The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program
Dayton Peace Accords Series

PROFESSOR BRUCE HITCHNER

Interviewed by: Fran Leskovar
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R. Bruce Hitchner was the co-founder and Chair of the Dayton Peace Accords Project (1998 to 2014) and a member of the international team that assisted political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina with the April 2006 Package of Amendments to the Dayton Peace Accords Constitution.

INTERVIEW

[Note: Clean Archival Edition based on interview conducted January 22, 2025. Edited for clarity and standardized formatting.]

Q: Okay, so we're going to go on the record. Today is January 22nd, 2025. This is the Dayton Peace Accords oral history project and this is an interview with Bruce Hitchner. All right, Bruce, let's just start with your early life. Can you tell me a bit about your upbringing? Where did you grow up and where did you go to school? So let's talk a little bit about that.

HITCHNER: I spent most of my life in Levittown-Yardley, Pennsylvania, Bucks County. I met my wife of 52 years in high school when we were both 16. She has been a great source of love and support throughout my life in this regard, always following and supporting me in my efforts, working at the time. She went to Tennessee and Penn State and received a BA in English literature. When I took my first job at the University of Virginia, she founded the YMCA Latch Key program in Charlottesville, and then her M.Ed. at Virginia. We had our first son, Brett, there in 1982. She later taught English at Dayton.

I also went to undergraduate school at Penn State. From there, I went to the University of Chicago for my master's degree and PhD at the University of Michigan. Until I began work on Dayton and Bosnia, my career was entirely devoted to teaching and research in ancient history, Roman history and Roman archaeology. I directed archaeological projects supported by the National Geographic Society, the National Endowment for the Humanities, and others, in Tunisia and France. I also served as editor-in-chief of the *American Journal of Archaeology*. While I was a Ph.D. graduate student in Tunisia, I also

taught American History at the University of Tunis and briefly at the American Cooperative School in Tunis. It was during that time that I came to know many people in the diplomatic community, particularly Amb. Steve Bosworth and his wife, Sandy. I was frequently invited to give tours of ancient Carthage, and in the process acquired a good understanding of how the diplomatic community worked.

Q: Let me ask you, so how did you get into studying ancient history—sort of, your major—how did you get into that? Was that kind of a natural thing? Can you explain that process in your head of when you were deciding what your—

HITCHNER: My interest began at an early age, no later than the fourth grade, and it remained with me for the whole of my life afterward. It probably had something to do with going to Catholic school, but the roots of it are not easy to explain. One of the reasons I went to Michigan for my Ph.D. was that it had a long and deep academic tradition focused on Roman history and archaeology. And it was there that I studied under John W. Eadie, who sadly passed away on November 20th. My dissertation was focused on the study of a Roman town and its countryside in central Tunisia, Sufetula (mod. Sbeitla). It was while I was writing my thesis as a Michigan grad student and American Schools of Oriental Research Fellow at Carthage, Tunisia that I learned to dig with the British Archaeological team which was part of the UNESCO Save Carthage project at the time. My first archaeological project was in Kasserine, near the Kasserine Pass where the famous WWII battles were found. I directed the project for almost a decade, the focus of which was identifying and recording hundreds of Roman period olive press farms in the region. I am still publishing the results of the project which established my reputation in Roman archaeology. In the 1990s and 2000s I also directed archaeological projects near Arles and in the Alps in France.

Q: So let me ask you, out of your family and your upbringing, were you the first person to go to college? What was your parents' occupation? How was the dynamics in your family when you were deciding what you wanted to do?

HITCHNER: My mother was a nurse and my father was a carpenter. My family story is complicated. My mother's first husband was killed in the Second World War in Alsace and is buried at Epinal. They had a son, my half-brother, Curt. He was the first to go to college. My mother subsequently remarried but I did not learn until late in my adult life that my supposed father was not my birth father. In any event, I have a younger half-brother and half sister through my mother's second marriage.

Q: Wow.

Has your background, has it sort of shaped you as a person, in a sense of getting into questions of the Balkans, into studying ancient history? Was there kind of an understanding, "I understand," for example, "what people in the Balkans are going through?" Or did it have any impact on you and your career in a sense of, in the sphere of international affairs?

HITCHNER: There was no relationship between my career and my subsequent work on Dayton, apart from the fact that while at Michigan I had also studied Balkan history

under the great historian, John Fine. But the experience I gained while in contact with the diplomatic community in Tunisia was helpful. Indeed, I also had to learn early-on how to conduct sometimes difficult negotiations with Tunisian authorities when running the archaeological project there. Importantly, even when I was deeply involved in Dayton and the Balkans, I never gave up what my wife referred to as my "day-job" in Roman history and archaeology, as I came to believe that one nourished the other. Lastly, when I started Dayton, I also recalled something Steve Bosworth said to me in Tunisia. "Bruce, don't you want to do things that are actively involved in changing the world or engaging with the world?"

Q: Can we talk a little bit more about your experience in Tunisia, your first interaction with diplomacy and impressions and reflections on it and people that you were interacting with—what lessons were you learning—in more detail than what you just described?

HITCHNER: Well, as I mentioned above I was frequently invited to do tours for diplomats and visiting dignitaries like Sen. Paul Simon and US ambassador to the UN Donald Henry. Becky and I were also frequently invited to dinner with members of the diplomatic community. Also when I was teaching at the University of Tunis, I experienced the frequent political conflicts and strikes that would occur between students, faculty, and the Tunisian authorities. When I was teaching American labor history, I remember a student saying to me at one point "You know, American history is only about two things: slavery and capitalism." It taught me a fundamental lesson about how my own country's history was understood in some parts of the world. It was an awakening.

We became very good friends with Captain Gregg Helmsing and his wife Merriam in the liaison officer at the US embassy. We talked quite a lot about politics, diplomacy, and so forth. We also had frequent dinners with Steve and Sandy Bosworth. He would invite me to talk about what was going on at the university. I was actually invited to consider joining the CIA but I declined on the advice of Captain Helmsing who said he thought I would be frustrated. Better to stick to my career in history and archaeology. It was good advice.

Q: It's another place. Right, yeah. So when you were studying and you were in college, you just studied Greek and Latin. Were there any other languages, study abroad experiences, or was it pretty much just ancient, classical—?

HITCHNER: In addition to ancient history, I also did Byzantine, Eastern European, Balkan, Ottoman, Middle Eastern histories and took courses in Greek and Latin (in addition to French and German) to build my reading capacity. I had a mentor—another mentor—who taught Middle Eastern history, who I'm still in touch with. He's the only one of my mentors still around. He's 86 years old. He's still very, very vibrant. He lives at State College. His name is Arthur Goldschmidt. He took me under his arm when my original undergraduate advisor left for another institution. I took Middle Eastern history with him as an undergraduate. And so I learned Middle Eastern history. So I've got—I'm now getting all these different triangulations. I also went to Rome one summer as an undergraduate for six weeks to take a course on the Roman Empire. Lastly my wife and I

hitchhiked with only $100 in our pockets from Italy to the north of England in July 1971. We almost starved in the process. It was in the days when you could do that sort of thing.

