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**Impacting Foreign Policy as a Mid-Level Bureaucrat:  
The Diplomatic Career of George Lister**

by

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Professional Report

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School

of The University of Texas at Austin

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degrees of

Doctor of Jurisprudence and

Master of Public Affairs

The University of Texas at Austin

May 2007

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this Professional Report to Margaret Eubank, Karen Engle, Tracy Wahl, and everyone who has helped me to explore George Lister's career; to my parents, who have supported me through four years of graduate school; and finally, to all the people who have struggled on behalf of George Lister's "hopeless cause."

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Gregory Krauss, J.D., M.P.Aff.

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Supervisor: Alan Kuperman

Most models of foreign policymaking emphasize the role of high-level decision-makers. George Lister served in the State Department for 61 years, never assuming a prestigious post, yet he managed to have a profound impact on U.S. foreign policy, particularly in giving a higher priority to human rights. The following Professional Report evaluates Lister's impact over the course of his career and the reasons for his success.

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## Chapter 1. “Mr. Human Rights”

Early in 1941, months before the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor and the subsequent U.S. entry into WWII, a recent graduate of The City College of New York named George Lister moved to Bogotá, Colombia in search of adventure and employment opportunities.<sup>1</sup> Soon after arriving, by chance he met an officer from the U.S. Embassy.<sup>2</sup> Lister had previous experience working at a bank, and so the Embassy hired him to work in its commercial section.<sup>3</sup> Lister eventually took and passed the Foreign Service exam, beginning his diplomatic career in December 1945.<sup>4</sup> Lister’s service to the State Department would not be short-lived. Until 2002, Lister maintained an office in the State Department.<sup>5</sup> In total, his State Department career spanned 61 years and 12 Presidents, from Franklin D. Roosevelt to George W. Bush.

The history of U.S. foreign policy is often written from the perspective of Presidents, cabinet members, and other high-ranking foreign policy officials. Those individuals explicitly entrusted with the authority to make major foreign policy decisions are thought to be the ones with the most influence and impact. Over the course of his lengthy career, George Lister never served as Secretary of State or as an Assistant Secretary with responsibility for a State Department bureau. He was never selected for an Ambassadorship—the position most coveted by career Foreign Service officers. Yet, those who knew him thought that he made fundamental

contributions to U.S. foreign policy, especially in giving a higher priority to human rights.

Lister spent most of the early part of his career working abroad at U.S. embassies. In addition to Colombia, Lister's assignments included Poland, the U.S.S.R., and Germany.<sup>6</sup> Between 1957 and 1961, Lister served as the First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Rome.<sup>7</sup> For the remainder of his career, Lister was based in Washington, D.C. In the 1960s and early 1970s, Lister served in the Department's Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, his work centering on the promotion of democracy in Latin America.<sup>8</sup> Human rights legislation passed in the 1970s led, among other consequences, to the designation of human rights officers in every bureau. In 1974, Lister became the first human rights officer for Latin American.<sup>9</sup> In 1981, he joined the State Department's new human rights bureau, then called the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.<sup>10</sup> Lister officially retired in 1982, but he continued to work in the human rights bureau as an unpaid policy advisor until 2002.<sup>11</sup> He passed away in 2004.<sup>12</sup>

In the last decade of his career, Lister received plenty of accolades. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., a friend of Lister's, described Lister to a reporter as "Mr. Human Rights."<sup>13</sup> In 1992, the Government of Chile invited Lister to Chile to receive an award for his role in restoring Chilean democracy.<sup>14</sup> In 1997, Lister was nominated, but not chosen, for the Warren M. Christopher Award for Outstanding Achievement in Global Affairs.<sup>15</sup> In 1998, Kim Dae Jung invited Lister to his

inauguration as president of South Korea to recognize Lister's help in bringing democracy to that country.<sup>16</sup> When Lister died in 2004, Bill Richardson told *The Washington Post*: "His contributions are going to have a lasting effect, but there is no George Lister now. There are probably a lot of people who have human rights in their titles, but the conscience of human rights is gone."<sup>17</sup>

### **The Mid-Level Bureaucrat in U.S. Foreign Policymaking**

Most studies of the U.S. foreign policymaking process emphasize the role of top decision-makers. Walter Issacson's *The Wise Men*, for example, details how six high-level foreign policy officials, all friends, worked together to shape U.S. foreign policy in the post-war era: W. Averill Harriman, Robert Lovett, Dean Acheson, John McCloy, George Kennan, and Charles Bohlen.<sup>18</sup> In *The Faces of Power*, a well-regarded text on 20<sup>th</sup> century U.S. foreign policy, Seyom Brown likewise chronicles the decision-making processes of top officials, namely the President and various agency heads. Brown writes that his "overriding purpose has been to gain insight into the worldviews prevailing at the *highest levels* of the United States government..." (emphasis added).<sup>19</sup> Brown, however, portrays a competitive process in which top officials compete to win the President's favor.<sup>20</sup>

Like Brown's *Faces of Power*, Morton Halperin's *Bureaucratic Politics and U.S. Foreign Policy* describes a foreign policymaking process in which top officials compete for influence. Halperin, though, portrays the process less as a competition

between personalities and more as a competition amongst the foreign policymaking bureaucracies: the Department of State, the Department of Defense, the National Security Council, the Central Intelligence Agency, and other agencies.<sup>21</sup> The same sort of competition for influence occurs within agencies, according to Halperin.<sup>22</sup> Thus, in both the Brown and Halperin models, the foreign policymaking apparatus is crowded with advisors; the opportunity for top-level officials to wield decisive influence is limited—and correspondingly more so for mid-level officials.

A mid-level bureaucrat in Lister's time wishing to make a mark on foreign policy might have had other difficulties, according to many depictions of U.S. foreign policymaking. Schlesinger notes in *A Thousand Days*, his chronicle of the Kennedy years, that the Foreign Service had grown rapidly from 1700 members in 1930 to over 9000 members in the 1960s.<sup>23</sup> During that time, the State Department moved from a smaller building near the White House to its current home at Foggy Bottom.<sup>24</sup> With a larger State Department came increased bureaucratization and hierarchy. Schlesinger writes that a system of concurrences was created “which required every proposal to run a hopelessly intricate obstacle course before it could become policy.”<sup>25</sup>

Aside from the limited opportunities for influencing major foreign policy decisions, Halperin notes a set of incentives which limit the chances that individuals within bureaucracies will actually *want* to take initiative or chances. According to Halperin, because a bureaucratic organization's influence is itself limited, such organizations tend to favor policies that have the effect of expanding organizational

interests.<sup>26</sup> Those interests are defined by what Halperin terms “organizational essence”—the consensus view among dominant members of an organization regarding its mission and capabilities.<sup>27</sup> Career officials, concerned about their own careers, tend to support organizational interests; they recognize that “in large measure, promotion depends on being seen as advancing the interest of the organization.”<sup>28</sup>

The problem of conformity has been described as especially acute within the Foreign Service. Halperin notes that Foreign Service Officers (FSOs) must be especially careful to win the approval of their immediate supervisors, who prepare efficiency reports on their performance.<sup>29</sup> Efficiency reports are the key criteria in determining promotion.<sup>30</sup> During Lister’s career, and especially in the 1950s and 1960s, the problem of conformity in the Foreign Service may have been even more serious. Schlesinger argues in *A Thousand Days* that the McCarthy era had taken a heavy toll on the Foreign Service, creating FSOs who had “stopped telling Washington what they really thought and consecrated themselves to the clichés of the cold war.”<sup>31</sup>

### **An Exception to the Rule**

Based on most accounts of foreign policy-decision making, Lister’s ability to influence foreign policy would predictably be small and limited to the particular sphere in which he worked. Lister would be expected to competently perform his

duties but not jeopardize his career advancement by making waves. For all of these reasons, it is remarkable that Lister, at the end of his career, stood out as someone who had made significant contributions. George Lister clearly had many supporters, but, what, was his actual impact? How much of the praise he received was deserved? And, if his impact was beyond the ordinary, what were the keys to his success?

Lister's impact can be measured in several ways—in terms of his influence on U.S. foreign policy-making, but also his influence on the human rights movement and on the state of human rights in countries around the world. Of course, over the course of six decades in the State Department, Lister had more opportunity than most career officials to accomplish his foreign policy goals. The mere cumulative impact of his many small contributions is surely substantial. But even taking into account the length of his career, Lister's impact was probably outsized for someone of his position—even though, measured against his own objectives, Lister was quite often unsuccessful. His impact, I believe, was related to many factors, but they include his persistence and his understanding of the power dynamics involved in achieving progress on human rights issues.

