually families fighting against each other. There were cases of nieces and nephews taking over the property of their aunts and uncles who were not in agreement.

In some cases, these properties had been turned over to the national housing bank and resold to Nicaraguans living in Nicaragua, very often for a small fraction of their real value, but the occupants had some kind of legal document that they could wave in the air.

In some cases the properties had been mortgaged two or three times before the owners left Nicaragua. All right, so what's the equity interest in a property like that?

So there are all sorts of very complicated issues to be worked out in these cases.

Q: Well, then, were we just observers, or were we trying to help?

TRIVELLI: We helped a lot. First of all, we actually brought in some folks, the economic section and AID, to give the government some friendly advice on what kind of system they might put in place.

It was important to do that, because, remember, under U.S. law, non-compensated expropriations could be grounds for canceling all assistance programs, to it was important that something be put in place.

Also, we spent a lot of time of course actually working through the cases themselves, in other words, people would come to the embassy, they would bring all their paperwork so we would have it, then they would file a claim with the government, at an office that they eventually set up to look at these things and we would try to work with the claimant and the government to try to come to a deal.

In fact we ended up hiring at one point three Nicaraguan attorneys to work as FSNs to assist claimants and work with the government to resolve some of these claims.

Q: How did you find the Chamorro government to deal with? Obviously as an economic officer you had an awful lot of work to do with them.

TRIVELLI: Yes, we had a very, very strong, positive relationship with that government. They were open to us, they were obviously appreciative of what the U.S. was doing in terms of assistance, they were appreciative in terms of political support and I think that by and large they tried to put in place economic policies that were pro-growth, that could slowly put this economy back on track and really reconvert it from a command economy, a Soviet style or Cuban economy, into something that would pass for a market economy.

Of course, a massive task. You have to start by refounding the banking system from scratch, for example. But in general I think we worked well with them.

And of course they were under enormous pressure. The Sandinistas were constantly stirring up political problems, were sending their people to the streets in protest. Just before I got there, Sandinista mobs actually burned down the mayor's office.

So the Chamorro government was not in an enviable position. They were trying to rebuild the country at the same time as fighting a rear guard action against the Sandinista Party.

Q: Well, now, what about internally, how was the dismemberment of the contras and the revolutionary guards, the Sandinista Army, how was this going?

TRIVELLI: There was of course a large demobilization of the contras. Thousands of weapons were turned back in. There was a program to give demobilized contras and in some cases soldiers land or technical education and other benefits.

Not everybody was happy with that. When I was first there, there were still bands of people in the mountains who were ex-contras or ex-army who were still armed who were acting almost as little bandit groups, because they just had not bought in to the demobilization.

Q: I take it that what you were looking at was very much a work in progress, nothing really had been decided or set in place?

TRIVELLI: Although I think the framework was there and I must say, one thing that impressed me during my three years in Nicaragua is that when I left the country was in immeasurably better shape than when I started.

And Nicaraguans, particularly Nicaraguans with some money, had come back from Miami and elsewhere in the States and Europe and Central America. So they were beginning to restart the economy.

So we saw restaurants begin to open, a movie theater opened, my God, that was like a national holiday, when the movie theater opened, a series of supermarkets sprang up, there was actually road repair, people actually bought cars.

When we came, one of the odd things about Nicaragua was there was almost no traffic. The only cars on the road consisted of extremely broken down Soviet buses and jeeps and then some old Ladas and the only nice cars were ones being driven by foreign embassy and assistance agency personnel. Everything else was just a wreck.

So, really, I think, amazing progress over the three years I was there. I really felt like the government had put the country on the right track.

Q: How did you find, say, the media there?

TRIVELLI: Yes, interesting. At that time, *La Prensa*, which was the centrist, pro-democracy newspaper.

Q: That was Mrs. Chamorro's husband

TRIVELLI: And actually owned by the Chamorro family, that's exactly right, had, with fits and starts, survived the Eighties and was again flourishing. There was still, when I got there, two very virulent Sandinista papers.

La Barricada actually went out of business and *Nuevo Diario* transformed itself, actually I think it became owned by one of the Chamorros as well and it had become a more responsible left of center newspaper. Very little TV at that time.

Q: Were political parties developing?

TRIVELLI: Yes, of course the Sandinistas were well organized. The old Liberal Party had survived, as well as some very small parties and in fact one of Doña Violeta's strength's, when she ran for president was she was the unified opposition candidate. So I think that's one of the reasons for her victory, because the anti-Sandinista vote was not splintered three, four, five ways, as it might have been.

The non-Sandinista parties were regrouping and reforming themselves, with the Liberals of course, the two traditional Nicaraguan parties, the Liberals and the Conservatives were the mainstays as the parties rebounded.

And in fact some of the work that AID had done through some of their civil society programs, working with the International Republican Institute and the National Democratic Institute, did a lot of work with these democratic parties to get them up to snuff, retrain them to do all the sorts of things you need to do to have a truly democratic political system.

Q: Sort of on the ground, was the Sandinista Party still the major organized party there?

TRIVELLI: Yes. It was the major organized party. The Sandinistas are extremely good at organization and they remained organized all the way down to the neighborhood level at that time.

The PLC, one of the liberal parties, and the Conservative Party reformed themselves, as well as some smaller splinters from both those groups. Nicaragua has a history of a very fractured political party system and that got restarted after Chamorro's election.

Q: Looking ahead, what was it that was going to put Ortega back in power?

TRIVELLI: Well, of course he lost several elections before he regained power. But the Sandinista machine, that party, survived rather well. They've always had, you take polls in Nicaragua over time, even after the Chamorro victory, 30, 35 per cent or so of the electorate was still pro-Sandinista.

The Sandinistas themselves, many of them, had been government workers and burrowed in to the bureaucracy. The other thing the Sandinistas did was they founded dozens and dozens and dozens of small NGOs, so they were able to get funding from the outside and keep afloat financially and personally by being employed by the NGO community. Meanwhile, like I say, while still remaining very organized.

Q: On the economic side, were you able to get good economic statistics? Was it a sound government, would you say, from the economic point of view?

TRIVELLI: Yes, AID and IMF and World Bank worked very hard with those new ministries to get them up to snuff in terms of their policies, in terms of their statistics, etc and certainly the government was pretty transparent, in terms of the release of those numbers. So that was really not a problem.

Q: How about other countries, I'm particularly thinking of the socialist countries in Europe, which had been giving us a rough time during the Sandinista period? Were they coming around, or what was happening with them?

TRIVELLI: That's a great point. Managua had become an odd sort of collection of people during the Eighties. There were terrorists, including Red Brigades folks, who had landed there. The PLO had an office there, very openly, a very large Soviet Embassy, lots of folks from the Eastern Bloc and Iranians and others.

And when the Chamorro government came to power, a lot of those people drifted away, there just was not a conducive environment for them any longer.

But I tell you, those people did a lot of things. I once went to dinner, years later, when I was ambassador, in a very wealthy person's home and he said, "Well, do you want to see the prison in my house?," because during the Eighties the house had been taken over by the Sandinistas.

And I said, "Sure."

He said, "Come out to the yard" and lifted up a trap door and there was a tunnel that had been built of reinforced concrete into the hill and it had lights in it, you could walk stooped over fifty or a hundred yards into the hill and you could see a series of cells that had been made.

And when I asked him, "Who built this?" 'cause it was obviously very well built, it was pretty impressive. And it had been built by East German and Czech engineers. And this was obviously one of the places where the Sandinistas had held very quietly political prisoners and so forth.

Q: What about the reconciliation period, because there had been an awful lot of mistreatment of people, prisoners and all that, and bringing them back into society? Was that going on while you were there?

TRIVELLI: Yes. There were a lot of things that went on. Like I said, demobilization means lots of folks laid down their arms and tried to reintegrate in society. Many Nicaraguans who had fled the country came back and were very bitter about their experience.

So there continued to be a serious amount of polarization and bad feelings. I even experienced it coming back to Nicaragua years later, but some of that had lessened.

The kind of personal animosity because of the war and of course the Sandinista revolution actually split families. It took a long time to work through that. My own personal theory has always been that until the generation that actually was in power in the

Seventies and Eighties passes from the scene Nicaraguans will never be fully reconciled with themselves.

Q: Were you able to get out into the countryside much?

TRIVELLI: Yes, a fair amount, sure.

Q: I was wondering whether there were armed bands of bandits

TRIVELLI: There were some still in the northern mountains, north of Matagalpa. That's where a lot of the contras fought and that's actually a part of the country that was never even fully conquered by the Spanish, or it them took a very long time, a piece of the country with a very long, long history of resistance to outsiders.

But that notwithstanding, yes, we were able to travel throughout much of Nicaragua.

Q: What about the interest of Washington? Had that just dissipated by this time?

TRIVELLI: No, I think that there was very strong interest in rebuilding Nicaragua, putting it on the right track. Parallel things were happening in El Salvador, with the eventual peace accord there and then a peace accord later in Guatemala. So there was an interest in "let's get Central America done," if you will, both in terms of the politics and economics.

Q: What about the leadership, Chamorro and her cohorts? What was your impression?

TRIVELLI: *Doña* Violeta herself was very smart, extraordinarily gracious and I think she was really the right person to do this, because she had a grandmotherly persona. And so I think a lot of Nicaraguans looked at her as a conciliatory figure and I think she really helped that process.

Her right hand man, if you would, was her son-in-law, Antonio Lacayo. The rest of her government was really I think by and large very solid technocratic type people, a lot of ex-business people, people that she had known, in fact several that had come back to Nicaragua, 'cause they'd spent time in exile.

And it always struck me that they by and large they were good, solid people, pretty pragmatic, who had a pretty good vision of kind of how to get Nicaragua back on track.

Q: Were the Sandinistas trying to sabotage this, or did they say, "Okay, it's a new day" and they're sort of starting again, or what?

TRIVELLI: No, I think that they tried to make it very, very difficult for the Chamorro government. There were a series of strikes, a series of violent demonstrations. They tried to many times stay in positions of power and within the bureaucracy and it was very

difficult and really a drag on the Chamorro government to try to fend off all of these other political pressures as well.

Daniel Ortega made it very clear that even though he was no longer president that the Sandinistas would continue to rule from below and that's what they tried to do.

And the National Assembly at one point, there was so much contentiousness in the National assembly, because there were members from the Sandinista party and others, that it almost had ground to a halt, in fact, I think it was completely out of session for a year, because they could not decide on the formula for assembly leadership.

So a lot of the mechanisms of government were not working particularly well. The Sandinistas were just not willing to cooperate and turn into the loyal opposition. One thing about parties like that, it is very difficult for them to separate the party and the government in their mind, so the thought of a loyal opposition really, they're never really able to internalize that.

Q: What about neighboring countries, particularly the big ones, like Mexico and Cuba? Were they messing around in there?

TRIVELLI: Well, the Cubans, of course, were very, very active in the Eighties, but all those folks left, that large presence, departed once the Chamorro government was elected.

I don't recall Mexico playing a particularly large role at that time. Obviously there was an embassy with staff, but I don't remember them playing a large role.

Q: What about foreign investment, particularly American, but other countries? Were they stepping in?

TRIVELLI: The foreign investment portfolio I think had fallen to essentially zero when I was there. There were few factory buildings, there was limited electrical power, there were no modern roads, the port was a mess, so there was not a lot of interest.

One thing the Chamorro government did do, actually I think with some advice from AID, was to restart a free trade zone, so that businesses could come in, have a tax free area, put in factories to process textiles and other goods. Very slowly that got together.

But I imagine most foreign companies viewed Nicaragua as a high risk venture at that time and I can't really blame them.

Q: How about visits from Washington? Was there much?

TRIVELLI: Yes, particularly congressional staff, who were very interested in how the new government was doing. The Chamorro government actually got criticized from the right by some people in Congress who believed that it was too accommodationist to the

Sandinistas, that they weren't tough enough on the Sandinistas. So it was a very, very difficult line for them to walk.

Q: How did the ambassador operate, or the chargé and then the ambassador? Were they like proconsuls?

TRIVELLI: I think not, actually. John Maisto had a way about him in public. I don't know if you know Ambassador Maisto.

Q: Yes, I do.

TRIVELLI: A very warm, personable guy and he would repeat a mantra in public and say, "Hey, in the end, these are Nicaraguan problems that have to be solved by a consensus within Nicaragua."

He would then say, "In fact, in Spanish, there's no good word for 'consensus,' but let me give you an explanation" and he would offer a substitute concept that translated as "reciprocal concessions." So he would urge the political actors to work together for the better good of the country.

But he certainly did not believe in a proconsular approach. He also used to say something in private that was very right on and something I remembered when I later became ambassador to Nicaragua: "Ah, the Nicaraguans, very easy to love and very hard to help."

Q: Was there any residue by this time of the banana republic, in other words, United Fruit or anything of that nature there that sort of dominated.

TRIVELLI: No. Of course the banana companies left in the Eighties, but there are actually still civil suits pending, very complicated to get into, but there are still suits pending involving the use of certain kinds of pesticides on banana plantations. Some very enterprising lawyers went down to Nicaragua, got together with workers, folks that might have been working for the companies in the Seventies and Eighties and then claimed that the companies had used pesticides that they knew were harmful and that in turn had caused birth defects and sterility, etc.

So that issue has really never gone away. Up until very recently there were still court cases in the United States.

Q: Did Nicaragua have much of a, I guess you'd call it indigenous population?

TRIVELLI: A good question and a tough question to answer. There are some people on the Atlantic coast who belong to indigenous groups. In fact many of them fought for the contras, particularly in the northeast quadrant of the country.

There's another group of indigenous, the Ch'orti', in the mountains north of Matagalpa. However, my sense quite frankly is that they are not particularly well organized and indigenous languages there to my knowledge were not widely spoken.

On the Atlantic coast, yes, because there's a whole Miskito culture, divided into several ethnic groups and Miskito is a live language and it's still widely spoken in that part of the country.

And then there is a pretty extensive Afro-Caribbean population, the Garifuna population, which are people that came over to the coast of Central America in the 18th century. They were actually slaves that escaped from the Caribbean sugar islands like St. Vincent and wound up on the Atlantic coast of Central America. In Nicaragua's case, largely in the Bluefields area, which is in the southeast corner of the country.

So some very fascinating cultural mixes.

Q: Did they play any role in political life?

TRIVELLI: Yes, in fact the east coast in general was very anti-Sandinista. The Sandinistas had gone in and slaughtered indigenous peoples, particularly in one famous Christmas Day massacre.

So there were a lot of hard feelings. In fact, I think the hard feelings against reconciliation were probably even more polarized on the east coast of the country than in the more western Spanish-speaking areas.

Q: How about the church? What sort of role did it play?

TRIVELLI: That's a great question. The church had actually, during the Eighties and during the early years of the return to democracy, played a positive role. The archbishop and the cardinal would deliver homilies which urged people back towards democracy, etc.

And in fact, when we had visitors from Washington one of the folks they always wanted to see was to go see the cardinal, because of the role he had played in trying to redemocratize Nicaragua.

So the church was very, very influential. Now, ironically, years later that cardinal became friendly with Daniel Ortega and reversed himself and was seen as almost pro-Sandinista. But that's a very long, tortured political story.

Q: I have interviewed Tony Quainton, talking about the Maryknoll sisters coming in and giving him a very rough time for not being more supportive of the Sandinistas. This was all liberation theology. There was a whole sort of leftist movement coming out of the Catholic Church.

Now, things have reversed themselves to a certain extent. Was that still playing there?

TRIVELLI: I think what you've got is the traditional church hierarchy in Nicaragua tended to be anti-Sandinista. However, there may be folks like the Maryknolls that Tony referred to that were born of this liberal theology.

