

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

AMBASSADOR FRANK CHARLES CARLUCCI, III

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is December 30, 1996 and this is an interview with Frank Charles Carlucci, III being done on behalf of the Association for Diplomatic Studies. I am Charles Stuart Kennedy.

We are going to concentrate on Portugal, but could I say first you were born in 1930 in Pennsylvania, you went to Princeton, were in the US Navy and joined the Foreign Service in 1956. What attracted you to the Foreign Service?

CARLUCCI: Well, I always had an interest in the Foreign Service. I was in the Woodrow Wilson School at Princeton and had specialized in international studies. After I left the Navy I had an offer in business and then decided I would try business. I went to the Harvard Business School for a year. I spent about a year as a management trainee for a company and quite frankly became dissatisfied. So, looking around for options I decided to take the Foreign Service exam and somewhat to my surprise I passed it. The State Department against my wishes notified the company and I was given 24 hours to make my decision. So, even though I hadn't had the oral exam yet, I pulled up stakes (I was on the west coast), crossed the country and got myself a temporary job until I finished the process for the Foreign Service.

Q: Because of the time limitations, I would like to move directly to what I consider one of the more significant episodes in the work of the Foreign Service in the last few decades, and that is the situation you were put into in Portugal where you served as Ambassador from 1975-78. Could you tell me what were the circumstances that brought you to this appointment?

CARLUCCI: I am not sure I can tell you other than the fact that I spoke Portuguese because I had served in Brazil. I don't know whose suggestion it was. I was in the job of Under Secretary of HEW at the time, very far removed from foreign policy, even though I continued to serve as a Foreign Service officer. I did know Henry Kissinger and Don Rumsfeld and I also knew the President. Portugal was in a crisis state and the suggestion, I was told, came from somewhere in the State Department. I was asked, and given the circumstances, I decided to accept.

Q: Could you explain what the circumstances were in Portugal before you went there?

CARLUCCI: In retrospect it is quite clear that the president was a communist sympathizer, the prime minister was a communist, the top military structure was controlled by communists, the labor unions were controlled by the communists, most of the government was communist. There was a lot of unrest in Portugal and the feeling was that Portugal might be the first NATO country to go communist. It was quite a tense situation with a lot of demonstrations in the streets. So, it was something that needed urgent attention. Henry Kissinger had been dissatisfied with the previous ambassador, Stewart Nash Scott, and had summarily removed him. I was given very little time to get out there.

Q: What sort of briefing were you getting from the Iberian Desk, the Secretary and others about what you would find and what you should do?

CARLUCCI: The Desk pretty much confined itself to the facts of the situation. It was clear that Henry Kissinger felt that the situation was that Portugal was at least a pre-communist state. It is no secret that he called Mario Soares a Kerensky at the time, and I think that accurately reflected his views.

Q: Kerensky being the figure prior to the communist takeover in Russia in 1917, rather an ineffectual socialist.

CARLUCCI: Correct. Henry didn't have a lot of faith in the socialists. But he did agree in the outset that we could have some modest aid programs to Portugal. He felt I should have some tools to work with. I gradually became convinced that there were strong forces pushing against the current trend in Portugal. There were a number of considerations. Portugal was not adjacent to the communist bloc. The ties to the West and NATO were strong. The Church was influential, not in the hierarchical sense but at the village level. The people were by and large conservative and they were interested in protecting their economic interests. I thought the electoral process could serve to undermine the communist control of the country. There were a lot of skeptics about that. That was in essence the nature of the dialogue between Embassy Lisbon and the State Department, with a number of people in the State Department feeling it was probably best to write Lisbon off and teach them a lesson in order to protect the rest of the countries in Europe.

Q: Before you went out how big was the Azores question and the Pentagon's interest in that?

CARLUCCI: They showed a clear interest in the Azores which were essential in those days to any kind of airlift to the Middle East. They were very protective of their equity in the Azores. There probably were elements -- certainly there were elements in the Congress -- who were intrigued with the idea of Azorean separatism. Some, including one person within my own embassy, were intrigued with the idea of cooperating with the extreme right. I took a very firm stand against that.

