

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
AFSA Dissent Series

**JANET BOGUE**

*Interviewed by: Mark Tauber  
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**INTERVIEW**

BOGUE: Mark, you sent me a note saying that the Bosnia dissent was 30 years ago. I'm stunned.

*Q: Yes. I totally understand. To begin, a few background questions. Where were you born and raised?*

BOGUE: I was born in Tacoma, Washington. I was raised in a small town near Tacoma, called Gig Harbor. Before I joined the Foreign Service, I lived in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Alaska.

*Q: During that time, I imagine you pursued various professional activities. Were any of those activities helpful for you later on, when you began dissenting?*

BOGUE: My first thought is to say no. I had been in college and graduate school, and I had worked for a few years. I joined the Foreign Service when I was just turning 27, so I was still fairly young. I didn't have a lot of work or life experience, but I suppose that I, like so many in our generation, was involved -- in a very minor way -- in the nationwide dissent over the Vietnam War.

*Q: In that case, the only other question I want to ask before we move on to the actual dissent is, prior to the Foreign Service, were your pre-Foreign Service professional positions helpful in any way when you joined the Foreign Service? Were there skills and talents you acquired that helped you to carry out your responsibilities in the Foreign Service?*

BOGUE: I had been studying history in graduate school. During my years in the Foreign Service, I often thought that having a background in history may have given me some perspective on events. Syria is on our minds today, and I remember thinking yesterday and the day before, that all the signs were there. The Army was melting away. People in Damascus were pulling down statues, even though the city hadn't fallen. The kinds of things you look for in these circumstances were all happening.

*Q: All right then, let's move on to your first tour related to Serbia. I think that was '83 to '85?*

BOGUE: That's correct. I'd had a short first tour as a consular officer in London and then a year in the Operations Center in Washington. The advice I was getting, formally and informally, was to go to Moscow. But there was an opening in Belgrade, and I jumped at that. My home town, Gig Harbor, was populated by immigrants from the former Yugoslavia. They came from the Dalmatian coast, specifically from Brać, an island that lies across from the city of Split. I had been fascinated by Yugoslavia since I was a kid, and I decided that's where I wanted to go. People at the time told me that it was a backwater. As it turned out, it was really useful to have had that experience of former Yugoslavia and to have the language. You never know. A place is a backwater until it isn't.

*Q: Prior to your departure for what was then Yugoslavia, you were trained in Serbo-Croatian?*

BOGUE: Right. I had six months of Serbo-Croatian at the Foreign Service Institute.

*Q: How comfortable were you in speaking at that point?*

BOGUE: I was not comfortable. Because I wasn't tenured yet, I was just given six months of training, although Slavic languages typically were taught for a full year. I got better when I was at post – or I should say, my fluency improved although my grammar got worse. That isn't uncommon. I really enjoyed learning Serbo-Croatian, because it was so eclectic. Vocabulary came from everywhere: words about artillery from Turkish; about trains from German; about horse gear – bridles, saddles and the like – from Hungarian.

*Q: Take a moment, then, to describe what your responsibilities were, what you learned, and what you didn't learn in those two years. If I'm correct, you were in Belgrade.*

BOGUE: I was in Belgrade. It was my first political-officer assignment and I was the most junior person in the political section. One of the provinces that I covered was Bosnia and Herzegovina, so I spent a lot of time there. I also covered religious issues as a human rights concern.

*Q: But briefly in '85 they were still managing to have the rotating presidency. As you recall, when did that break down?*

BOGUE: Oh my gosh, I'd have to look that up to see when that happened.

*Q: All right, there's an interim period. You leave Belgrade and so briefly, what is then in the interim before you return, or before you return to Serbian and Serbo-Croatian issues.*

BOGUE: I went from Belgrade to Vienna, where I was on the U.S. delegation to the conventional arms control negotiations, which was called first MBFR, and then CFR,

Conventional Forces in Europe. I was there for three years and then I went to Pakistan for two years, where I was the Afghanistan watcher in the political section in Islamabad. At the end of that tour, I returned to Washington to be the desk officer for Yugoslavia. That was still a one-person job, although there were now multiple countries, multiple embassies, and multiple wars.

