

4 pages

U.S. Aide Resigns Over Balkan Policy

Administration's Handling of Civil War Decried as 'Ineffective'

Sun 8/26/92

By Don Oberdorfer
Washington Post Staff Writer

The State Department official who was in charge of managing day-to-day U.S. policy toward the Balkans resigned from the Foreign Service yesterday to protest what he called the Bush administration's "ineffective" and "counterproductive" handling of the devastating Yugoslav civil war and to speak out for change.

George D. Kenney, 35, who had

been deputy chief of Yugoslav affairs since Jan. 31 and acting chief for the past month, said in an interview that U.S. policy has failed to deal with the growing crisis in the Balkans because "the administration at high levels in the State Department and White House doesn't really want to get involved." Senior career officers, he added, "have chosen to take the safest course" by not challenging their superiors.

Kenney, who vacated his office Sunday and submitted a letter of

resignation yesterday, charged that the current international conference in London called to consider how to bring about a negotiated solution among the former Yugoslav republics is "a charade" whose outcome is known in advance.

He said the conference, sponsored by the European Community and the United Nations and attended by Acting Secretary of State Lawrence S. Eagleburger, is doomed to failure in the absence of "very strong pressures, including military pressures, against Serbia

See RESIGN, A16, Col. 1



GEORGE D. KENNEY
... Yugoslav conference is "a charade"

■ Lord Carrington bows out as the Yugoslav peace mediator. Page A20

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RESIGN, From A1

to stop its campaign of genocide in Bosnia." But the Bush administration is unwilling to consider applying such pressure, Kenney said, because of fear of public blame if it does not succeed.

Rather than realistically attempt to diminish or stop the killing, according to Kenney, U.S. policy is to continue to advocate "ideal political solutions" such as Serb withdrawal from Bosnia, while knowing current policies cannot bring this about.

State Department spokesman Joseph Snyder had no comment yesterday on Kenney's resignation. The administration has defended its policies as part of a serious international effort to deal with a complex conflict arising from age-old animosities without embroiling the United States in a new Vietnam-like quagmire.

Kenney, who wrote the first drafts of many of the State Department's public statements on the Balkans in the past six months, said strong language and graphic reports of suffering in Bosnia were often deleted or watered down by mid-level officials seeking to minimize the pressure for U.S. intervention.

On several occasions, however, former State Department spokesman Margaret Tutwiler restored some of the material that had been omitted by other officials, Kenney said. Kenney described Tutwiler, a veteran Republican political operative who was gripped this spring by the human tragedy in the Balkans, as "in reality, a bleeding-heart liberal who hated scenes of

Among his satisfying moments on the Yugoslav desk, Kenney said, was his role in introducing the term "ethnic cleansing" into the international lexicon after spotting it in a cable from the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade. He said he placed it in the draft of "guidance," the policy-approved material that the State Department spokesman uses as the basis for public statements. Tutwiler used it for the first time at a briefing on May 14.

Kenney was less successful in arguing within the State Department that Serb actions in Bosnia should be called "genocide." He said ongoing discussions over whether to use the phrase involve State Department lawyers because of the potential ap-

plication of the Genocide Convention, which calls on all signatories, including the United States, to prevent and punish such conduct.

Among his greatest frustrations, Kenney said, was his inability to persuade State Department officials to investigate vigorously charges that Serbs are guilty of systematic and well-organized "cleansing" of Muslim and Croat residents of Serb-occupied Bosnia.

After receiving a copy of a July 21 Newsday report of forced deportation of thousands of unarmed civilians in sealed freight trains, Kenney said, he delivered copies of the report to key offices within the State Department and proposed organizing teams of volunteer U.S. diplomats

with local language skills to interview refugees, much as journalists had been doing.

"People seemed to like the idea but nobody did anything" except to ask neighboring countries to include some questions about abuses in routine questioning of refugees from Bosnia, said Kenney. He said the administration was telling the truth in maintaining recently it had no confirmation of Serb-run "death camps" in Bosnia, but it had not been trying very hard to obtain such confirmation.

The absence of urgency on this issue is "symptomatic of how the administration deals with information that it doesn't want to have," he said.

Another major frustration, Kenney

said, was his inability to persuade the State Department to begin major steps to prevent a catastrophe this winter, when thousands of Bosnians may die for lack of food. Only "limited amounts of planning" are going on now, according to Kenney. "I don't know how you can just sit back and watch," he said.

"I came to feel it was very unlikely that I could contribute very much within the State Department ... [and that] the right thing to do was to leave the administration and speak out publicly to help focus attention on the great urgency and seriousness of the crisis," said Kenney in explaining his decision to resign.

Kenney said he had been considering resigning for several weeks and last weekend, in a quiet moment, "I realized that if I didn't leave, I wouldn't live up to my own standards." He went to his State Depart-

ment office for the last time on Sunday, cleared off his desk and took away his mementos—a Persian rug, an oil painting of an Indian scout on a horse and an African mask from Zaire.

He left a note for his superior officer saying that he was resigning, but without giving a reason. Yesterday morning, he said, he gave a State Department personnel official a brief resignation letter addressed to Eagleburger.

"I can no longer in clear conscience support the administration's ineffective, indeed, counterproductive handling of the Yugoslav crisis. I am, therefore, resigning in order to help develop a stronger public consensus that the United States and the West must act immediately to stop the genocide in Bosnia and prevent this conflict from spreading throughout the Balkans," Kenney wrote.

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Tutwiler became a major force pushing the State Department and her mentor, then-Secretary of State James A. Baker III, to engage U.S. policy in the Balkans, if only on an episodic basis, according to Kenney.

But in formulating U.S. positions, Kenney said, "I saw mostly reams of paper being churned out, policy incrementally being made on the fly and sometimes bursts of activity responding to the statements of Baker."

The U.S. approach to the violent breakup of the old Yugoslav federation has alternated between episodes of intense activity and long periods when the administration appeared to defer to the European Community and the United Nations.

Baker initially appealed last year to the disparate elements of the former Yugoslavia not to end their federation and, when that failed, encouraged the European Community to take the lead in resolving the crisis. After the Europeans proved unable to act effectively, Baker in May denounced the "humanitarian nightmare" in Bosnia and initiated a drive for U.N. sanctions against Serbia.

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Baker was for the most part "an invisible ghost" to lower-ranking State Department officials involved in policy discussions about the Balkans, Kenney said.

Eagleburger, who is considered a Yugoslav expert in view of his seven years in Belgrade as a Foreign Service officer and U.S. ambassador, was more in evidence as a policymaker. "His basic attitude was a pox on all their houses. He feels we should wait until they exhaust themselves [from fighting] and then move in," said Kenney.

Tutwiler's departure on vacation earlier this month and her recent transfer to the White House with Baker has put State's public pronouncements back in the hands of career officials. Since Tutwiler's departure, State has "become extremely cautious in news briefings in talking about the depth of the problem" in the Balkans, said Kenney.

Stronger statements "would prompt questions about what the United States is doing," Kenney said. "They don't want to have to answer those questions."

Kenney, the son of a career Foreign Service officer, joined the State Department in April 1988 and served as a consular officer in France, an economics officer at State and an economics officer in Zaire before joining the Yugoslav desk this January. He said he got the Yugoslav desk position largely through chance and without prior experience in the Balkans, but said that daily telephone discussions with the U.S. Embassy in Belgrade and the U.S. Consulate in Zagreb quickly made him feel a deep personal stake in the conflict.

A State Department official familiar with Kenney's work called him a hard worker who became emotionally involved in the issues of the Balkans and frustrated by the seeming lack of serious action while people are being killed.