But certainly by the time I arrived there the church was generally anti-Sandinista. I did not see a lot of activity by different orders of nuns and priests. It was not like, say, Salvador was when I was there.

I just did not see that kind of activity. It may have been there, but I didn't really see it.

Q: I keep using this term, the Sandalistas, the glitterati and their cohorts out of the left in the United States. This was a cause at one time.

TRIVELLI: Yes, it was and certainly in the Eighties there were lots of American and Europeans who lived in Nicaragua. In fact, there was a little neighborhood, right down the hill from the only big hotel in town at that time where these folks lived and it was known as the Sandalista neighborhood.

And these were people who worked for NGOs and some of them actually worked for the Sandinista government in one capacity or another. But, again, by the time I got there in '92 most of those folks had moved on.

Q: It no longer was The Cause.

TRIVELLI: Yes, that's right.

Q: Was the proliferation of military equipment, arms, etc, a problem while you were there?

TRIVELLI: That's an interesting issue. There were obviously still caches of arms that had been sort of privatized, if you will, by ex-Sandinista officials. In fact, when I was there there was a major explosion at one point downtown and it was traced to an illegal cache of arms that I think was controlled by Lenin Cerna, who had been the head of their intelligence apparatus.

And then all of those arms that were there during the contra era, some of that stuff was circulating. I know people estimated there were tens of thousands of weapons flowing through there.

There was concern about shoulder fired antiaircraft weapons as well, whether Russian or American, and what would happen to those weapons.

And also, the army itself of course had acquired huge amounts of Soviet weaponry. They had advanced helicopters, they had Soviet tanks, they had Soviet artillery pieces, all sorts of stuff.

The Sandinista military's really rather interesting, because what I found over the years is that they eventually downsized and professionalized, actually took the word Sandinista out of their official name and today they are a professional, relatively apolitical organization. So it's very, very interesting.

Q: What about the officer corps? In so many of these Latin American countries the officer corps is the way for people from basically the lower class to go to the military academies and rise through the ranks and this is a good solid path to social acceptance.

TRIVELLI: I think that's right. I think that was undoubtedly true under Somoza, with the National Guard.

The Sandinista Army's a different case, because you've got a series of folks who really were guerilla leaders, they commanded small units during the battle against Somoza and those people then became the officer corps of what was the Sandinista Army and then the army of Nicaragua.

I think it'll be interesting, because the last cadre of colonels and generals who were active against Somoza are now getting of retirement age. So it'll be interesting to see what happens with the army and to the police, actually, once that generation passes from the scene.

Ortega's current vice president is General Halleslevens, who was actually head of the Nicaraguan Army for several years.

Q: Again, I'm not a Latin American specialist, but many of these countries, particularly in Central America, you hear about "the 12 families" or the "14 families" or whatever. How stood the social pecking order in Nicaragua when you got there?

TRIVELLI: There were obviously families that are very historic, like the Lacayos, like the Chamorros and others, who have a long history in Nicaragua, dating back to the Liberal and Conservative political parties and wars of the 19th century.

Nicaragua's an odd case because there are elites that spring from two major cities: Leon and Granada. Managua actually wasn't the capital of the country until pretty late in its history, because those other two cities couldn't decide which would be the capital. One is the Liberal bastion, one is the Conservative.

So there's that whole history that is there. What later happened in Nicaragua was the Somoza family. The wealth that the Somozas accumulated outstripped everything.

I will tell you a story: when I was there a relative of the Somozas, I believe a nephew, who had become an American citizen, came in and presented me with a book of all of the Somoza family holdings that as far as he was concerned needed to be returned to the Somozas as they had all been confiscated.

And when I started looking through, this was literally a loose-leaf book full of documents, I realized that they wanted to reclaim about one third of the arable land of Nicaragua. That was what had been in that family's hands and really tells you why Nicaragua had gone through what it had gone through.

In any case, I think because of the Eighties and because of the revolution and because of the Sandinista government, because of the fact that many of the middle and upper class folks had left Nicaragua, a lot of them had had properties and houses and businesses confiscated, that the whole pre-Sandinista class system, if you will, or economic system, had basically crumbled away. It just was nothing like Salvador by that point.

Q: Well, having had this election coming out the way it did and the change of government, which caught a good number of people by surprise, was there, at the embassy, almost a sense of triumphalism or were we so caught up in the problems that that wasn't a factor?

TRIVELLI: You mean the Chamorro victory?

Q: Yeah, our reaction to it.

TRIVELLI: Well, I wasn't there for the election itself. For a lot of people, you're absolutely right, it was something of a surprise. I think that people were actually rather surprised that the election and the vote counting was clean and fair enough that someone other than Ortega could win.

And of course all of the polling that had been done, polling under an authoritarian government doesn't work very well, so all that polling of course had been totally false and manipulated.

But there were observers out there who said, "Hey, we think Chamorro's going to win. The Sandinistas are not very popular" and in fact that's exactly what happened.

Now, one upshot of this, though, was that Daniel Ortega really felt that he had been hornswoggled by Jimmy Carter and the OAS and others who had basically convinced him that he needed to hold fair elections.

So he felt rather betrayed when he lost and I believe that he personally has vowed to never give up power again. And this is in the back of my mind, thinking about what's going on in Nicaragua today, that one has to wonder whether Ortega is going to be ever willing to lose an election in the future. My guess is not.

Ortega I believe feels that he was tricked into holding democratic elections.

Q: You were one of the senior officers at the embassy. Were we keeping you might say a tight rein on the embassy staff, so that we didn't boast about "Boy, we really stuck it to you" or something?

TRIVELLI: Again, this was past that period. For example, Nicaragua was a non-fraternization post, even after I got there. You know the term, you're not supposed to have close personal relationships with Nicaraguans. That policy eventually was reversed.

We actually had a surprisingly low profile. The marines were not allowed to go out and so forth. There were various periods when we had curfews because of violence.

One of the odd things was the embassy building was just awful. It was a temporary building that had been constructed after the earthquake and had been meant to last for only five years. We were still in it in 1992, so we didn't have an awful lot of space and we didn't have a lot of resources.

Q: What about the diaspora of Nicaraguans, so many living in the United States, but particularly their kids who got educated in the U.S. and all? Was there much return, or was there much impact of this group?

TRIVELLI: There were returnees, particularly those in the financial sector, from Miami, young professionals who got up to Miami, learned a lot from the U.S. banking system and actually then came back to Nicaragua to restart the banking system, found new banks.

So I think, yes, there were lots of people that came back. There were some people who stayed in Miami, usually very conservative people politically who remained very critical the Chamorro government, because they believed that, again, the Chamorro government was too soft on the Sandinistas.

And in a lot of expat communities rumors start up. Very often a rumor would get started in Miami in the Nicaraguan community. They would then call somebody on the Senate or House staff and repeat that rumor, the staffer would then call the State Department, which would call the embassy and say, "What is going on? What have you done?"

And of course it was just rumor, but they were folks who tracked Nicaragua on a day-to-day basis, but from afar. It's almost like a game of Telephone. It could be politically very dicey.

Q: Well, was Jesse Helms a political presence there, he and his staff?

TRIVELLI: His staff, who I came to know actually quite well, both then and later, I don't believe the senator ever visited Nicaragua, but his staff would visit with some regular frequency.

Q: There's a Debbie somebody or other, wasn't there?

TRIVELLI: Uh, huh. Deborah DeMoss.

Q: She was fairly influential, wasn't she?

TRIVELLI: Well, she was one of the chief staffers for him, for just about everything going on in Central America, including Nicaragua.

Q: Were they just keeping an eye on things, or were they influential in what we were doing there?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we were in constant dialogue, not me all the time, but obviously the ambassador and folks in Washington were in regular dialogue with the Hill staff about the direction of our policy, what our assistance program would look like, what we would push the Chamorro government to do or not to do. So it was a very fluid exchange, quite frankly.

Q: Well, then, you left there in, what was it,

TRIVELLI: '95.

Q: Whither Nicaragua, at that time?

TRIVELLI: When I left I believed that Nicaragua was going in the right direction. On the economic side I think that it had made some important strides. Just small things like actually getting a solid currency and bringing inflation down to a reasonable level and reducing the debt burden to a reasonable level are all things that were happening while I was there.

So I felt that it was moving in the right direction. Politically, again, that was not my bailiwick, but it struck me that it was stiff fairly tenuous, I think just because of the fractious nature of Nicaraguan politics.

But, again, it was certainly a situation where it had improved markedly during my time there.

And you combine that with I think just the nature of the Nicaraguan people on a personal basis, Nicaraguans are very outgoing, they're extremely friendly, no one was discourteous to me during my entire time there.

So you felt like, hey, this was a place that may eventually make it.

Q: Well, now, was there a Central American network knitting together? It had grown apart, because of various civil wars and all. But what was happening? Did you see a more unified Central America, maybe economically, politically, or what have you?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think after all of the wars were over and everybody was democratic, the leaders were all elected, there was some great synchronization there, everybody had market economies now, there was a rebirth in interest in the economic and political integration of Central America.

SICA *Sistema de la intergración Centroamericana*, the Central American Integration System and SIECA *Secretaria de integración Económica Centroamericana*, the Secretariat for Central American Economic Integration, which are the organizations working towards the political and economic integration of Central America, were reborn again in the early to mid-1990s.

And in fact, too, when, a few years later, when we thought about the Central American Free Trade Agreement, one of the reasons that the U.S. government thought this was a good idea was it would further encourage the economic integration of Central America.

So it's something that obviously got put off, got postponed, or on pause during the Eighties, but then got restarted in the Nineties.

Q: Now was drug trafficking much of a problem while you were there?

TRIVELLI: As I recall, we had a small narcotics assistance section unit, but honestly I don't remember that being a huge policy priority at that time, because perhaps there were so many other things happening.

Q: We'll pick up when you left, this is

TRIVELLI: '95.

Q: Where'd you go?

TRIVELLI: I went to the Naval War College for a year.

Q: Today is the 13th of February, 2012. Paul, you're off to the war college. When did you go to the war college?

TRIVELLI: I was in Newport mid-'95 to mid-'96.

Q: I don't get too many interviews with people who were there. At the war college, you kind of work, don't you?

TRIVELLI: Yes, you earn a master's degree and I thought it was as academically rigorous as the master's I'd gotten years earlier at the University of Denver, although it was only a year, it's a year course.

Q: Now, what was the atmosphere like there and how were you received as a State Department officer?

TRIVELLI: I thought it was extremely professional and cordial. The navy prides itself, and I think probably rightly, for being the most rigorous of the senior war colleges.

There are not only naval officers there but perhaps a quarter of the student body are from the other services, plus, I can't remember the exact number, but somewhere between a dozen and two dozen civilian students, some from State, but some from other civilian agencies.

Q: Well, now, how were the courses constituted? How did this work?

TRIVELLI: Basically you are broken up into groups of about twenty or so students and you go through most of your year with that group.

The entire student body, which is several hundred people, goes through three core courses, one on Strategy and Policy, which is a historic look at the creation of military and civil-military strategies and even goes back to take a look at the Peloponnesian Wars and what is the basis of warfare and the basis of military strategy.

The second course on national security decision making really looks at current issues and international relations and politico-military affairs, so you spend several weeks taking a quick look at China, taking a quick look at nuclear disarmament, taking a quick look at budget making at the Department of Defense, etc.

And then a third course on operational warfare, which is essentially designing wars at the operational level.

Q: Okay, the Soviet Union was no longer the complete object, was it, there were other areas we were concerned about?

TRIVELLI: Yes, in fact one of the biggest topics during that time was the notion of peace keeping, or other roles for the U.S. military besides traditional warfare, a lot of talk about that next generation of technology, how computers and other technology would affect warfare and communications.

So it was a very interesting time, because the military was looking for a series of new roles. We were at peace, we were the only superpower, if you will, at that time, so it was actually a very interesting year to spend.

One thing I remember thinking at the time was people were taking a very hard look at China, even then and what was going on. It was almost as if people were searching around for a new foe.

Q: Well, you almost have to, if you're going to study, you would be remiss if you didn't. Well, I would think that the navy, it is limited by where it can engage, obviously it should be kind of wet. Were they thinking about what their role would be? For example, submarines and all this?

TRIVELLI: Oh, always, I think that's absolutely right. The marine corps of course is a sea service, I think had just published a new doctrine, *Forward From the Sea*, so there was a lot of talk about the navy's ability to operate not only on the oceans but within the littoral area and miles inland.

And they had a lot of statistics about, well, that in fact, a large part of the world's population lives within a hundred miles of a coastline, etc. So there was a lot of thought given to operations in coastal areas.

A lot of thought about what the next generation of U.S. warships would look like. There were ideas about building massive invulnerable platforms which has really not come to pass.

But certainly I think a pretty thorough examination of what role the U.S. military would play and what role the navy would play.

Q: Well, how did they treat the State Department? We represent another arrow in America's quiver, but it's one the military sometimes doesn't seem to understand.

TRIVELLI: I thought I was treated very, very well. They took the State Department students and sprinkled them among these different study groups and very often the professor would or another student would turn to me during the class discussion and say, "What does the State Department think? What would the State Department do?"

So I think that there was actually a fair appreciation for the civilian role in military affairs.

Remember, these are…

Q: Captains and commanders.

TRIVELLI: In the navy, yes. And in the other services it would be lieutenant colonel, colonel.

Many of these folks had had commands, but really their whole military career up to that point was focused on the operational nature of a submarine or a surface vessel or naval aviation.

Many of them had really never thought about the bigger issues of how you develop national military strategy, what do you do about Iran, what do you do about China.

So they were very eager to pick my brain on larger strategic issues.

Q: Well, I would think that you would find that Latin America, Africa would rank fairly low down in their concerns.

TRIVELLI: Yeah, that's right. One good thing about this program is, beside the core courses you also took one elective and they did offer some electives on Latin America which I did participate in.

But, absolutely, particularly since by this time the Central American wars were over, Cuba was not seen as a major military threat, not a lot related to Latin America, although, like I say, there was a lot of talk about the military's role in peace keeping and other sorts of non-lethal uses of the military.

So in that sense people were beginning to think about using the military for disaster relief, for peace keeping, for peace making and the literature on those possible roles was just starting to get ginned up.

Q: Well, what could the navy do for peace keeping?

TRIVELLI: A lot of these discussions of course were not simply navy related, because the students in Newport are from all of the services. But, for example, later on, my experience in Southern Command, after the Haitian earthquake the navy played a major role and the marines in delivering supplies and using marines for disaster relief activities.

In some ways the navy has a great advantage, because their on shore footprint is very small. If you send marines in a ship, they can ferry themselves back and forth to land very easily and do not have to create a large base camp.

So in fact the navy can be very useful. We also used their hospital ships which can be very useful as a strategic communications tool and obviously for delivering health services. The navy did a lot after the Pacific tsunami and they did a lot in Haiti.

Q: Well, I've talked to people who've gone to various war colleges and a good number have said they were surprised to find the marine senior officers were you might say the most mentally agile, grasping things and weren't just a bunch of Neanderthals to "Go up and take that hill," but they were really forward thinking. Did you find this?

TRIVELLI: I found that the marines took the course work and the courses extremely seriously and they had study groups among themselves, so that they would get excellent grades and hopefully have marines show up at the top of the class.

I must say, I did find the naval officers in general tended to have a broader view of the world. They seemed to be more familiar with the broader strategic vision. I didn't see that so much among all the services.

But I don't think that they were large differences. I think one of the good things about the war college for me is that I came to understand that there was a cadre of people who would become true soldier-statesmen, who were able to understand warfare and military leadership and at the same time have some idea about the larger world picture.

So I found it actually very instructive. I was actually encouraged by that, I remember thinking.