Frankly it took a number of meetings in June, 1976, with me and Henry Kissinger, for us to reach a meeting of the minds. Henry was coolly critical of what he regarded as my willingness to bet on the democratic parties which he didn't regard as very strong at that point and he had made a public derogatory comment about me which emerged as headlines in the press.

Q: What was that?

CARLUCCI: I think it was something along the lines of "whoever told me Carlucci was a tough guy." I had a few tense meetings where I told him quite frankly that his statements were pushing Portugal into the arms of the communists and his response was, "Well, if you are so goddamn smart, you make the statements," to which I said, "Fine, I will."

I had some discussions with the White House as well because I believed I worked for the President, not just the Secretary of State.

Q: This is President Ford?

CARLUCCI: Yes. I was well acquainted at the White House having been an Under Secretary of a major department, so had some discussions there. The next time I met with Henry he said something to the effect that the President had asked to see me.

Q: This was in 1976?

CARLUCCI: Yes, 1976. Quite frankly at that meeting Henry did say that he would give my policy option a chance, he would back me. So, I told him there was no reason for me to go to the White House. Henry couldn't have been more supportive from that day on. He had been highly critical up until that day, but once we reached a meeting of the minds, a joint decision, he gave me practically everything I wanted, all the support I needed. It turned out that the electoral process worked, and as history has demonstrated, the socialists came in. The socialists ran a campaign of privatization, an undoing of much of what the communists had done.

Q: I would like to go back to the beginning of 1975. You arrived out there just about at the turn of the year, didn't you, from 1974-75?

CARLUCCI: January, 1975.

Q: What was your impression of the embassy at that time? Obviously, the former ambassador, who had been a political appointee, had gone. This had been a rather sleepy, rather undermanned post. I interviewed Ed Rowell, who was on the Iberia Desk, and he said it was a very small embassy at that time and not particularly well staffed.

CARLUCCI: That is an understatement. Larry Eagleburger, who was Under Secretary for Administration at the time, told me it was the worst embassy in the world. We had in the embassy's political section somebody who, according to the Office of Personnel, was always on the verge of being selected out. His reporting was not up to par. To put it mildly, it was a turnaround situation.

Q: How about the DCM?

CARLUCCI: Well, the DCM had left. I am not sure of the circumstances, but, I picked my own DCM, Herb Okun, and we, in essence, went out together.

Q: Well, you had known Herb from...?

CARLUCCI: From Brazil.

Q: You are faced with the worst embassy in the world. A NATO country, which is sitting on some vital real estate, with a communist government. What do you do?

CARLUCCI: First of all you try to shape up the embassy. I gave that task to Herb. The natural tendency for people like Herb and myself, is to do the reporting ourselves, which we did for a couple of weeks because there was no other option. Then I told Herb he had to stop rewriting cables and start sending them back to the drafters and tell them to redraft them and how to redraft them until we got people trained. He had to set schedules, he had to set goals. We had to be very precise as to what we wanted out of the staff.

Secondly, I began to work on an AID program. I had a lot of trouble with AID, they wanted to send me flocks of people instead of programs. But, we worked that out. I got a good AID director and I started to design AID programs myself.

Q: Who was your AID director?

CARLUCCI: Glenn Patterson

Q: That's all right.

CARLUCCI: I had had considerable background in the domestic area and began to design some programs myself in the health area. I started the first emergency medical services program, which is alive and well in Portugal today.

Q: Is this because of your background in HEW?

CARLUCCI: Yes. I started a management school at the Catholic University. I moved forward on a housing program. I designed a package for the military try to reprofessionalize the Portuguese military. I worked very closely with David Bruce, Ed Streater and Al Haig on that. In fact, it was rather amusing, I went up to USNATO and participated in the drafting of a cable in the evening at Ed Streater's house recommending a military aid package for Portugal, and then went back to Portugal and wrote an endorsement of the USNATO cable.

Thirdly, I began a rather intensive campaign of getting to know the political figures. I would make it a goal of meeting at least two or three political figures a day. I would just call them up and setup appointments, invite them to lunch, invite them to dinner. So, I became quite well-acquainted.