Lister's papers were donated to the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at The University of Texas at Austin in 2005. In the following Professional Report, drawing upon Lister's papers and supplementing them with interviews, I examine Lister's impact and the reasons for his effectiveness. In Chapter Two, I look at Lister's impact in the first part of his career, between 1941 and 1961, when he was

mostly stationed abroad. Chapter Three examines Lister's impact between 1961 and 1973, while he was working at the State Department in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. Chapter Four reviews the development of human rights in U.S. foreign policy and examines Lister's role in shaping that development. Chapter Five presents four case studies of countries in which Lister tried to impact democratic development. Chapter Six reviews the reasons for Lister's impact and discusses what lessons might be drawn from Lister's career.

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<sup>1</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, Reading by Margaret Eubank, "Final Reflections," February 21, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> "Career History," undated, Papers of George T. Lister, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin [document hereinafter "Career History"].

<sup>5</sup> Press Release, The University of Texas at Austin, "Papers of diplomat George Lister come to The University of Texas at Austin," August 17, 2005. Online. Available <http://www.utexas.edu/opa/news/2005/08/libraries17.html>. Accessed: May 1, 2007.

<sup>6</sup> Career History.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Press Release, "Papers of diplomat George Lister come to The University of Texas at Austin."

<sup>9</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, "George Lister, Mr. Human Rights," February 21, 2004, p. 6.

(This is a collection of remembrances of Lister that were read aloud at a memorial service in honor of his life and work.)

<sup>10</sup> Career History.

<sup>11</sup> Press Release, "Papers of diplomat George Lister come to The University of Texas at Austin."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Guy Gugliotta, "Risky Work at the State Department," *Washington Post* (October 19, 1993), pg. A-21.

<sup>14</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, "George Lister, Mr. Human Rights," February 21, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Patricia Sullivan, "George Lister Dies; Human Rights Pioneer," *The Washington Post* (February 14, 2004), p. B-6.

<sup>18</sup> Walter Isaacson, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), pp. 20-27.

<sup>19</sup> Seyom Brown, *The Faces of Power: United States Foreign Policy from Truman to Clinton*, 2d ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), p. xiii.

<sup>20</sup> See generally, Ibid.

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<sup>21</sup> Morton H. Halperin and Patricia A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, 2d ed. (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2006), pp. 25-61.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co. 1965), p. 409.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 410.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> Morton H. Halperin and Patricia A. Clapp, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy*, p. 26.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26-27.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, p. 411.

## **Chapter 2. Early Career Impact (1941-1961)**

In *High on Foggy Bottom*, Charles Frankel’s humorous memoir of his two years as Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs between 1965 and 1967, Frankel writes that in a large bureaucratic organization such as the State Department, it becomes quite difficult for officials to gauge their effectiveness. “A man launches an action on the bureaucratic sea,” he writes, “[b]ut he is never there, where the action comes to shore and where people have to live with its consequences.”<sup>1</sup>

The impact of any State Department official on historical events is difficult to judge. Foreign policy is made collectively, and, as Frankel suggests, the consequences of a decision are not always readily apparent. Furthermore, a variety of forces shape history, making any one individual’s impact difficult to discern. Even the impact of a diplomat’s contact with a foreign government, although easy to attribute to a particular diplomat, can be difficult to assess. In George Lister’s case, assessing his impact is no less difficult—especially in the early part of his career, when the historical record is scarce.

### **Early Life**

Born in Chicago in 1913, George Lister was raised in New York City.<sup>2</sup> Lister’s parents were separated, and Lister’s mother struggled to support him and his

younger sister. As Lister's long-time friend, Margaret Eubank recalls, his family was once evicted for failing to pay rent.<sup>3</sup> Although the family was poor, Lister's mother managed to instill in him a sense of the importance of political life. While the family was still living in Chicago, she took him to Washington, D.C. where he was introduced to Illinois Representative Joseph "Uncle Joe" Cannon, the former Speaker of the House of Representatives.<sup>4</sup> Later in his youth, Lister regularly read *The New York Times*.<sup>5</sup>

Although higher education was a luxury during the Great Depression, Lister managed to receive a college education by attending night classes for seven years at The City College of New York (CCNY) and working days as a full-time bank teller.<sup>6</sup> In college, Lister received an introduction to radical leftist politics. In a speech in 1993, he recalled that every evening at CCNY "there were three groups of students arguing and debating in the basement: the Socialists, the Stalinists, and the Trotskyites."<sup>7</sup> Lister remembered that he "did not have much time" but that that he would occasionally "ask questions, moving from one group to another."<sup>8</sup> Lister's portrayal of himself at a young age suggests that he was curious to understand leftist philosophy and eager to initiate political conversation—yet not a radical himself.

After college, Lister was discontent with his job as a bank teller; he had the sense that he wanted "make something of his life," according to Eubank.<sup>9</sup> Leaving his bank job, Lister moved to Bogotá, Colombia where, as already noted, a chance encounter with an officer from the U.S. embassy—as well as Lister's previous

experience working in a bank—helped him get a job in the commercial section of the embassy, beginning in May 1941.<sup>10</sup>

## **First Assignments: 1941-1957**

### **Background**

Lister remained in Colombia from May 1941 through at least March 1944, when he became stationed in Buenaventura, Colombia. After passing the Foreign Service Exam, Lister was appointed a Foreign Service Officer (FSO) in December 1945.<sup>11</sup> Lister's assignments for the next decade were mainly in Europe. In February 1946, he was assigned to Warsaw, Poland, where he worked at the U.S embassy for two and a half years.<sup>12</sup> In February 1949, he began a year of Russian language training in the U.S., followed by two years as a political officer in Moscow, where he served under Ambassador George F. Kennan.<sup>13</sup> Beginning in August 1952, Lister began a year of Communist and Soviet studies, taught in Russian, in the Bavarian city of Regensburg, in West Germany.<sup>14</sup> He then returned to the State Department, where he worked for four years mainly at the Polish desk, which, as the name suggests coordinated policy towards Poland.<sup>15</sup>

Lister's direct encounters with Communist countries in these years not only made him an avowed anti-Communist, but also shaped his perspective on how Communism should be fought. In his work as a political officer, Lister's job largely entailed combating Soviet propaganda. He thus came to regard the Cold War largely

as an ideological battle that the U.S. needed to win in the realm of ideas. His experience with Communism also led him to distinguish between Communist governments and the people living beneath those regimes. Although Lister clearly opposed Communism due to the threat posed to U.S. national security by a growing Soviet bloc, he also understood that life under a Communist system was bleak in comparison to life in Western democracies.

At a conference in Geneva in 1949, Lister consulted with various Polish diplomats about U.S. trade policy towards Poland. Lister reported in a memorandum that one of the diplomats, whom Lister realized did not wholeheartedly support the Communist Party, told Lister “not to forget Poland.”<sup>16</sup> Lister replied that he “had great respect for the common people of Poland” and that he “would never forget them.”<sup>17</sup> Lister also describes an encounter in Geneva with another U.S. diplomat, Walt Rostow, who appeared to have been impressed by “Polish achievements” in a recent visit to Poland.<sup>18</sup> Lister was critical of Rostow, observing that he did not seem “to have a full appreciation of the human effort and misery which many of those achievements represented. Nor did he seem to realize how cordially the Polish people hate their Government – and how desperately they hope that America will force the Soviet Union out of Poland.”<sup>19</sup>

Lister’s concern about life under Communism was rooted partly in his own studies. During his year of training at Regensburg, in 1952-1953, he completed a 75-page paper on Soviet careers titled “How Soviet Careers Are Made or What Makes

Ivan Run.”<sup>20</sup> Lister concluded that “for those who have even a partial understanding of the operation of the Soviet system, the widely advertised and loudly lamented shallow materialism and grubby values of the West are very secondary shortcomings indeed.”<sup>21</sup>

### **Impact During Early Assignments**

Lister’s impact during the initial part of his career is more difficult to judge than at any other time period; the document record is scarce. His impact, I suspect, was akin to that of other FSOs charged with the kinds of activities he performed: analyzing information about the political situation in the countries he was assigned to, developing contacts who could serve as sources of information, and seeking opportunities to win the propaganda battle against the Communists.