Q: Well, I take it, by this time you might say the curse of Vietnam had dissipated?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think that the military had become confident, they'd been a non-draftee military for many years by that point, they had gone through the Gulf War, which was successful and short.

So I think at that time the military was feeling very good about themselves, although they were worried about the future, in terms of funding. There was a lot of talk about a peace dividend and what that would mean for military budgets down the road. We learned the DOD budgeting process and a lot of discussion of how big should the military be, how much should DOD spend, what should they spend it on and how they should determine priorities.

Q: Did you get any feel for the State Department and its relation to the military? Was there a good fit, or not?

TRIVELLI: You know, my actual contact with State during that year was very, very limited, so it's really hard for me to say. Certainly, talking to my fellow students, they seemed to really value my experience.

There were a couple of senior State Department officers who were on the staff at the Naval War College and they had positive experiences and the students would lunch with them every month or so.

And so I thought on that level the relationships seemed absolutely fine.

Q: As you were doing this, what were you looking towards, whither, for you?

TRIVELLI: I assumed that I would go back to Washington at that point and indeed that's what I ended up doing. It was a little disconcerting because of the bidding cycle, as soon as I started my one year there I had to bid on my next job, which I did.

But I think part of the reason to go to Newport was to get back to the United States and give my children a few years in the States. I was happy to go to Newport, in fact had

chosen it, because my family lived in Connecticut. So for the first time in many years I could visit my parents and siblings on a regular basis, so that was terrific.

My mom was still in Cheshire, just outside of New Haven and my dad was in Orange, just outside of New Haven.

Q: So what happened?

TRIVELLI: I graduated, I guess in June of '96, and then immediately went to Washington to become deputy director of Central American Affairs.

Q: Did you find, was there sort of a change in Central American Affairs, were the concerns quite different than when you'd left?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think for a couple of reasons. One interesting thing was for years and years there were actually two offices, there was Central American Affairs and Panamanian Affairs and those two offices had combined.

And up until my tenure there were still two deputy directors, one for Panama and one for the rest of Central America. That went away and I was the sole deputy in that office at that time.

And because of, again, the end of the Central American wars and that intense interest, that office ended up working on other kinds of issues.

Q: By this time, we'd gone in and taken Noriega out, hadn't we?

TRIVELLI: Uh huh.

Q: So was Panama a major concern, or was this just sort of another country?

TRIVELLI: Well, actually, the Panamanians didn't like this reorganization at all, because they really felt that they had that special relationship with the United States, because of history and because of the continued implementation of the Canal treaties. But in fact they were moved over with the rest of Central America.

One issue, big issue, that did come up while I was there that Ambassador Negroponte was attached to our office for several months, tasked with some very quiet conversations with the Panamanians on would there be a way to have a multinational drug center perhaps at one of the former U.S. military bases that would continue to function beyond 1999, go beyond the actual full implementation of the treaties.

In other words, some kind of multinational residual presence at Howard Air Force Base or one of the other bases.

Those conversations were not successful, but there was an effort there to figure out if there was a way to utilize those facilities even after the final treaty turnover.

Q: How would you characterize the outlook of the Panamanians and all? They just wanted to make sure that there was a clean sweep, was that it, or what?

TRIVELLI: Panama was always of two minds about the treaties, in the sense that on one hand they were very proud that those treaties were negotiated, they were very proud that the implementation was going well, they were very proud that eventually there would be a complete turnover of all facilities.

On the other hand, there was a certain nervousness about what happens when the U.S. leaves totally, both in terms of security and economics.

My gut told me at the time that the Panamanian government was not necessarily completely opposed to the idea of some use of those facilities on a multilateral basis, but I think that they made the political calculation that it just wasn't going to fly, that they really needed to complete the entire turnover before they could even begin to entertain notions about non-Panamanian official presence on their territory.

Q: Well, how did we view the other countries of Central America at that time? Supposedly the turmoil was over, but a hell of a lot of problems remained. How stood they?

TRIVELLI: I think we still maintained significant interest. President Clinton visited the region during that time. So that was a lot of work and very interesting.

But I think the general feeling was that people were pretty upbeat about Central America. At that time all of the governments were democratically elected and seemed relatively efficient.

Many of the large armed forces in the region had been successfully demobilized, many of the ex-guerillas had been integrated in one way or another into society. The view was that democracy was taking root, finally. So I think people were pretty positive about Central America's future at that time.

Q: Did any of the countries have your particular attention or concern?

TRIVELLI: Yes, thinking about what I had to get involved in most as deputy director, Guatemala still was of concern. For example, for many, many years, because of human rights abuses during the 1980s, we were prohibited from any significant military assistance to the Guatemalan armed forces and that was both required by law and by an understanding with the staff on the Hill.

And we started to take a look at that and said, "Okay, we've gone past all of that now. Is there some way to rebuild some kind of relationship with the Guatemalan military?"

And it seemed as if we might be able to convince people that would be within the realm of possibility and then immediately Bishop Gerardi was killed under mysterious circumstances in Guatemala City, so that immediately set us back.

It was always one step forward and half a step back in terms of Guatemala.

Q: What was your reading on the Gerardi business?

TRIVELLI: You know, I have heard so many things and the Guatemalan police forwarded so many different theories about that, I have no idea. I don't believe that he was murdered by a government-sponsored thug, or army-sponsored hit man. It was something else there. But, really, to me, to this day, it seems enormously unclear.

Q: Well, let's take the military in these different states. The military's, it's an important class within a country. How about Guatemala? How stood the military?

TRIVELLI: Well, Guatemala's an interesting case, because the peace accords had actually established a significant downsizing of the military, it went down by two thirds, which had its good aspects and its bad aspects.

In one sense, in terms of government spending and in terms of any possible abuses, it probably makes sense to have a reduced military and I'm sure that's what the negotiators of the agreement were thinking.

On the other side of the coin, though, in a place like Guatemala very often local military commanders, at a zonal level, are almost the only national government representatives in a zone. They are the people, in many cases, that local populations turn to for security and disaster relief and other things.

So when you withdraw those people, there needs to be a concomitant reinjection of other sorts of civil authority from the central government and in many cases that tended not to happen. Part of the problem in Guatemala has always been that its central government is enormously weak.

Their ability to collect taxes, for example, is very low. I think traditionally the World Bank and IDB suggest that in order to have a central government which functions and provides basic services, you're generally talking about 15 per cent of GDP needs to be government revenues, that needs to be at a minimum the size of the government.

And in Guatemala at that time I think the number was eight or nine per cent. So they simply didn't have the resources to have that police force, to have primary schools everywhere and health clinics and all the things that you need to do to provide basic services.

In fact, part of the peace accords were related to increase in government revenues and increase in social sector spending.

Q: Well, were we trying to do anything about that?

TRIVELLI: I think so. Certainly we encouraged the Guatemalan government in the implementation of the accords. We continued to have a robust assistance program, both on the AID side and the INL i.e., the narcotics and law enforcement side. So I think yes, we were encouraging them to do the right thing and establish civilian authority with a good human rights record.

Q: What about Honduras? How stood things there?

TRIVELLI: I think okay. Let me see, that would have been, Carlos Flores would have been elected president, they were alternating back and forth, first by design and then by electoral parties, between the two major parties.

We maintained our military presence in Soto Cano, at the Honduran Air Force facility in central Honduras. So at that time Honduras seemed to be doing pretty well, in terms of both reestablishment of democracy and getting out of the Central American wars and contra period.

Q: And El Salvador?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think El Salvador was a pretty good news story. They were able to have a series of fair elections. The Salvadoran military which had fought that civil war downsized. There was, under UN guidance, there was a large scale demobilization of the FMLN. And an improving economy. So I think at that time, again, we believed that El Salvador was back on the right track.

Q: Your favorite spot, Nicaragua?

TRIVELLI: Well, in my office, in Central American Affairs, we actually had to have two Nicaraguan desk officers, because there was a lot of work, a lot of it actually related to our assistance program and these property cases, U.S. citizen property cases, that I talked about, ‘cause there was an enormous amount of public inquiry about those.

Again, I think there was slow progress with the Chamorro government and then the Alemán government. But we continued to have a very, very robust assistance program, because Nicaragua really needed it.

Q: Did you feel that Nicaragua, that leaving the armed forces in the hands of the Ortegas and all was a mistake, or inevitable, or what?

TRIVELLI: Well, interesting, remember that the U.S. government did pressure the Chamorro government to actually move Humberto Ortega out as head of the army and that eventually happened.

And although there were many, many concerns at the time about the Nicaraguan military and what role they would play, in fact it seems like they took it upon themselves, one, to downsize, secondly to become more professional.

They even changed their name away from the Sandinista Armed Forces to the Armed Forces of Nicaragua and became somewhat independent from the Sandinista Party.

So, again, I think that was a surprise for many people, because they really tried to, in my view, anyway, separate themselves from local politics and ideology and create something more like a professional armed force.

Q: Was anything happening in Costa Rica, except for us to thank God for Costa Rica, or what?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I can't remember any real controversy with Costa Rica. Certainly Costa Rica at that time was beginning to bill itself as an environmentally aware place and so forth. They were marketing themselves as a great place for U.S. tourism, including ecotourism. They were marketing themselves to U.S. businesses and eventually some rather major U.S. businesses put up manufacturing facilities in Costa Rica.

So they seemed to be doing well. The only issue we ever had about Costa Rica, there's a series of some very messy expropriation cases that always seemed to dog us and seemed difficult to resolve. Other than that, things were going pretty well on that score.

Q: Well, in this period, were the Cubans pretty well out of the game, as far as Central America was concerned?

TRIVELLI: Yes.

Q: Were you seeing a withdrawal of their embassy personnel from the region and all that?

TRIVELLI: Exactly, both the Cubans and the Russians. They maintained some diplomatic presence, but really I don't think any of the Central American governments at that time had a deep relationship with the Cuban government.

Q: Well, now, did Mexico begin to adopt the role of the colossus to the north?

TRIVELLI: Not to a great extent. I think that came a little bit later, at least in terms of Mexico reaching out to Central America more.

Q: Looking at it overall, how about the Catholic Church? Is their role as a player in Central America changing, or not?

TRIVELLI: To my mind, the Catholic Church remains very, very influential. Of course the Catholic Church provides not only religious services, but a very important amount of social services, whether directly or through organizations like Catholic Relief Services, etc. Certainly in Central America there are lots of schools and orphanages, universities that have ties to the Catholic Church.

I think an interesting phenomenon over the last 10 or 15 years is the rise in evangelical Protestantism in Central America. Depending upon the country, these countries were once 95 per cent plus Roman Catholic but in more recent years, perhaps twenty to thirty per cent of populations have converted to evangelical Christianity.

Q: What about religious orders such as the Maryknolls and all who had played, you might say, on the revolutionary side, the leftist side? What happened to them?

TRIVELLI: Well, I believe that a lot of those orders continued working on the social services side, but in terms of political activism, I think once the Central American conflicts were over, once it looked like Central America was on the path towards much greater respect for human rights, which it certainly has been reasonably successful at, I didn't see that high profile activity of those orders by that time.

Q: Well, then, the other great influence, the drug lords, particularly in Colombia and all, how were they impacting on Central America?

TRIVELLI: Well, the trafficking patterns at that time touched on Central America, not as much as they do today. I do remember at that time we actually withdrew the INL *i.e.,* the State Department's air wing from Guatemala, almost in its entirety and I believe it ended up moving down to the Andes, to the growing areas. I know the embassy was not particularly happy about that development.

Q: Were we seeing an increase in drug money penetrating those societies?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think that gradually happened, although it accelerated significantly in the last five years.

Q: Once you get peace, you don't get any money any more.

TRIVELLI: I think to some extent that's right, yes, if you take a look at our assistance budgets for Central America, by the mid- to late Nineties they were still there, but nothing like, say, they had been in the late 1980s

In fact, Costa Rica by the late Nineties had actually graduated from our aid program and we actually turned over the AID mission, the building itself, to the Costa Rican government.

The AID mission in Panama had become very, very small. In fact, there was a lot of back and forth about the possibility of closing it entirely.

Q: How did the Clinton Administration work in this area? Was there much interest in it?

TRIVELLI: President Clinton traveled to Central America, so that was a big boost, whenever you get the White House traveling, you get attention focused on you. So that actually was pretty useful for us.

Q: How successful was his trip?

TRIVELLI: I think very much so. I know he went to Costa Rica and I believe he touched down in two other places.

But the theme of the trip really was what I mentioned earlier in our conversation, the fact that Central America was becoming successful, democracy was taking root, market economics was doing well and that Central America really had become a success story. So that really was the focus of his trip.

Q: How did you find the bureau? Was it different from what you had experienced before, in spirit or outlook or what have you?

TRIVELLI: No, I don't think so. Obviously the emphasis changes over time. But, remember, in terms of the folks involved, many of the WHA people had devoted much of their career to Latin America, so they would come back to the bureau every few years, they had had successful tours in the regions. So it was many of the same people who grew up in that bureau. So I didn't see large changes.

Q: When did you leave the bureau?

TRIVELLI: '98.

Q: Whither?

TRIVELLI: Honduras, as DCM.

Q: You were in Honduras from '98 to when?

TRIVELLI: 2002.

Q: Before you went to Honduras, what were our interests there?

TRIVELLI: Well, one, it was the only place in Central America where we had active military forces, at Soto Cano Air Base, of course much scaled back from the 1980s, but

there were still five or six hundred U.S. military personnel there, mostly an army aviation wing.

I think Honduras was viewed, interestingly enough, as one of the places that had not really gone through much of a guerilla upheaval. There was never any large-scale insurgency in Honduras.

It's a country that had been ruled by the military until fairly recently. That changeover to civilian government was only in the 1980s. So their roots in democracy were shallow.

And I think we also viewed it as a country that is rather resource poor and very mountainous, so for reasons of geography and history, not a particularly wealthy place, but a relatively stable place.

Q: Was there much of an indigenous population?

TRIVELLI: Yes, particularly along the Guatemalan border, although not terribly well organized, I do not believe, at that time. Of course people did speak indigenous languages, but not to an overwhelming extent.

Honduras also has an Afro-Caribbean community, in the Bay Islands and on the northern coast, the Garifunas and others and that added another interesting dimension. In fact, the Bay Islands were largely English speaking, even when I was there, at that time.

Q: Did they play any role, or were they sort of a culture unto themselves?

TRIVELLI: Well, there tended to be a separation, culturally and politically, between the Bay Islands and parts of the northern coast. That has changed over the years, but integration perhaps is not as strong as it could be.

People were beginning to think about how do things like building resorts, particularly on the mainland and the Garifuna communities obviously were very wary about that, because they viewed many of these areas as their ancestral homelands.

Q: What was the government like?

TRIVELLI: The government was under Carlos Flores, the president, from the Liberal Party. He was a newspaper owner. He owned *La Tribuna*, which is the paper of record of Honduras.

What really colored that government and then my stay there, I arrived in August and the very end of October Hurricane Mitch hit. That was a Category Five hurricane that did significant damage to much of the country. So much of my next three years at post was related to the reconstruction effort, as was the entire embassy's, of course.

Q: First place, what did the hurricane do to the embassy and embassy personnel?

TRIVELLI: The hurricane itself parked over the Bay Islands for several days and circulated and stripped, for example, Guanaja, one of the smaller Bay Islands, it stripped every tree, literally, on the island.

But for the Tegucigalpa area, it meant five or six days of absolutely steady rain, 24/7 rain. Some wind, but certainly not hurricane force winds.

And we knew this was bad, but we could not have dreamt how bad it was. I remember very distinctly, we went to a Halloween party on a Friday night at the Marine House and did what you do at Halloween parties and I was the DCM and I left at a reasonable hour, went back home, got up early the next morning and looked off my balcony.