Q: Were you part of any clubs or any extra-curricular activities there?

HITCHNER: I lived in Theta Delta Chi while at Penn State. At the time, I didn't join the fraternity because it was sort of out of fashion, but I was still part of it. I washed the pots and lived in Theta. My room in the fraternity was originally Hugh Rodham's, Hillary Clinton's brother.

Q: It's quite interesting because years back, you're going to be interacting with them again, in the context of the Dayton Accords.

HITCHNER: Yeah, ironically, though, not with Mrs. Clinton.

Q: Always Bill.

HITCHNER: Yes, and that only after we awarded him the Dayton Peace Prize in 2001.

Q: Wow. So anyway, so all right. So you had an experience in Tunisia. So you were teaching at the American School there, right? And then what comes next? Like you're getting a PhD? Or that was—

HITCHNER: I came back to Michigan to finish my PhD. There were three job openings in the country that year in my field, and I received offers to all three as well as a fellowship at Dumbarton Oaks, which I declined in favor of an assistant professorship in History at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in 1981. As I mentioned above, we loved it there and had our first child there, Brett, in 1982. My wife was deeply involved in the afterschool programs, and took her master's degree in English Education. It was a fantastic experience. Unfortunately, I was denied tenure because the Tunisian authorities did not allow me to publish the work of the survey until 1986 when I was a Fulbright Research and an NEH grant recipient at the University of Provence in 1985-1986 It was a traumatic experience to be denied tenure, because I had, up to that time, I had not experienced a professional setback of this magnitude. Yet I did not have any animosity toward my colleagues. My friend and colleague in the department at the time, who later became president of the University of Richmond, Ed Ayers, argued to the department that, "We're making a mistake. This person's works will still be read 40 years from now." And he was not wrong, I believe, as my archaeological work in Roman Africa is still seen as groundbreaking and relevant. But I was in a history, not a classics or anthropology department. Luckily I was immediately offered posts at Hofstra, Villanova and the University of Dayton, the only openings in 1988. I took the post at Dayton, as fate would have it as far as my future work in Bosnia was concerned. As I alluded to above, I began working on new archaeological projects in Provence (near Arles) and the Alps in France between 1991 and 2008 with the support of my dear friend and colleague, Professor Emeritus, Philippe Leveau, as my work in Tunisia ended in 1988. I also served as Editor-in-Chief of the American Journal of Archaeology from 1998 to 2006, Yet, I also continued work on Bosnia and the Balkans, albeit in a new way. So the move to Dayton turned out to be quite fortuitous.

Q: So can you talk a little bit about your Fulbright experience and getting a Fulbright scholarship? What, sort of, pushed you to apply for it? And just the experience during the Fulbright?

HITCHNER: Because my initial archaeological project in North Africa and the French have had a long controversial and deep colonial period history there, and continue to engage in archaeological collaborations, France and especially the University in Aix-en-Provence, where Philippe Leveau was a professor, was an obvious choice for the scholarship location. association. I remain in close contact with Leveau, who's in his mid-80s. His work in Algeria in the 1960s was a model for my survey in Tunisia. There were many other specialists in North Africa there and there were archives of great value. We have been going to Aix-en-Provence since that time, every summer to work, with the exception of one or two years, the pandemic included, because that's where I had spent two or three months, every summer, either running an archaeological project or writing up projects, which I'm doing still now. And so the experience of being at Aix-en-Provence as a Fulbright—as a research Fulbright was enormous. It laid the foundations for my relationship with many colleagues and friends in the field. Our first son, Brett, went to school there and learned how to speak French. My wife took a certificate in French as a consequence of this. I'm a great advocate of the Fulbright system for this reason. I was later a visiting fellow at the University of Copenhagen (1991), Churchill College in Cambridge (1994-95), and All Souls College in Oxford (2010) where I worked on publications of my work on North Africa (and Bosnia and Kosovo at Oxford). I was also in recent years a fellow at the American College of the Mediterranean in Aix. In truth, our whole family has lived overseas almost every summer. I've always brought my family. I thought it was important not to-- we have three children. My oldest son was born in ‘82, our daughter, Katherine in ‘91, and Robert in ‘94. They're all successful in their own right these days. They gained enormous experience, which one couldn't just get in school.

Q: Have you ever considered taking a foreign service exam or joining the Foreign Service?

HITCHNER: Yes, I did. In retrospect, it could have been an alternative career.

Q: Right. And was PhD always on your mind, like when you were a little kid, or when you were?—

HITCHNER: No, but when I was in undergraduate school, I realized that the only path toward a career in Roman history was by pursuing a Ph.D. But after I began working on Dayton and Bosnia at the University of Dayton, I applied to the International Crisis Group and was invited to head the Balkan desk. Ultimately I decided not to accept the position because at the time the ICG had not fully worked out its status with Belgium..

Q: All right, Bruce, let's shift to the Balkans and primarily the 90s. So do you remember when the war broke out, like, the thoughts when you were seeing, witnessing that on TV, watching television and seeing what was going on. So the period prior to the Dayton Peace Accords being even considered.

HITCHNER: Yes.

Q: Can we talk a little bit about that? Your interactions and reactions given the—

HITCHNER: We followed events in the former Yugoslavia and Bosnia regularly on the news. But when the negotiations came to Dayton, I had just been appointed director of International Programs at the University of Dayton and my wife said, "You should do something." Dayton's name was all over the news. What were we as a community going to do about this as a community? And that's how it started. We soon learned that the Dayton Council of World Affairs and Air Force Association branch at Wright Patterson Air Force Base were organizing ways for the community to engage as well. So, together we formed a Council of Partners. In 1998, I founded the Dayton Peace Accords, later a UN affiliated NGO with Richard Holbrooke as the Honorary Chair. The DPAP, as it was called, created the Dayton Peace Prize whose first recipients were President Clinton (2001) and George Soros (2002). The idea behind the prize was to award an individual or organization for outstanding achievement in IMPLEMENTING peace, not just negotiating and signing peace agreements. We also organized alone and with other organizations such as the United States Institute of Peace and the Center for Strategic and International Studies numerous conferences, symposia, and workshops involving policy makers, specialists, the media, and officials and politicians from Bosnia and the Balkans. We also supported off-the-record private meetings. For example, the Kosovars and the Serbs met in Dayton in 2001. We were funded for many of these events by various foundations, businesses and citizens in Dayton, the university, and for the 2001 conference in Dayton in part by the State Department.