*Q: This is 1992 when you return.*

BOGUE: Summer of '92.

*Q: Okay. Just a quick question going back to your work on arms control, since those negotiations were essentially between NATO and the Soviet Union, the Warsaw Pact, with Yugoslavia not a part of those talks but I imagine an observer. Did you learn anything more? Was it in any way helpful for what would subsequently come with your knowledge in '92, when you go back to the desk.*

BOGUE: The events in Yugoslavia were heavily covered in the Austrian press, so I kept up that way. There wasn't a direct connection with the arms control talks. Yugoslavia was neither a participant nor an observer at the talks, which were a NATO-Warsaw Pact negotiation.

*Q: How did you decide, or how was it decided that you'd go to what was still the Yugoslav desk?*

BOGUE: I had done three back-to-back overseas assignments, for a total of seven years. It was time for me to go back to Washington, and I wanted to work on Yugoslavia. I had some background, spoke the language, and I cared about the place.

*Q: How large was the desk? How did they divide responsibility at that time?*

BOGUE: The desk was one person large.

Since the end of World War II, Europe had been quite stable. So, the European Bureau at State was not, at that time, quick on its feet in the way that NEA [the Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs] was. In EUR, the attitude was that it had always been a one-person operation, even though the circumstances had changed. Portugal was a two-person desk, and I say this with love for my colleagues who worked on Portugal, but honestly, they didn't have a war going on. They didn't have multiple embassies springing up, and multiple countries springing up.

I was the desk. I was completely overwhelmed by the work that needed to be done, and there wasn't a lot of help getting additional people. I was told to go out and find people to help, and I did. I found people who were on medical hold and people who needed a bridge assignment. We were a wonderfully motley crew. Ultimately, a few additional positions were created. We didn't get any extra physical space, so the bureau brought in children's desks to make room for us. We were all, men and women, too tall for the desks

and had to sit side-saddle to work at our desks because we couldn't get our knees under them. The European Bureau is much better now. I tell this story not to make fun of the Bureau, but to sketch the background for the dissent.

*Q: As you're watching Yugoslavia and so on, what became the key issues for you that began to create in your mind the need for a statement of dissent?*

BOGUE: A number of things coalesced, and I don't think that the Bosnia dissent would have happened, in the way it did, and with the people involved, had not all of these factors come together. We were all exhausted. We didn't have enough resources. We were all frustrated. Truly horrific things were happening in Yugoslavia: the concentration camps; the rape camps; the siege of Sarajevo and other cities, where snipers and shelling were taking a huge toll.

*Q: And just to clarify one second, most of the attacks were Serbian or Serbian-aligned forces against Muslims, and to a lesser extent, Croats.*

BOGUE: People will take issue with that and say there were atrocities on all sides. That's true, but the great majority of the atrocities, including the ethnic cleansing, the rapes, the concentration camps, were carried out by Serbian forces or, more typically, by Bosnian Serb paramilitaries, sponsored by, equipped by, and assisted by Serbian forces. We had not seen these atrocities in Europe since World War II.

American policy was "hands off." This is Europe's problem. Let's let Europe solve this. We don't want to get involved. If we get involved, it'll be another Vietnam. We'll be stuck in the Balkans forever.

Another thing that is important in the story of dissent is that the assessments of the people who were actually working on this basis were not filtering up to policy makers, and indeed, some factual information was not filtering up to the seventh floor, because the people in between us and the seventh floor were rewriting memos to downplay human rights abuses, to downplay the seriousness of the conflict, and to play up the challenges of any sort of involvement in former Yugoslavia. A lot of that was based on their personal views. One of the people in our chain of command had a son who was thinking of joining the army; his father, our boss, said, "My kid is not going to go fight in Bosnia." Some of it was their professional view; whichever it was, it was more and more maddening. It's one thing in the Foreign Service to be heard and told we're going in a different direction. It's another thing to feel that even essential facts are not reaching the policy makers.

*Q: Just to kind of summarize, you were getting information from a variety of sources. The U.S. embassy was still open in Belgrade.*

BOGUE: Yes, and we had an embassy in Zagreb at that point, as well.