My house was on a ridge and I could see much of downtown Tegucigalpa and all I saw was water. It literally looked like it had turned into a lake. Essentially what had happened is that five, six days of very intense rainfall had rushed down the mountains and Tegucigalpa is built along a river. And I also knew that the U.S. Embassy was right next a tributary.

So I got in my car, went down to the embassy and looked across the street to this normally very placid stream that ran right behind the AID mission and it had turned into this incredibly powerful rushing river. And we had a lot of concern that it would take the bridge out, there's a small bridge over that tributary that gives access to the ambassador's house on the other side of the valley.

Luckily that did not happen, but it also became clear from driving around that there was significant devastation in the downtown area and it turned out the major highways leading in to Tegucigalpa were destroyed and Tegucigalpa itself was cut off for several days.

And this gave us great concern all of a sudden, because we were worried about the embassy personnel, the ability to get gasoline, the ability to get food, etc. And we ended up declaring a voluntary departure for families and non-essential staff.

Q: What was the effect of the hurricane on the country? Did it pretty well destroy the infrastructure?

TRIVELLI: Yes, when you flew over Honduras in subsequent days, the country looked more like an archipelago than dry land. In fact, when the hurricane was happening, the choppers at Soto Cano went out to rescue the president and his family. The president had been out in a small town doing a political event and the highways leading out of there had been cut. So the choppers from Soto Cano actually went out to get him and his entourage.

So the president himself was trapped at one point. That's the kind of devastation. It destroyed, I can't remember the exact numbers, but something on the order of 200 bridges, destroyed hundreds of mile of paved road, destroyed thousands of homes and

buildings. It really was an enormously detrimental impact on the infrastructure of most of the country.

Q: Well, now, had there been banana plantations, or other commercial crops?

TRIVELL: Yes and also a significant amount of damage to the agricultural sector.

Q: So what was our involvement in reconstruction?

TRIVELLI: Well, the people at Soto Cano did immediate rescue and relief work, both in literally plucking people out of trees and off rooftops and then in ferrying relief supplies and trying to do some basic kind of road openings.

Of course the ambassador used his authority immediately to get Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance funding. And Congress eventually ended up approving a supplemental appropriation for relief aid. The hurricane had affected several countries in Central American, of which Honduras the worst. Something on the order of $ 300 plus million was appropriated for Honduras.

So we went the next three years spending that money in appropriate ways, everything from reconstruction of bridges and highways to housing reconstruction to immediate relief of displaced persons.

Q: How did the Honduran government respond?

TRIVELLI: I thought reasonably well. Obviously their capacity to respond, in terms of heavy equipment and so forth, was somewhat limited, but they certainly used what resources they had, including the military, to do rescue work and then transportation.

They were pretty organized in terms of directing relief efforts. A lot of nations were interested in helping. Mexico sent down almost immediately some cargo aircraft with earthmoving equipment and started digging out some of the streets downtown. That may be one of the first time that Mexico deployed its military outside its borders in a relief effort.

There were also a lot of heavy hitters. Former President Bush actually got on *Nightline*, he was very concerned about Honduras and Hurricane Mitch and made an appeal for the Red Cross and the UN, which helped. So I think there was genuine concern in the United States and a lot of interest.

Q: Who was our ambassador there?

TRIVELLI: The final three years I was there it was Frank Almaguer. The first year it was Jim Creagan.

Q: I've interviewed Frank, some years ago.

Was there much interest in Congress in Central America, or had Congress been there, done that and their interests were elsewhere?

TRIVELLI: I think there was a continuing interest on the part of the congressional staff to see that the relief funds were well used. I think one of the interesting pieces of this, though, was that a wide swath of the Executive Branch wanted to become involved in the reconstruction.

Part of my challenge as the DCM was trying to figure out how to accommodate these people. In other words, HUD, under the appropriation, had gotten money to build housing, but HUD was not particularly familiar with how to do overseas work.

So just the logistics of trying to figure out, okay, how do you get the HUD people down there, what is their diplomatic status, how do they spend their money, how do they do contracting, all of those things were a challenge.

HUD was down there, HHS was down there, the Department of Agriculture, through the Forest Service, was down there, the Marine Fisheries Service was there. Lots of pieces of the Executive Branch had an interest and they had been tasked with some of the reconstruction under the legislation.

Q: What about your family? How did that work out?

TRIVELLI: My family stayed. They did not accept voluntary departure. My wife said she was not going to be separated from her shoes. The American School, although it was closed for about two months, had become a hub for the collection of food and clothing and so forth.

So she and even my kids spent a fair amount of time there, putting bundles together, trying to figure out how to send relief supplies out to the right people.

It was a challenging experience. Literally for two or three weeks it was hard to get food. There was no fresh bread, the restaurants were all closed, there was no power. It was a pretty challenging experience for several weeks.

Q: Were you getting temporary staff from other embassies or Washington to come and help?

TRIVELLI: We did get some folks down. We did get some consular people down. I remember our AID mission of course grew with TDY personnel pretty significantly.

I remember very, very distinctly after this hurricane hit, the head of WHA/EX called me on the phone and said, "Okay, Paul, what do you need from us? Do you need people, do you need money, do you need evacuation orders? What is it that you guys need?"

The Europeans all had missions in Honduras, the Canadians had a mission, a lot of NGO presence. So there was sort a wide spread interest. I believe that, however, the United States in the end ended up being the largest reconstruction donor. But the World Bank, the IDB, UN, everybody was involved.

A lot of travel, in other words, let's see, the President of France came to visit, the British Prime Minister, the Canadian Prime Minister, our first lady, Hillary Clinton, came down. So the six months after the hurricane, not only were we trying to deal with the welfare of the embassy and then the reconstruction of Honduras and whatever role we could play in that, we had lots of visitors.

We actually got pretty good at doing whirlwind tours and so forth.

Q: Beyond this hurricane business, just during the time you were in Honduras, was there much of a Honduran-American community and did it play much of a role in Honduras?

TRIVELLI: There were Honduran-Americans, but the numbers are not large, or they did not seem to be very large.

Q: So there wasn't a significant element there that had any policy impact?

TRIVELLI: No, I don't recall that being a major issue. Oh, President Clinton came down, too. So everybody was there.

Q: All right, you want to talk a bit about this air wing that we have there, what it was doing before, what was the rationale for it and how did it fit in?

TRIVELLI: Well, it's at a Honduras Air Force base. At any given time, it waxes and wanes a bit, 500 to 600 people, a dozen to twenty helicopters of different types, largely Blackhawks and Chinooks.

And Soto Cano was a place during the Eighties to actually help train contras, quite frankly. But by this time all of that was over, but there seemed to be a need and value of maintaining this unit.

And I think events like Mitch actually really proved its worth, because it enabled the United States to have that kind of forward presence and then immediate engagement in a region like Central America, very vulnerable to natural disasters of one sort or another.

So they were able to do considerable work in Honduras in the wake of Hurricane Mitch, and also did smaller deployments to Nicaragua, El Salvador and Guatemala.

In fact, the Mitch-related deployment to Managua was the first time that the U.S. military had established a working relationship with the Nicaraguan military since the revolution. So that's really what enabled the U.S.-Nicaraguan military relations to get a bit back on track.

Q: Now had this base originally been, you say for the contras, was it also used to try to interdict drugs?

TRIVELLI: Yes and that's the other aspect of it: transport local police authorities in the drug fight. That was contemplated as one of the other major roles.

Q: Did we have anything in the way of a training mission or anything dealing with the Honduran military as regards coastal interdiction and that sort of thing?

TRIVELLI: We must have. I know that we were trying to build or improve a small Honduran naval station that was up on the Miskito Coast, because it's an area of the country that was far away from central authority and part of what INL was doing was trying to figure out how do you put in a dock, how do you put in some decent facilities to at least have a small Honduran naval presence out there, for example. Otherwise, traffickers would have the run of the region.

We had a reasonably robust INL program, we had INL staff full time there at this time. We had a lot of conversations with the government, because our numbers suggested that during this time eighty to one hundred tons of cocaine were transiting Honduras in any given year, so it was pretty significant.

Q: Then, when you left there, in 2002, was it

TRIVELLI: Yeah, I left in 2002.

Q: Whither?

TRIVELLI: Back to Washington.

Q: And what job?

TRIVELLI: I was director of Central American Affairs in WHA and then director of WHA's policy coordination office.

Q: Did you somehow feel that you were shackled to Central America?

TRIVELLI: Well, by this time I didn't have much choice.

Q: I was going to say, did they make you an honorary Central American?

TRIVELLI: I don't think so. I don't think that there's much more I can say about Central America at that time. So I'm going to let that one go.

Q: Okay, I speak as somebody, my Latin American experience is a trip once to Tijuana. I didn't care for it particularly, so I sort of wrote off the whole Latin American thing.

But then you went into, what, public affairs?

TRIVELLI: No, it's WHA/PPC, policy coordination. It's the catchall office on the political side for WHA. It's the office that does the strategic planning documents, does some of the speechwriting. There's always a political/military officer there, there's always a labor officer there. So it's the office that does the overall coordination of implementation of many of our policies.

Q: One of the things that strikes me, we have these policy planning offices, George Kennan set up one, but they always end up writing speeches. We don't seem to be very good at really thinking about where are we going. The focus is always on today's problems.

TRIVELLI: That's right. That office was called Policy Planning and Coordination, but you end up getting caught up in the crisis of the day. Now sometimes speechwriting and writing those long congressionally mandated documents can be a good thing, in the sense that you really do then think about, hey, what are the pillars of our policy, where are we going?

But what you tend not to get is anyone thinking hard about what is the relationship going to be with the region ten and twenty years down the road. That generally does not happen, in my experience.

Q: Well, we now we had the Bush Administration in. Were they coming up with a different outlook? Did you sense a change, as far as Latin America was concerned?

TRIVELLI: Not a very large change. The one thing I would say is the front office was more concerned about Cuba perhaps than the prior administration, so some thinking was being done on where to go with the Cuban relationship.

Q: Well, what were we thinking about Cuba? Castro's getting on in years. It's almost a policy which rests on one person and that's Castro.

TRIVELLI: At that time the Bush Administration commissioned a rather large study of Cuba policy and if I remember right, the co-chairs were technically the Secretary of State and Secretary Mel Martinez. Cuban Affairs and the NSC and others went ahead and wrote this very large study about where they thought Cuba was and what the relationship was and where would it go.

A lot of emphasis on trying to support if at all possible the dissidents and the democratic forces, such as they are, within Cuba. Money was given to Radio and TV Marti. So there was I think more interest in Cuba perhaps than in the past.

I think the question in peoples' minds, you could string out a lot of scenarios about what would happen in post-Fidel Cuba and it was never really clear what the most likely outcome would be.

Now, in the meantime, I think the Cubans have outsmarted us all and rather than having all the power in Fidel's hands and having him just suddenly die, they passed the power, the day-to-day running of the country to his brother Raul.

So that very abrupt kind of shift of power will not take place. Fidel will pass from the scene, but he's been largely out of the running of the government for several years.

Q: Also, in a way, I would think that by this time our Cuba policy, it's gotten to the point of being more of an irritant than a really major thing, because the Cubans are out of Africa and they're sponsorship by the Soviets is obviously gone. They're no longer of the same caliber.

TRIVELLI: Right, they don't have that place on the world stage that they might have had earlier. And I've never really worked on Cuban affairs intensely, and of course here in Southern Florida it's almost dangerous to talk about Cuba policy.

There are three things that I like to remind people: one, our Cuban policy, unlike most aspects of foreign policy is actually set in law, under the Helms-Burton Act. So any president, any administration, unless that law is changed, has relatively limited room to maneuver and that's different from our relationship with most other countries.

Secondly, current legislation allows for pretty significant export of agricultural goods and medicine and medical equipment to Cuba. So the last time I checked the figures, ironically, the United States was Cuba's fourth or fifth largest trading partner, despite the embargo.

And third and Secretary Clinton has said this again fairly recently, it's not really clear that the Cubans themselves want to reestablish any kind of reasonable relationship with the United States.

It always seems as if there's some hint that relations may thaw, the Cubans then do something that makes it impossible. The shoot down of the Brothers to the Rescue aircraft during the Nineties is an example of that.

And then currently, the detention of AID contractor Alan Gross. As long as Gross is in custody, it's impossible for the relationship to improve.

Q: It seems in a way this is like our relations with Putin's Russia, where the security forces seem to say, "Well, things are getting too cozy, let's do something to roil them. They seem to be able to call the tune.

TRIVELLI: Well, it's not clear to me exactly what's happening in Cuba. It does appear that with Raul's assumption of power that the Cuban military has become an even more important institution, because they're not only running security services, they're also running a significant part of the Cuban economy, I understand. We'll see.

Q: Was Venezuela and Chavez at all rearing their heads while you were in the bureau?

TRIVELLI: Yes, well, there had been a coup against Chavez at one point and Chavez has never forgiven us for that. He believes that we were somehow behind all of that, even though there does not seem to be any evidence whatsoever that that is indeed the case.

I think Venezuela was a matter of concern to us at that time, but it's been more so in very recent years, with the large assistance programs under ALBA the *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Neustra America*, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America and other things that Chavez has been able to put in place.

Q: Were there any other concerns? How about Bolivia and Ecuador? Were they

TRIVELLI: Not so much then, not so much in that period.

Q: Were we watching with trepidation or delight or what, Brazil? Things were moving there, weren't they?

TRIVELLI: Well, remember, there was a fair amount of hand wringing when President Lula was elected, with him being a union leader and definitely left of center. It was not clear to the United States government or to the markets what would happen.

But as it turned out he was able to follow very solid economic and fiscal policy and Brazil began to boom.

That's an interesting part of WHA lore, in a sense, that is, WHA has been broken into different pieces. Remember, we "took over" Canada several years ago, so there's a whole different set of people that work on Canada. The Caribbean, the English-speaking Caribbean, is one set of folks and then the Latin Americanists, if you will.

But for many years, in a career sense, there weren't a lot of folks that who were focused on Brazil, who would become true Brazilian experts and good Portuguese speakers. And certainly in recent years, that's happened, so there's really been a shift in the bureau, in terms of resources and how people look at their careers.

Q: Was Argentina of concern to us? It always seems to be on the brink of some sort of

TRIVELLI: I don't remember that being a terribly big issue at that time.

Q: When you left WHA, where did you go?

TRIVELLI: I became ambassador to Nicaragua in 2005.

Q: You sure you didn't have citizenship of some sort?

TRIVELLI: They did give me an award when I left, but Daniel Ortega took it away. That's another story.

Q: When did you go to Nicaragua?

TRIVELLI: The summer of 2005.

Q: Were there any hiccups about getting Senate confirmation?

TRIVELLI: No, it all went rather smoothly.

Q: When you were talking about Honduras, I did an interview with Bill Walker and he described the Honduran military as "small guys with big mustaches and funny hats."

TRIVELLI: You're going to get in trouble if people read that stuff.

Q: He did say that at one point somebody called him up and said, "Would you like to go to Nicaragua as ambassador?" and he, "Hey, wait a minute! You know what my name is?" A man named William Walker his namesake, a pre-Civil War American soldier of fortune, seized power in Nicaragua and proclaimed himself its president, 1856-57 was not exactly going to be high on Nicaragua's want list.

TRIVELLI: No, in fact, there's a famous anti-Walker painting that's like in every public building in Nicaragua, still.

Q: Today is the 21st of February, 2012, with Paul Trivelli and Paul, you're off to Nicaragua. Did you have any problem with confirmation, or not?

TRIVELLI: No, the hearing was very positive. There was actually only one senator there most of the time, Norm Coleman. And I was on a panel with several other ambassadorial appointees.