When I went to Tufts with the DPAP in 2003, I began working on less visible but more substantive policy-oriented activities and op-ed writing, partly reflecting the post 9-11 environment and the important emphasis at the time on Dayton peace implementation. And it was in 2005 that Amb. Don Hayes, Professor Paul Williams and I teamed up to begin the NGO driven negotiations that would later lead to the April Package of reforms to the Dayton constitution (Annex IV of the Dayton Agreement). We were funded by all the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, Tufts University, and the Carnegie Corporation of New York. We were also given money by—what's the name?—the Packard Foundation. I had no trouble raising money to do what we were doing.

Q: Yeah, so were there any international students from the Balkans there? Studying in universities?—

HITCHNER: No.

Q: No interaction there?

HITCHNER: No, in fact, our connection was mainly, as a Catholic university, with Latin America and human rights.

Q: So prior to that, what was sort of a daily routine—daily reality—in Dayton, prior to being on the map—the world—like what was going on? Like how was Dayton prior to the Dayton Peace Accords?

HITCHNER: Dayton was facing difficulties as many cities in the Mid-West were at the times. But it was an interesting community. Wright-Patterson was there as well.

Q: Right. And I heard that the Dayton communities were very divided prior to the Dayton Accords. There was no, sort of, a unity that the Dayton Accords—in this particular case also, Mike Turner as a mayor was able to unify the community as one during the accords, and then end those divisions between those communities.

HITCHNER: I don't recall that. Mike was a good mayor. He did see the opportunities where they needed to be taken.

Q: Let me ask you, do you remember what the delegations—or just when the Wright-Patt was first time considered to be a place for negotiations? You remember delegations coming in, the reaction of those—initial reactions in the community, whether it was more, they were surprised or it's more, "We're very excited about it" or "We're just kind of"—

HITCHNER: I would be putting it mildly if I said that no one in Dayton saw this coming. When it was announced, I remember the newspaper headline in the Dayton Daily News saying something like "Dayton is selected," and everyone's first reaction was "What? How did this occur?" Subsequently, the answer for why it happened was obvious. It's an hour from Washington. There were multiple flights. They could keep all sides isolated in a way that would not cause any difficulties. The US also could own the negotiations in a way not possible in Geneva, or elsewhere.

Q: So let me ask you, so here come the preparations. It's late October, the whole city is being transformed into the Peace City, and visitors are almost arriving. What was—where the community was engaged, what was the feeling over at the University of Dayton among the faculty, among students? What was going on in that preparation kind of a period?

HITCHNER: No reaction. I mean, I can't say that the community, apart from the base, was engaged at all. Nothing was happening at UD.

Q: So have you ever—so, do you remember the initial days when—I know there was even a protest happening outside of the base. Did that have any impact on community, in the sense of people arriving and protesting? Whether there were those interactions or even in?—

HITCHNER: I remember that people in town were supportive of the idea of the peace negotiations, that Dayton was at the center of the international stage.

Q: So did you interact with anyone while the negotiations were going on? Like—

HITCHNER: No.

Q: Nothing, okay. So let's go into your involvement, during that period of time, and starting—your beginning, your interest begins to study the Dayton Accords, study what's going on in Bosnia. So was Richard Holbrooke the first person you met? How did the whole thing go?

HITCHNER: No. In fact, our direct involvement was simply through the initial discussions we had with the Dayton Council Representatives David Neer and John McCance of the Air Force Association. And, as I said, that came about rather belatedly, because we were already thinking, separately, on our own, that we should do some sort of conference on Dayton that may be around the anniversary. We were thinking that, and this is—and what I started to do was I started to call up—I was then in contact with people who had been involved on the policy side, in the academic community, but more importantly, I reached out to people at the Office of European Affairs, I believe, at the State Department about doing something at the University of Dayton. This included Aric Schwan and Christine Elder. They were delighted. So I started having a conversation with them about organizing an event, which would bring them back—many of those involved in the proximity talks at Dayton for a conference in November 1996. I then started reading to get a better understanding of developments. I also started talking to people on the phone, policy specialists, journalists, historians, and most importantly Bosnians and people in the Balkans and Europe. We decided to have, in addition to the conference itself breakout sessions which focused on how does the city of Dayton could make connections with the people of Bosnia, and help implement the peace. To this end, we engaged with the business community, schools and universities, the healthcare community, the schools, and civil society. People and institutions started donating things like musical instruments, health equipment, and various foundations and businesses underwrote the cost of the planned conference which we would do in tandem with a DCOWA dinner honoring Strobe Talbot and other speakers through the Air Force Association.

Q: We're back on record. Today is January 22nd, 2025. This is still Part One with Bruce Hitchner. All right, Bruce, you were saying about the businessmen in Dayton before we were—we lost connection. So was there anything else to add to it?

HITCHNER: I realized that it was important to build relations with the whole community of Dayton for the future of what we were doing. And that meant that communities might be involved that had no connection with Bosnia or the Dayton Accords. For example, the India Foundation in Dayton saw what we were doing and asked if we could do the things with them, in a similar vein. And I remember a Puerto Rican organization came and asked, “Can we talk about statehood?” and things like that. In other words, our investment in Dayton peace implementation was serving a stimulus in the community for thinking in a bigger way about the city. And part of that had to do with the demographics of the part of Dayton, is that, as you know, because people from Wright-Pat were often people had come from many other places who were well-educated, that because there were a lot of important businesses in town still, there was a very sophisticated group of people in Dayton who were thirsty for something that the Dayton process provided, visibility, engagement with the international community, with international affairs.

It became very quickly obvious after 1996---we had a very successful dinner, and conference, and so forth---that we could keep doing this. We began to collaborate in other initiatives; I became head of Dayton sister cities. We established a sister city relationship with Sarajevo, and a university to university relationship with the University of Sarajevo. My wife and I and others traveled with Mike Turner and others to Bosnia to engage in that process. We brought together the Dayton Sarajevo Philharmonic orchestras through a

grant from the Trust for Mutual Understanding to perform in Dayton during one of our conferences. The idea was to create a sense of Dayton as an international town, a town that had a role to play in this process. And the interesting thing is, the international community wanted to come to Dayton, because they wanted to see this place where this had occurred. We had no problem attracting people for our events. And so from 1997 onward, we were in regular touch with prime ministries, foreign mayor affairs, foreign ministries. We had pretty much had all the key people, just like at Davos, coming to Dayton every year to talk about a theme related to Dayton implementation and the Western Balkans.

