

A Sense of Resignation: The Bosnia Dissenters

Three Young Men Cut Short Their Careers on Principle

By Laura Blumenfeld
Washington Post Staff Writer

They're blue-blazer guys, who manage to come back from Florida pale, who lived a floor below you in college but you never noticed. Even their names sound ordinary: Marshall Harris, Jon Western, Stephen Walker. "Works well with others."

We never should have heard of them. They were mid-level bureaucrats, dots in the State Department matrix. But they've gone and done something extraordinary in Washington: They quit their jobs on moral grounds.

They are protesting U.S. policy in Bosnia and have created the most public dissent in the department since the Vietnam War. Men schooled to analyze and keep their opinions quiet are clanging frying pans. They have demanded intensified diplomatic efforts, an end to the arms embargo against Bosnian Muslims, a decision to bomb the mean out of the Serbs.

They were three fine young specimens with promising futures in senior slots, until they opened up their mouths and cried "principles."

What happened?

Now that you're here, he'll click off U2's "Zooropa." Otherwise the stereo must play, constant thumps, drumming out the lurid noise in his head.

He hadn't been into music. This year, though, Jon Western slipped out every day at lunch, clamped on headphones at Tower Records and dissolved some pain. He didn't use to have trouble sleeping. But this year, nights, he kept his eyes open.

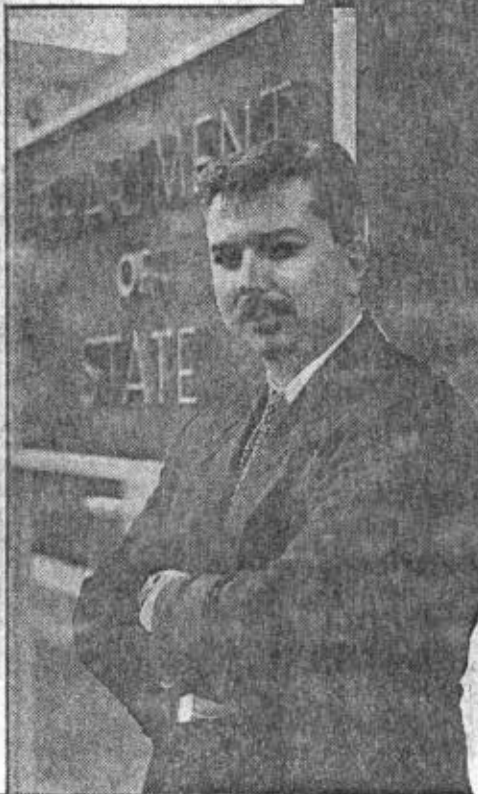
"You close your eyes and get holograms of the carnage in your mind," Western says.

The 30-year-old's task at State was to compile reports on the atrocities, sift through thousands of documents, examine photos, screen videos of "human beings who look like they've been through meat grinders."

Western's job as an intelligence analyst was to look for patterns in Serb behavior toward Bosnian Muslims. He found one, he says: "Genocide."

His voice is taut, as if he were gripping each word too tightly in his throat. He has

See BOSNIA, F8, Col. 1



PHOTOS BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Marshall Harris, above, and Stephen Walker, left, resigned their State Department jobs in protest over U.S. policy toward Bosnia. "What we were doing was not only wrong," says Harris. "It was something I couldn't participate in."

King Stand

BOSNIA, From F1

hair, and a soft, fair face that in boyish if it weren't so seri-

is twisting his fingers in the palm of a rented home in Arlington. Around him, boxes clutter the room. A wine rack is empty, the pictures bare, as he packs up to leave. This fall he'll start a PhD in political science at Columbia University. He and his wife, Jennifer, are bringing the money they'd saved from their house into \$17,000-a-year tuition choice, he believes.

He and I decided if I stayed here for her year . . . Western can't finish the sentence. So he blinks blue eyes that have become so much lately, and flushes. He grew up in North Dakota, surrounded by ICBMs, wondering why about international affairs. He left government jobs, State as an intelligence analyst. He says the job I've always dreamed of, a journal entry on his first day, 1990.