Fourthly, I made myself accessible to the press, too accessible according to Washington. But it had a major impact on public opinion, the fact that I was open. The fact that I spoke Portuguese helped. To my recollection no previous ambassador had spoken Portuguese. That began to create a positive image. There were all kinds of charges about the CIA. The communists put out a book, two inches thick, called "Dossier CARLUCCI: CIA." There was one press conference where I answered all these charges. The questions were so

slanted that even the communist minister of information jumped in at one point and said, "Now look, you can't expect the ambassador to constantly answer negatives to prove that he is not part of the CIA." But, the fact that I was open, I think had a major impact.

Finally, I quietly established lines with the Church. Not that I ever asked them to do anything, but I would go over and talk with the Archbishop quietly, have lunch with him, and came to understand what the Church's view was. I regarded the Church as being very important and indeed the so-called counter-revolution did start with the village priests in northern Portugal, so the Church played an important role.

Q: Did you find them rather dispirited at the beginning, when you arrived there?

CARLUCCI: Yes. The first meeting I had with Mario Soares he came around to my house. I will never forget it. It was an evening and I had been there only a day or two. I think he was foreign minister at the time. He was very down. When he left Herb Okun and I turned to each other and said, "What have we gotten ourselves into?"

The Portuguese are wonderful people but a little pessimistic by nature, fatalistic. It is always hard to cheer them up and get them to look at the positive side of things. I set about deliberately to do that, to convince them that things were not lost. I had had a little experience doing that when I headed for Richard Nixon the disaster relief effort after hurricane Agnes where people were totally depressed up in the Wilkes Barre area of Pennsylvania. I went in specifically with the goal of taking a public position and turning around people's attitudes by telling them that it wasn't the federal government that was going to do it for them but they were going to do it for themselves. And it was much the same kind of thing in Portugal. Expressing faith in the Portuguese people, expressing faith in the Portuguese leadership that you can do this. That you can be a free country. That you haven't lost your revolution. It has taken a little detour, but you can work your way out of it. So, the positive outlook I think was extremely important.

Q: What was your impression of the Communist leadership and their hold in the country at that time when you arrived?

CARLUCCI: Very erratic leadership. I spent many, many hours in long debates and discussions with the prime minister, Vasco Gonçalves, who liked to argue and had a very Marxist point of view, but he was erratic and disorganized as could be. The president, Costa Gomes -- when I had a briefing in the State Department, the desk said that the one hope was Costa Gomes. When I had had about two meetings with Costa Gomes, I went back to my desk and wrote a cable saying he isn't any hope at all. At best he is a dead loss and at worse he may be a sympathizer. Indeed, subsequent events have borne out the fact that he was a sympathizer. So, I didn't have a lot of tools in the government to work with other than Mario Soares who was then foreign minister but later took to the streets.

There were other democratic parties that I worked with very closely -- the CDS (Christian Democrats) and the PSD (Social Democrats). The PSD later became critical of me, but I

worked very closely with them in the early days. My theory was that I was not favoring one party over another. What we needed to do was to support all of the democratic parties.

Q: Did you find that you had any problem with reigning in the CIA? This was the time when CIA had been rather intrusive in Chile and other places.

CARLUCCI: No, I had very good relations with the CIA and my view then, and when I was in the CIA subsequently, has been that with a strong ambassador you never have problems with the CIA. I, in fact, personally designed whatever covert action programs there were in Portugal. I told them right from the outset that I didn't need to know sources and methods, but I needed to know everything about the program and how it was implemented. I gave them strict instructions on no contact with the far right. Once you lay down the ground rules they will follow them.

Q: It seems from what you are saying that because of the fact that the Communist Party was somewhat erratic they weren't as ruthless in taking over as has happened in some other places and therefore were unable to put their hold on as compared to some other countries.

CARLUCCI: A couple of things. One was the communist leader, Alvaro Cunhal, although capable, was a bit of a Western asset because he was a very vain man who had spent so many years in Czechoslovakia that when he returned he behaved in a very non-Portuguese way. The Portuguese are not vain people. But Cunhal was a little imperious, he felt that the job had already been done. So, the communists overplayed their hand.