As I said, it was in 1998 that I formed the Dayton Peace Accords Project to succeed the Council of Partners. Richard Holbrooke agreed to become the honorary chair. And that's how my relationship with Holbrooke grew. To be honest, very few people were inclined to do the heavy lifting of following what was going on in the region and what the key policy issues were and how they were evolving. I took on that role, because in many ways it was an extension of my academic life. I increasingly focused on my work with the DPAP. Our focus was always on how to continue to implement the Dayton Agreement

From 2000 onward we also had the deep cooperation of WPAFB thanks to the support of the base commander, General Lester Lyles. He told me that "The base will be at your disposal to run these events because we think this is advancing the foreign policy mission of the United States. And it's in the interests of the U.S. Air Force to do it." And so in our last major event in Dayton in 2001, it was complete collaboration with the Air Force Base. The entire team at the base we worked with at the base was just fantastic. We also initiated smaller, more focused programming on war crimes and NATO. I began attending policy events in Washington and at one time testified before Congress. We had great support from the Dayton community. And we made certain that the events and dinners we organized were to the highest standards.

All of these activities, particularly the conferences and peace prize events took us away from our normal family routines. During the peace prize ceremony for President Clinton, my wife mentioned this to him and said, "Could we introduce our daughter to you. And he said, "Of course." Our daughter was ten at the time. When she joined us at the head table, the first thing he said, taking her hands, was "Will you forgive me?"

Q: Wow. For what?

HITCHNER: For taking so much of our time away from our parenting roles to put on the events.

Q: Yeah.

Let me ask you—let's talk about Holbrooke. So what was he like? You can elaborate on your interactions with Holbrooke, but I'm curious, what were your interactions with Dick Holbrooke?

After 1998, I would meet with Holbrooke informally, because we were registered at the UN [United Nations], now, as an NGO. And I would either talk to him on the phone or go to New York and we would meet. In fact, we were supposed to meet on 9/11 at the UN

that day to discuss some future work in Bosnia. I would talk to him, not every month, but quite frequently, I was in communications. He would ask me what I knew was going on in Bosnia. And so I developed a personal relationship with Holbrooke. And Holbrooke was never afraid to tell me out if he didn't like what I was doing. He was always instrumental in helping me—when I decided that I thought Soros was the right person, he arranged the meeting with me with Soros—in Soros's office. I was deeply impressed by his talent and commitment. He was always talking about what was the right thing to do. How should we do this? What needed to be absolutely done?

A side story indicative of Holbrooke's character. When John Kerry was running for president, Holbrooke was at a meeting at Harvard to talk about the campaign, at the Harvard Business School. I came over to see the meeting. It was late. When I arrived he interrupted his remarks to say, "There's my friend Bruce Hitchner, who's done all this wonderful work with Bosnia and Dayton." As I mentioned earlier, I occasionally provide an update for him on what was going on in Bosnia, as I was in frequent touch with people in the international community, in Bosnia, in the media, in the diplomatic corps, with the U.S. ambassadors in Sarajevo, I knew virtually everything that was going on. I would get weekly off the record reports from various people in Bosnia and elsewhere. I then became involved in Kosovo. I went to Kosovo with a fact-finding mission organized for Governor George Pataki and others. This is how my involvement in the April package was germinated. At this point, I should say that I've never been anything less than altruistically committed to seeing Bosnia through. I was invited to be involved in some way with the Iraq commission when the Iraq War started but I declined to do so because I wanted to see through the process of Dayton implementation

Q: Right. And you said—I know you referenced that many times before—I know you had a feeling you had to do something. What was, sort of, your central mission? What was your goal? Was there—trying to get the policy changed? Was it more implementation of the accords?

HITCHNER: What can we do to make sure that the Dayton Agreement was effectively implemented? The Dayton Agreement was essentially a peace treaty, with attached annexes to stabilize the peace and rebuild the country. Many of them were only partially articulated in the Agreement One of the reasons we organized the breakout sessions in our early annual conferences was to determine how the community of Dayton could contribute significantly in this regard. We also focused on improving the effectiveness of the War Crimes Tribunal through a publication entitled "Bringing War Criminals to Justice." Each year we focused on particular problems related to Dayton and Bosnia. We wanted to engage with the EU and international institutions like the World Bank and others and so we always had them to the meetings in Dayton. It was important to get the right people in the room talking together. And so it became a total process.

Q: Do you remember when the Dayton Accords were signed? Do you remember thoughts you might have had about on November 21st, '95, what was going on—going on in your head? What were you thinking about? Was it just, "I have to do something," or?—

HITCHNER: I have discussed this above. I will only add here that I knew that the peace agreement was profoundly significant on many different levels both at the time and

historically speaking, but it took some years for me to comprehend what that meant precisely. It was a learning process which took years to understand. In my view, it was a groundbreaking treaty. It wasn't a treaty just to end a war but to build a sovereign state.

Q: Right. And so when you work with EUR, going to the State Department, those early stages, to organize those anniversary events and symposiums, what was sort of—you said they were very excited, very happy, that you're working on it. Was there, did it become like a big part of the public diplomacy for the State Department? I know you're saying—

HITCHNER: —Yes.

Q: —"national security"—

HITCHNER: —Yes.

Q: —"utilizing it." Can you talk a little bit more about it? How you, as a professor at University of Dayton, pretty much became an effective citizen diplomat in the area of the Dayton Peace Accords, and how the State Department was seeing it or any other?—

HITCHNER: As I ramped up, I needed to figure out how to talk to officials about this stuff as I was not an expert. I did a lot of listening. They would talk to me about what they were doing, what they were trying to do. They would send me positions and talking points. I told them we were not going to do academic but policy oriented events which attempted to come up with solutions to problems. And I said that USG representatives needed to attend the events but they didn't fully appreciate this at first. At the first conference in November 1996 Amb. John Kornblum was watching the event from his hotel suite, but he realized that if he wasn't in the room, the US position might be lost in the discussions. So he came down and started to participate directly. But we did have representatives from DOD, the Security Council, Department of Commerce, Department of the Treasury, and so on, as well as many leading NGOs. Our objective at the end was always to come out with a paper or communique which articulated the main points of the conferences. I also stayed in regular touch with every U.S. ambassador to Bosnia. It got to the point that the State Department used the 2000 conference to organize private meetings to discuss the status of the port of Ploče with Bosnian and Croatian authorities. And we also managed to bring together Ibrahim Rugova and the Serb foreign minister Goran Svilanović to the meeting in 2000 in Dayton.

Q: So who were the participants during the first one? Who came? Like can you tell me?—

HITCHNER: Let me just say that over the course of time, starting in 1996, the conferences regularly included many senior officials, including presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers, and ambassadors from most of the states in southwest Europe and the EU. This was because eventually the scope of the conferences extended beyond Dayton and Bosnia to issues covering the Western Balkans. Indeed, I became more directly with Kosovo, and became part of a group headed by Paul Williams and Jim Hooper of Public International Law & Policy Group focused on drafting a constitution for an independent Kosovo, an engagement which presaged my later involvement in the April Package negotiations in 2005.