I was asked perhaps three or four questions. Very straightforward, there were really no issues.

Q: Senator Helms of North Carolina, was he raising hell at that time?

TRIVELLI: No.

Q: Okay, so you went out there. You were fully informed of the situation in Nicaragua. Were there any surprises, or anything like that, when you got there?

TRIVELLI: Of course I was familiar with the situation. I had served there before, I'd subsequently been director of Central American Affairs.

Actually, in some ways, when I got there I was pleasantly surprised, because what I saw was a country, a city, that looked much better, much more construction.

Q: This is after the earthquake?

TRIVELLI: Well, this is well after the earthquake, but when I left Managua in '95 the city was still pretty rough, just a few things had come back in.

And when I went in 2005 there had been I think a marked improvement in at least the appearance of Managua, more modern buildings, including modern office buildings, new universities, a large, modern shopping center. It certainly was not Paris, but it all seemed much better.

And in fact my own sense and I think the numbers bear me out, in that intervening ten years the socioeconomic indicators of peoples' lives had made some modest improvement. People were earning more money, there was less unemployment, better access to health care and so forth. So I felt from that point of view pretty good about the country and pleasantly surprised.

I think in working with the government of President Bolaños, who I had known slightly previously, again, I think that was very quickly a positive experience, I think good ministers, mostly serious technocratic folks who were doing their best to improve the lot of their nation.

Q: Well, what was the background of the president you were dealing with?

TRIVELLI: He actually was a businessperson who had worked in several enterprises in Managua. He had stayed during most of the Sandinista period. He was an older fellow, Enrique must have been in his seventies.

At the same time, there was a very complicated political situation. He had been elected to the presidency after Arnoldo Alemán, who was widely viewed as extremely corrupt and then Enrique proceeded to charge Alemán with corruption and had been able to jail him. This was before I had gotten there.

So there was a huge fight going on in the Liberal Party about that, a lot of rancor, a lot of splits in the party. President Bolaños actually created his own offshoot party, named APRE the *Alianza por la Republica*, the Alliance for the Republic. So the politics were almost hopelessly confusing, quite frankly.

Q: Well, in a situation like this, I would think that the American ambassador would be, if you were a politician, somebody you simply wanted to be friends with. Did you find yourself being courted by not very savory characters?

TRIVELLI: I think that politicians of all stripes in Nicaragua wanted to have a good relationship with the U.S. ambassador, with the possible exception of the Sandinista Party, but the other folks, yes.

So certainly the embassy had wide-ranging contacts, both on the right and the left, again, not so much with the Sandinistas. I also did not have any direct contact with Arnoldo Alemán, who we quite frankly considered to be *persona non grata*, in a political sense.

Q: Well, what was his situation, at that time?

TRIVELLI: Very complicated, but he had been put in the penitentiary and then magically there was a decision that commuted the sentence to house arrest and then that became, oh, the house arrest could extend to the entire city of Managua and then eventually most of the country.

And he was able to do that because, really, he had, again, very complicated, but he had forged a pact in essence with Daniel Ortega several years prior, cut some deals, including a deal which lowered the percentage of votes it took to win on the first round of presidential elections and they were able to lower that number to 35 per cent. In other words, if someone got 35 per cent of the vote and that was five per cent more than anyone else, they would become president without a runoff.

That was an extremely convenient number for Daniel Ortega, because if you looked at how many people had voted for the Sandinista Party in past elections and what the polls said, his support was generally in the 35 to 40 per cent range. So there was always a good chance that he would be able to garner that 35 or so per cent.

This was lowered I believe from 45 per cent, because it would be very difficult for Ortega to win a one-on-one runoff election, because his popularity never went up that high.

Q: Well, how stood the situation with the Sandinistas when you arrived? This was 2000 and, what

TRIVELLI: Five.

Q: In other words, had there been reconciliation boards or something? A lot of property had been expropriated and all that. How stood things?

TRIVELLI: Well, by time I got there the whole body politic was looking forward to the 2006 election. There were elections in November of 2006.

Daniel Ortega and the Sandinista Party were already in campaign mode. The non-Sandinista parties, of which there were several, were already looking towards how they were going to nominate their candidates.

But I think really there was still a fair amount of polarization in the political system. Also, there was a lot of odd cooperation and backroom dealing, along the same lines of the Alemán-Ortega pact and people would form small political parties and then those parties would be hijacked by someone else. Just a very cloudy political situation.

Q: Were there political families or sources of political power within families within Nicaragua at the time?

TRIVELLI: There are certain prominent families, the Lacayos and others and actually there were still some relatives of Somoza active in the Liberal Party. But there was not a dynasty, with the exception of Ortega and his extended family. One thing that Daniel Ortega did and then did more after he became president again was basically his family suddenly accumulated businesses, TV stations and radio stations and so forth. But there was no sort of dynastic family at that time in Nicaragua's politics.

Q: Were there any foreign elements, governments, messing around there at the time, or that was pretty well over?

TRIVELLI: Well, certainly not in the same way it was done in the Eighties. In other words, the Cubans and the Russians and others, were still present. What was happening, though, it was becoming very apparent that the Sandinistas were being quietly funded by Chavez in Venezuela.

Q: Just to get my timing right, Chavez was a power at this point?

TRIVELLI: Yeah. He became president, let's see, 98, 99 Chavez was elected in 1998 and inaugurated the following year and by this time had founded ALBA, had done several oil deals and there was a lot of money floating around and it was pretty apparent to us that the Sandinistas were quietly receiving money.

Q: Well, what was in it for Chavez, to gain some influence in Nicaragua?

TRAVELLI: Well, I think he believed that if he could help bolster the Sandinistas that Daniel Ortega would come to power and be a natural ally. His political plan for many years has been to construct a solid anti-American, anti-imperialistic bloc and that piece, Nicaragua, was a natural building block.

Q: How was sort of the Sandinista money being spent?

TRAVELLI: I think on election campaigns and also giveaway programs. They would go out and give away food packets, zinc roofs, etc, etc. It was pretty clear as the campaign wore on that the Sandinistas were very well funded. Large billboards sprung up.

They had very large rallies and in Nicaragua, in order to get a large rally, basically you have to pay people to show up, at least give them bus fare and a sandwich and a beer or soda, so it becomes a rather expensive proposition.

That said, I asked people on the local political scene how much does it cost to run a full fledged election campaign in Nicaragua, what's the total cost for a presidential election and they told me somewhere in the 12 to 15 million dollar range.

So in the grand scheme of things, when you have oil money, 12 to 15 million dollars is not an awful lot of money.

Q: What were we doing? Were we violently opposed to Ortega, or did we say we could live with the guy, or what?

TRIVELLI: Well, during the campaign period, actually, right after I got to post Bob Zoellick came down and

Q: Zoellick at that point was what?

TRIVELLI: Deputy Secretary and he came down and talked with people and made some public appearances and I think made it very plain that the United States was interested in the preservation of democracy in Nicaragua, that we were opposed to corruption and that as the Nicaraguans went towards the election period they had an opportunity to keep this new democratic tradition alive.

And I spoke a lot in public during that period and sometimes was criticized for it, I was criticized a lot of it, in some quarters, but I think my main thrust was, "Look, Nicaraguans have a great opportunity in this election to embrace new democratic forces" and what that meant was, "Hey, you've got democratic options both on the right and the left and you don't really have to go back to voting for either the Sandinistas or the old Liberal Party, whose presidential candidate was hand picked by Arnoldo Alemán."

I never said, "Don't vote for Ortega." I never said, "Don't vote for José Rizo." But it certainly was interpreted that way.

The other thing that we did and I think very consciously is we spent as much money as we could doing small grants to civic organizations that were democratically minded, the Movement for Nicaragua and others, who were out there doing civic education, helping to train democratic party members, were doing the kind of basic democracy building blocks that we thought needed to get done.

Q: During this election, did you feel there was a strong anti-democratic left and anti-democratic right?

TRIVELLI: Yes, the anti-democratic left being represented by Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas and a corrupt, authoritarian minded right manifested by the Liberal Party, the PLC, as I mentioned, with a candidate hand picked by Arnoldo Alemán.

And to us that was falling back into an old paradigm. Neither of those alternatives were particularly I think positive for the United States or, quite frankly, positive for Nicaragua.

So what happened is that a candidate emerged from the democratic right, Eduardo Montealegre, a banker, who helped found another Liberal offshoot party as well as a party, the MRS, the *Movimiento de Renoivación Sandinista*, or Sandinista Renovation Movement, which was basically composed of ex-Sandinistas and social democrat types and was, I think, a reasonably responsible democratic alternative on the left.

So those were the kinds of people that we envisioned would make more sense for Nicaragua.

Q: Well, did these parties welcome your support, or were they saying, "Stay away, don't screw up the deal"?

TRIVELLI: No, I think that they welcomed it. In fact, I talked to a lot of politicians and the last thing that I wanted to do, or have the embassy do, is to do something that is counterproductive.

And I would ask people, "Look, the last thing I want to do is cause an allergic reaction by being strongly in favor of new political forces. Should I shut up?"

And I was encouraged by them not to go overboard, but to make supportive statements. I think the calculation was most Nicaraguans at least keep an eye on what the United States is thinking and it was important to remind them.

The other irony is if you said nothing Nicaraguans take that silence as an endorsement of a Sandinista victory or of a Liberal Party victory. So we were really caught in a difficult situation.

The unfortunate thing in a sense, though, because of the way the voting formula had been restructured, if you have several parties running, that would be much easier for Daniel Ortega to win, 'cause you're actually splitting the non-Sandinista vote.

And the International Republican Institute, with my encouragement, offered to help fund a primary of non-Sandinistas, to see if there could be a unified non-Sandinista candidate. The PLC, in particular, had simply no interest in doing that.

Q: Well, was the Venezuelan card played by either party, in that, one, here's a foreign country really supporting the Sandinistas, or, in general it's a bad idea to have undue foreign influence in Nicaraguan elections or what? Was that an issue during the election?

TRIVELLI: Yes, Chavez became something of a campaign issue, because the right argued that if Ortega became president he would become an openly Chavez disciple and

that was something that was not good for Nicaragua. I think that was argued very, very extensively.

Q: Well, given the world situation in which the leftist movement outside maybe Chavez or something was pretty bankrupt, the Soviet Union and Cuba were no longer players and all and I take it China wasn't doing anything

TRIVELLI: No.

Q: It would behoove Nicaraguans to play nice to the United States.

TRIVELLI: I would say a couple of things. What had happened by this time in Latin America was you saw a resurgence of the left forged by Chavez. And I can't remember all the timing, but of course it wasn't just Venezuela. There was Evo Morales in Bolivia.

Q: Ecuador?

TRIVELLI: In Ecuador, Correa, so there was a lot of movement in that direction. And there was a lot of writing about a resurgent left in Latin America and what that meant.

So really I think Chavez gave the left new life in Latin America and of course had significant resources to spend.

Q: Well, what were we doing? You were making speeches, but what other efforts were we doing there?

TRIVELLI: Well, one thing that we did was a lot of work trying to demonstrate to Nicaraguans the value of a good bilateral relationship. largely through the support that we gave Nicaragua.

In fact, not only did we have our traditional aid program, the U.S. military had reestablished good relationships with the Nicaraguan military, so there both humanitarian projects and more traditional provision of military education and so forth.

In addition, we had a very robust Peace Corps program, a couple of hundred volunteers, and Nicaragua has signed a Millennium Challenge compact, so there were if I remember right about two hundred million dollar Millennium Challenge series of projects going on in agriculture, in property titling and in road infrastructure.

We also had the ambassador's cultural fund, not a lot of money, but we could do some things like repairing parts of historic churches, other buildings.

So I made a great point of using those positive things that the United States has done to public advantage at all the ribbon cuttings, making sure we had articles about these activities in the newspaper.

I had AID, the Millennium Challenge account, the Department of Agriculture and the Peace Corps write large pieces which detailed what they did, with photographs and so forth and we actually had them as inserts to the major newspaper in Managua.

So we did what we could and pushed the U.S. agenda, but more broadly the value of the bilateral relationship.

Q: Had there developed a strong business connection between Nicaragua and the United States?

TRIVELLI: Well, about forty per cent of Nicaraguan trade is with the United States, and the U.S. is by far the largest foreign investor in the private sector. Not major industries, but lots of processing of textiles and so forth.

So, yes, that business connection was there. There were also about six thousand Americans living and working in Nicaragua, although many of them were dual citizens, but nevertheless that community was there as well.

Q: Well, how did the election turn out and were and others observing and all?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we had both an official White House-named team plus thirty or forty embassy and AID officers on observation missions. The OAS observed, European Union observed, widespread electoral observation, the Carter Center. So it was quite widely observed.

Q: And how did it turn out?

TRIVELLI: Well, Daniel Ortega won about 38 per cent of the vote, which was actually somewhat less than he had in past elections, but because of the split of the non-Sandinista vote he was able to win on the first round.

The electoral observers proclaimed it free and fair. All I can say is that the electoral council stopped actually reporting the votes formally at 91 per cent of votes counted, there was never actually an official 100 per cent accounting for all the votes in that election. So who knows exactly what happened?

But be that as it may, Daniel Ortega became president.

Q: Well, how did we view that? I assume we were, as an election comes, the political section and all looks at it and says, "If so and so wins, such and such will happen vis-à-vis *our relations. In other words, we have to calculate what can happen.*

TRIVELLI: Yes and I think we calculated and I think rightly so that that would not be a comfortable outcome for the United States and for the bilateral relationship. Ortega's someone who is reflexively anti-American and so the relationship would not be smooth.

That said, I believe that Daniel Ortega, because of the history and close relationship between the U.S. and Nicaragua, I think even he understood that most Nicaraguans, the vast majority of Nicaraguans, wanted to see that any Nicaraguan government had at least a courteous, non-confrontational relationship with the United States.

So I think he probably made the calculation that he would push the relationship with the United States, but perhaps not push too far and go over the brink.

Q: Well, had you had contact with him prior to the election?

TRIVELLI: Tom Shannon and I, the assistant secretary at the time, talked extensively and Washington cogitated for a week or so after the elections and then suggested to me that I needed to go in and talk to the transition team, the Sandinista team.

Which we did, in an effort to at least make the best of what we thought would be a very difficult situation. We gave the designated folks a series of briefings on the extent of the U.S.-Nicaraguan relationship and activities of the U.S. embassy and AID mission and others.

And I must say, it was done very professionally. I sat there, my DCM, AID mission director, head of the military assistance group, head of the Millennium Challenge account and our counter-narcotics folks.

If I recall correctly, there was a series of three or four briefings and I must say, I think the other side was enormously surprised by the extent of the support that the U.S. government was lending Nicaragua.

Q: Was this a matter of their listening and being noncommittal, or what?

TRIVELLI: Yes, those meetings were polite and they listened and we gave them some written information. I think their theme, though, and the theme that they subsequently had with the donor community is that they felt that they wanted direct control over all the assistance.

In other words, it was an attitude, "Oh, I see your AID mission spends $40 million a year," which is roughly what that number was. " But in our view, a lot of that money is wasted by paying implementers and consultants and so forth. What we'd really rather do is, could you just please give us a check for $40 million?"

That was the attitude they had with the donor community, which caused a fair amount of friction over subsequent months.

Q: Well, did we send a representative to the inauguration?

TRIVELLI: We did. We sent the Secretary of HHS, who had been a former governor of Utah.

Q: Well, was there some debate about who should go and all that?

TRIVELLI: Yes, there was and I think the decision was made that the U.S. government would try to establish a reasonable relationship with the Sandinista government.