*Q: So you were getting information from them on all of the different atrocities, or the effects of the conflict. Were you also getting information from other countries in the area and from the United Nations?*

BOGUE: I would say that at that time, we were probably more of a provider of information to the United Nations than a receiver of information. Our information was coming from a lot of different sources. Our missions were doing—I used this word in my oral history, and I will repeat it now—heroic reporting on these things, in situations that were not easy. We were getting reports from other countries – the French were very helpful, as I remember – as well as from humanitarian organizations that had people on the ground. A huge amount of information we got was from journalists, who would come in and brief us.

I'd like to add another thing that was happening, because I believe it was one of the triggers for the dissent. The Holocaust Museum opened in Washington on April 22, 1993. Our office at the State Department was the Office of Eastern European Affairs, and heads of state or heads of government from Eastern Europe were coming to Washington for the opening of the Holocaust Museum. The office was working madly on that---not me personally, because I was completely occupied with Bosnia. The staff of the Holocaust Museum invited us on a weekend tour of the museum before it opened. When we walked in, what did we see? I'm sure you've been to the museum, but there are glass panels with the names of towns etched in them. So many of them were places where we were seeing ethnic cleansing in Bosnia. It was quite shocking, because in the lead-up to the museum opening, there was a lot of talk from the U.S. government about “never again.” For us, working on the Balkans, “never again” was happening right in front of us, and in the same places.

Here is what had coalesced. One, events on the ground in Bosnia. Two, Bill Clinton had been elected the previous November, running partly on a promise to be much tougher about Bosnia. Then the Clinton Administration came into office and decided not to do anything about it. So there was a revolution of rising expectations on our part. Three, the Holocaust Museum was opening. Four, we were exhausted, frustrated, and anguished all the time. I think that if any one of those factors had been missing, the dissent would not probably have happened the way it did.

*Q: The ultimate form the dissent took was a memo, but it was signed by many other officers, including you. How did all of you become engaged together? How did the dissent bubble up?*

BOGUE: The person who really deserves the credit for launching the dissent is Marshall Harris. I hope that you'll have a chance to interview him if you haven't already. Marshall came to me one day and he said, "Enough. I've had enough. I'm going to send a letter to the Secretary, do you want to join me?" And my immediate reaction was, yes. Of course, I had to see what the letter said before I could sign it, but yes.

Mark, when you sent me an email and asked about strategies for the dissent, it made us sound far more organized than we were. We were working crazy hours. We were exhausted. We did not talk through all the options that might be available. For instance, we did not use the dissent channel. I think that is something we think about overseas rather than in Washington. In addition, we knew we had to do something outside the system. We had to do an end run in order to get this in front of the Secretary without it being watered down. We decided on a letter. We also decided that we would include the people who were working on this all day, every day. But we wouldn't go out and try to collect signatures. Many of us, a little more than half, I think, were in the office of Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia. There was also someone from International Organizations, the bureau that works with the UN, who was specifically working on this issue. There was someone from the Economic Bureau, who was on loan from Treasury to work on sanctions. Twelve of us signed.

One of the people who signed was not in the office that day. I called him, as I didn't want him to be left out. We had classified the letter so I couldn't send it to him or read it to him over the phone. He just said, "If you're happy with the text, I'm happy with the text; go ahead and sign for me."

There was negotiation over the text to find the right balance of moral concerns and U.S. interests – of course, moral concerns can be a U.S. interest. We classified the letter, not because it had classified information in it, but because we wanted it to be, and remain, a private communication to the secretary. To this day, I do not have a copy of it. The best version of it, from my memory, are the parts that were quoted in The New York Times. The New York Times had a copy of it, but I don't.

*Q: A not infrequent problem. So one question before we proceed, how did all 12 become involved? Was the responsibility to contact others given to you, given by Marshall? Or in other words, how did they find out that you were beginning to write something?*

BOGUE: I think that was a little bit haphazard. When Marshall began, it was our group in EUR, and then somebody probably pointed out that another colleague was also on the issue full time and would want a chance to be included. At some point, we called a halt to further expansion. We had also decided it was going upstairs that day and so it had to happen quickly.

We got a lot of calls later, after it was leaked and became known, from people who said they wished they could have signed the letter; again, a petition was not our intent.