Q: Would it be fair to say that it was a back channel for the State Department—in a sense, seen as a back channel, as a good resource, as a good tool in a diplomatic toolbox—and that people are coming in in a hope of getting to the point that there is going to be a breakthrough of some sort?

HITCHNER: No. I would say that there were a number of policy specialists and groups at the time which were deeply involved in assisting in stabilizing the Balkans in one way or another. The papers that we would write, the events we organized were often seen as important for the U.S. Indeed, the State Department partly funded our conference in 2000 for the first time. We were just an important facilitator among maybe a half dozen NGOs in Europe and the U.S. that could do this. Dayton became in one sense a place to be at the time. This was one of the reasons the base engaged with us. I will say, however, that it was sometimes awkward for the University of Dayton, because as a Marianist institution, its mission was not always aligned with the concept of engaging in highly visible international conferences on the Balkans. This was a key reason I founded the DPAP because it created an independent means to pursue the work we were doing with the community.

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Q: Alright. Today is January 23rd. This is part two of our interview with Bruce Hitchner. Alright Bruce, let's start talking about 9/11 and when you were visiting New York on 9/11 and your interactions with Holbrooke. Can you explain more about that?

HITCHNER: I was in New York to meet with Holbrooke to discuss events in Bosnia. I was in a hotel in New York, right near the UN, and we were going to meet at the UN because my NGO is a registered NGO. My wife called, said, “Look out your window at the hotel, they’ve hit the Trade Center towers.” I could see all the smoke in the distance, I then got a call right after that saying, “Holbrooke's not going to come in,” So, we didn't meet as it turned out.

Q: Can you talk a little bit about your relationship with Richard Holbrooke spanning from your involvement with the Dayton Peace Accords, organizing all of those events, all the way to April Packages. How was that going, and was there anything in particular that you guys were tasked with, that you were talking about? Can you talk a little bit about that relationship?

HITCHNER: Our relationship began slowly; it began with him learning about what we were doing in 1996 and wanting to be there. I remember meeting him in the lobby of the Hope hotel for the first time, and he was very cordial. But it was after our first conference in 1996 that we stayed in more regular touch with what we were doing. And in 1998, when I formed the Dayton Peace Accords Project, I invited and he accepted my invitation to him to become the honorary chair. He was instrumental in supporting the idea of the Dayton Peace Prize from the very beginning and helped secure President Clinton and George Soros as our first two prize recipients.

I was never personally close with Holbrooke but I had a very particular relationship with him that I will remember with fondness. I was honored to be invited to the ceremony to

honor him posthumously at the Kennedy Center. There are many people who had the kind of relationship I had with Holbrooke. I've already mentioned his greeting to me at the Harvard Business School event. He also had kind words to say about me in the video he sent for the Dayton Peace Prize ceremony for President Clinton.

Aric Schwan who was the Proximity Talks with Holbrooke said that there are some people who, when you work with them, they're interested in taking what you know and not really giving you any credit or engaging with you after that in any serious way. But he said people wanted to work with Holbrooke because he'd bring everyone together, and he'd hold an open discussion. And after the discussion was over, he'd come back the next day and say, "Here's what I think you've told me, and I want to have a further discussion on this based on what I heard you say." I'm paraphrasing what I remember, but Holbrooke was a listener and a person not averse to taking fresh ideas and giving other people a sense of ownership of them. He could be ruthless. There was no funny business when Holbrooke wanted to do something but his instincts about trying to do the right thing mitigated that.

Q: When you were interacting with Holbrooke, what was sort of his sense, what was he saying about the Dayton Accords, did he see them as sort of his creation, his product, or was it more product of a team, international cooperation. Do you remember how he was seeing it and how he was approaching it?

HITCHNER: I think Holbrooke felt that he was clearly given the support by the Secretary of State to do what he was doing. The fact that he was appointed at the level he was to conduct these negotiations— Assistant Secretary of State— is an indication that Christopher had a lot of confidence in him. But he would have freely admitted that this was an operation put together by a team of people, and he was just one of those people. He did express a lot of frustration with the reluctance of DOD [Department of Defense] to be more aggressively supportive of arresting war criminals. As you know, he would continue to go back frequently to the region and talk to people and talk about the implementation, things that needed to be done. He was very, very committed to seeing that done. But, from his point of view, his role in Bosnia was quickly superseded by events in Kosovo, and so Bosnia became somewhat secondary to his interests because the issue had been resolved. He wasn't an advocate of Dayton II. He was more or less saying, "Let's just implement the Accords. So, his ongoing interest in Bosnia was there, but it increasingly and rightly took a back seat to his role in Kosovo and later Afghanistan.

Q: So, what about Warren Christopher and Madeleine Albright? Did you have any interactions with them, or—

HITCHNER: No.

Q: No? Alright, Bruce, let's get to April Package. So, can you talk about how you became a member of a team? And let's make an introduction for April Packages, what they were?

HITCHNER: I'd already moved to Tufts. Tisch College within the university gave me substantial funding to continue my work on Dayton. After 2001, I participated in a lot more focused policy conferences both in the US and Europe, and frequently teamed up

with think-tanks in Washington on some of them. I also continued to meet from time to time with people at the State Department. I'd also been asked to monitor the vote in Bosnia by the Administration but the timing was never right.

In January 2005 I was invited by the New Century Foundation, as I alluded to above, to join a fact-finding mission headed by Governor George Pataki to go to Kosovo and to Montenegro and Bosnia. Paul Williams of the PILPG was also part of the mission. I was with a number of other people, and we traveled and met with all of the key people in Kosovo, in the government. We then went on to Montenegro. We had trouble getting into Montenegro because when Milošević heard that we were going to Montenegro, he closed the airspace, forcing us to drive over the mountains of Montenegro to meet with the President of Montenegro, prime minister, and so forth. From there we went to Bosnia where we met with all the three member presidents, council of Ministers, and members of parliaments as well as the US ambassador.

Pataki was a quick study —I was extremely impressed with his capacity as a politician to understand the issues and how he handled himself so astutely in our meetings with officials.

Paul Williams and I met with Don Hays. Paul and I, as I mentioned early, had been involved in a PILPG initiative to write a constitution for an independent Kosovo. I said that I thought we ought to be doing a similar project with Bosnia to reform the Dayon constitution (Annex X). Paul agreed because he had been the U.S. lawyer representing the Bosnians at Dayton. He was also one of the State Department officials, you may recall, who resigned under the Clinton administration in protest over the arms embargo imposed on the Bosnian Muslims during the war.