And our theme was, I think that our theme right at the beginning, including statements that the Secretary made, was, "We are willing to work with any government that's democratically elected and continues to govern democratically."

Q: How about the Venezuelan ambassador? Was he or she riding high at that point?

TRIVELLI: Yes, although he was not a particularly flamboyant guy. Chavez of course did come to the inauguration. In fact, we all waited for a couple hours because he showed up late.

We were waiting outside and it was just incredibly hot, because Managua's pretty much always hot and the foreign minister-designate motioned for some of the heads of delegation and some of the delegations to come to an air conditioned lounge area, we were kind of crammed in, but at least it was air conditioned, because it was obvious that Chavez was going to be late.

And all of a sudden Chavez showed up with this entourage of uniformed guys with red berets, they all barged into the room, which was already overcrowded and were making their way around the room.

And I'm talking about a room which had the president of Colombia, the president of Peru, the crown prince of Spain, very, very important people and this mass of *Chavistas* pushes its way into the room.

And then the foreign minister-designate goes around with Chavez, introducing him to everybody. He gets to me and Mike Leavitt, the Secretary of HHS and he says, "Well, Mr. President Chavez, I want to introduce you to Secretary Leavitt. I want to introduce you to Ambassador of the United States Trivelli."

Chavez looks at me and he says, "Ah, Ambassador Trivelli. Give my regards to Ambassador Dudley." Dudley was our ambassador to Caracas, who was not on speaking terms with Chavez.

And then, when he realized who Leavitt was, he said, "Hey, do you have any idea what the infant mortality rate is in Cuba?" and he comes up with a number "And what it is in the United States?"

And then he said, "Yeah, in Venezuela we're trying to get that number down." He then launched into this *non sequitur* conversation about infant mortality rates in Latin America. So you just never know.

Finally, Ortega was inaugurated, in the broiling sun. He gave a very short speech and then said, "My people await" and he went tearing off with Chavez and a few other like-minded delegates to another plaza in the city where the Sandinista Party faithful were waiting. So we had waited for hours in the hot sun for what turned out to be a relatively short ceremony.

Q: How did things work out, as you dealt with this Ortega Administration?

TRIVELLI: I'll say a few things. We ended up having a fair amount of visitors from Washington and I must say Daniel Ortega received most of them. Always received them at very late hours, a lot of these meetings didn't start until seven, eight, nine at night, but he received the visitors from Washington and within those meetings treated people with I think a reasonable amount of courtesy and respect. While he might in the course of the meeting criticize the United States, it was not in a bombastic, insulting kind of way.

I think that we had reasonably good access to folks at the minister and vice minister level. I also had a good relationship with the vice president, who's actually a non-Sandinista by the name of Jaime Morales, who had been one of the peace negotiators for the Contra War and had been high up in the contra hierarchy. So I was able to talk with him on a regular basis.

And we tried to do things to, again, make Ortega understand the value of the relationship. A very serious hurricane hit the Atlantic coast and left the Atlantic coast isolated. I talked to the State Department, I talked to Southern Command.

Within hours I picked up the phone and called the vice president and said, "Look, Mr. Vice President, the United States stands ready to provide helicopter and other airlift out of Soto Cano Air Base for relief supplies and search and rescue. We also have ships in the Caribbean that could come and assist. If you are interested in that, we're at your disposal."

And within an hour, Daniel Ortega called me and said, "Thank you" and said, "Yes, please, we're going to need your help" and Southern Command and the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance did a great job, just a great job, in immediate airlift operations and then longer term relief supplies to a very remote area of the country.

Q: I keep coming back to this Venezuelan theme, because I see the yin and the yang here. Did Venezuela do much, or was it pretty much they had money and that was it?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think Venezuela always attempted to do something in a flashy way. In other words, during this hurricane, they did bring in a C-130 full of relief supplies and land at the airport and make a big splash to show of solidarity with Nicaragua.

Certainly what we did was many times I think more effective and larger scale, but the Venezuelans always made an attempt to do something flashy.

And Chavez visited several times and there were speeches about building tens of thousands of houses, an oil refinery, a transoceanic canal and of course a very small percentage of those projects ever actually got off the ground.

Q: The Nicaraguan canal, this has been talked about for more than a hundred years. Not just in the Chavez context and all, but was anything while you were there being done about this, or was this just a pipe dream?

TRIVELLI: Daniel Ortega actually talked a lot about this. There was actually a company that was set up in Managua to push this notion and draw up very notional plans of what a new canal would look like.

My belief always was that this was nothing more than a pipe dream. It was a bit of a national obsession. This was something that Nicaraguans had obviously long been interested in and I think probably never fully forgiven the United States for building the canal in Panama, as opposed to Nicaragua.

But when you talked to people who were knowledgeable, they say a couple of things: one, the Panama Canal itself and particularly with the planned expansion has sufficient capacity to meet any kind of foreseeable surge in ocean freight over decades.

Secondly, the cost of trying to build a new canal would be phenomenally large and it would have to be a sea level canal, which raises a whole series of questions related to the mixing of the ecosystems in the ocean.

And when you think about peoples' concern about environmental impact of projects, even gas pipelines, and now you're talking about a project that's many, many times larger than a gas pipeline, it's hard to see that that kind of work could ever get done.

Q: So, it's sort of out there, but

TRIVELLI: Out there, but I believe in the pipe dream category.

Q: It looks like the Panama Canal, to expand it makes sense.

TRIVELLI: The Panamanians are building a third set of locks that are larger right now, spending five to seven billion dollars. That's a sensible thing to do, I think.

Q: The people you talked to, did Chavez's largess have much attraction in Nicaragua?

TRIVELLI: I would say yes and no. I think it probably had some attraction to folks who were dedicated Sandinistas. I think many other people were very suspicious, because Nicaragua has a history of being victimized by populist dictators, so people get very nervous when they see one, or at least some people.

I think the Sandinistas themselves had a very positive view of Chavez and his money and his charisma and his ability to get on the world stage. And one thing Ortega certainly enjoyed was being back on the world stage.

But I think a lot of Nicaraguans were rather suspicious.

Q: Well how did you view the Ortega brothers at this point?

TRIVELLI: By this time Humberto had really been out of Nicaragua for years. He's basically living in Costa Rica. He would come up every once in a while. He wrote a book and he did a book signing and I was at that book signing. So he would come up fairly often for academically oriented events of one sort and another and I had the opportunity to chat with him several times.

I think the brothers were genuinely estranged. Their mother died while I was there and there was some question about who would actually go to the funeral. My sense is, although I was not great friends with either of them, there was significant distance between the two.

If people are interested, one of the embassy staff actually wrote a book about this period called The New Nicaragua and Steven Hendrix is the author (PSI reports, 2009) and it goes into a lot of the twists and turns of both the politics and what the AID democracy promotion program and other people were doing during that period.

Q: Good, well, this is what we want, we want people to use this and then to go off and do further research into topics raised during these oral history interviews.

Okay, well, we'll pick this up and sort of cover really the running of a government by Ortega and the Sandinistas, just how the thing was running and all.

And you were there from, what

TRIVELLI: 2005 to the middle of 2008.

Q: Today is the 28th of February 2012, with Paul Trivelli and we've reached the point where, we've talked about the buildup and what happened after Ortega took over again, but let's talk about the running of the country then. How did this go?

TRIVELLI: The Sandinistas had been out of government for more than a decade and it became difficult at first for them to find the right people to fill slots to staff a government. Then there was a huge push on their part, which they were reasonably successful at, of pushing out folks in the lower levels of the ministries and filling those slots with Sandinista supporters.

So what we saw really was a slow erosion of some of the ministries, where the folks who had been good technocrats over the course of years and in fact had in many cases been trained by the U.S. and the donor community were slowly being forced out of positions.

And that to me began to introduce kind of an inefficiency, because what we found was people fairly high up in ministries just really didn't in some cases have much of a background at all.

Now, the Sandinistas did reach out and particularly on the economic side try to find some folks who had experience in the business community. Even within the business community, oddly enough there was sort of a cadre of Sandinista entrepreneurs, if you will, particularly folks that had benefited from the takeover of properties and businesses in the so-called *piñata*, when Ortega left office in 1990.

So there was a small cadre of Sandinistas who had something like business experience, although it's pretty easy to make money if you get your factory for free, which they had. But there was a small group of people who could do that.

But in general what we found was a general pushing out of the technocratic class that had been largely trained by the donor community and then putting in people much less familiar with their jobs.

Q: Had sort of the revolutionary zeal gone out of the Sandinistas?

TRIVELLI: My thesis on all of this is that *Sandinismo* really became more of a power acquisition exercise, as opposed to a true ideological exercise. In other words, the Sandinistas sought political and economic power and resources and that was really the most important thing, that's what was driving the movement.

And that's why there's this hard core of Sandinista supporters, because there was a class of Nicaraguans who basically owed their livelihood over the course of many years to the Sandinista Party, who were getting small salaries for being organizers and minor party officials, working in communities and working in Sandinista NGOs and those folks wanted to preserve and then expand their power and their resources. And that's what we saw begin to happen.

One of the tough things about Sandinistas and about many governments of the left, many populist governments of the left, is they began to have a hard time distinguishing between the party and the state, almost in a classic Soviet sense.

In their minds, the ministries and the government really became an extension of the Sandinista power structure and that's why when Ortega leaves at some point in the future it's going to be very hard once again to make a transition.

Q: What was the reaction of the business community and the people who'd gotten accustomed to the Chamorro regime and its democratic successor governments? Was there another exodus, or what happened?

TRIVELLI: Well, a lot of the business community I think became in a sense co-opted, maybe that's too strong a word, but took on sort of a wait and see attitude, to see if they could continue to prosper or to survive under a second Sandinista government.

I think the Sandinistas did meet with the business community or at least its leadership on several occasions and I think there was an understood message that Ortega delivered to the private sector: "We will let you keep your businesses and we will let you continue to make profits if you promise to stay out of politics, if you promise not to fund the opposition in any major way."

So there became an understanding with the business community and Ortega, although I think he did things the business community did not like and he certainly is not a free market capitalist, on the other hand he did not do anything that would have been catastrophic to the economy: he did not renationalize the banking system, he did not pull out of the free trade agreement, he actually continued a series of agreements with the IMF, so that the fiscal side of the house and the macroeconomic side of the house and the monetary tools were all within some reasonable bounds.

He did not yank the rug out from under the system to cause grave damage to the economy or to the private sector. That said, they didn't get along well, but there was an understanding, and remember, there were Sandinistas in the business class.

Q: Well, were there any elements, foreign or domestic, on the right, that were vehemently opposed, trying to screw things up?

TRIVELLI: I think there were a lot of people who were obviously upset, a lot of people were ideologically opposed and public pronouncement opposed, but you didn't see people doing anything drastic. In other words, there were not people in the streets protesting.

There were some rumors that some of the ex-contras wanted to take direct action again and that really never happened. I think given the intervening time period, there was no way for them to organize themselves and do anything, which probably would not have actually been a very good idea of course. Violence was not going to solve anything.

Q: What was our policy? Was there conflict, say, in the administration that you were getting rumblings of from Washington, "Let's get tough," "Let's isolate these people" or "Let's try to get along?"

TRIVELLI: I think that both the White House and the State Department came to the conclusion pretty quickly that we should at least make an effort to get along. The

strategic message was, "We are willing to work with folks that are elected and then govern democratically."

And in fact not long after the election Tom Shannon, the assistant secretary, came down and had some conversations with the government, along those lines, saying, "We're going to be skeptical of course, there's a long history here that's not always positive, but we are willing to keep our assistance programs, where we can, in place, we're willing to work with you on issues of mutual interest, like counter-terrorism and counter-drugs and see where that takes us."

Q: Had we cut out pretty much our developmental assistance programs and all?

TRIVELLI: No, in fact virtually everything remained in place, at least for a few years. There may have been some minor cutbacks in funding, but I think rather unrelated to the Sandinista government, perhaps more related to other aid priorities.

But we kept our socioeconomic programs, humanitarian programs, in place. The Millennium Challenge account project, remained in place for at least a couple of years. Our counter-narcotics program remained in place and the modest amount of security assistance remained in place.

So there was no rush to cut things off. I think that the Ortega government really wanted to change the way that we and other donors related to them. They didn't like much the idea of so much donor control over the funding and the accountability of resources.

They did not like our democracy programs, by and large. They did not like us giving grants to pro-democracy NGOs, etc and they took steps to slowly make that more and more difficult.

And the fact is, over time several countries began to either downsize or even close their missions, because they felt that it was beginning to be just too difficult to work with the Sandinista government.

Q: Were we encouraging other governments to stay, or to leave, or what?

TRIVELLI: I don't remember myself urging governments, one way or the other. One good thing, actually, about Nicaragua was the donor community had a lot of dialogue, on both the ambassadorial level and then the aid mission director level, there was a continuous series of dialogues and meetings about development, about projects and then also about this semi-political stew as well.

Several governments reached their own conclusions that it just simply was not worth it, that they weren't getting enough cooperation from the government to stay in business and then, too, some European countries were downsizing their missions overseas and Nicaragua became an easy closure.

Q: Well, what about, Nicaraguan officials down below that worked with the donor community, were they sort of doing this grudgingly, was this a problem?

TRIVELLI: Yes, the Sandinistas also tried to have the foreign ministry play a larger role in donor relations and in fact they created a vice minister position whose basic job was liaison with the donor community.

I think that the personal relationships between the aid mission folks and other people that did similar work, like the Millennium Challenge account and USDA, and the government was hit and miss. In some cases, the relationships remained pretty good, in others it became rather difficult.

Q: How about you and your officers, how did you find working in this country?

TRIVELLI: The access to government and government officials at the highest levels, although it was doable, was obviously much less fluid than under the previous administration.

It was a situation where many times they wanted a request for a meeting in writing and that might take several days to process. Several times the foreign ministry wanted to be the conduit for that kind of thing. And so it became less fluid, more difficult over time. It wasn't impossible, but it became more difficult.

And one of the difficult things about working in Nicaragua and many countries in Central America, sometimes, in order to get any kind of decision, you really have to go high up into the bureaucracy.

If there's an important decision to be made about an aid project or about a political issue or a demarche at the foreign ministry, it almost has to be done at the vice minister or ministerial level, just because people lower than that are simply not empowered to make decisions. So unless you can have that fluid access it slows down the relationship.

Q: Did you feel that you were trying to develop a lasting relationship with this government, or was this a waiting brief while you were marking time, doing a minimum, until better times came?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think it's more the latter. I think we made our best effort to continue some kind of working relationship with the government. We were reasonably successful in that during my tenure there, the last year and a half or so of my tenure. But I think it was clear that we would never have a kind of open, fluid, friendly, cooperative relationship, that that probably was not going to happen.

And of course what happened, not long after I left there were municipal elections in November of 2008. They were widely seen to be unfair and dishonest. The opposition and some observers make a good case that thirty to forty municipalities were literally stolen by the Sandinistas.

And at that point then it became more difficult, because unless you could reasonably maintain a facade that there was still a reasonable democratic process going on, then it becomes difficult to work with that government.

Q: Were we holding back on looking for new things to do and all at that time?

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think that that's fair. I think that we were looking to find ways to preserve what was important in the relationship, whether on the political side or on the development side.

And certainly no one was advocating to start any major new works or cooperation with the Sandinista government, that just wasn't really going to be in the cards.

Q: What was the role of Venezuela during the time you were there?

TRIVELLI: Chavez visited several times. Lots of agreements were signed, including for a new refinery and all sorts of new industrial plants and road construction and dam construction.

But it never seemed that any of those project would actually get off the ground. There'd be a big ceremony, they'd lay a cornerstone and then not much happened. In fact, the press, every few months they'd run an article showing the site of the future refinery and there'd just be nothing there. So I think in general, Venezuelans probably actually delivered on about ten per cent of what they promised.