The letter was finished late Friday afternoon. I had two close friends in the Secretary's office. One was Beth Jones, who was the Executive Assistant to the Secretary, and one was one of the three staff assistants, a woman named Peggy McGinniss. You know who Beth Jones is, of course. Peggy left the Foreign Service and is now a law professor. I took the letter to Peggy and asked her to get it into the Secretary's hands. She took one look at it and ran down to the garage where the Secretary was getting into a car, gave it to him

through the car window, and said, "I think you need to read this." The Secretary set up a meeting with the 12 of us for the following Monday.

*Q: Wow, that's astonishingly fast for the State Department. Let's step back for a second. You decided on a letter, a confidential letter. You decided against a public letter that would go to a media organization, and you decided against the confidential dissent channel that would typically arrive in the policy planning staff for analysis. Was there any moment where the 12 of you thought to maybe use the opportunity to make this public, or start with the policy planning staff - in other words, from the get-go, you were certain it was going to take that format?*

BOGUE: We didn't discuss that a lot, in my recollection. Again, as I said, I think one of the reasons was that Marshall said he was writing a letter, and we all said, "Okay, let's do it." We knew it couldn't go through the normal paper process. And we were all adamant that it not be a public document.

*Q: So the letter you send to Secretary Christopher provides at least some clear data on what's going on, and then makes a recommendation?*

BOGUE: Right. It both made a moral argument and a national interest argument for stronger U.S. involvement in the Bosnia issue, and it recommended that the U.S. take military action.

*Q: And again, without revealing a lot of confidential information, the military action you were proposing was against the Serbs or the Serb aligned forces?*

BOGUE: Against the Serb-aligned forces, who were besieging the cities and conducting ethnic cleansing. I think our most immediate goal was to break the sieges of Sarajevo and other cities.

*Q: So, the Secretary gets it, obviously he reads it over the weekend, and an invitation to all 12 of you is sent and you go in that following Monday.*

BOGUE: We went in that following Monday. We had a little confab before and the group asked me to be the lead speaker. I was the longest-tenured person on the desk, and, as a few colleagues said, I was the right personality to speak to someone of the Secretary's personality. In other words, I would be calmer than some of the others, and certainly Secretary Christopher would not respond well to outrage. We thought he would want a more judicious approach, focused on why it was in the U.S. interest to intervene, and why the U.S. had a responsibility to intervene.

He heard us out. He asked good questions. What would be the end game? What would be an acceptable conclusion? How do you get out once you're in? We had a lengthy meeting with him. He was skeptical, but he was courteous and respectful. We assured him that it was our goal to keep this a private matter between us, and we left. I would add that one of the ways in which Warren Christopher differentiated himself from James Baker, his

predecessor, if I leave out the brief reign of Larry Eagleburger in the middle, was his openness to dissent.

We twelve had a meeting afterwards. We agreed that the Secretary had listened to us in a serious and receptive way, and we agreed that nothing was going to change. It was a somber meeting.

Then we went back to work. That Thursday, the news about the letter and the meeting appeared in The New York Times. It was leaked. I don't know who leaked it, or why. Some of us were out for beers, maybe a year later, and everyone wrote who they thought the leaker was on a piece of paper. The answers were all different. I don't think it was one of us, because in our meeting, we agreed that even though the letter had been leaked, we would still treat it as a private communication, and we would not speak to the press.

*Q: Now, once the memo gets to Christopher and obviously becomes public, in looking at the immediate changes to US policy, ultimately, you know, however long it took, did they take some of your ideas?*

BOGUE: Ultimately? Yes, but I've always been reluctant to claim that the dissent changed policy. Certainly, it didn't make any immediate change, but if you look at policy a year later, most of the things that we suggested had been done, but a lot had happened in Bosnia in the intervening year, and that played a big role as well.

I would say that our dissent was one piece of a broader puzzle. I didn't know at the time that there were dissents coming from others more influential than we were. There was a significant dissent, of course, from Madeleine Albright, who was then at the United Nations. I did know about that, but I didn't know—and I'm not revealing a secret, because this became known publicly as well—but Warren Zimmerman, who had been ambassador in Belgrade, and was then head of the Refugee Bureau, had made a private dissent some months before.