He first began investigating the accusations against Serbs, no doubts.

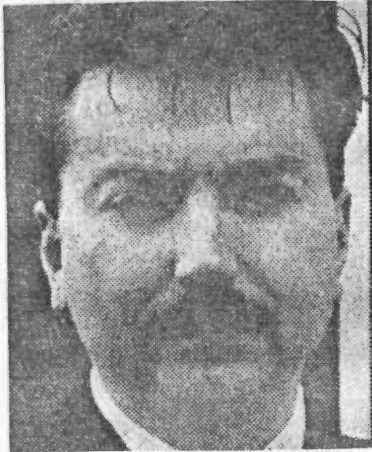
He is taught to be objective," says. "You're trained not to everything you hear."

The evidence piled up, he says, filtered through reports, often until: There were the Serbs who Muslim prisoners to carve on each other's skulls; the press raped in front of their par-65-year-old Muslim man and 17-year-old son forced at gunpoint castrate each other. The son The father took a bullet in

"It's a civil war," Western con- tains. It's the systematic slaughter

and reread the 1948 U.N. Convention for the Prevention of Genocide, and decided that what they were doing fit the definition. He

Bill Clinton, hoping the candidate would live up to his pledge for a stance against the Serbs. He pointed



PHOTOS BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

Stephen Walker, left, and Marshall Harris both say that leaving their State Department jobs was due to U.S. policy on Bosnia.

His hands might be trembling a little and his eyes might be fixed on the office table, but this backroom boy is stepping out.

"I resigned on principle," says Marshall Freeman Harris, 32, formerly a leading Bosnia monitor on the department's Yugoslavia desk.

Harris is sitting in the office of his new boss, Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.), perched on the same black leather chair McCloskey sat in earlier this month when Harris asked him for a job. The congressman is a critic of Clinton's Bosnia policy. Harris now works in a similar cubbyhole and manic atmosphere as he had at State. But here the ceilings are higher, and so are his spirits.

"What we were doing was not only wrong," says Harris. "It was something I couldn't participate in."

He wears sober ties. He has an unrehearsed smile and a brown tangle of hair, lacking any apparent shape or vanity. He reads Australian poetry anthologies for fun and keeps a slight crease between his brows when he speaks, as if he were simultaneously calculating mileage between foreign capitals.

"We would write stuff we knew bears no relation to what's happening," he says. "We'd say the Serbs will negotiate in good faith when we knew they were on a rampage. We'd look at the policy points and burst out laughing. And ultimately you wanted to cry."

Humor helped Harris and his office mates cope. When the cable traffic got heavy, they called it "a bad hair day." Although he never talked openly about resigning, Harris did meet with Western and others at lunch to debate possible courses of action.

of World War II. After work, after 13-hour days of Bosnia grief, he would crawl into bed, flick on a lamp and read "The Rise & Fall of The Third Reich" or a biography of Ribbentrop, Hitler's foreign minister.

"There are bone-chilling parallels," says Harris. "I was like, here we go again. There's genocide taking place and we have an obligation to prevent it."

Finally, a friend hooked him up with Rep. McCloskey, who offered him the foreign policy adviser position for roughly the same salary. Two days later, he left State, after eight years in the Foreign Service, including postings to Macedonia, Bulgaria and England.

The night before he resigned, Harris called his father to break the news. His father winced. Quit? Are you sure?

"I said, I'm sure," Harris recalls, by now master of the black leather chair. The tremble has left his hand and his eyes have let go of the office table. "I said, I'm doing the right thing."

The sound technician loops a mike under his arm and clips it to his tie.

"Hey!" says Stephen Walker. Before his resignation Monday, Walker, 30, hadn't been on television since he was 6 years old, jollicking on a Boston show called "The Boomtown Kids."

"I was the sheriff once," Walker says, in a reference that seems to escape NBC's State Department correspondent, John Dancy.

The men are seated under a fir tree on the front lawn of the NBC bureau, in the crossbeams of lights and cameras. Walker has just pulled up in an NBC courier car. It's melting hot out. Someone brings him a Diet Coke. Walker has round cheeks, wide brown eyes with thick lashes, and a mustache combed with gold. He looks like a friendly forest animal.