Secondly, there were splinter groups basically to the left of the Communist Party. The MRPP, indigenous Marxist groups that did such foolish things as seize the Catholic radio station for which the Communist Party got blamed. So you had the head of the Communist Party, Alvaro Cunhal appearing on television saying that he wasn't anti-Catholic. Well, nobody believed that. So they committed a number of mistakes and indeed part of my lecture to my Portuguese friends was to allow the communists to make their mistakes.

Q: The communists would obviously see you, an American Ambassador coming from your position, this was not an ordinary appointment, as a threat. Did you feel personally threatened at that time?

CARLUCCI: Well, the head of security, Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho, who was a general and one of the original revolutionaries, went on television one night and in effect made me a target. There was a coup attempt, I guess it was a right-wing coup attempt, nobody knows much about it, on the 15th of March, 1975. That evening we were all in the embassy and there were demonstrators out in the street. Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho went on television and said that the American Ambassador had been behind the coup attempt

and that he had no intention of protecting me. I got him on the telephone and said, "First of all I want to make sure that is what you said," and he said, "Yes." I said, "Well, you understand that that is the equivalent of declaring the American Ambassador persona non grata." He said, "No, I didn't understand that." I said, "Well, that is not your job." He said, "What is my job?" I said, "Your job is to protect the American Ambassador and you made me a virtual target." We went on in that vein for a while and he finally said, "What should I do?" I said, "Well, you had better protect me." To my surprise he sent some troops over to my house. I was always nervous as to whether they were there to protect me or for some other purpose.

Sure, there were a number of threats and there were demonstrations virtually two or three times a week. At one point they were on the verge of breaking into the embassy and I issued orders to use tear gas. At one point they caught me in my automobile and started rocking it. The State Department sent me a lot of security. We went through all that.

Q: What about the staff? Were you able to develop a stronger embassy as time went on?

CARLUCCI: Oh, yes. Almost by the nature of things the State Department began to send me better people. Charlie Thomas, the political counselor when I came over there, was a good man. I was able to work with him. He was succeeded by Rick Melton, who was first rate. Jim Ferrer took over the economic section and he was excellent. So, the staff began to improve, began to respond to guidance. We did the normal managerial things that one does -- daily staff meetings and setting clear goals. I chose not to chair the staff meetings. I let Herb chair them and I would sit in on them to make sure there was a point of continuity.

Q: What about the military attachés?

CARLUCCI: Some good, some bad. There was one that I hand picked, Bob Schuler, who is still in Lisbon today. He had served with me in Brazil. I tended to work extensively through him. He was the first one to identify Ramalho Eanes, when he was a colonel. He organized a visit for him to NATO, which had a decided impact. The Defense Attaché was singularly lacking in judgment. He disobeyed my orders one time and had some contact with a well-known member of the far right and he argued with me that we needed to support the far right. I asked for his removal but the Pentagon argued me out of removing him. He did get disciplined in some way. But, as I say, they were a mixed bag.

Q: What about the NATO connection? I know there was a rather important NATO meeting in Brussels in May, 1975. President Ford attended, etc. You had been there about five months at that point.

CARLUCCI: It was extremely important. Probably if I had to point to one thing that the United States did that helped to turn the situation around, it was the reintegration of the Portuguese military into NATO. The creation of a NATO Brigade, which I worked out

together with Al Haig, Ed Streater and David Bruce. I must say Bruce, Streater and Haig couldn't have been more supportive.

Q: Haig at that point was the head of NATO and Bruce was the ambassador to USNATO.

CARLUCCI: And Ed Streater was his DCM. We functioned as a very effective team, in constant communication. We came up with the idea of creating a special Portuguese brigade for NATO that we would equip. We provided tanks and APCs (armored personnel carriers). I remember coming back to Washington and trying to sell the idea. The State Department kind of shook their heads and said that was an interesting idea but there was no money for that. I said, "Fine, I will get the money." I went to OMB where I had been a deputy director and managed to get their okay to the money if I could get somebody in Congress to sponsor it. So, I went to Ed Brook, senator from Massachusetts, who was on the Armed Services Appropriations Committee. He sponsored it and pushed it through. I managed to pick up support from other people who had Portuguese constituents. Claiborne Pell was helpful.

Q: We are talking about Massachusetts and Rhode Island, both of whom traditionally have had a rather large Portuguese element.