According to Lister, his job at the Polish desk permitted him to be particularly effective. Lister recalled in a memorandum from 1962 that his Polish desk position had been “the best job in the Department at the time.”<sup>22</sup> Lister wrote that “[w]e made significant progress against the Communists” when [Władysław] Gomułka, the long-time Polish Communist leader, returned to power in the 1950s after a brief removal.<sup>23</sup> “Among other things,” he recalled, “I was able to establish some very useful confidential contacts inside the Polish Embassy.”<sup>24</sup>

In his job at the Polish desk, Lister took advantage of the smallest opportunities to win the ideological battle against Communism. For example, in

February 1955, Lister received a letter from a Mr. K. Romanowicz, a Polish émigré to the United States who also operated an anti-Communist bookstore in Paris.<sup>25</sup>

Romanowicz sought \$3000 to operate a “mobile anti-communist library” in northeastern France, where the Polish minority was being targeted by the Warsaw government with Communist propaganda.<sup>26</sup> Romanowicz’s imaginative scheme was to purchase an automobile, which he would use to drive around Polish minority areas and distribute anti-Communist literature. Lister urged in a memo that the request be approved; he argued that “this could well prove to be a case in which a modest expenditure would be put to very effective use...”<sup>27</sup>

Some of Lister’s attempts to gain a propaganda advantage were quite skillful. For instance, Lister recognized that a conference on world affairs planned for April 1956 at the University of Colorado, Boulder, would be an ideal chance to counter Polish Communist propaganda.<sup>28</sup> The organizers of the conference had requested the Polish Ambassador to the United Nations to submit a Polish flag, but Lister writes in a memo that the Ambassador, “with typical Polish Communist enterprise and brashness” announced that he would bring the flag to the forum himself, thus securing himself a place as a speaker.<sup>29</sup> Lister was successful in arranging for a “capable, articulate, and well-prepared Polish anti-Communist” to surprise the Ambassador at the forum by joining him on the same panel.<sup>30</sup> Additionally, he proposed providing Voice of America (VOA) coverage of the panel for broadcast to Poland. Lister wrote, “Naturally, it would not be necessary for the VOA man to stay any longer than the

Polish Ambassador, who may lose his enthusiasm when he sees how things are working out...”<sup>31</sup>

## **Rome: 1957 - 1961**

### **Background**

Between 1957 and 1961, Lister served as the First Secretary of the U.S. Embassy in Rome. Lister’s Italian experience proved to be defining for him. In Rome, Lister adopted a strategy of combating Communism by trying to break the historic alliance between Socialists and Communists. Lister hoped to persuade Italian Socialists to leave their Communist political partners and join in a center-left coalition government. Rome also provided Lister with his first run-in with the State Department bureaucracy—an experience from which he did not emerge unscathed.

Democracy in Italy was in a precarious position in the late 1950s. Italy had the largest Communist Party of any democratic country in the world, with the Communist Party receiving nearly 25 percent of the vote.<sup>32</sup> The Italian Christian Democratic Party (the “Christian Democrats”) held power, but there was no alternative party which believed in a democratic system.<sup>33</sup> The Italian Socialist Party, led by Pietro Nenni, generally allied itself with the Communists. In 1956, the Soviet invasion of Hungary had convinced a group of “autonomists” within the Socialist Party to favor splitting with the Communists and allying themselves with the Christian Democrats.<sup>34</sup> They were reluctant to do so, however, due to the political risks, and because they

wanted to bring the entire Socialist party with them, not just a faction. A decade before, Guiseppe Saragat and a group of followers had left the Socialist party to form the Democratic Socialist Party (“Social Democrats”), but Saragat’s party had become weak.<sup>35</sup>

The Eisenhower policy in the 1950s, under Ambassador Clare Boothe Luce, had been to take a hard line against the Socialists and to not have direct contact with them.<sup>36</sup> Luce’s successor, Ambassador James D. Zellerbach, continued the policy after Luce left her post in 1957.<sup>37</sup> When Lister arrived in Rome in September 1957,<sup>38</sup> he was given responsibility for reporting to the Embassy on the activities of several leftist Italian political parties, including the Social Democrats, the Republicans (another left of center party), the Socialists, and the Communists.<sup>39</sup> With Zellerbach’s approval, Lister established contact with Socialist autonomists in early 1958 and soon was having regular conversations with them.<sup>40</sup>

Lister’s efforts to influence the Italian Socialists continued with the support of the Embassy until early 1959,<sup>41</sup> when Outerbridge Horsey became the new Deputy Chief of Mission (DCM).<sup>42</sup> Horsey was skeptical about the possibilities for bringing the Socialists into the democratic fold, and, according to Lister, he expressed that the “the thing to do was to drive the Socialists back towards the Communists.”<sup>43</sup> Horsey put pressure on Lister to cease meeting with the Socialists, but Lister continued the meetings. He also reached an agreement with the Italian desk at the State Department by which he was permitted to send informal reports back to Washington giving his

own, unofficial descriptions of the Italian left.<sup>44</sup> On July 1, 1960,<sup>45</sup> while Horsey was on vacation in Austria, Lister took his case to Ambassador Zellerbach,<sup>46</sup> as a result, the Embassy made some slight modifications in its official policy stance.<sup>47</sup> However, tension between Lister and his Embassy superiors led the Political Counselor, his immediate boss, to criticize him in a February 1961 efficiency report for “a lack of discipline and cooperativeness.”<sup>48</sup>

In March, 1961, Roving Ambassador W. Averell Harriman visited Rome. Lister served as Harriman’s interpreter in conversations with leaders of the Socialist and Republican parties.<sup>49</sup> Aware that Lister was knowledgeable about Italian politics, Harriman invited Lister to his hotel to discuss the Italian political situation.<sup>50</sup> Harriman evidently agreed with Lister’s attempts to reach out to the Socialists; according to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Harriman “pronounced Lister the only officer in the Rome Embassy who understood the Communist problem.”<sup>51</sup> Later that year, Lister’s tour in Rome ended. He returned to Washington, D.C., where he was informed by the State Department’s Promotion Panel that he had been recommended for “selection out” of the Foreign Service.<sup>52</sup> Lister’s job was only saved by intervention from Harriman, although he was still demoted—a consequence which severely hampered Lister’s career prospects.<sup>53</sup>

Lister, however, continued to be involved in the Italian political situation. On October 16, 1961, Harriman wrote to Lister to tell him that he had mentioned Lister’s name to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., then a top advisor to Kennedy.<sup>54</sup> Lister and

Schlesinger soon began working together. Lister's Italian center-left friends often would come to Washington, D.C. on visits, and Lister would take them to the White House to be introduced to Schlesinger.<sup>55</sup> The turning point in Italy finally happened in July 1963, when Kennedy, on a visit to Rome, took Nenni aside at a garden party for a lengthy conversation.<sup>56</sup> In November 1963, the Socialists joined with the Christian Democrats and entered the government, forming the first center-left coalition in Italian history.<sup>57</sup>

Lister believed that the formation of a center-left government had been a large success for U.S. interests. "The Nenni Socialists proved very cooperative in foreign affairs, Italy remained a staunch ally of the U.S., and the largest communist party in the world had sustained a sharp defeat," he wrote around 1970.<sup>58</sup> Yet, the success was not unqualified. Nenni, the Deputy Prime Minister in the new government, accepted that Italy would remain part of NATO, a stance which bolstered U.S. security.<sup>59</sup> However, this caused a new split in the Socialist Party;<sup>60</sup> many Socialists continued to work with the Communists.<sup>61</sup> The Socialist party was so weak by the end of the 1960s that the Communist party managed to increase significantly its influence over the country's political agenda.<sup>62</sup> The Socialists did not rebound until the 1980s.<sup>63</sup>

## **Lister's Impact on Italian Politics**

### *Influence on Italian Socialists*

Lister was undeniably successful at influencing Italian Socialists to moderate their views towards the United States during his time in Rome. The mere fact that Lister initiated contact with Italian Socialists probably had some impact on their perceptions of the United States. Lister's first contact with Italian Socialists took place in February 1958, when he made an appointment to speak with Ricardo Lombardi, a Socialist leader.<sup>64</sup> Lombardi was startled to find himself having coffee in the Italian Parliament with an American diplomat; he later revealed that he had suspected privately that Lister was with the CIA.<sup>65</sup> Lombardi asked Lister if this meeting represented a U.S. policy change.<sup>66</sup> Lister replied, noncommittally, that he was merely trying to meet as many Italians as possible—which was not untrue.<sup>67</sup>

Lister's relationships with Italian political leaders went beyond formal appointment-making. His intimacy with many of them is evident from the descriptive portraits in his memorandums. A five-page memorandum from February 1963 describes the politics and personality of Saragat, leader of the Democratic Socialists:

He is high strung, mercurial, sensitive, proud and easily moved to anger. At his worst he can become pretty ugly, especially when he loses control of his temper. On such occasions, at various Directorate and Central Committee meetings, he has really shaken his victims with his withering blasts to the point where they have seriously considered leaving the Party.<sup>68</sup>

The same memorandum makes use of personal details to provide insight into the relationship between Saragat and Nenni. Lister observes that “Nenni likes and

respects Saragat more than vice-versa. For example, the former always sends [Saragat] a Christmas card. Of course, it is easier for Nenni to be more generous, for he is in a stronger position, but I think this is genuinely indicative of the real feelings between the two men.”<sup>69</sup>

Some of the Italian Socialists Lister made contact with became true friends. His apartment in Rome, where he lived with his wife and mother, was centrally located, permitting it to become “an open-house for advocates of the center-left.”<sup>70</sup> Lister became friends with two Italian Socialists in particular—Paolo Vittorelli and Giovanni Pieraccini—with whom Lister recalled debating “day and night.”<sup>71</sup> The trust Lister developed with various Italian Socialist leaders was strong enough that he was able to affect their public statements and actions. He recalled that sometimes he would receive phone calls from Nenni’s friends late at night asking him to help them with public statements they were preparing for Nenni.<sup>72</sup>