McCurry acknowledges that within State, "there's a lot of frustration, people here saying, we wish there was more we could do." But, McCurry says, "you talk to your relatives, I talk to mine, and they think [Bosnia] is a horrible problem, but they don't think we should be getting in the middle."

Walker asks: How can we not?

"We came out of the '80s thinking our generation was driven by ambition and money," he says. "This shows we haven't lost our principles."

Walker had taped a fictitious newspaper article to his desk at State, headlined "Hitler Agrees to Negotiate With the Jews," drawing ironic parallels with the Serb-Muslim talks. He confided in the guys who already had resigned. The Foreign Service is the only job he has known since college. He agonized constantly—while he was shaving, staring at his newspaper, walking the Mall and bumping into Jon Western on his way back from Tower Records—over whether to break ties with his "Foreign Service family."

But by last week, Walker had decided he no longer had a choice. "It felt like I was filing for a divorce," he says sadly. When Walker submitted his letter to a senior official, he recalls, the man looked at him aghast and said, "My God. Why are you doing this?"

And almost immediately, there was the Associated Press jangling his phone. "At first I thought, O God—the press—call the public affairs officer," Walker says. "Then I was, no, wait—don't call him—talk to me—it is me."

After eight years of indoctrination on avoiding journalists, of security clearances and classified documents, of institutional lockjaw, Walker felt jittered by reporters. During the first few interviews, he clutched his resignation letter to keep his thoughts clear. But by the time the BBC rang at 11 p.m. and he had spoken to all the majors, he was fine.

"Connie Chung saying my name on the news," Walker says. "That's a thrill."

He's moving up to Stamford, Conn., where Marissa, his commuter wife, has her podiatry practice. Monday, he'll print out résumés and start looking for a new job. No offers so far. They're going to have to cut back on luxuries. They have already agreed to give up their favorite, Ben & Jerry's Chocolate Chip Cookie Dough ice cream.

More sacrifices lie ahead, some anticipated and others they haven't even begun to imagine. But this evening Walker feels the rush of speaking his principles, and an NBC courier car is waiting to take him home.

started pacing at night. He'd run his daily five miles and buy new pants a couple of sizes smaller. He trudged from the Metro building in the evening, bitter, muttering. When he got home he agitated over it and ended to his wife of four years. They were watching renting drama videos, only one dies. They declared "no-Bosnia" and would go out, but all it took was a radio headline on Sarajevo to fill the room with gloom. At a wedding, he was talking about the Detroit Tigers and some friends when one asked, "How's your job. Western went off to the children being shot and tortured."

"I got really quiet," he says. "The day he came back broke on July 21, when the secretary of State Warren Christopher told the United States was doing all it could in the Balkans. From that day on, I began leaving the office by 5:30. I was done," he says. "I was baserated."

"I had yet another sleepless night, he said in his resignation on Aug. 6, 1995, "I am personally and professionally heartsick by the unwillingness of the United States to make resolution of the conflict in the former Yugoslavia a foreign policy priority." He entered the letter into his daily journal, describing his mood as "thoroughly dejected and depressed."

"The telephone rings. It's Western informs the caller, "The washer is seven months old." He's trying to sell it. Jennifer is going with a friend, so she can't take her job as a legislative aide for Byron Dorgan from North Dakota is their only source of income. Western gave up his \$50,000-a-year salary.

Sunday they will leave the little home, with their plants, cookware and furniture divided. They're trying to figure out what to do with the cat. "Just one more thing to get out about," Western says. The cat has put a lot of strain on his eyes, he says, rubbing his eyes.

Western walks into his study. The bookshelves are empty and his attache case is filled with forms from Columbia University. He's spending life as an academic exploring why states end up like Yugoslavia.

Western is backed against the wall is a plaque in the department—"In Recognition of Extraordinary Analysis." Next to it is a globe.

"I'm old," Western says, rotating it. The finger rests on an orange candle labeled Yugoslavia. "It's back from the world was nice and safe."