They did have a discounted oil deal. It was run through this very oddly structured public/private business with no accountability and obviously was a way to funnel large profits to the Sandinista Party itself.

Q: Was Cuba playing any role?

TRIVELLI: There were certainly Cubans there. We did see Cuban doctors. There were political visits back and forth. And I think the Cuban embassy and the Cuban ambassador got puffed up a bit. But I don't recall seeing any great surge in Cuban presence or rhetoric.

Q: How about Honduras, Salvador, surrounding countries? How did they relate?

TRIVELLI: I think that there was an effort to try to keep the Central American integration process intact and in fact they continued. That process has a very large series of meetings throughout the year at the ministerial and vice ministerial level.

On the other hand, the Sandinistas seem to find a way very often to have tiffs with their neighbors. As recently as a year or so ago there was a border incursion, a very minor one, with Costa Rica. When I was there the Nicaraguans and Hondurans were fighting over

and then I think there was finally a Hague International Court decision on a maritime boundary.

So there was cooperation, but on the other hand, I think actually largely for domestic political reasons, Nicaragua would find some way to anger their neighbors.

There was also the phenomenon of the FMLN presidential candidate winning in El Salvador, so there ended up being two governments of the left as neighbors.

Q: Did you see a lasting role for the left, that it was more attractive to the people than the right in Central America at that time?

TRIVELLI: What I think can happen and I think El Salvador's actually a pretty good example of this, the right had probably gotten somewhat out of touch, they'd been in power for a long time, there were a whole series of kind of scandals linked to the ARENA governments and I think people just got tired of that and were looking for something new.

In Salvador's case, I think the FMLN did a rather clever thing in nominating for president someone who had really never been an FMLN member. In fact, he actually was a sportscaster and TV personality, rather than what they'd done in the past, which is nominate hard core, old time FMLN folks. So with a new face, a younger face, a more presentable face, I think they were able to make the case that the country needed a change.

A related point, in a place like Nicaragua many of the original Sandinista leaders had in fact abandoned the party over the years and Ortega was one of the few people left of the original cadre.

Many of those folks actually formed a competing leftist party, more democratically minded, the MRS and I used to joke, "Geez, all the smart people left the Sandinista Party, so it's kind of difficult to work with them."

Q: Were there the equivalent of, I don't know what they called them, the Young Pioneers or something, trying to raise a cadre? Rather than just a party, was this still a movement?

TRIVELLI: That stuff I think characterized Ortega's first presidency in the Eighties. I certainly did not see that when I was there, although we did see a move to slowly change the course curriculum in public education, for example, to make it more in line with Sandinista doctrine and more favorable to recent history.

I'm sure there's a Sandinista Youth Party or youth organizations, but nothing that would conjure up images of a Cub Scout-like party-sponsored mass movement among the young.

But they're very good at organizing. Every block, almost, in every city's got a local Sandinista rep. He talks to people in the neighborhood. If the neighborhood needs something, there's a system to request help at the district level, to see if they can get some resources. They try to keep people in line politically. This system is currently overseen by the First Lady via a Citizen's Power Council organization.

So they're extremely good at that and that's something that the right in Nicaragua and I think largely elsewhere in Central America has really never been able to do, they're just not nearly as well organized.

Q: In Congress and all, had the powers in Congress been there, done that, and they were interested in something else now, or what?

TRIVELLI: Yes, the number of folks in the U.S. Congress who were deeply interested in Latin America had fallen pretty dramatically. There are folks like Burton and others who actually came down to visit, but I don't remember anyone in Congress taking this issue on in a very strong way. And as you suggest, there's just so many other competing foreign policy issues to kind of worry about.

Q: How about within the Department? Were you getting strong direction or consultation, or were you just another country?

TRIVELLI: The only thing that I remember very explicitly was right after the election, in that interregnum period between the election and the actual installation of the new government, Tom Shannon and I had several conversations about how to proceed.

He said, "Look, don't reach out to the Sandinistas until Washington figures out how we're going to do this." And it took a little while, a week or two, but together we laid out a path to at least engage the folks that were going to assume power on a very quiet level.

And so there was some back and forth then. But I think after that they let us run the embassy. I don't think we were about to do anything too far from administration policy there.

Q: How did your political officers find it? Was this kind of in a way fun, because it was a different situation than normal, as far as contacts go and all that?

TRIVELLI: Well, I think, during the time I was there it was a very fascinating time for political officers because of the elections and the complexity and personal nature of Nicaraguan politics.

I think that once the Sandinistas came back to office I think they probably felt pretty much as I described, that it was difficult for them to reach out and build contacts, 'cause there was considerable suspicion.

Our contacts within the Sandinista Party prior to the election were not that deep, so really it would take a lot of work to build those insights that political officers like to build up. Just a huge difference between the one Nicaraguan administration and the next.

Q: Was Mexico a factor at all?

TRIVELLI: We've talked about that before. I think Mexico's had a new found interest in Central America, has actually started some small donor-like activities on their own.

They've been pushing the interconnection of electrical power throughout Central America and helping fund that. They've talked about doing joint infrastructure, like highway projects.

Mexican businesses became interested in Central America in the last few years in a way that they had not earlier.

The government of Mexico did some disaster relief after major hurricanes and so forth. They became more interested in Central America during my time in Honduras and during my time in Nicaragua.

Q: What about the role of the American military? We've always had National Guard units come down and do their road building thing or something like that, or fleet visits. Anything like that going on?

TRIVELLI: Well, in Nicaragua I would say yes. There was not much of a relationship between the militaries until Hurricane Mitch. During Hurricane Mitch the government at that time did seek out U.S. disaster relief assistance in Nicaragua, including some helicopter support. That meant that the Sandinista military had to work with our military on a very close basis for really probably the first time.

I think that they then were able to become more familiar with each other and a certain amount of trust was developed. We had in Nicaragua some very modest programs where Nicaraguan officers and senior enlisted personnel could be trained in the U.S.

Our military assistance revolved much more around preparation for disaster relief. In other words, we donated equipment to the military like refurbished large heavy trucks and so forth and disaster supplies.

We had the hospital ship come down for the first time. The *Comfort* docked in Nicaragua, which was a huge strategic communications coup for us, very well received by the Nicaraguans.

Q: What was done by the hospital ship?

TRIVELLI: Well, several years ago the head of Southern Command at the time thought that it would be great to use our capacity with that ship, the *Comfort.* We only have two hospital ships in the Navy, which of course most of the time are not used.

Southern Command developed an operation called Continuing Promise where every year, every other year the ship would make a series of port calls in the Caribbean, Central America and even South America, spend about ten days at each stop, do surgical operations, do some basic medical care, do inoculations, work with the local health ministry and we would end up treating thousands of people in the course of ten or twelve days.

In the particular case in Nicaragua, when the *Comfort* came in, I went out with the vice president, who was not a Sandinista, but a friend of mine, who, when he saw the *Comfort*, got rather emotional, because he said he had seen the *Hope* make a visit there, at that same place in the early 1960s. He said he never thought he'd ever see another U.S. hospital ship in Nicaragua but certainly there was one.

I think this type of activity is enormously positive for the United States and for Nicaragua.

Q: What about the expatriate community? An awful lot of the work here in Washington is done by Central Americans and many of them are from Nicaraguans. We've had Nicaraguan restaurants and all. What was the impact, money coming back, was there much flow of people one way or the other? What was happening?

TRIVELLI: Of course the large flow of Nicaraguans into the States peaked in the 1980s, when you had folks who were literally fleeing the Sandinistas, either folks of some substance who had lost properties and had businesses taken over and fled for their lives, and then economically driven people because the economy during the 1980s was so bad, some people left just to get out of there and work.

During my time there and even after the Sandinistas were elected I didn't see a big outflow. In fact, there had been some movement back in, particularly by the educated class, the banking community and others, in the 1990s and I don't think that many people left again once the Sandinistas came back in, I don't it had gotten to that point.

There's been a lot of discussion about what kind of Nicaraguans are in the States, a discussion often linked to the possibility of those expats voting in Nicaraguan elections. Some politicians are very interested about whether these people are Sandinistas, are they people of the center/right, who are they?

Every poll that I've seen ever done suggests that the expatriates pretty much reflect the same makeup as people living in Nicaragua, that they're roughly the same diversity of political views.

They're certainly those in the expat community who were very anti-Sandinista, would try to get the ear of the administration and the Congress from time to time and that's certainly their right.

Q: Were there any centers of Nicaraguans in the States and did they develop any political clout while you were there?

TRIVELLI: Miami is probably the biggest center for Nicaraguans and continues to be to this day, particularly in a little municipality right down the street from where I live, Sweetwater. You go there and it's packed with Nicaraguan restaurants, the local park is the Ruben Dario Park, etc. So lots of folks are there.

They've integrated into the Miami community and opened businesses and become active in local government, but certainly nothing as large as the Cuban community.

Q: What about the contras as a group, both in Nicaragua and abroad? Was this a group that sort of dissipated, or what?

TRIVELLI: Yes, it tended to, after the contra conflict, it fractured, it became lots of different factions. There were some that actually continued in the field in a small way after peace came. The contras did form a political party which had only very limited success and then really by the time I was there really only had power when in alliance with other parties.

There were some ex-contras who actually became very cooperative with the Sandinistas, oddly enough. So it was a pretty wide, diffuse set of folks during most of my time there.

We of course had conversations with ex-contra leaders, because they'd long been contacts of the embassy and I didn't see any full consensus on their part about their leadership and where they should go.

Q: What about the leftists in the States and maybe in Europe, too, the Sandinistas had been their darlings and all? Was there a revival, was that again a case of something that happened long ago and far way in another country?

TRIVELLI: I'm certainly familiar with the so-called "Sandalista" phenomenon of the Eighties. I honestly did not see any large amount of Americans or Europeans coming back to Nicaragua to relive the relationship with the Sandinistas.

There were a handful of Americans who had stayed. One actually was pretty high up in the Sandinista government when I was there. But I didn't see a large amount of those folks.

Q: Well, then, you left there when?

TRIVELLI: Summer of 2008.

Q: How did you see, when you left, whither Nicaragua, your impression?

TRIVELLI: I was fairly pessimistic. There was another election season there, later in the year, which I mentioned, municipal elections which were not run fairly. I was very concerned about Ortega and his family continuing to accrue wealth and power within the country, worried about the fact that the Sandinistas really were trying to take over every level of political power in the nation.

And I think in the back of everyone's mind was will Daniel Ortega ever leave? In other words, will he ever be willing to leave democratically and I think that that's still an open question, although my guess is that will not happen.

So I came down on the pessimistic side. You could make the case that the economy has maintained itself and as I just explained Ortega did not make any catastrophic economic errors, but in general I was fairly pessimistic when I left.

Q: Well, did you see a change in Ortega? Was he getting very much status quo *and getting elderly? How did you find him?*

TRIVELLI: I had limited contact with him. He had never been a charismatic, fiery figure, he'd never been a great public speaker, and to some extent always seemed uncomfortable around people. He let much of the day to day running of the government to his wife.

I think he was very impatient with the day to day running of the government and was much more interested in taking a place again on the world stage, to make those speeches at the UN General Assembly, welcome visiting dignitaries and that side of the business of being president. I found him much more interested in that.

Q: Well, then, okay, so you left there and whither?

TRIVELLI: Southern Command.

Q: First place, can you explain what your role was?

TRIVELLI: Yes. I was both the foreign policy advisor and a role which Admiral Stavridis had created, the civilian deputy to the commander. I was to provide standard political-military advice to the commander and the rest of the command and then also have the role as one of two deputies. There was a military deputy who worried about Title X issues.

Q: Title X being

TRIVELLI: Title X being the portion of the U.S. Code which gives the Department of Defense its authority, so he would worry about the strictly military affairs, as well as

other related issues and I was given a role as a co-equal deputy to focus on the civilianized aspects, if you will, of Southern Command's mission.

In other words, larger strategy issues, strategic communications, our humanitarian missions, our relationship with the State Department and other foreign affairs agencies, SOUTHCOM's relationships with ambassadors and DCMs and embassy personnel in the field. There were a whole host of things that I was asked to do.

Q: The Southern Command, in the first place, what is its area?

TRIVELLI: It covers all of Latin America and the Caribbean, with the exception of Mexico and in the northern Caribbean. They do not cover the Bahamas, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands.

Q: Well, How come Mexico is excluded?

TRIVELLI: Because of the formation of Northern Command, it was felt they should have the links with both of our two neighbors.

Q: Yeah, well, in a way it does make sense.

TRIVELLI: For many, many years Mexico and the Mexican military resisted direct contact with the geographic combat commanders, when that system was established. They felt as a neighbor they should deal directly with the Joint Staff at the Pentagon.

So when NORTHCOM came into being, it took a while but I think those relationships are now much, much better than they were 15, 20 years ago.

Q: Where does Cuba fit in this?

TRIVELLI: Cuba is within the responsibility of Southern Command and one of the most difficult challenges of Southern Command was Guantanamo Bay. The naval facility itself is not managed by Southern Command, it's still managed by the navy, but Southern Command via a joint task force was given responsibility for the detention center.

Q: Guantanamo Bay, I thought there was a hundred year lease, or something like that, after the Spanish-American War, but that's come and gone. How stands the situation there?

TRIVELLI: I think that the rights were actually granted in perpetuity, if I'm not mistaken and I believe the U.S. government still actually deposits the rent in an account every year. It's not very much, it's a few thousand dollars, and the Cubans have never touched it.

I think to some people's surprise the base commander and the local Cuban district military commander hold fence line meetings every month. There are even a few joint training events that are done between the two militaries, like firefighting, or what do you

do if you discover unexploded ordnance, etc. So there's some amount of basic cooperation at the local level between the U.S. and Cuban officials.

Q: While we're talking about Cuba, was that an irritant, a challenge, or almost a nullity, while you were doing this?

TRIVELLI: Well, we don't really have military to military relations with Cuba. The only military-like person that I'm aware of who is at the Interest Section in Havana is a Coast Guard representative, who deals with their border control people on immigration and drug issues.

So Southern Command and the U.S. military/DOD doesn't really have anyone in Havana and there's no direct military to military relationship. To my knowledge SOUTHCOM has not talked directly to the Cubans.

We've talked about Cuba in our annual posture statements and so forth and I think that the Pentagon's view and Southern Command's view is that Cuba at this point does not represent any significant military threat to the United States.

Q: Well, looking at the whole Western Hemisphere, I would imagine that Venezuela would have occupied, at least from a distance, a concern.

TRIVELLI: Obviously Southern Command followed events in Venezuela. Again, I think in public statements the commander has said he doesn't believe that Venezuela represents a significant military threat to the United States at this point.

We have expressed concerns about, for example, the proliferation of modern weaponry that the Russians have sold to them, including advanced fighter aircraft. We're probably even more concerned about the large amounts of small arms and even establishment of a small arms factory by the Russians in Venezuela.

But just because someone acquires advanced weapons or more sophisticated weapons doesn't mean that they're necessarily proficient in their use or their maintenance or they are well integrated into national strategy.

So, again, I don't think we saw Venezuela as a military threat. That said, I think Southern Command had the same concerns I'm sure the State Department did, in terms of the ability of Chavez to mentor like-minded folks in Latin America. That probably was something of a deeper concern.

Also, we monitored closely the Iranian relationship with Venezuela and others, because that theoretically could eventually be of real concern, another wild card that we were always looking at.

Q: I would think a major concern of ours would have been Colombia, wasn't it?

TRIVELLI: Yes, if you take a look at how Southern Command spends its money and its resources, my guess is about forty per cent of that during my tenure and in previous years had been spent on the Colombian situation, although those numbers are beginning to fall gradually because of the Colombianization, if you will, of the war.