Ambassador Zimmermann knew me from our days in Vienna together. He called me after the leak and asked if I could come to his office. There he told me about his dissent and conversation with the Secretary. He was much more senior than we were, much more knowledgeable about the former Yugoslavia than we were, and a very thoughtful human being. He met with me just to let me know that we were not alone.

*Q: Very interesting, because you, in your construction of the dissent and your recruitment of people who would be part of it, you were in the same building, but unaware of these other people who might have joined you, had there been better communication.*

BOGUE: Yes, and again, one of the 12 was in the Refugee Bureau, but was a working-level officer.

*Q: Which leads to the perfect next question, which is, you deliver it to the Secretary, you have the talks. Did you fear reprisal?*



BOGUE: No, I didn't fear reprisals. Christopher had made it very clear, I'm told, in the senior staff meetings, that there would be no reprisals. Had there been reprisals, though, we were prepared to accept that. When I was invited to speak about dissent to Foreign Service entry classes years later, I would say that if you were not prepared to walk away from the State Department, you are not prepared to dissent. It has to matter so much to you that you don't care about its impact on your career.

I do want to mention a few colleagues who helped us. The night before publication, The New York Times gave State's Press Office a heads-up about its article. The Press Office called Peggy McGinniss, one of the Secretary's staff assistants. Peggy called me. I was devastated. I was literally sick to my stomach that night. We were not trying to embarrass the Secretary or the President. We were not trying to get attention for ourselves. I called Beth Jones, the Secretary's Executive Assistant, so that she could call the Secretary, so that he would not be blindsided.

The day after the leak, it was my turn to write press guidance, so I had gone in before six o'clock --- I wasn't sleeping anyway. I was writing press guidance about myself, which was weird. I thought I'd call Beth Jones and see what the Secretary wanted to do about the press guidance and suggest that someone else write the guidance.

At that moment, Beth walked into my office—we knew each other from Pakistan—gave me a hug, and said, "I know you didn't want this to happen. I know none of you wanted this to happen. Go ahead and write the press guidance." At the noon press meeting that day, Richard Boucher, the Department spokesman, answered a question about reprisals against the "Bosnia Twelve" with a firm "no."

There weren't reprisals, but it was made clear to those of us in the Office of Eastern Europe and Yugoslavia that we needed to move on -- and of course, we wanted to anyway. Our immediate bosses were angry and embarrassed, and trust had broken down. We scattered to the four winds in the Department.

*Q: Two of the signers did resign, and that was in protest.*

BOGUE: Marshall resigned soon after that. There were some other resignations, but I think they came later.

*Q: Where did you end up after this, because you left in May, barely a month after the letter.*

BOGUE: It was clear that there was not going to be a successful working relationship in our office after the dissent. One of my bosses said to me, "Why didn't you just come to me?" I pointed out that we had, over and over. Another said, "I'd like to see a copy of the letter." And I told him no. That's not a recipe for a great working relationship. Oddly enough, the Secretary had recently decided that he needed a speechwriter from inside the Department to help with things that were largely internal – awards days, swearing-in

ceremonies – and he needed somebody who knew Bosnia, because he was having to comment and testify on Bosnia frequently. Richard Boucher suggested me, because he had seen a lot of my writing. Secretary Christopher liked the idea, partly for its practical advantages and partly because it demonstrated that he was open to dissent. Here was one of the dissenters now working on his staff, traveling with him, and writing speeches for him.

*Q: So in terms of the actual event of sending the letter and having the Secretary consider it, looking back after this, two questions. One, you had already mentioned that other people, if they're considering a dissent, really should be ready for whatever happens next. But would you give any other advice to people about how to form dissents or how to go about doing it?*

BOGUE: I used to give talks on dissent to A-100 classes. Everyone was bright-eyed and eager to dissent on everything. I wouldn't say I discouraged people from dissenting, but I argued that it should be rare in a Foreign Service career.