In the spring, he and 11 other Foreign Service officers sent a letter to Christopher, demanding U.S. intervention. When Harris resigned Aug. 4, State Department officials said he was frustrated at being left out of the policy process. Christopher himself called it the act of a "young officer."

"Christopher may be 67, but he can make mistakes, and he is dead wrong on this issue," Harris says. "I have the courage of my convictions."

He also has the support of hundreds of other officers who disagree with U.S. policy, Harris says. The system at State breeds caution over independent thought, its critics say. There's a culture of expedience and euphemism. And if your views vary with U.S. policy, you're still bound to go out and faithfully defend it.

Yet dissent on Bosnia is wide open, Harris says—walk the halls and listen. Within hours of his resignation, colleagues flooded him with calls and notes saying well done, he says. Older members have been less willing to go public, Harris says, because they have become more insular in their relationships, have more seniority at stake and carry greater financial responsibilities.

Harris had his own domestic pressures. By June he was ready to check out, but his wife, an engineer who grew up in London, liked the Foreign Service lifestyle. She urged him not to quit until he had another job. His father owns a timber company in Virginia; neighbors joked that the poetry aficionado could always make a living chopping down trees. He flip-flopped: Should he, could he, resign?

Meanwhile, he compounded his misery by immersing himself in histories

"Fascinating, dealing with all the attention," says Walker, a Croatia specialist. "It's heartening to know there's interest."

George Kenney, the former desk officer for Yugoslav affairs—the first to leave State in protest last August—arrives for the joint interview. Dancy claps his hands and calls, "Rolling!"

Several questions and several bobs of Walker's Adam's apple later, Walker states, "There's no reason to think the administration is going to follow through on its commitment—"

Cut. "Could everybody just blot for a minute?" a technician asks, and out fly the handkerchiefs. "We're trying to cut the shine."

All week, the State Department dissenters have danced the media polka. Far from spotlight-chasers, they felt their resignations would effect change to the extent it raised public awareness. This administration, more than past ones, bases policy on public opinion, they say.

Department spokesman Michael

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State Dept. Balkan Aides Explain Why They Quit

By STEVEN A. HOLMES
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Aug. 25 — It was the kind of gut-wrenching cable that came across Jon Western's State Department desk every day for virtually a whole year: a 9-year-old Muslim girl raped by Serbian fighters, then left in a pool of blood while her parents watched helplessly from behind a fence for two days before she died.

It was the kind of cable that led Mr. Western earlier this month to quit his job as an Eastern Europe analyst out of frustration with what he considered America's lack of resolve in solving the Bosnian crisis.

"The whole thing has been very demoralizing and very depressing," said Mr. Western, a soft-spoken man whose boyish features belie his age of 30. "I found myself walking home every night just angry and bitter. My wife could tell you of my large mood swings. You can't read through the accounts of atrocities on a daily basis, add them up and see what's happening and not be overwhelmed. It calls into question your morality."

Mr. Western is one of four mid-level staff members who have quit the State Department in the past year to protest United States policy towards the conflict in the former Yugoslavia, saying they could no longer countenance a policy they feel rewards Serbian aggression.

Malaise Over the Balkans

The four said in interviews today that their actions were symbolic of a larger malaise within the State Department over America's policy on the Balkans.

"The dissent is not confined to the European bureau," said Mr. Western. "I've covered or been associated with the Yugoslav issue since the outbreak of hostilities. In my time, I have met one, possibly two people, in the department below the level of assistant secretary who believe in the policy."

Stephen Walker, the Croatian desk officer who resigned this week, also

said that anger with the policy towards Bosnia runs deep within the State Department. After word swept the building that he too was quitting in protest, Mr. Walker said he was approached by numerous colleagues "who said they agreed with my frustrations with the policy."

Three of the dissidents — Mr. Western, Mr. Walker, and George Kenney, who quit last year — spoke in a joint interview today about their experiences at the State Department and about why they oppose current American policy towards Bosnia. A fourth, Marshall Harris, a one-time leader of the dissidents at the State Department, could not attend the group session, but was interviewed later by telephone.