Lister’s overtures to Italian Socialists not only brought him into their favor, but also improved their perception of the United States. Lister later wrote that the Socialist autonomists labored “under many misconceptions, many of them grotesque...as to life in the United States, the nature of our society, and American foreign policy aims, in general and in Italy specifically.”<sup>73</sup> Lister used his conversations with Italian Socialists to try to shed light on why the U.S. so strongly opposed the Soviet Union; he also drew upon his experiences in Poland to emphasize the differences between life under a democratic system and life under Communism.<sup>74</sup>

Perhaps Lister's most effective technique was to invite his Socialist friends to Washington, D.C. on "leader grants" funded by the Department. The document record suggests that visits by Socialist leaders were quite common. In mid-1962 alone, visitors included Paolo Vitorelli in April 1962; Cesare Bensi in May 1962;<sup>75</sup> and Giovanni Peraccini in October 1962.<sup>76</sup> Lister invited these leaders for discussions at the State Department<sup>77</sup> and, as noted, he would bring them to the White House to meet Schlesinger. Lister wrote in 1962 that these White House visits "helped to bring the Socialists still closer to us."<sup>78</sup> Socialist leaders claimed to have greatly enjoyed their visits. In a personal note to Lister on October 12, 1962, Giovanni Peraccini described his visit to the U.S. as having been "marvelous."<sup>79</sup>

#### *Influence on State Department Policies*

Although Lister was successful in improving the U.S. image among Italian Socialists, he was less successful at winning State Department backing for his policy preferences. Lister's primary difficulties were with his superiors at the Embassy—not necessarily with the Department. On May 4, 1960, he submitted his personal analysis of the Italian political situation to the State Department. The analysis, submitted under the title "Despatch 1062," argued that the U.S. ought to be open to the possibility of a center-left government in Italy.<sup>80</sup> The State Department's appraisal of the memorandum on July 11, 1960 commended Lister for his "resourcefulness and courage," calling it "undoubtedly the most extensive examination of the Nenni

Socialist Party that this office has received in many years from official sources in the field...”<sup>81</sup>

The Embassy, however, never adopted completely Lister’s position. In Despatch 1164, dated June 4, 1960, the Embassy argued that a center-left government would not be in U.S. interests until there was a total split between the Socialist and the Communist parties.<sup>82</sup> Lister later explained that his decision to go to the Ambassador on the issue, rather than simply take it up with his immediate supervisors resulted from a belief that “the stakes involved for the United States were now so high as to be an overriding consideration.”<sup>83</sup> Lister’s personal conference with the Ambassador did have the effect of reopening an Embassy policy review. The Ambassador asked Lister to draft him a memorandum, which Lister did, and in September 1960, the Embassy resubmitted a new policy statement which took something of a middle ground. Lister did therefore succeed in slightly modifying the Embassy position, but only to a point, and his decision not to consult his supervisor was most likely what led to his negative Efficiency Report.<sup>84</sup>

In any case, what may have mattered more than the Embassy’s position was what policymakers at the top of the Kennedy administration believed. Schlesinger recalls that soon after Kennedy’s inauguration in January 1961, he and Robert W. Komer, a member of the National Security Council Staff, had joined together to advocate an “apertura” or an opening to the left in Italy.<sup>85</sup> Schlesinger and Komer believed that the U.S. should not only tolerate a center-left government coming to

power, but that the U.S. should actually support it.<sup>86</sup> Schlesinger and Komer may have reached these conclusions on their own, but perhaps they had also read Lister's reports from the field. Regardless, it appears that Lister helped to win Schlesinger and Komer a new ally in the administration in the form of Averell Harriman. Harriman's visit to Italy in March 1961, when he requested Lister's opinion on Italian politics, convinced the senior diplomat to support Schlesinger and Korman.

Schlesinger wrote that by June 1961, when Prime Minister Fanfani visited Washington, the Kennedy administration had made up its mind to support the *apertura*. According to Schlesinger, Kennedy told Fanfani that if he "thought the center-left a good idea, we would watch developments with sympathy."<sup>87</sup> Schlesinger recalled that the difficulty was in convincing a staunchly conservative State Department to implement the policy.<sup>88</sup> Another account by Leopoldo Nuti casts Kennedy as undecided as to how much to advocate for a center-left government, but still willing to give Schlesinger free reign to operate.<sup>89</sup> Perhaps the visits by Italian Socialists to the White House that Lister arranged eventually helped persuade Kennedy to reach out to Nenni. Lister later said that it was Schlesinger who "played the leading role in changing Washington policy regarding the Italian center-left."<sup>90</sup>

#### *Impact on the Emergence of the Center-Left*

Even if Schlesinger was the key to persuading Kennedy, George Lister still made a significant contribution to the emergence of a center-left government in Italy.

First, his contacts with Italian Socialists helped moderate both their views towards the U.S. and perhaps their ideological commitments, making an alliance with the Christian Democrats more conceivable. Second, Lister helped bring about what was perhaps a watershed moment—Kennedy’s long conversation with Nenni at the Rome garden party in June 1963. The conversation was a “highly symbolic” moment according to Nuti.<sup>91</sup> Lister helped this moment to occur in two ways. By influencing the Socialist stance toward the U.S., he made it possible for Nenni to publicly embrace Kennedy. And to some extent, his efforts may have helped a group of top officials led by Schlesinger to persuade Kennedy to act.

Schlesinger later gave Lister “much credit for the development and consolidation of the center-left, and the isolation and eventual collapse of the Italian Communist Party.”<sup>92</sup> At first blush, it might seem dubious that Lister could have such a profound effect on Italian politics. Yet, Italian politics at the time were sensitive to the international climate such that, according to Nuti, the “gradual softening of the American position was bound to draw attention, spur discussion, and have a remarkable political impact...”<sup>93</sup> Nuti argues that the Kennedy administration affected the timing and nature of the formation of a center-left government in Italy, though Nenni was moving toward forming a center-left government at some point anyway.<sup>94</sup>

## Conclusion

Apart from his initial stint in Colombia, during the first 20 years of his career, Lister served in the European theater, on the front lines of the Cold War against the Soviet Union. As a political officer, his job was to promote democratic ideology, discredit Communist regimes and dogma, and report on political developments in the countries he was covering. His experiences in Russia and Poland left him as a committed Cold Warrior but also someone who cared deeply about the plight of people living in Communist societies.

In Italy, Lister actively engaged in trying to persuade the Socialists to become more receptive to the U.S. and to become firm adherents to the idea of democracy. His efforts were a factor in the emergence of a center-left government in Italy. Regardless of whether a center-left government turned out to be in U.S. interests, Lister's Italian experience demonstrates the possibilities for a mid-level bureaucrat to alter U.S. foreign policy at the execution stage. By virtue of being in Rome, rather than in Washington, Lister was in a position to give U.S. policy towards Italian Socialists his own interpretation. His key technique was dialogue. Beginning a conversation with Italian Socialists was enough to send them a different signal, even though they knew he was only a functionary.

In some senses, the debate that occurred inside the White House when Kennedy took office was occurring *after* a small policy shift had already taken place. By 1958, Lister had already decided that it would be valuable to become more

receptive to the Italian Socialists—and he had steered U.S. policy in this direction. On the other hand, it took White House involvement for the U.S. to take the most significant step in altering U.S. relations with the Socialists: a conversation, in public view, between Kennedy and Nenni. U.S. actions to bring about a center-left government in Italy can probably best be characterized as a collaboration between officials at the highest and the lowest levels.

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Frankel, *High on Foggy Bottom: An Outsider's View of the Government*, (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), p. 81.

<sup>2</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, "George Lister, Mr. Human Rights," February 21, 2004, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, Reading by Margaret Eubank, "Final Reflections," February 21, 2004, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Margaret Eubank, Retired Foreign Service Officer, April 15, 2007.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," in *Italian Socialism: Between Politics and History*, ed. Spencer M. Di Scala (Amherst: Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 192.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Margaret Eubank, Retired Foreign Service Officer, April 15, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> "Career History," undated, Papers of George T. Lister, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin [document hereinafter "Career History"] [papers hereinafter "Papers of George T. Lister").

<sup>11</sup> Career history; Memo, George Lister to Clare Timberlake, September 19, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2 [hereinafter "Timberlake memo"].