I think our take on that is that Colombia in many ways is an important success, that over the last several years the central government of Colombia has been able to reestablish authority and security in virtually all of Colombia. They're become a very proficient military and police force and one thing that folks don't credit the Colombians for, if you take a look at their security costs, is that U.S. aid only represents roughly ten per cent of the costs. In other words, the Colombians have paid ninety per cent themselves.

They've also I think been very good in lending some quiet advice to some of their neighbors who are facing similar problems. In fact there are Mexican pilots who were trained in Colombia's helicopter school, the pilots that were needed for the Merida initiative.

So on balance Colombia's quite a success story.

Q: Well, in a way, although it's not played up that way, Colombia has developed probably the most capable military in the hemisphere, other than the U.S.

TRIVELLI: Yes, I think if you look at the militaries in Southern Command's area of focus, Colombia, Brazil, Chile, I'm pretty sure would be the most capable military forces.

Q: A question I didn't ask about Nicaragua, during the time you were there, what about the drug situation?

TRIVELLI: We actually got very good cooperation from the Nicaraguans even under the Sandinista government. There was a lot of transport of cocaine by waterborne means along the Atlantic Coast going on and I must say every time JIATF South (Joint Interagency Task Force South, a Key West-based interagency anti-narcotics headquarters) or someone else was able to give the Nicaraguans a tip on a possible drug boat, they'd go ahead and launch and try to grab them and they grabbed some.

That said, there were some cases on the other side of the ledger, where people were arrested with cash, obvious drug people and suddenly, magically their money was siphoned away and somehow they were let go. There was obviously an issue of judicial misconduct.

So it's a mixed record. But in terms of the Nicaraguan military and their willingness to cooperate, I must say they've done a good job.

Q: How about Panama? How stood relations with Panama? Things had gotten kind of testy from time to time.

TRIVELLI: Between the United States and Panama?

Q: Yeah.

TRIVELLI: Yes, putting on my Southern Command hat, if you will, of course Panama does not have a military *per se* at this point. We did have programs on the maritime side with the Panamanians and I think established a good relationship, although much of the security assistance to Panama is from INL i.e., is counter-narcotics related and linked to the police forces.

The other thing to remember about Panama is it's a pretty wealthy country and they're able to fund a lot of programs themselves. In my last year at Southern Command they were very interested in putting up a series of radars to detect any planes and small watercraft involved in drugs and I understand they made those purchases. Southern Command helped them construct some small naval outposts. So I think we had a pretty good relationship.

Q: Well, then, Brazil, here's a huge power. How stood things?

TRIVELLI: I think the military to military relationship with Brazil increased steadily during my three years at Southern Command. We started to see much greater participation in military exercises.

The Brazilian military seemed to be much more willing to work with us. They accepted and funded a lot of slots for training in the States. We did full joint exercises together. We sent people to their jungle school for training, for the first time.

We sent down some folks to take a look at how they did expeditionary medicine. Because of the Amazon they have a rather unique riverine medical capability that we hadn't really seen before.

Lots of visits by high-ranking Brazilian military up to the States and *vice versa*. So I think that relationship has strengthened considerably.

There's been this issue about their next generation of fight aircraft. I don't think that decision's been made but the U.S., Swedish and the French aircraft manufacturers have been very interested in what would be a large purchase of fighter aircraft, so that issue was always out there.

So I think the military to military relationship has improved, I think there's more trust between the militaries. And historically, remember, Brazil fought in World War Two

Q: Had a division in Italy.

TRIVELLI: So there was that older tradition of very good cooperation with the U.S.

Q: How about with Argentina? Was that rivalry still going on, or had that pretty well died?

TRIVELLI: Brazil and Argentina?

Q: Yeah.

TRIVELLI: Well, I'm sure there's always tension, but I think with Brazil's very large economic growth over the last 10 or 15 years to some extent, Argentines will hate to hear this, but they've left Argentina behind economically.

Q: Did the nuclear issue arise at all while you were there?

TRIVELLI: No.

Q: What was that, during the Nineties or something?

TRIVELLI: Yeah.

Q: How about, with Argentina, anything there?

TRIVELLI: Our military to military relationship with Argentina I think really became more tense during my tenure. We even had a couple of incidents where we, fully coordinated, sent down a C-5 with some folks on it, equipment, to conduct special forces exchanges with the Argentines.

The plane got there and it was immediately boarded by Argentine military and customs officials and even foreign ministry officials, who were determined that we were illegally trying to smuggle in all sorts of secret superduper equipment and the claim they hung their hat on is that of the weapons on board one serial number of one weapon did not exactly match the manifest and there was some expired medicine in the medic's medical bag.

And they seized some communications equipment as well. So that was a bit of a standoff and it took several months before all that equipment was released. They'd obviously done it for political motives.

Q: Where did this come from? It sounds like somebody said, "I'm going to create an incident."

TRIVELLI: Yeah, I think it likely the foreign minister and the president just thought this would be a wonderful way to poke at the United States. They both dislike the United States in many ways and at the same time they get offended if we don't pay them enough attention.

Actually, if I remember the timeline correctly, this happened just after President Obama and the White House announced the president's trip to Latin America and Brazil was on the schedule and Argentina was not. I think that's the kind of thing that leaves them rather angry.

So they just went out of their way to provoke this crazy incident. They would send over notes in protest just about every time the U.S. Navy went through the Straits of Magellan, claiming somehow that we hadn't followed the right rules. Of course the naval ships had, but they claimed it was an infringement of sovereignty for taking free passage in an international waterway.

So there was a rather tense relationship with the military and I think there was a tense relationship, too, between the Kirchner government and their military, and so military to military relations and other relations became increasingly difficult during my tenure at Southern Command.

Q: Chile?

TRIVELLI: Very good relationship. The Chileans are full partners on a whole series of military exercises. We helped them out after the large earthquake badly damaged naval facilities.

I think Southern Command had a deep respect for the Chilean military, views it as very professional, we have lots of information exchanges, lots of military exchanges, lots of exercises together. So that relationship, on the military to military side has been very, very good.

Q: Were there any concerns, from the Southern Command perspective, about activities of terrorists in Latin America?

TRIVELLI: Yes and it's very difficult, because the Intel community has said this, there are people in Latin America that have links to Hamas and Hezbollah and other groups.

Q: There are a lot of Lebanese, aren't there?

TRIVELLI: And in Latin America there are three to six million Muslims, spread out throughout Latin America and some evidence that there's fundraising that goes on in Latin America for Hamas and Hezbollah. There have been rumored links with Al Qaeda.

I think there doesn't seem to be evidence that I was ever aware of that there were actual operational cells of these organizations, but they could certainly develop and I think a lot of concern about the lone wolf or small cell scenario. There are a lot of mosques in the Caribbean, for example.

Someone becomes radicalized and decides to do something bad and those things are tough to track and neutralize. A lot of concern about that. And I think a lot of concern about Iranian mischief with those groups.

Q: What about Peru?

TRIVELLI: Yes, we actually had I thought a good relationship with the Peruvian military, one that improved while I was there. They sought our advice at times on what to do about a resurgence of their home grown terrorists in the mountains.

Q: The Shining Path, yeah.

TRIVELLI: Well, yeah, it's the Shining Path. But, oddly enough, the founder of the Shining Path, who still is in jail, denies that these other people are actually Shining Path members.

I think what you've got is a group of narco-terrorists, not sophisticated, but some dedicated narco-terrorists. So the Peruvians discussed that with us.

They participated in exercises, came to see us quite a bit. I think that relationship was quite good.

Q: What about Bolivia? Bolivia has essentially an anti-American government.

TRIVELLI: Yes, our military to military relationship with Bolivia certainly was on the downward slope during much of my time at Southern Command. The Military Advisory Group there became quite small.

We would offer slots in military training courses to the Bolivian military and very often they just would not reply and we saw that more and more during my three years there.

I don't think that the lines of communication were totally cut, but certainly much cooler relationship than prior to the Morales government.

Q: Were there sort of the same changes in Ecuador?

TRIVELLI: Yes. I think that the military to military relationship with Ecuador tended to be somewhat more hit and miss. There were some things that we could do with the Ecuadorian military.

I think they appreciated the fact that as we left Manta, our air base there, the contract had expired and we made a great effort to leave in a very organized way, to turn over to the Ecuadorians as much equipment and buildings and other facilities as we possibly could and I believe that they appreciated that.

So there was some relationship with the Ecuadorians.

Q: Were we still giving help for both air and riverine interdiction of drug trafficking in that area?

TRIVELLI: Yes, well, once Manta of course went away it became more difficult for the U.S. government to monitor the Eastern Pacific, but in all of those nations we of course have pretty robust INL i.e., counter-narcotics programs.

The Southern Command in Ecuador I don't recall being deeply involved in counter-narcotics operations.

Q: Can you describe a bit about what you would do as political advisor, the type of work you were doing?

TRIVELLI: There were certain projects that I worked on on a regular basis, like the development of our strategic documents that have to get produced every year. I would work with J-5 on a very frequent basis on that.

Q: J-5 being

TRIVELLI: Being the pol-mil office, strategy and plans. So I would work with them on that.

I worked very closely with J-9, which was the interagency directorate, the small directorate that was specifically charged with the relationship with the other pieces of the U.S. government. In fact we had more than thirty representatives from non-DOD agencies in the building to help us keep those relationships alive.

I also had our strategic communications shop and our public affairs shop directly reporting to me, so of course I would meet with them on a regular basis about press guidance and what we're doing and what our messaging needs to be and anything innovative that they wanted to do.

And in fact while I was there the Southern Command moved into the world of social media. The Southern Command commander has a blog and there's a Facebook page, etc, etc.

And then I did a lot of work with our embassies in Latin America. For example, say the Department of Defense is proposing a new defense attaché, they'd want to make sure the ambassador down there could live with that choice.

So I'd be the person to reach out to the ambassador and say, "Hey, Colonel Smith has been nominated. This is his or her background. Are you okay with that?" I did a lot of work like that.

And then a lot of work sitting in on meetings in which Southern Command would discuss its operations and its plans and its Intel and I would sit back and listen and then provide a civilian sounding board, because every once in a while the U.S. military wants to do something and has a bit of a tin ear. So you just go in there and say, "Hey, you may want to think about doing this another way." I provided a lot of that kind of generalized advice.

Q: You were mentioning about the attachés and I'm going back maybe thirty, forty, fifty years, but there was a reputation that Latin America was getting an awful lot of superannuated colonels, really, this is just a retirement post. We've gotten far more attuned to the world. Had you found a change?

TRIVELLI: I think so. I think that the quality of the folks in the military advisory groups was really pretty high. I think the army has established its foreign area officer program, in which officers can specialize in some parts of the world and so that has really been taken to heart, so there's now a cadre of officers, particularly in the army, although the air force and navy are catching up, with long experience in Latin America.

The other thing is that the Pentagon made a good decision, because as you probably recall, very often there'd be disagreements between the military assistance group and the defense attaché office in some embassies.

And they went ahead and established a defense representative system, where either the commander of the mil group or the defense attaché is designated as the leader and designated as the direct representative of the Secretary of Defense.

There was a lot of wringing of hands when that system was implemented, but I think it's been good, because I think it's reduced some inevitable confusion over lines of communication and lines of authority.

But I must say in general I thought that the quality of our mil group people, a lot of experience and very active, in general was quite good.

Q: Well, then, you did this until when?

TRIVELLI: Until September 30th of last year.

Q: How did you find the Obama Administration's policy approach to the Western Hemisphere? How stood things with them?

TRIVELLI: Well, I thought that there was actually a surprising amount of interest, given other things that the Secretary and the president need to worry about in foreign affairs. But I didn't really see any big surprises, I didn't see any huge shifts in our policy in Latin America with the new administration.

The president has visited the region. The Secretary has visited the region several times. I think that they maintained a reasonable level of interest. We've preserved the number of

people we have in Latin America in our embassies and consulates. Our assistance levels are roughly what they've been. So I haven't seen any huge differences.

Q: As we're talking, I realize we've forgotten to mention the colossus to the North, Canada. Talking about getting upset if we sort of forget them, the Canadians, did you have to make special efforts, or

TRIVELLI: Actually, that's an interesting question, because the Canadian military's institutional relationship is with Northern Command. But, that said, we actually visited back and forth with the Canadians.

The Canadians have only two military commands, but they are very interested in Latin America. They were very interested in pooling our knowledge and resources for disaster relief missions and even training, very interested in being more active again in Latin America, particularly the Caribbean.

So we actually had a good I think institutional relationship with the Canadian military, even from Miami. Every time they traveled down to the region they'd usually stop in Miami and chat with us. We had Canadian liaison officers at Southern Command. So the relationship's been excellent and really very cooperative.

Q: I was wondering whether, we're concerned about disaster relief and the Canadians have always had their special relationship with Cuba. Are they sort of the designated disaster relief people for Cuba?

TRIVELLI: You know, I don't know if it's as formal as that, but I think that that makes a great deal of sense.

The Canadians, I must say, have a very innovative way of doing business. Their aid agency and their military have worked together and developed a robust rapid response capability.

They've set aside equipment, they've set aside transport, they've got trained teams who are on a 24-hour string and can report very quickly. They've done some very innovative things on disaster relief.

Q: Have we learned from our sort of not very good response to the Grenada crisis, kept an eye on the Caribbean Islands, what's happening there and how to help and all?

TRIVELLI: Yes. Of course many of those islands do not have militaries *per se*. They tend to have national police forces, with some exceptions. Southern Command certainly has an institutional relationship with all those governments.

The U.S. Navy and U.S. Coast Guard patrol in the Caribbean on a regular basis, so they're able to put into port and touch people on a regular basis.

However, I would argue that we probably need to do more in the Caribbean, in terms of naval presence and Coast Guard presence, if for no other reason than because of drug trade issues.

But in general I think Southern Command worked hard in keeping up good relations in that sub-region.

Q: Did we have in place disaster help or something? We've just gone through this horrible accident in Italy, where one of these huge cruise ships turned on its side and a number of people were killed and I would think that the cruise business, these ships are getting bigger and bigger and bigger, that if you're a naval officer, you'd think, "Oh, my God, we've gotta keep and eye on this," just in case something happens, to do something.

TRIVELLI: I would answer in a couple of ways. I would say that one thing that Southern Command and the Office of Foreign Disaster Relief have done in the Caribbean and elsewhere is to help set up an institutional response system within the nations and between those nations in the region, has actually helped construct and train operations centers, emergency response centers, as well as the construction of warehouses for emergency equipment and supplies.

The Caribbean's essential ability to respond to natural disasters has much improved over the last decade or so.

Also, I'm sure there are lots of contingency plans, particularly on the Coast Guard side, for the kind of accident that you are positing. That's one of the reasons the Coast Guard continuously patrols in the Caribbean.

Q: And I suppose in the Caribbean there's a real hurricane alert each year.

TRIVELLI: Yes, we literally regear up every spring, rewrite all the disaster response plans, talk to each other, talk to the local governments, because there are hurricanes in the Caribbean every year. That's something I think all countries concerned have worked pretty well on, actually.

Q: Paul, I think we've pretty well covered most things. What have you been doing since you left the Foreign Service?

TRIVELLI: Not much of anything. Annoying my wife, apparently, but aside from that, nothing productive.

Q: Okay, well, I want to thank you very much.

TRIVELLI: Thank you, it's been really interesting to sit and reflect.

Q: Well, I think, for all of us, we don't get this chance very often and that's why I thinks why our program has prospered. Okay, well I thank you very much. Take care,

TRIVELLI: Take care, Stu. Bye.

End of Interview