CARLUCCI: Yes, I obviously focused on them. I had some political experience. If I may say so, it was somewhat unique, an ambassador pushing through his own aid program, but I did. After I designed the program for the army, the air force came in and said they needed a program. So, we designed an aircraft program for them. Finally the navy came in and we ended up designing a frigate program for them which took something like 10 to 15 years to materialize but it came about. We now have a Portuguese frigate that was built as a result of the aid program that started when I was there.

Q: The Portuguese military had started the coup, sort of young officers starting the coup, but had this feeling sort of disintegrated as a military force and more political at that point?

CARLUCCI: It was the rabble in the streets. In fact, I became fairly close to some of the original coup plotters, Melo Antunes and Vitor Alves, even Vasco Lorenzo. I spent a lot of time with them and was convinced that even they were not happy with the turn the events had taken even though they were all on the left side of the spectrum. I think those contacts at least helped to neutralize them, if nothing else. But, the military was turning rapidly into an uncontrollable rabble and the idea was to restore a sense of professionalism, get them back into the barracks, get them out of politics and enable the elections to take place and the civilian leadership to take over. And, that in fact is what happened.

Q: What about the elections? With the communists in control of the government the elections were all suspect. Did we get involved?

CARLUCCI: There were all kinds of monitors who came for the elections. In fact it was rather an inspiring sight. I went around a lot of the polls myself and you would see Portuguese standing in line for hours on end to wait to vote. The Portuguese people expressed themselves decidedly. The results were indisputable. With the monitoring that was taking place, including monitoring by the press, it was very difficult to tamper too much with the elections, not that there weren't irregularities, I am sure.

Q: How did the election come out?

CARLUCCI: Well, the socialists won, the communists came in second and the other democratic parties a distant third and fourth. Eventually Mario Soares was elected prime minister.

Q: As your embassy monitored this prior to the election, did you see the socialists coming out ahead?

CARLUCCI: That was our assessment. It wasn't always believed in Washington and even if it was believed there was considerable skepticism that the socialists were the kind of people who you could work with. But the embassy took the position that the socialists were likely to win and that we could work with them.

Q: Tell us a little bit about the relationship in Washington. Here you were trying to save a situation which many in "Washington" had written off. Who were some of the people you had to deal with who were skeptical about how things were going?

CARLUCCI: It is not my purpose to name names and I haven't seen what Henry is going to write in his memories. He has talked to me about this and asked me to explain a little more where he and I disagreed on Portugal, and I tried to do that. I don't want to make this into a war, it was not.

Q: Oh, I know, but I am just trying to look at the process.

CARLUCCI: I think Henry had around him some advisors who were truly skeptical of the position that I was taking. He, himself, expressed skepticism on several occasions. So, it was at the top. I think the Desk in a sense agreed with me but had no clout. Art Hartman as assistant secretary was kind of caught in the middle as best I could tell. Once I got the signal from Henry, everyone fell into line.

Q: Ed Rowell was saying at one point that Art Hartman was sort of not letting things move up to Kissinger's eyes and sort of sitting on things until he felt the time was right. He said that one report he finally let go was by Bill Kelly who had written about Soares standing tall, or something. Does that ring a bell with you?

CARLUCCI: I never saw the report, but Ed Rowell would be more conversant with what was going on inside the Department than I. I know that I received at critical points some

very, very difficult cables. I remember receiving one cable that in essence said to cease and desist and that these guys were bad guys and we are going to drum them out of NATO, or something like that. I wrote a response and Charlie Thomas, my political counselor, came in to me (I had the habit of showing my cables to my senior staff before sending them) and said, "Frank, please do me a favor, put this one in a drawer and don't send it until tomorrow." By the next day I had cooled down and sent a much more measured response.

And silly things. I had wanted an airlift to help bring the Portuguese out of Angola. Well, the State Department sent me a cable saying I couldn't have the airlift until I had traded off some political advantage for it. I shot back something saying that was just pure nonsense. There were some heated exchanges by cables.

Q: What about the African connection? This was one of the major things that group did, to get out of Angola and Mozambique. Did that play a role?