<sup>12</sup> Career History; Timberlake memo, p. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Career History; Timberlake memo, p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Career History; Timberlake memo, p. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Career History; Timberlake memo, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Memo, Lister to unnamed, June 1949, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Report, George Lister, "How Soviet Careers are Made or What Makes Ivan Run," June 20, 1953, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 73.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Timberlake memo, pg. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>25</sup> Memo, George Lister to Mr. MacKnight, "Request for Anti-Communist Library," Papers of George T. Lister, February 23, 1955, p. 1.
- <sup>26</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>27</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.
- <sup>28</sup> Memo, Lister to Mr. Kormann, "Colorado University Forum," Papers of George T. Lister, April 6, 1956.
- <sup>29</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>30</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Memo, Lister to unnamed, undated, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2. The document is a nine-page description of Lister's experience in Italy.) [hereinafter "Italy description"]
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 1.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Leopoldo Nuti, "The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Left, 1953–1963," *Journal of Cold War Studies*, vol. 4, No. 3 (Summer 2002), p. 39.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 42.
- <sup>38</sup> Career History.
- <sup>39</sup> Italy description, pp. 2-3.
- <sup>40</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," p. 186; Italy description, p. 3.
- <sup>41</sup> Italy description, p. 3.
- <sup>42</sup> Arthur S. Schlesinger, Jr., "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," in *Italian Socialism: Between Politics and History*, ed. Spencer M. Di Scala (Amherst: Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 186; Italy description, p. 3.
- <sup>43</sup> Italy description, p. 5.
- <sup>44</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Samuel Lewis, former State Department Director of Policy Planning, April 26, 2007.
- <sup>45</sup> Memo, George Lister to unnamed, "Memorandum for the Record," undated, p. 2.
- <sup>46</sup> Italy description, p. 6. Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," p. 186-87.
- <sup>47</sup> Italy description, p. 6.
- <sup>48</sup> Italy description, p. 9.
- <sup>49</sup> Letter, W. Averell Harriman to Tyler Thompson, February 1, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid; Memo, George Lister to unnamed, "Memorandum for the Record," undated, p. 2.
- <sup>51</sup> Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," p. 187.
- <sup>52</sup> Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," p. 187.
- <sup>53</sup> Memo, George Lister to W. Averell Harriman, undated, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>54</sup> Memo, W. Averell Harriman to George Lister, October 16, 1961, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>55</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," p. 195.
- <sup>56</sup> Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," p. 191.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Report, "'What is to be Done' -- In Chile," undated, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 4. (Memo is most likely from 1970.)
- <sup>59</sup> Elizabeth Wiskemann, *Italy Since 1945*, (Great Britain: St. Martin's Press, 1971), p. 58.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 59
- <sup>61</sup> Norman Kogan, *A Postwar Political History of Italy: From the Old to the New Center-Left* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1981), p. 27.
- <sup>62</sup> Charles L. Bertrand, review of *Renewing Italian Socialism: Nenni to Craxi*, by Spencer DiScala, *The American Historical Review*, 1990, p. 864.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>64</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," p. 193.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Letter, George Lister to Arthur Schlesinger, February 12, 1963, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2-3.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 5.
- <sup>70</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," p. 194.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid. pp. 193-194.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 194.
- <sup>73</sup> Italy description, p. 3.
- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> Memo, George Lister to Mr. Velletri, "Leader Grant Visit of Cesare Bensi, Italian Socialist," May 14, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>76</sup> Letter, Giovanni Pieraccini to George Lister, October 12, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>77</sup> Memo, George Lister to unnamed, June 28, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>78</sup> Timberlake memo, p. 2.
- <sup>79</sup> Letter, Giovanni Pieraccini to George Lister, October 12, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>80</sup> Italy description, p. 4.
- <sup>81</sup> Report, "Foreign Service Political Reporting Appraisal, July 11, 1960, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>82</sup> Italy description, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>83</sup> Italy description, p. 6.
- <sup>84</sup> Italy description, p. 7.
- <sup>85</sup> Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left, 1953-1963" p. 187.
- <sup>86</sup> Leopoldo Nuti, "The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Left, 1953-1963," p. 46.
- <sup>87</sup> Schlesinger, "The Kennedy Administration and the Center-Left," p. 189.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>89</sup> Nuti, "The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Center-Left, 1953-1963", p. 47.
- <sup>90</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," p. 192.
- <sup>91</sup> Leopoldo Nuti, "The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Center-Left, 1953-1963," p. 47.
- <sup>92</sup> Speech, Arthur Schlesinger, undated, Papers of George T. Lister. (The document appears to be a draft of the speech he gave that became the basis for his chapter in the Di Scala book, cited above. Schlesinger's chapter does not contain this line.)
- <sup>93</sup> Nuti, "The United States, Italy, and the Opening to the Center-Left, 1953-1963," p. 52.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 51

### **Chapter 3. Mid-Career Impact (1961-1973)**

Lister's Italian experience deeply impressed upon him the importance of persuading those on the fringes of the political left to join the democratic process. In addition to developing his foreign policy beliefs, his Italian experience also developed in him definite ideas about the State Department bureaucracy and his own role in it. Lister believed he had been effective in Italy due to the flexibility he had been given—or assumed for himself—to develop relationships with the Italian Socialists.<sup>1</sup> And, he doubtlessly resented that the State Department bureaucracy had penalized him, even though he had pursued a policy that was favored by some top level foreign policy officials.

Although Lister wanted more freedom of action in his job, he would spend the rest of his career based at the State Department, never again being selected for an overseas mission. Over the next twelve years, Lister would achieve some successes, though not the level of success that he enjoyed in Italy or beginning in the mid-1970s. His career prospects as of 1962 were not promising, even as he continued to work closely with Schlesinger at the White House. For a time, he was assigned to facilitating the visits of Soviet delegations to the United States. He wrote to Harriman that the job had some “pleasant aspects” but that it was not what he wanted to be doing.<sup>2</sup>

As he frequently did though, Lister took matters into his own hands. Lister asked Harriman to use his influence to create “a slot” that was “not geographically or functionally limited.”<sup>3</sup> Lister proposed to use the slot to implement what he felt the State Department needed: a “global, activist anti-Communist approach.”<sup>4</sup> This approach, he wrote, would consist of “watching carefully for opportunities to take the initiative against the Communists and keeping an eye out for areas or situations where things are going against us now, or likely to do so in the future.”<sup>5</sup> It would mean “employing a very flexible, informal and non-bureaucratic approach in suggesting action, stimulating various bureaus and offices, and cooperating with them in the implementation of these activities.”<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the approach would permit Lister to serve as a backup where the bureaucratic structure failed to deliver. Lister wrote that his goal was to be “doing those things which otherwise would just not get done...”<sup>7</sup>

Harriman apparently granted Lister his request, for Lister was soon assigned to work under Clare H. Timberlake, then a recent Ambassador to the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is unknown what position Timberlake had at the time. Lister’s memo to Timberlake on September 19, 1962, suggests just how disenchanted Lister had become with the bureaucracy:

We should hover on the periphery, suggesting, innovating, intervening, implementing, helping to implement, etc., without being tied down to the bureaucracy, or expanding to the point where we become unwieldy, or putting ourselves in the strait jacket of a tight definition of operation. There is a crying need in the Department for just this kind of operation. We can play a

special role because we are not trapped in the bureaucratic morass and can take initiatives without a large number of clearances.<sup>8</sup>

Lister's attitude toward his own place within the State Department bureaucracy might best be encapsulated by the following suggestion to Timberlake: "I feel we would try to play the role of anti-Communist activists who *happen* to be inside the Government, rather than seeking to perform as typical bureaucrats."<sup>9</sup> (emphasis added).

By mid-1964, Lister had taken his flexible assignment to the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs (referred to in the State Department as "ARA" due to its former name, "American Republic Affairs"), the bureau responsible for Latin America.<sup>10</sup> His position still afforded him the flexibility to operate as an "anti-Communist activist," but just in a Latin American context. Explaining his position in a July 29, 1965 memo to Robert M. Sayre, who in 1965 became Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, Lister wrote that his job included improving the "day to day political warfare" against the Communists, attending to opportunities not within the purview of any department, and correlating efforts between the teams assigned to individual Latin American countries.<sup>11</sup> "His function was to be an ombudsman in some respects," recalled John H. Crimmins, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in Nixon's first term.<sup>12</sup>

## **Impact in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs**

In his position as an “anti-Communist activist” in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Lister worked on issues of concern to all Latin American countries. His impact was therefore more disparate than it had been in Italy and somewhat less measurable. Lister predicted as much in his memo to Timberlake on September 19, 1962: “I do not think this method of operation will give us an opportunity to appear in a brilliant role, or yield us much prestige or status inside the Government, but if we continue these tactics I think that over a period of time we will have helped deliver a really substantial blow to the Communists, regardless of whether it shows very much on the record.”<sup>13</sup>

Lister was successful on multiple fronts during these years, though he quite often failed to win support for his policy proposals. Below I review his efforts to enhance the political positioning of the U.S. in Latin America; his own propaganda and public diplomacy efforts; and his involvement in policy concerns related to Chile and the Dominican Republic, two countries which in different ways drew his attention. Finally, I review his efforts to shape policy on defense and military matters.

