

# THE U L T I M



George Kenney



Warren Zimmerman



Stephen W. Walker



Marshall Freeman Harris

# DISSENT

**R**esignations on principle are rare in our government but several Foreign Service officers recently have quit to protest American policy toward Bosnia.

# A T E

BY HENRY BUTTERFIELD RYAN

**N**ot since Vietnam War protests peaked more than 20 years ago has the State Department seen so much anger and dissension within its ranks. Today the issue is Bosnia, and the anger is over American passivity in the face of Serbian aggression against the Muslims. NATO's decision in February to use force if necessary to control Serb attacks has assuaged employees' feelings somewhat, but by the time that policy was announced, five State Department officers had resigned in protest, then gone to the media to express their outrage.

The first to resign was Foreign Service officer George Kenney, in August 1992. A year later, two other FSOs and an intelligence analyst—like Kenney, in their thirties—gave up their jobs. Finally, last January, a senior FSO, age 59, stepped down.

The five dissenters have different criticisms of the Bush and Clinton administrations' responses to the Bosnia crisis and different views as to what the United States should do about it. But they say unanimously that U.S. inaction has been disastrous and that the rationale behind U.S. policy on Bosnia is bogus. They scoff at warnings by top foreign affairs officials that the United States could be sucked into a fierce, multilateral civil war if it intervenes, and they believe the ghost of Vietnam, which haunts this discussion, teaches entirely the wrong lessons.

Samuel Lewis, who served until last February as director of State's Office of Policy Planning, concurs with these views about the Pentagon's reluctance to get involved. He recalls that throughout 1993 the Joint Chiefs presented very large and "pessimistic" force estimates for any engagement in Bosnia. Kenney, who lectures at military institutions, says the armed forces have so overlearned the Vietnam lesson that even young officers who never experienced that war seem to talk of nothing else.

Limited use of force could have been ef-

fective from the beginning of Serbia's attacks, say all the dissidents, and would not have led us into a Vietnam-style quagmire. The real issue, they maintain, is not civil war but Serbian aggression, which can be checked with modulated force, principally air power.

Some applaud NATO's new willingness to use its muscle, but lament that it took two years of death and destruction to bring it about. They also believe that the current border proposals constitute the best solution available now, even though they leave Serbia with territory gained by violence. Others angrily reject that view. One of the resignees, Stephen Walker, for example, says the United States is exerting unfair pressure on the Bosnian government to accept a partition plan. He says that had he not already resigned, he would do so now.

## Motivations

Kenney, acting Yugoslavia desk officer at the time he resigned, says the atrocities in Bosnia constituted only about half of his motivation. He takes a largely geopolitical view of the crisis and wanted to protest a policy that he believes has lessened American influence in Europe, weakened European security, harmed the West's relations with Muslims and encouraged aggressive Russian nationalism. "I was not only watching a policy failure, I was a part of it," he says.

The other resignees display more emotion in discussing their reasons for quitting. Walker, former Croatia desk officer, says of his August 1993 resignation: "I couldn't do my job anymore." He feels the United States was "complicit in genocide" in agreeing to the U.N.-imposed arms embargo, which mainly hampered the more lightly armed Bosnian Muslims. In addition, he feels the United States not only pressured Bosnia's Muslims to accept a solution that rewarded Serbian aggression but stood ready to help enforce that solution with 25,000 American troops. "I couldn't be a part of that," he says. "My frustration and anger were overwhelming."

The other two who resigned last August were Jon Western, an analyst for the Bureau

of Intelligence and Research, and Marshall Harris, a political officer on the Bosnia desk and the only one of the younger group to have served in Yugoslavia. (He spent four months in Macedonia.) They too speak of revulsion at a policy that they think ratified Serbian territorial gains won through violence, including "ethnic cleansing."

The fifth dissenter, Warren Zimmerman, had somewhat different reasons for leaving his job. In 1992, the State Department, to protest Serbian aggression, had recalled him from his post as ambassador to Yugoslavia, which by then had all but disintegrated.

Back in Washington, Zimmerman served as director of the Office of Refugee Programs, which now is slated for elevation to bureau status. It will be known as the Bureau of Population and Refugee Migration Affairs and will be headed by an assistant secretary. Zimmerman wanted the new job, was highly qualified for it and was recommended for it by Secretary of State Warren Christopher. But the White House has reserved the job for a woman and/or a member of a minority group. So Zimmerman resigned in January with mixed motives, disgruntled with both personnel and Bosnia policies.