We met with Amb. Don Hays who, as it turned out had just left, his post as senior deputy high representative, and was given the mandate to continue his own efforts to reform the Dayton constitution at the USIP [United States Institute of Peace], under the aegis of the USIP. We sat down together. Now you might imagine that this might create some sort of tension. But Hays right away said, “Why don't we work together? Why don't we come together and form it as a team and do this?” He briefed us on the work that he'd been doing. He'd been spending a lot of time traveling to Banja Luka and Mostar --over 50 meetings—to talk with Bosnian Serb and Bosnian Croat politicians, so he knew them well and he had a relationship. And the other thing that worked was that, Paul Williams, because of his work as a negotiator, had a very good relationship with the Bosniak leadership, and a well-deserved reputation for his work on international law and conflict negotiations. And because of my work in Dayton, I had a very strong reputation as an honest broker by all the parties — Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks. Each of us brought something different to the table. Paul, great legal expertise, Don Hays, a diplomat of long and good standing in Bosnia who worked with Holbrooke, and my own work with the Dayton Peace Accords project.

Hays had already made contact with the Scandinavian and Swiss embassies about potentially funding the initiative (which they eventually did) that he was going to run through the USIP. He introduced us to them. We also met with them. I also secured a grant for the work on the project for the DPAP from the Carnegie Corporation of New

York. Our approach was to build on the recommendations recently made on constitutional reform by the Venice Commission. There was considerable interest, albeit cautiously on the part of the Bosnian Serb, Croat, and Bosniak political leaders to initiate a modest constitutional reform initiative.

Our initiative came at a time when the US was preoccupied with Iraq. This meant that any progress we made on constitutional reform with the Bosnians as an NGO initiative was going to have to be substantial enough to enlist potential US support and involvement. We ultimately achieved that objective by November 2005. But the path was a complicated one.

The Venice Commission, especially Thomas Markert, was engaged to advise us in the effort. Indeed the Venice Commission document was written with the view to actually engaging in constitutional reform. Hence, we determined to use the Venice Commission report as the basis for engaging in constitutional reform discussions. We also determined to pursue negotiations by insisting that we serve as the secretariat for a Bosnian negotiating team made up chiefly of members of the leading political parties in the state parliament. In other words our role would be to structure, mediate where necessary but not actually chair the negotiations. This was a very different approach to that being employed by the EU with police reform negotiations which were occurring at the same time.

But before we could even think about carrying out any negotiations we needed to meet with the heads of the major parties to determine what was feasible. Thus in February and March we held meetings in Sarajevo, Mostar, and Banja Luka in which we posed the same question: “What do you think can be done? We then used their responses to establish the basis for the negotiations which began in April and ran through November 2005. The Bosnian team elected a chair person to run the negotiations. During the meetings a proposal for an amendment would be made and the chair would go around the room and ask everyone for their views. Once completed we would take a break to write up what had been agreed upon and then go back in the second session to announce. “Here's what you told us — let's talk about it again.” The meetings generally lasted no more than three days and were held in different locations.

I have written about the negotiations elsewhere as has Hays so I am not going to go into detail here. Suffice it to say that, at the time, all sides saw merit in making modest reforms which, if successful, could lead to further reforms down the road. Ultimately it was generally agreed that the main objectives of the negotiations were to amend the constitution such that the parliament, council of ministers, and presidency were more functional and efficient, with greater powers being ceded to the council of ministers, and to limit the ethnic vetoes which were built into too many places in the state government. Each time we met, we would record the negotiations and prepare a report which focused on areas of consensus and non-consensus which would then serve as the basis for subsequent meetings.

Q: And in other words, you were interacting with them, asking them for, you know, basically working with them, right? It was more dialogue rather than imposition, right?

HITCHNER: Yes. We repeatedly reminded them that we're not going to lead the negotiations. They needed to decide on what amendments were plausible and our job was to ensure that they stayed within the framework of the Venice Commission recommendations and what was allowable under Dayton. There was a general acceptance that the role of the council of ministers could be strengthened at the expense of the powers of the presidency that it might be possible to create ministries or agencies (such as in agriculture) that were best positioned at the state level. We started low-hanging fruit. Everyone at the time agreed the parliament was too small to be an effective legislative body.

Following each set of negotiations , Hays, Williams, and I would meet with members of the international community, including Paddy Ashdown, the embassies, etc., and so forth, reporting on our progress. We did this all the way through to December. By that time, the basic framework agreement of what would become the so-called April Package had been negotiated. Our work was more or less finished; the negotiations could now move from second to first track under US leadership.

I reported on our progress to the PIC Eventually the proposed amendments were introduced for a vote in parliament, but it fell short by two votes of the two-thirds majority necessary for passage. There's a lot that could be said—and has been said—about the April Package, but it will only say this here. If it had passed its impact on the Dayton constitution would have been much greater than the amendments implied. I will have more to say about that in the future. Suffice it to say also that many still believe that any future negotiations on constitutional reform could still involve aspects of what was agreed on in the April Package.

I was invited in 2008 by Miroslav Lajcak to join the OHR staff to restart constitutional reform negotiations but the continued failure of police reform and other events made taking up the post unrealistic. I subsequently assisted with other (failed(attempts to restart constitutional reforms

Q: So let me ask you this — so let's talk about techniques you used. What I'm hearing is more like it was a seminar style of approach. You were kind of running a seminar, having a conversation. You were facilitating a conversation and then building up basically a proposal. Was that—

HITCHNER: —Not quite a seminar. You could say that in effect, we thought it was actually beneficial for us, as the secretariat, to sit in the back of the room, not at the head of the table. Also we didn't actually put proposed amendments into full legal terms until near the end. Rather we were used political language as much as possible to keep the discussions fluid. We developed a rapport with our Bosnia counterparts — a level of trust that was extraordinary,

Q: So let me ask you, when you're looking back, what was sort of a secret of success? What was one thing that you guys had that, for example, State Department diplomats didn't or were unwilling to use to achieve the same result?

HITCHNER: One of the difficulties of many negotiations is that they are often bi- or multi-lateral which means that the interests of the parties may be at odds whereas with second track or NGO negotiations such interests are not at work. It's also true that first track negotiations are often not possible in the early stages of a negotiation process. It was much easier for all sides to talk with us because we were seen as honest brokers whose actions would be taken seriously by the US and EU if we made progress.

Q: And you guys probably also didn't have limits and sort of guidance that you had to follow, right? So you had a free hand.

HITCHNER: Yes. We had a free hand. We held no big press conferences. We discussed nothing about what we were doing publicly. It was only when we held one of our meetings in Brussels with the support of the European Commission that press coverage became more evident, and that it made it harder to continue to make progress and to keep everyone on the same page.

Q: So you were building a relationship. It was just a relationship building exercise that ended up being a seminar, conversations building up, basically creating an outline for a larger, for the package eventually, right?