### **Effective Political Positioning**

Most of the issues that concerned Lister between 1962 and 1973 related to politically positioning the U.S. in Latin America. Lister was intimately involved in shaping or drafting the circulars distributed to Latin American embassies on how to

present U.S. policies and objectives in a favorable manner. Cables sent by Lister to U.S. embassies in Latin America urged them to stay informed about the U.S.-Soviet relationship so as to accurately explain the conflict to Latin Americans; to follow propaganda from Communist governments more closely in order to find ways to use it against them in Latin America; and to improve contact with Latin American people, not just with Latin American governments, including with politicians out of power, intellectuals, and activists critical of U.S. policy.<sup>14</sup>

Lister persistently called upon embassies to take a politically astute approach to fighting Communism and to have the kind of contact with Latin Americans which would both positively influence Latin American political views and gather information for U.S. policymakers. At some level, Lister was advocating applying the same kinds of strategies he had used in Eastern Europe and as a political officer in Rome. Some of Lister's directions to embassies were probably heeded, but evidently many embassies, to Lister's dissatisfaction, remained blissfully unaware of local political trends. When guerrilla violence broke out in Bolivia in 1966, Lister lamented the failure of the U.S. Embassy in Bolivia to have predicted the potential for such activity.<sup>15</sup> In response, Lister advocated a new policy requiring embassies to report on potential guerrilla activities; he was successful in winning approval for the policy, which he cabled all ARA embassies on June 5, 1967 to announce.<sup>16</sup>

The two greatest deficiencies in U.S. policy towards Latin America were a "lack of effective political dialogue with the left" and a "lack of attention to potential

leaders,” Lister wrote in 1971.<sup>17</sup> Regarding the latter problem, attention to potential leaders, Lister attempted to create an institutionalized framework. In 1969, Lister wrote a lengthy draft report titled “Identifying, Contacting and Influencing Potential Latin American Leaders.”<sup>18</sup> The report analyzed the activities of the entire U.S. government—including the State Department, the U.S. Information Agency, the U.S. Agency for International Development, the Labor Department, and the Defense Department—in building relationships with potential leaders in Latin America, particularly with Latin American youth and young professionals.<sup>19</sup> The report called for more attention to the issue, better coordination of programs and objectives, and regular evaluation of relevant programs.<sup>20</sup>

A draft of Lister’s report was proposed to the National Security Council as National Security Study Memorandum NSSM 68. The draft, however, was unsuccessful at winning National Security Council approval.<sup>21</sup> Opposition was perhaps greatest from the Defense Department, which, according to Lister, “paid lip service to the draft ‘as a useful exercise’” but opposed the concept of seeking to influence potential Latin American leaders as unfeasible.<sup>22</sup>

### **U.S. Visa Policy**

Lister had more success at changing U.S. government policy in another arena: U.S. visa policy. Lister believed that only rarely should the U.S. fail to grant a visa due to a foreigner’s political beliefs, even if those beliefs were representative of the

anti-American leftist extreme. Visa refusals, he wrote, played into the hands of Communist governments, giving them the opportunity to label the U.S. as “reactionary.”<sup>23</sup> Denying a visa was also a missed chance to favorably influence an extremist’s political views. As part of his efforts to reform U.S. visa policy, Lister prepared several airgrams for ARA embassies in the early to mid-1960s encouraging posts to be open to granting visas to some political extremists.<sup>24</sup> Additionally, during a three-year period in the mid-1960s, he intervened personally in approximately 100 visa cases.<sup>25</sup>

Lister took special care to intervene in cases regarding high-profile Latin American intellectuals. In February 1966, Lister intervened to assist Pablo Neruda, a Chilean poet but also a Socialist politician, in obtaining a visa to attend an international writer’s conference in New York City.<sup>26</sup> In 1971, he helped assure that leftist Colombian novelist Gabriel García Márquez had no difficulties obtaining a visa to receive an honorary degree at Columbia University.<sup>27</sup> In Márquez’s case, Lister flew to Kennedy airport in New York to greet Márquez and his wife personally, assist them through customs, and bring them to their hotel.<sup>28</sup>

Lister apparently helped to convince the Department to craft a visa policy to his liking. “After considerable difficulty and hard plugging it has been possible to develop a very liberal and politically sophisticated visa policy for Latin America,” Lister wrote in 1967.<sup>29</sup> Lister observed that the U.S.’s reformed visa policy was noticed by Communist governments, which began issuing public statements “warning

Latin Americans to watch out for [the U.S.'s] 'new' visa policy and the 'new Yankee offensive on the cultural front.'"<sup>30</sup> Lister found the response by Communist governments to be "reassuring and [a] heart warming sign that our tactics are sound."<sup>31</sup>

### **Daily Propaganda Battles**

On a day-to-day basis, Lister was alert to potential opportunities to embarrass Communist supporters and sympathizers. For instance, in 1964, when Salvador Allende, leader of the Socialist Party in Chile, was running for President, Lister drew attention to an interview Allende had given to an Italian newspaper. In the interview, Allende reportedly had said that "we will make Socialism [in Chile] like the Cubans" and that he hoped to achieve the "same result" as in Cuba but "by an electoral method."<sup>32</sup> Lister argued that the Department should "find appropriate ways to have [Allende] hit quickly, hard and often on this one."<sup>33</sup>

Some of Lister's suggestions for advancing U.S. interests were particularly sly. In May 1967, looking beyond his immediate focus on Latin America, Lister suggested to Harriman that the U.S. "arrange for skillful, unattributed propaganda exploitation of available material" showing that the Hanoi government in North Vietnam was aligned with Gamal Abdel Nasser, the President of Egypt.<sup>34</sup> Lister argued that showing a North Vietnamese-Egyptian alignment could weaken the resolve of Jewish leaders in the anti-war movement.<sup>35</sup> It is unclear how far Lister's

plan went—but Lister did go so far as to follow up with a June 2, 1967 memo providing examples of pro-Nasser, anti-Israeli statements by Hanoi.<sup>36</sup>

Lister's propaganda efforts paid clear dividends in certain instances. This was facilitated by Lister paying close attention to information traffic concerning Chinese and Soviet activities in Latin America.<sup>37</sup> In February 1966, Lister drew attention to a Soviet broadcast which was offensive to the Brazilian Government as well as the U.S. Ambassador to Brazil, Lincoln Gordon. Lister arranged for Portuguese tapes of the Soviet broadcasts to be given to the Brazilian government. As a result, within 48 hours the Brazilian government expelled the local representative for Radio Moscow and *Izvestiya*, the Soviet newspaper.<sup>38</sup>

### **Speaking and Publishing Activities**

The special effort made by Lister to greet Gabriel García Marquez was typical of his approach to visiting Latin Americans, whom he took pleasure in hosting. On a regular basis, he met with Latin American visitors in the State Department, where he would lead a discussion on U.S. foreign policy.<sup>39</sup> In 1966, according to Lister's performance evaluation from that year, he was hosting an average of two groups each week of 15-20 people.<sup>40</sup> Visitors included journalists, teachers, students, and labor leaders. Discussions frequently were "provocative" and "intense" according to Lister's 1966 performance evaluation, and they sometimes lasted up to four hours.<sup>41</sup>

Lister's facility with explaining U.S. foreign policy objectives created speaking and publishing opportunities. He became a frequent speaker at U.S. universities beginning in the late 1960s. In September 1966, he recorded a 15-minute record with the title "Communism in Latin America" which was distributed to about 400 U.S. high schools and colleges.<sup>42</sup> Additionally, he drafted a 1400 word Spanish-language pamphlet for the U.S. Information Agency that explained U.S. policy towards Communism in Latin America. In English translation, the pamphlet was entitled "United States Foreign Policy: Sterile Anti-Communism?"

Lister's speeches and publications provide a detailed picture of what he meant by "effective political dialogue." As the title of his pamphlet suggests, Lister tried to confront the perception that the U.S. was anti-communist in too simple-minded a fashion. A text of one of Lister's speeches from the time explains that the U.S. is motivated by two objectives: survival and democracy.<sup>43</sup> He defines the "basic world struggle" not as a contest between the economic systems of socialism and capitalism, but between the political systems of democracy and Communist dictatorships.<sup>44</sup> Lister also assured his audiences that the U.S. was "not trying to make the world a carbon copy of the United States" and that individual countries may "have different values and different temperaments."<sup>45</sup> The U.S. does not object, he said, to countries choosing a socialist economic system within a political democracy.<sup>46</sup>

All of Lister's speaking and publishing activities reached thousands of foreigners and doubtlessly gave them a more favorable impression of the U.S.—if not

its foreign policy goals. Robert W. Adams, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, believed that Lister's discussions with visiting student groups were effective in shaping their perceptions of the U.S. "I am convinced that these discussions...can be extremely important in establishing a frame of reference within which the students' further experiences in the United States will be perceived and interpreted," Adams wrote in a memo on January 22, 1965.<sup>47</sup>

Indeed, many Latin American visitors raved about their encounters with Lister, and much of this praise was filtered back to the Department via the Embassies. "I have never seen so many spontaneous tributes to an individual in any particular field," wrote Lister's performance evaluator in 1966.<sup>48</sup> Latin Americans attending a Lister presentation found him frank, yet able to portray the U.S. in a positive light. "Your exposition gave me that uplifting so necessary after so much dish-wash talk," wrote Arnolando G. Borrego, a law student attending George Washington University, in March 1968.<sup>49</sup> A student next to Borrego said aloud "God, we are getting ahead again" and Borrego wrote "I had the very same feeling."<sup>50</sup>

### **Dialogue with Chilean Socialists**

Besides trying to improve the State Department's performance in achieving U.S. objectives in all Latin American countries, Lister devoted extra attention to the situation in certain countries. Lister was particularly drawn to the case of Chile, a country with a strong Socialist party which he believed could be influenced to move

away from the Communists, much as had happened in Italy. Nevertheless, during the 1960s and early 1970s, Lister had little success in convincing U.S. policymakers to pursue this course.