Since the summer of 1992, Zimmerman has opposed U.S. unwillingness to use force in the former Yugoslavia to check Serbian and Croatian aggression against Bosnia's Muslims. Although he is against arming the Muslims, he thinks the international community should use force, if necessary, to supply and protect them. Having spent a total of six years in Yugoslavia throughout his career, Zimmerman became increasingly frustrated in Washington because he no longer had a say in Balkans policy.

Policy making for the Balkans region is now handled by a very small group of top officials. According to Lewis, it became more highly restricted last year following a leak regarding Bosnia that infuriated the White House. Policy now is formulated almost exclusively by Secretary Christopher and his politically appointed aides, including Stephen A. Oxman, assistant secretary for European affairs. Career officials below the

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assistant secretary level—the “journeymen,” as Lewis calls them, who know most about the situation—have been cut out, causing frustration and bitterness. Lewis says this is a common pattern during crises.

### Resigned

Multiple, angry, public resignations are new to the government's oldest department, reflecting new trends not only in that elite subculture but in American life generally. Kenney, a second-generation Foreign Service officer, says he had not necessarily viewed the Foreign Service as a permanent career and never felt the same commitment to it as did his father, a 35-year FSO who disagreed with his son's decision to resign.

All of the younger dissenters expressed views similar to Kenney's. Although Walker left with strong regrets, even he says he did not feel the sense of vocation that characterized earlier generations. FSOs, part of a highly disciplined and elite corps, traditionally have believed that one should serve for life, representing all administration policies loyally and well, and that FSOs who find they cannot do so should leave quietly—as many did during the tormented period of the Vietnam War.

Most FSOs are too disciplined, “too ready to be quiet,” says Lewis, who himself had a Foreign Service career. Kenney agrees, arguing that senior FSOs should long have been criticizing the government's Balkans policy, as many younger officers were trying to do. “But by the time you get into the Senior Foreign Service,” he says, “you have been so thoroughly trained to do exactly what you're told that the notion of challenging your political superiors just doesn't come up.”

Even less likely to come up is the notion of going to the press with one's complaints. State's career employees, especially FSOs, are very much part of a silent service. They have traditionally considered going public with opposing views, even upon resigning, to be a breach of etiquette, if not of trust.

Why then did five employees resign in a blaze of publicity that they themselves generated to a great extent? (Some of them sent their letters of resignation to the press at the same time they sent them to the Secretary of State, and all of them have taken part in media interviews.) F.A. “Tex” Harris, a senior FSO, believes the enormous prominence of the media in American life has made the difference. Harris, currently president of the influential American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), which represents present and former Foreign Service

employees, says “dissent now has a new dimension. Before, we saw dissent as something internal with a minimum spillover. Today, external dissent is the big play, and internal dissent is the minor play.” The threat of officials jumping ship, going public and swaying opinion on major issues has become a new force with which State's top policy makers must contend.

### Institutionalized Dissent

The State Department has tried since the 1970s to provide an institutional means for employees, especially in the lower and middle ranks, to challenge policies. The principal method, the “dissent channel,” permits

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employees anywhere in the world to send messages disagreeing with government policies directly to the top officers in the department, including the Secretary. No clearances are required, and no supervisor can interfere with the transmission of these messages. Rosemary O'Neill, who oversees the “channel,” considers it a model system.

Others disagree. Senior officers, including Zimmerman and AFSA's Harris, believe the dissent channel has little, if any, effect on policy. Kenney puts it more strongly. “The thing is moribund. It has zero effect,” he says. Of the five Bosnia dissenters, only Harris ever tried the channel—although Western used it in announcing his resignation, hardly what the department had in mind when it created the channel.

Harris says he used every means available to express his opposition and admits that he “was heard, but not necessarily listened to.” Like the others, he resigned not because the government silenced him, but because it persisted in a policy to which he had “an overwhelming moral aversion.”

Some officers maintain that supervisors privately discourage using the dissent chan-

nel, saying it can damage an employee's career. Furthermore, the Bureau of Intelligence and Research, where Western worked, reportedly tells its officers that expressing dissent can compromise the bureau as a source of disinterested analysis. Even O'Neill stresses that writers must take great care in crafting dissent messages because they go directly to the department's top leadership. Consequently, only about 12 messages are sent through the dissent channel in an average year.