'A Certain Luxury'

The three who quit recently said they feel that others would resign if they were not encumbered by family responsibilities. "The four of us are young," said Mr. Western. "That affords a certain luxury of being able to make the jump. We don't have all the commitments and responsibilities to family. We're not 20 years into a career."

"We don't have kids going off to college," said Mr. Walker, 30.

State Department officials reacted testily when Mr. Harris quit, the first of the most recent spate of resignations. Some officials emphasized Mr. Harris' youth and low ranking in the department and suggested that he was quitting because he was not involved more in policy making. Such comments caused anger within the State Department and after the resignations of Mr. Western and Mr. Walker, State Department officials have gone out of their way to say that resignation is an honorable form of protest.

Dissent within the Government's foreign policy apparatus over high-profile and contentious issues is nothing new, and neither are such resignations. Cyrus R. Vance quit as Secretary of State



Paul Hirschman/The New York Times

In the past year, four mid-level State Department officials have resigned, saying they could not countenance a policy they feel rewards Serbian aggression. Three of the four dissidents were interviewed in Washington. From left were George Kenney, Jon Western, and Stephen Walker.

in 1980 to show his disagreement over President Carter's decision to attempt to rescue American hostages in Iran. Tony Lake, the present National Security Advisor, was one of 10 National Security Council staff members who resigned in 1969 and 1970 over the Vietnam War.

But, virtually everyone at the State Department agrees that there has not been such public protests by those given the task of carrying out a policy since the height of the Vietnam War.

Administration Criticized

"This Administration has used and manipulated the media and public opinion on Bosnia," Mr. Harris said, "and so we should not hesitate to do protest so publicly and make our views heard."

Ironically, the resignations come at a time when even they admit that the State Department under Mr. Christopher has become more open in allowing staff members to express dissenting views than during the tenure of former Secretary of State James A. Baker 3rd, who virtually cut out the Department's career professionals from policy mak-

ing. But the three who just quit say that while they and others in the State Department who agree with them can express dissatisfaction internally, there seems to be little change in the policy.

"My problems were not with the process, or the access," Mr. Walker said. "I felt that from my position I had sufficient opportunity to voice my opinions, my frustrations; that the Department has tried to give opportunities to the professionals to bring up other options. But despite these opportunities that people have had, it's had little or no effect on policy. And that, I think, has increased the level of frustration within the Department."

The dissidents cited a news conference given by Mr. Christopher on July 21 as the low point. While Serbian forces were intensifying their siege of

Sarajevo, the Secretary of State told reporters that the United States was doing all that it could consistent with its national interest.

The next day, Mr. Walker said, Serbian forces lobbed more than 3,700 artillery shells into the capital city. "The signal sent to the Serbs was we're doing everything we can, go ahead, have a good time," Mr. Walker said.

Mr. Kenney was the only one to provide a specific alternative to current policy.

"We should have a clearly stated goal of getting rid of the Serbian government," he said. "Just putting an economic embargo and sanctions on them is not going to do enough. We ought to close our embassy in Belgrade. Cut diplomatic ties. Throw them definitely out of the U.N. Have Radio

Free Europe broadcast into Serbia, telling the Serbian people, that, hey, you've got a lousy government, and until you change it, you're going to suffer."

There were differences in what appeared to be important about American policy towards Bosnia. Mr. Walker spoke often in broad policy terms, saying the Administration's inaction would harm American credibility, undermine United Nations peacekeeping efforts, and lead to a peace settlement that would not hold. He said it would also set a dangerous precedent for the oppression of ethnic minorities elsewhere in the world.

"No matter how you look at it, the policy as it stands right now is wrong," he said. "That's why dissent and frustration is so widespread and consistent."

Third State Dept. Aide Quits Over Balkans

WALKER, From A1

mental U.S. foreign policy principles by failing to act.

Current U.S. support for Bosnian peace talks being held in Geneva, Walker, 30, said in an interview, "puts a gun at the head of the Bosnian government and tells it: 'Sign, or else.'" The talks are aimed at dividing Bosnia-Herzegovina among the Muslim, Serb and Croat populations, forming three loosely linked republics. The Muslim-led Bosnian government regards the arrangement as forced dismemberment and a reward for Serb aggression.