Lister's involvement in Chilean affairs began as early as January 1963, when he prepared his first memorandum advocating ways in which the U.S. might begin attracting the Chilean Socialists away from the Communists.<sup>51</sup> His memorandum was sent on to Santiago, but Ambassador Charles W. Cole concluded that the Chilean Socialist Party was too radical to be influenced and that any such attempts would be futile.<sup>52</sup> Lister persisted. On September 4, 1963, commenting on the State Department's most recent comprehensive policy statement on Chile, Lister wrote that he feared that "we may be leaning too heavily on those political combinations which sound and/or are the most reliably anti-Communist."<sup>53</sup> The State Department might "be seriously underestimating" the chances of splitting the Socialists from the Communists, he wrote.<sup>54</sup>

In 1964, Chileans elected Eduardo Frei, a centrist leader from the Christian Democratic Party, as President. In an effort to forestall rising Socialist influence in Chile, the U.S. government showered the Frei government with foreign aid—a total of \$1.2 billion between 1962 and 1970.<sup>55</sup> Following Frei's election, Lister again called for the "development and maintenance of an effective and extensive political 'dialogue' with Chileans" with the goal of influencing Chilean Socialists to enter squarely within the democratic fold.<sup>56</sup> Lister's policy suggestions again went

unheeded. In 1970, Socialist Salvador Allende was elected to the presidency. Lister wrote in a memo that the “deliberate decision” of the U.S. government not to develop contact with the Socialists during the 1960s had been a mistake.<sup>57</sup> Now a “triumphant Socialist-Communist” coalition had been elected “run by people who know little or nothing of us and of whom we are abysmally ignorant.”<sup>58</sup>

Despite missed opportunities, Lister argued in 1970 that the U.S. should not give up attempts to influence the Allende government’s political philosophy or keep it from falling under Soviet influence.<sup>59</sup> It might be possible, he wrote, for the U.S. to establish a “modus vivendi” with Allende.<sup>60</sup> Once again, Lister’s input counted for little. On November 6, 1970, the National Security Council met to discuss ways to remove Allende from power. Over the next three years, the U.S. engaged in an effort “to destabilize the Chilean government—economically, politically, and militarily,” according to Chilean expert Peter Kornbluh.<sup>61</sup> On September 11, 1973, the Chilean military, led by General Augusto Pinochet, ousted Allende from power.

### **Intervention in the Dominican Republic**

In a speech in 1992 on his role in the development of the Italian center-left, Lister asserted that he was not with the CIA in Italy and “never has been.”<sup>62</sup> Probably the closest Lister came to participation in a covert intelligence mission was in May 1965, when President Johnson intervened militarily in the Dominican Republic to prevent a popular rebellion from unseating a military junta. Lister was sent to Santo

Domingo as part of an inter-departmental team charged with gathering evidence that Communists had taken over the rebel movement.<sup>63</sup>

The political situation in the Dominican Republic in 1965 was complicated. Prior to the 1960s, the country had suffered for three decades under the brutal rule of dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina.<sup>64</sup> In 1962, the country elected Juan Bosch, a moderate leftist, as president. A military coup deposed Bosch from power in September 1963.<sup>65</sup> In April 1965, an uprising began which attempted to restore Bosch to power. President Johnson, arguing that Communists had taken over the rebel movement and that a rebel victory would lead to a second Communist nation in the Caribbean, intervened to prevent the rebels' success. In May 1965, the U.S. deployed a force of more than 31,000 from the Army, Navy, and Marines.<sup>66</sup>

Upon only two hour's notice, Lister was chosen as the State Department representative to go to Santo Domingo to produce evidence of Communist takeover of the rebel movement.<sup>67</sup> Arriving by Air Force plane on May 5, 1965, he was accompanied by a representative from the Department of Defense, an Army officer, and two representatives from the Department of Justice.<sup>68</sup> Over the course of several days, Lister interviewed Dominicans on both sides of the conflict, tape recording some of his interviews;<sup>69</sup> he then cabled synopses of his interviews to Washington. Among those he interviewed were the following: José Rafael Molina Urena, a rebel leader who had briefly been installed as president until a successful junta offensive;<sup>70</sup>

various Dominicans seeking asylum aboard the U.S.S. Boxer warship;<sup>71</sup> and various Dominicans on the streets and in the bars of Santo Domingo.<sup>72</sup>

Lister's analysis of the Dominican situation was that the majority of rebels were not Communists and that Communists had not been involved in planning the uprising.<sup>73</sup> At the same time, he believed that Communists in the Dominican Republic had taken advantage of the situation and that the rebels had lost control of the uprising.<sup>74</sup> "Commies apparently knew trouble was coming and were ready to go for jugular when saw opportunity," Lister cabled to Washington on May 9.<sup>75</sup> His final report, written after his return, concluded that Communists would not initially have controlled the government if the rebels had won, but that they likely would have "maneuvered themselves into complete control" within six months.<sup>76</sup> Lister concluded overall that the intervention had been necessary.<sup>77</sup>

Lister was an unusual choice for the mission because he had had little experience in Dominican affairs, recalled Harry Shlaudeman, who served as a political counselor at the U.S. embassy in the Dominican Republic from 1962-1964.<sup>78</sup> Given his lack of familiarity with the Dominican Republic and the short notice he was given for the trip, Lister executed his assigned task well. An evaluation of Lister's performance in the Dominican crisis praises him for his series of "highly useful cables" which displayed "enterprise and ability in making valuable contacts easily and obtaining badly needed information quickly..."<sup>79</sup> Lister's final 10-page report on

the crisis was “interesting and informative enough” that it was sent to the White House.<sup>80</sup>

Beyond his personal performance, Lister’s impact during the Dominican crisis needs to be understood in the context of the intervention. At the time, many Latin Americans were outraged that the U.S. had interfered militarily in a sovereign state’s affairs.<sup>81</sup> Historians have doubted U.S. motives as well. Eric Chester Arthur, for example, has argued that President Johnson’s official reason for intervening in the Dominican Republic was pretextual. The U.S. intervened, according to Chester, not because Communists had usurped the rebel movement, but because President Johnson and his top aides were uncomfortable with a return to power of left-leaning Juan Bosch, the constitutionally elected president.<sup>82</sup> The U.S. intervention led to an election in 1966 between Bosch and Joaquín Balaguer, the former deputy to Trujillo. Balaguer won amidst accusations of voter fraud, allowing him to rule autocratically until 1978 and be a force in Dominican politics for most of the next 30 years.<sup>83</sup>

Lister’s task during the Dominican crisis thus was to provide a post-hoc justification for a policy that critics said was not necessarily wise or based on sound evidence. Lister undoubtedly must have felt pressure to produce only the kind of intelligence that would justify the President’s policy—much as some intelligence analysts felt in the lead-up to the current Iraq war. Shlaudeman recalled that he found Lister’s mission to be “bizarre” for several reasons: because the Johnson administration had already gone through with the intervention; because the evidence

of Communist infiltration was weak to begin with; and because of the unlikelihood that Lister, a stranger to the Dominican Republic, could quickly enter into those Communist circles that did exist.<sup>84</sup> “I just remember our general feeling that the whole exercise was ludicrous,” he recalled.<sup>85</sup>

By finding evidence of Communist infiltration of the rebel movement, Lister’s reports did tend to justify Johnson’s policy. On the other hand, Lister’s reports were not necessarily beholden to the Johnson administration’s preferred version of events. His analyses may have reduced Communist involvement in the rebel movement beyond what the administration wished to believe. Lister also reported that there was “some feeling in Santo Domingo that we should have pushed harder in past months for holding elections, and that this might have helped to avoid the recent explosion.”<sup>86</sup> Some of what Lister reported evidently was controversial. His performance evaluation commends him for “his intellectual courage in reporting events and situations honestly and objectively (regardless of the effect this might have on his career).”<sup>87</sup>