HITCHNER: One of the things we were trying not to do was to return to a Yugoslav constitutional model, if we could help it. We believed we had a window of time with and after Dayton to alter the direction of Bosnia in a strong Euro-Atlantic direction, perhaps no more than a ten year window, and the April negotiations were near the end of the moment, after which it would become harder and harder to set Bosnia on a stable secure path to the future. By 2008, with the international community's attention elsewhere, Bosnian local parties and leaders started to push back and no longer looked at the international community's role in Bosnia as one which would dominate the landscape. That's when you get the big push towards secession. That's when you had people no longer wanting to strengthen Dayton, and calls for the closure of the OHR became louder.

Q: So in other words, implementation was on track going from '95, and then, you know, there were challenges, during that period of time from '95 to 2005 and '06, right. But, everything was on track, progress was, you know—

HITCHNER: —Yes, I believe so. Up until the EU established its own agenda for Bosnia integration into the EU, Dayton implementation was on track in my view. The European integration plan was not always in sync with the mission implementation plan. The EU wanted to close the OHR because you can't have a country belonging to the EU until they have full sovereignty, until they function properly as a state. And, therefore, for the EU to be running an implementation effort before Bosnia was fully sovereign and functional made the EU effort seem premature. There's nothing about the EU integration process that is designed to build a country. And so in our view it was as important to finish the Dayton peace implementation mission as it was to launch the EU integration process. For until Dayton Bosnia becomes a functioning state, its ability to be part of the EU, which requires the surrender of a part of a state's sovereignty to the EU, the goal of integration remains any time soon remains distant.

Q: So let me ask you, what about NATO troops pulling out in 2004? Was that a moment that had an impact?

HITCHNER: Yes, I think it weakened the capacity of the OHR to sustain the peace implementation process. The Bosnians started pushing back on the international community's role in Bosnia, especially the Bosnian Serbs. I think it made the prospect of a Dayton II unlikely.

Q: Right. So can you talk a little bit about Europeans and how they were interacting, you know, I mean you already referenced, but I'm curious whether European sort of divisions within Europe — France, Germany, how they were approaching because they have different approaches to Bosnia.

HITCHNER: Well, there is the EUSR and then all the European embassies, not one and the same thing. The reason why the United States has a uniquely powerful position is because of Dayton and the USG speaks generally with one voice on policy (for better or worse sometimes). But the U.S. prefers not to take the lead. It prefers to lead from behind, because it does view this as ultimately something which the EU should be leading on; it therefore supports the EU integration effort. It also backs the OHR (up until now at least) because it sees the OHR as the guardian of Dayton implementation in principle. At the same time it needs to be kept in mind that Bosnia is not a prime national security interest of the U.S. NATO is, the EU is, but Bosnia in particular is not. If Bosnia threatens the security of the EU or threatens the security of NATO as it did, almost leading to the breakup of NATO in the war, then Bosnia becomes an issue. But Bosnia has never been at the top of the list of primary national interest in the United States. And thus the United States, although it has a special relationship with Bosnia, does not feel the need to intervene as it once did.

And the other thing the US doesn't want to do is it doesn't want to destroy the success. The success story is the Dayton Agreement. And if you go in, and you try to do something, and it all unravels, then a policy success becomes a failure. One of the things that some people think is that more progress will be made in Bosnia under a Democratic party administration than a Republican one. But it's also true that Democratic administrations are also the ones that least want to upset the apple cart. You can’t forget that April was undertaken during a Republican Administration in the midst of the Iraq war. And the U.S. at the time embraced this.

Q: In other words, it was celebrated because it was an achievement. It was something that was necessary to just get on a front page of a newspaper saying we are continuing a success story as possible, right?

HITCHNER: Exactly. It would have been an unexpected foreign policy victory at a time when the US desperately needed one. I have told my Bosnian friends that if you start working together on constitutional reform and make progress, the United States would jump in with both feet all the way up to the White House to ensure it. But if you don't do it, they're not coming to your rescue.

Q: Alright, Bruce, let me ask you. So, when you're looking back to the Dayton Accords, and I know you're referencing that the U.S. sees the Dayton Accords as an agreement that is a success. And is that true that it is a successful agreement? Can you elaborate, what are your thoughts about the Dayton Accords, just reflecting on them — are they successful?

HITCHNER: Two things — yes, there's success in the sense of absolutely, it stopped the war. Nobody can conclude that war is not picked up again, right? But the other part of it is that it's not just a peace agreement, it's something more than that. It is an attempt to essentially build a state, and in that sense, it's unfinished business. It was never meant, and nor was it understood that what was achieved at Dayton was supposed to end there. Almost everything except the actual treaty terminating the war was unfinished, and it was firmly believed that people would come back and continue to carry out that implementation. So, you could say Dayton is an unfinished piece.

Q: Alright, so what would be the next step? Like when, let's say in '95 when the agreement was negotiated, and later, like during the implementation, what would be the next step? Would it be a 2.0 or it would be a local, as you're referring to, sort of conversations underground, sort of local thinking how they can move forward. Locally, they have to find a solution. Is that sort of a successor to the Dayton Accords?

HITCHNER: Well, at this stage, you might say that one short of — short of, if you will — a revolutionary event, an event in which the Dayton-Bosnia is overturned for some reason or another. So for example — financial collapse, conflict, renewed conflict for some reason, that the process is going to be a process of slow evolution, generational evolution. You could argue that, for example, it probably takes a generation after a conflict for a state to stabilize and emerge into a more, you know, functional entity. You look at the Second World War, you know, when do Germany and Japan come online? You know, at least it takes 20 years, roughly, almost up to 40 years for them to reach their full — restore themselves to where they once were. One could argue that over time, Bosnia will, short of serious cataclysmic events. The state, the society will continue to evolve in the Dayton framework and that if changes or reforms occur, the most likely way they'll occur is when all sides in Bosnia see, reach consensus that certain things make sense to do.

In other words, over time, one would hope that Bosnia might evolve institutions at the state level where everybody agrees that there's a shared interest. Now, how could that be done? One thing you don't have to do is call it a ministry. You know what I mean? You can use words like agencies. You can use all sorts of terminology to create structures at the state level which do not threaten or perceive to have that — you know, even the word constitutional reform kind of becomes a bad word over time, you know, just because of what it implies. But I could see those things happening.