CARLUCCI: It certainly played a role in the original revolution. One of the prominent pro communist figures, Rosa Coutinho, had been a Portuguese representative in Angola and he was an admiral. There were strong feelings in Portugal on the subject of Angola and Mozambique. A lot of the Portuguese military who were involved in the coup had served in places like Guinea-Bissau, so there was an historical significance in that sense. Something like 600,000 Portuguese refugees returned from Angola to a country that had a population of 7 or 8 million. This had an enormous impact on the social and economic structure of the country. But, it was also politically helpful because these people were by and large conservative, not wanting to have anything to do with communism - the reason they fled Angola. The last thing they wanted to see was a communist government in Portugal. So, it provided strength to the democratic forces.

Q: What about the media while you were there? Was there a relatively free media?

CARLUCCI: It was communist controlled. I don't think I went on TV that much as it was government controlled. The newspapers were not directly controlled as such although the vast majority of the journalists came from the left, I guess that probably is the best way to put it. But, if I gave an interview there were newspapers that would print it word for word. Now, a lot of things I said were distorted, but if you keep saying them over and over again...

Q: But, we had an outlet?

CARLUCCI: Yes. The fact that I became a very visible figure in Portugal meant that the press couldn't ignore me. I didn't set out to make myself a visible figure, I set out to make myself an open figure, but it turned out that I became very visible.

Q: Were you portrayed as the American proconsul?

CARLUCCI: Oh, God, time and time again. In fact, by the time I had been there three years I thought it was time for me to leave because I had become too much of an actor in the drama and the drama was nearing an end anyway. There was no question I became a player and that is not normally a healthy thing for an ambassador to become.

Q: What about the Azores negotiations? Even under the best of circumstances the Azores are always a difficult problem.

CARLUCCI: The Department sent out Bob Barbour to handle the negotiations and he did a skillful job. I sat in on most of the negotiations. There was a simple question of an aid package in exchange for the continued base rights. The Portuguese were anxious for the aid money, so we were able to bring those to a successful conclusion.

Q: Franco died in November, 1975 and there was real concern of what was going to happen after Franco. Was there concern in Portugal and Washington that maybe the whole Iberian peninsula was going to go down the drain or had things begun to change?

CARLUCCI: Things had progressed enough in Portugal so we were relatively confident. In fact, I think it was pretty much the other way around, that had Portugal not pulled itself out of the communist abyss, Spain would have had a lot more problems in transiting to a democratic society. I think most historians now argue that Portugal had a significant impact on developments in Spain, if not in much of the world, particularly Latin America. I think there are those who are arguing today that what's a third wave in democracy started in Portugal.

Q: Just one last question, did the Soviet Union play any role while you were there?

CARLUCCI: Oh yes. They had a very active ambassador. I was a player in a drama and he was too.

Q: Wasn't his name Kalinin?

CARLUCCI: Yes, a very aggressive young man. He was a real player in the drama. Alvaro Cunhal, the Portuguese communist leader, was a die hard Stalinist who traveled frequently to Moscow. There was no question that Moscow was calling the shots of the Communist Party in Portugal. The book that I mentioned earlier, "Dossier CARLUCCI: CIA" was obviously not produced by the Portuguese, it was produced in Moscow. They had total support. You were never able to identify the exact amount of money given to the Portuguese Communist Party by Moscow but you were never in doubt there was substantial funding to the party from Moscow.

Q: And this was a period when the Soviet Union under the Brezhnev Doctrine and all was felt to be both aggressive and having success around the world.

CARLUCCI: Oh, no question. And Portugal was a major battleground. People tend to forget it today, but it was one of the hearts of the struggle.

Q: Okay let's stop here.

CARLUCCI: Let me make one other point. Once the Socialists were in power, it became important to support them in their efforts to stabilize the economy and undo the nationalizations. We got some money from the IMF, but not enough. Mario Soares and I conceived of the idea of a "jumbo loan," a multinational loan of, I believe, about 9 billion.

State and Treasury were not enthusiastic. Treasury was particularly difficult. I found a Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Paul Boeker, who believed in it and was willing to help. He did an excellent job of pulling together a number of countries. Bob Hormats who was in the White House at the time was also extremely helpful.

The loan was a great success, not only for the flexibility it gave Soares, but for the symbolic support of so many countries.

End of interview