Rarely has the State Department experienced such open displays of dissent. Even during the tumultuous Vietnam War era, much greater numbers of protest resignations—including that of Anthony Lake, now President Clinton's national security adviser—were handled with relative discretion. Part of the difference apparently is the vast opportunities for publicly voicing dissent in the electronic age, as well as resentment at the administration's success in putting its own spin on the stakes in Bosnia.

"This generation sees that television and the media play a more important role. The administration has hidden behind public opinion, saying no one will support action [against the Serbs]. I hoped my resignation would have some effect," said Marshall Freeman Harris, 32, who quit as Bosnian desk officer Aug. 4 and now works for Rep. Frank McCloskey (D-Ind.).

Jon Western, 30, who left his job compiling evidence of war crimes for the department's Intelligence and Research Bureau in early August, cited what he said amounted to Washington's countenance of "systematic rape, systematic torture, instances where Serbs have raped [Muslim] preteens in front of parents and left them to wallow in blood and die over the course of days. These are the kind of things with which we, collectively, were aware of on a daily basis."

"It's a very tragic commentary that at the end of the 20th century, we are not able to respond to genocide," Western said yesterday.

The dissidents also believe that acceptance of the alteration of Bosnia's borders by force puts the underpinnings of global peace at risk. If Bosnia cannot be salvaged, they have asked, how can the West respond effectively to potentially explosive ethnic-border conflicts in the former Soviet Union and elsewhere?

"The irony is that we are undermining the multilateral system that we are looking at to resolve future problems," said George Kenney, 36, who resigned from his post as deputy chief of Yugoslav affairs last year.

No policy in recent years has so divided the State Department, longtime observers said. In recent weeks, Christopher has tried to keep his policy preferences to

himself, largely out of mistrust that department professionals would leak information to the news media.

Although President George Bush's policy toward the Balkans also drew internal dissent, officials said yesterday that his straightforward rejection of intervention made public gestures seem useless. Clinton's zig-zag approach, seeming to favor intervention but not throwing the full weight of American power and influence behind a program, has repeatedly raised and then dashed hopes.

"Each time we saw signs that he would do more, we would get excited. But eventually, we'd get rebuffed for counseling action," Harris said.

During both the Bush and Clinton administrations, dissenting officials fought rear-guard actions to push for intervention. Kenney recalled preparing press guidance for delivery by then-spokesman Margaret Tutwiler that included the words "ethnic cleansing," words used by the Serbs themselves, but which had not entered the American public lexicon. "We are sometimes reduced to fiddling at the margins," he said.

Once, Christopher changed a request for policy options from an "action" to "discussion" paper so that if leaked, the options could not be described as a call for intervention by State Department officials, Harris said.

The word genocide was not used, despite efforts by desk officers to persuade Christopher to include it in public pronouncements, Harris added. "It's genocide and the secretary of state won't identify it as such. That's where we get beyond the political to the moral. We report on human rights records throughout the world. In Bosnia, there is a most egregious case of abuse, and we don't publicly recognize it," he said.

"The secretary of state has a tremendous resource at his disposal; he can define the issue," added Western, the intelligence analyst, who plans to pursue graduate studies at Columbia University this fall. "We are not talking about civilians caught in crossfire. We are talking about systematic abuse."

The former Foreign Service officers said they regard the Geneva talks as a mere cover for Muslim capitulation, and the threat of U.S. airstrikes against the Serbs insufficient given the issues at hand. Their solutions for Bosnia center on two options that have been discarded by the Clinton administration: insertion of U.S. troops to shore up the resolve of European allies and impress the Serbs that they should back off; and the arming of the Muslims by lifting a United Nations-imposed weapons embargo.

Anything short of that, they said they believe, evades the basic responsibility of preserving Bosnia and stopping ethnic cleansing. "Everything seems geared toward the dismemberment of Bosnia. That's what's focused my mind," Walker said.