But the only thing that you can't say, and you do worry about is that, and so what is the international community doing? What the international community is doing is playing the status quo, keeping their hand on the tiller to say we're not going to let instability occur. We're going to try to work at this slowly. We're going to hope that over time the changes can come of their own fruition inside the country. You do need to change the national

media in the country. It's toxic at this stage. That's a real problem. But the point is that, slowly but surely, the U.S. and the international community will just work slowly as long as the situation doesn't get out of hand. And it doesn't want to get out of hand because then the international community feels like it loses control. You know, it can't do the things, it has to respond to the problem of instability. So for the time being, the policy is status quo — status quo, slow progress, hope that ultimately things will change incrementally. Because there doesn't seem to be at present a set of conditions which could make for positive substantial reform of the type that we saw in the first 10 years after Dayton. [Since I gave this interview, my views on this and the future of constitutional reform in Bosnia have become more clear in a new op-ed co-authored with Ed Joseph in the National Interest (November 21, 1995).]

Q: Let me ask you, what about a truth and reconciliation? Is that necessary? No?

HITCHNER: No, it would only make, in my view at this stage, the whole problem — you know, it reopened a lot of the problems that were out there. And I think — I just have this feeling that it would do nothing but harden people's perspective on, you know, the various ethnic groups. A truth and reconciliation in certain places can work. But in Bosnia, I think it would be counterproductive at this stage.

Q: Let me ask you, what about critical minerals — thinking about them right now, is that complicating the whole, you know, peacebuilding—?

HITCHNER: That's a new reality. Yes, that's a new reality. It's actually providing — there's a couple of things that are current within it. One is that it's changing the way people look at their interests in these places — Serbia, Bosnia, the region. Suddenly these places have a potential economic interest or value. And that means that policies, international foreign policies are not just made on ideals but on pragmatic principles, interests. But there are also serious environmental concerns in the region about the damaging impact of mining rare minerals. resistance to it among local peoples because of the enormous environmental impact.

So, yes, it's changing the relationship. Maybe it can be a potential positive force in the sense that if both sides' interests, economic interests are met, it might provide leverage for reforms to be made alongside those economic engagements, okay.

And that's one dynamic which could lead to, so for example, let's say Serbia decided they want to do this. That would almost certainly lead to deep resistance from the Bosniaks. And the Bosniaks are not afraid to think about using military force to seize the RS. The RS is militarily weak, you know, relative to the Federation. And the first thing that some Bosniaks would call for is heading straight for the drina, you know what I mean, and occupying this area. So it's out there. It's a new element. It could be a potential force. It's changing the dynamic of the relations, much like the old days. I mean, why did a lot of European countries have such a strong interest in Serbia leading up to the war? Because of the mines. Why were they willing to back the Serbs? And there was a second part during the Second World War. The Serbs fought the Nazis, that sort of thing. And so there was a distinct decision to just kind of be favorable to the Serbs because of those interests, even during the war, they could quite forget that those things were there, and it got in the

way of the problem of the atrocities that were being committed by the Bosnian Serbs and the elements of the Yugoslav army. And so those kinds of things mix up. Those things could reveal themselves again.

But I agree, it's a new element to consider.

Q: So let me ask you, looking 30 years later, you know, what would be sort of advice for future Foreign Service Officers, you know, anyone who's interested in diplomacy or nonprofit work as you did in the sphere of international affairs, working on issues in the Balkans. What are some lessons they can take out of the Dayton Accords? If you had to summarize three or four lessons that Dayton Accords are teaching? What are some of those insights that people should take notice of?

HITCHNER: The first thing is that it's not enough to sign a peace treaty. You've got to have a plan for after the fighting stops. And Dayton was a laudable attempt at such a plan. That is still an important part of any negotiations to end a conflict. It does nothing if you simply stop the war and do nothing afterwards. And that means while you're doing it, thinking about what those next steps are down the road. What it is that you think you need to continue to do that isn't purely diplomatic. One of the things that is frustrating to me is that too many times diplomats place too much emphasis on the personalities that people are dealing with on a day-to-day basis and the day-to-day events. What they should try to do is get below the surface, really understand the institutional and structural realities behind the problems that they're confronting because therein lies the solution. Because you could develop a set of wonderful relations with these people, but they may be gone in a year or two, and somebody else is going to have to start the process all over. Also it's important not to get bogged down on the day-to-day ins and outs. Think about the deeper structural and institutional makeup of the place, the problem you're addressing and what that means in terms of finding longer-term solutions to things. What are the deeper imperatives that drive the cause of the problem to be intractable at times?

In truth, we may not have much better ways of thinking about it than we did 30 years ago, but Dayton was an important attempt to say, we can't just stop at the ending of fighting. We have to figure out what comes afterwards and how diplomats aren't trained at this.

Amb. Don Hays once related to me, “I had to learn how to get the airport running again,” when I was there, said, “I had no idea how to start up an airport, but I had to learn about it.” In other words expanding one’s horizons as a diplomat is not a bad thing. Diplomats also need to stay longer in places. If one is only in a country for two years, there is always the risk of reinventing the wheel, rediscovering the problem. You're constantly going to be in a situation where, just at the point where you get to master it, you're gone. We're still in Dayton. We're still in Bosnia. We're still in Bosnia with a lot of the same vehicles. It seems to me that we need to think about how we're gonna invest in them below the level sometimes of simply having people come in, say a few words about how Dayton needs to be implemented, talk about it and leave.

Q: Is Bosnia an American problem? You know, sort of a notion that the Dayton Accords were created in the — it was an American creation, the only way of resolving the issue.

HITCHNER: No, no, no, it's not an American — America has a special interest in Bosnia. As I said, it's the guarantor of the Dayton peace agreement, and that gives it a special place. And it doesn't have it in Kosovo, for example, right? The UN has it there — the EU. But because of Dayton, we do have a role to play, which is symbolically greater than any other state in the region. And that role gives us a special power.

Q: Let me ask you this. Looking back to your career and your involvement in the Balkans, do you consider yourself being a citizen diplomat? I know we touched on yesterday, but I'm curious, like looking retrospectively — do you think that as a citizen diplomat, you were able to achieve things that might've not been possible as a diplomat. I know we talked about it, but I'm curious whether that term has any meaning to you.

HITCHNER: I have acted in that role without calling myself that. I think there's always a role for people to engage in that way. At the same time I can't pretend that I'm something I'm not. Being engaged as a "civilian diplomat," does involve a high level of peculiar investment in knowledge and understanding. As a sometime practitioner I have, sometimes, had to learn when to leave my academically acquired knowledge behind in favor of pragmatic and realistic approaches to things. But as my wife reminded me, "Just keep your day job,"

Q: Alright, Bruce, I think we covered everything. Is there anything else?

HITCHNER: Yeah, I think so too. Thank you so much for being willing to listen to me for this long time.

End of interview

Further Reading:

"30 Years After the Dayton Accords, Here's How Donald Trump Can Help Bosnia", *National Interest,* published November 21, 2025 by: Edward P. Joseph and R. Bruce Hitchner,
https://nationalinterest.org/feature/30-years-dayton-accords-donald-trump-bosnia