One of the questions that I used to get was why I didn't dissent on Rwanda. Did I not care about Rwandans? I did, and I thought what was happening was horrible, but honestly, I had nothing to bring to the table. I had no credibility on Rwanda, and I tried to make the point that if you dissent on every policy you disagree with, all over the world, you quickly become a crank.

In my view, in addition to the outrage you feel about an issue, a dissenter also needs to be focused on U.S. interests. And potential dissenters need to ask themselves if they have been heard.

Then comes the hard part. If after you dissent, the policy you objected to continues, do you leave the State Department or stay? Is it better to be on the outside, or is it better to try to make change on the inside? I remember reading an interview with George Kennan, who, famously, resigned over Russia policy and later said he regretted it because he had lost his ability to influence policy, even as famous as he was, and as active as he was.

I don't mean to compare myself to George Kennan. I am not in his league. But this is a difficult problem for people. Everyone has to evaluate their own "red lines" and navigate their own family and financial circumstances.

*Q: Now, in closing, where did you go after the end of this tour? Where did you go in May, 1993?*

BOGUE: That's when I went to the speechwriting office.

*Q: Right. Were there long-term results that you can identify that you ultimately did take from your dissent?*

BOGUE: I never felt that the dissent put me at a career disadvantage. I continued to get good assignments. In fact, a few years after that, when I was a candidate for a job, I wasn't sure that the person hiring knew I had been involved in that dissent. I wanted him to know, so that he wouldn't be blindsided. I told him. He said he was aware of that and counted that in my favor. He didn't want someone who, on the bridge of the Titanic, said to themselves, "Man, that iceberg is huge. It's going to really hurt when we hit it." He wanted someone to say, "There's an iceberg ahead, and we're going to hit it if we don't change course now." It takes a boss with a certain confidence level to say that.

*Q: Interesting. And who's going to make sure that people at the working level are getting their views up? Because she's not going to let what happened to her happen to them.*

*I've asked all the questions that I want to ask, but have I overlooked something that you want to remark upon?*

BOGUE: If I may, I want to pay tribute to my Foreign Service colleagues. The day The New York Times ran the story of the dissent, my phone rang all day. It was either a journalist wanting an interview, which I said no to, or it was a colleague, including people I didn't know at all. I was getting calls and emails from Chile and Suriname and all over. Some colleagues said that they were upset about Bosnia and supported the dissent. Others said they couldn't find Bosnia on a map but supported the principle of dissent. Then I got a call from a colleague who'd been with me in Vienna. He and his wife were friends of mine. They're very conservative, and they were opposed to intervention in Bosnia. He called and said, "You have a listed number in the phone book. You have an uncommon surname, and The New York Times spelled it correctly. If you go home tonight, your life is going to be hell, so come have pizza with us and the kids." This is someone who disagreed with me on the dissent, but was trying to protect me from its consequences. And sure enough, when I got home—you know that we didn't have beepers or cell phones then—my answering machine had 56 messages on it.

I'll just close with a comment my mother made. I didn't want the Secretary blindsided nor did I want my mother blindsided. I called her and explained what had happened. She said, "Well, I hope you're okay, and I'm really proud of you." Then she said, "You know, in yesterday's New York Times, the cover story named some Navy pilots who were involved in the Tailhook scandal.

*Q: Tailhook. Okay.*

BOGUE: She said, "I think they're probably having a harder time explaining that to their mothers than you're having explaining this to me."

*Q: I apologize, there is one last question, which is, how did you find out you were being considered for an award from AFSA for constructive dissent? Do you know who recommended you? How did that come about?*

BOGUE: The first I knew of it was in April of 1994. I was in Russian language training getting ready to go to Kazakhstan. I got a letter from Tex Harris at AFSA announcing the award. I don't know who put our names in. I was not at the ceremony, because by then I was in Kazakhstan.

I really appreciate the existence of the award; people who work in other federal agencies have told me how much they wish that their agencies had a mechanism for dissent and a tradition of dissent.

*Q: All right. That sounds like a great place to stop. If you've finished your remarks on this.*

BOGUE: I have indeed. Thank you, Mark. I feel I can remember it as if it were yesterday, because the dissent had a big impact on me, but after 30 years, I may have gotten some things wrong. Forgive me for that, and thanks for letting me review the past.

*End of interview*