### Why Bosnia?

The State Department's report to Congress on human rights for 1993, says, “In Bosnia, Sudan, Burundi, Somalia, Angola, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Georgia and elsewhere, armed conflict led to massive numbers of civilian deaths, refugee flows and human rights abuses.” Amnesty International's latest report, reviewing 1992, says, “In countries such as Chad, China, Iraq, Liberia, Peru and Sri Lanka, human rights violations and abuses continued at horrifying levels,” although they “barely made the news.”

Nor did they cause gifted State Department officers to quit their jobs.

Bosnia's special impact undoubtedly stems in part from the massive flow of information about the crisis there. It comes not only from the media, but from many other sources, whose reports, often consisting of detailed accounts of grotesque atrocities, pour into the State Department. They originate with American officials, military officers serving with U.N. forces, and organizations that deal with refugees flooding into other parts of Europe, to name just a few. No comparable glut of information comes from Chad, Sudan or Sri Lanka.

Another factor is “the Eurocentric nature of our culture,” says Lewis—an assessment the dissenters and other officials almost invariably second. “Although it is not politically correct to point it out, perhaps,” Kenney says, “Europe is going to matter more to most Americans than will sub-Saharan Africa, or South Asia, or other parts of the world.” He considers that not only natural but morally defensible and says, “We tend to be more interested in areas that mainly gave rise to our culture.” He and others emphasize also that events in Bosnia have serious strategic implications and that Serbian aggression could be seen by Russian nationalists as a model.

Walker, however, ascribes a different reason for U.S. concern than Bosnia's European location: outrage at a U.S. policy that involves us in the conflict in Serbia's favor.

## Dissenters' Profiles

By almost any standard, the "Bosnia Five" are privileged, which makes protest resignations, if not easy, at least feasible. Kenney, 36 when he resigned, is the eldest of the four middle-grade officers. The two youngest, Western and Walker, were just 30 when they quit last August. Typical of young State Department officers, all are bright, articulate white males, educated in the nation's best universities, and all have done some graduate work.

With the exception of Zimmerman, who spent just six months in the Army, none of the dissenters has served in the military—something those who disagree with them are quick to point out.

The changing status of minorities and women affected most of the resignees, though in different ways. Zimmerman resigned in part because the job he wanted was reserved for a woman and/or a minority. On the other hand, Harris, Walker and Western all have working wives—one of them a physician—whose incomes eased the transition into new lifestyles. Zimmerman is the only one of the resignees who has children, and they are grown. He collects a comfortable government pension after 33 years of service. As some observers have pointed out, resignation would probably have been out of the question if the dissenters had been in their forties, when new work can be hard to find, mortgages are unpaid and children are headed for college.

Although he announced his resignation in January, Zimmerman left his State Department job only in March, with an agreement in hand to become a senior fellow at the Rand Corp. Western has returned to graduate study, working for a doctorate in political science at Columbia University and planning an academic career. Kenney, whose resignation immediately made him something of a celebrity, literally lives by his wits. The astonishing number of op-ed pieces he writes and speeches he gives about Balkans policy produce an income almost equal to his State Department salary, he says. The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace gives him office space but no stipend.

Harris's and Walker's new careers show how the various strands of Washington life interweave as intricately as Celtic tracery.

Harris lined up a job with Rep. Frank McCloskey, D-Ind., before he resigned, then became executive director of the Action Council for Peace in the Balkans, a group McCloskey helped establish. The council, which consists of more than 25 prominent Americans from many walks of life, gets

much support from financier George Soros, whose foundation undertakes philanthropic projects in Eastern Europe. The Wexler Group, a major Washington public relations and lobbying firm of which Soros is a client, also helped put the Action Council on its feet and then signed it up as a client.

Walker searched for work for several months, then started the American Committee to Save Bosnia, an umbrella organization

for nationwide grass-roots groups. It too got help from Soros and the Wexler Group and became a Wexler client. It shares offices and a small staff in downtown Washington with Harris' Action Council, of which Walker is an officer. They are in the same building, in fact, as the Wexler Group.

While Western has moved on, the others will continue strenuous efforts to re-shape U.S. policy in the Balkans. □

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