### **Military Solutions to the Communist Problem**

Though Lister specialized in strategies to win the ideological battle against the Communists, he could be hawkish in his foreign policy approach. As his involvement in the Dominican episode indicates, Lister was not averse to the use of U.S. military power. Furthermore, at least in the late 1960s, he worked hard to support the Vietnam

War effort. Besides his propaganda suggestions for undercutting the anti-war movement, Lister was dedicated to a project to win financial or military support for the war from the governments of Latin American countries, according to Sandy M. Pringle, who served in the Bureau Inter-American Affairs in the late 1960s.<sup>88</sup> Pringle recalls Lister's efforts were generally unsuccessful.<sup>89</sup>

Lister's views on Vietnam may have evolved. In a note from late 1967, Averell Harriman asked Lister to prepare a memorandum calling into question Senator Robert F. Kennedy's anti-Vietnam stance given the Senator's earlier support for counter-insurgency operations as Attorney General.<sup>90</sup> During the Kennedy administration, Harriman had chaired a special "CI" committee on counterinsurgency tactics in Vietnam.<sup>91</sup> Harriman wrote that he chose Lister for the memorandum because he wanted it to come from "someone who has admired the work [Robert Kennedy] did for the Special Group C.I."<sup>92</sup> Lister replied to Harriman that he preferred not to write the memorandum due to the risks to his career.<sup>93</sup> But Lister also suggests uneasiness with promoting counterinsurgency tactics, telling Harriman "I still remain faithful to your original exhortation to me (at the time of my assignment to ARA) to work on behalf of '*peaceful, democratic revolutions*' in America" (emphasis added).<sup>94</sup>

Additionally, Lister was beginning to question whether U.S. assistance to Latin American countries was being used for repressive purposes. In September 1970, he went on a tour of the International Police Academy, a school providing training to

foreign police officers founded by the Office of Public Safety in the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID). Lister was alarmed by a verbal exchange in which it was suggested that the “good guys” were “always on the side of law and order.”<sup>95</sup> He did not go so far as to question the academy’s existence, but he did suggest to Deputy Assistant Secretary of State John H. Crimmins that the program receive “political guidance.”<sup>96</sup> It would later become apparent that foreign police officers trained by the Office of Public Safety were being used in counterinsurgency operations. The Office of Public Safety and the International Police Academy were eventually closed in 1975, after having trained a total of 10,000 people.<sup>97</sup>

Lister also spoke out directly against some repressive Latin American regimes. In 1968, he reportedly questioned U.S. support for the Guatemalan military regime.<sup>98</sup> In 1969, Lister wrote a memo to Crimmins on an upcoming visit by New York Governor David H. Rockefeller to Brazil in which he strongly urged against Brazilian plans to decorate a U.S. general. Lister wrote that the decoration would “seem to put the U.S.-Rockefeller stamp of approval on the present regime.”<sup>99</sup>

In 1972, Lister played a useful role in supporting democracy in El Salvador. International observers believed that Christian Democratic candidate José Napoleon Duarte had won the election, but official tallies from a fraudulent recount by the military-supported government put the government’s preferred candidate, Colonel Arturo Armando Molina, ahead.<sup>100</sup> The Salvadoran government was holding Duarte prisoner, so Lister went to the Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American

Affairs to ask that the U.S. press the Salvadorans to release Duarte.<sup>101</sup> His memo on the subject does not mention the Acting Assisting Secretary by name, but it was most likely John H. Crimmins, who served in that position when Charles A. Meyer, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, was abroad or on leave.<sup>102</sup>

The Acting Assistant Secretary, gazing out his window at Arlington, told Lister it wasn't the business of the U.S. government to get involved.<sup>103</sup> However, Lister insisted, arguing that the U.S. should support Duarte because he was "a democrat."<sup>104</sup> The Acting Assistant Secretary agreed to send the Salvadorans a cable about the issue, and shortly thereafter Duarte was sent into exile in Venezuela.<sup>105</sup> "I believe that it was partly because of our pressure that Duarte was sent off..." Lister later wrote.<sup>106</sup> In the early 1980s, Duarte would serve as president of El Salvador, though his years in office were marked by some of the worst years of El Salvador's civil war.<sup>107</sup>

The support Lister showed for human rights and democracy in Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s occurred at a time when "human rights" was not a part of the common vocabulary of Foreign Service Officers. Indeed, Lister rarely, if ever, used the word in his memorandums before 1973. Nevertheless, Lister helped prepare the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs for what was to come. Crimmins, in a recent interview, said that Lister "had a very useful effect on...members of the Foreign Service," by raising issues that were not usually given much attention.<sup>108</sup> "He

was sort of an oddball in a sense but I thought he was a terrific man of principle,” Crimmins said.<sup>109</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Between 1961 and 1973, Lister worked quite independently in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs in a position that was free of the bureaucratic restraints he loathed. His success was mixed. He was least effective at persuading top decision-makers to fully adopt his policy ideas. His bureaucratic freedom left him able to weigh in on a variety of policy issues. Yet, without a bureaucratic constituency, very often it seems nobody was listening to him.

Lister, for example, was unable to persuade those responsible for U.S. policy towards Chile to open a dialogue with the Chilean Socialist party. Despite his best efforts, U.S. embassies in many Latin American countries did not participate in what Lister called “effective political dialogue.” Lister also failed to win approval for his proposal to the National Security Council for the U.S. government to coordinate efforts to identify and influence potential Latin American leaders.

His greatest impact may have been on the opinions of thousands of Latin Americans regarding U.S. democracy and foreign policy goals. His anti-Communist propaganda activities and his speaking and publishing efforts amounted to a significant public diplomacy effort for one lone State Department official. His success in persuading the U.S. government to adopt a more open visa policy also helped to

win the ideological battle against the Communists, both by denying Communist governments an opportunity to portray the U.S. as fearful of leftist political philosophy and by increasing the number of Latin American visitors who stood to be favorably impressed by the United States.

Much of Lister's ability to affect policy occurred at the interpretive level. The cables he sent out to embassies to clarify certain policies provided him an opportunity to shape those policies—for example, on the threat of guerilla warfare in Bolivia. Moreover, when speaking to students, Lister claimed to be trying to remove some of their misconceptions about U.S. foreign policy. Many of the “misconceptions” he addressed, however, were not misconceptions, but rather a true reflection of certain strands in U.S. foreign policy thinking—for example, the “misconception” that the U.S. cares if a country is economically socialist or capitalist. Lister's speeches and publications may have served not only to influence Latin American audiences, but perhaps also to pressure U.S. foreign policymakers to take a nuanced approach to fighting Communism

All in all, by 1973, Lister could probably have considered his career to have been moderately successful. Although he had never risen to become an Ambassador or a top State Department official, he had helped stop the advance of Communism into Western Europe, particularly in Italy. He had also developed a strong record combating Communist influence in Latin America. At 60, he was eligible for retirement from the Foreign Service. But Lister still had more energy left. He had yet

to devote himself completely to the cause of human rights—the issue on which he would have the most impact and that would define his career.

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<sup>1</sup> Memo, George Lister to W. Averell Harriman, undated, Papers of George T. Lister, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin [hereinafter “Papers of George T. Lister”]

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Memo, George Lister to Clare Timberlake, September 19, 1962, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Memo, George Lister to Mr. Williams, “Allende’s Paese Sera Interview,” August 5, 1964., Papers of George T. Lister.

<sup>11</sup> Memo, George Lister to Robert Sayres, July 29, 1965, Papers of George T. Lister.

<sup>12</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with John Crimmins, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, April 5, 2007.

<sup>13</sup> Memo, George Lister to Clare Timberlake, September 19, 1962, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, “Status Report on Some Policies and Tactics,” September 14 1967, Papers of George T. Lister, pp. 1-15.

<sup>15</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, “Preventing Outbreaks of Guerrilla Warfare, April 27, 1967, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, “Status Report on Some Policies and Tactics,” September 14, 1967, p. 12.

<sup>17</sup> Memo, “‘What is to be Done’-- In Chile,” undated, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1. (Memo is most likely from 1970.)

<sup>18</sup> Report, George Lister, “Identifying, Contracting and Influencing Potential Latin American Leaders (NSSM 68), undated, Papers of George T. Lister.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>21</sup> Federation of American Scientists, *National Security Study Memorandums*. Online. Available: <http://www.fas.org/irp/offdocs/nssm-nixon/index.html>. Accessed: May 1, 2007.

<sup>22</sup> Memo, George Lister to John Crimmins, “Resurfacing NSSM 68 Potential Leaders Draft,” November 28, 1969, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 3.

<sup>23</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, “Status Report on Some Policies and Tactics,” September 14, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>27</sup> Memo, George Lister to Harry Shlaudeman, “Gabriel Garcia Marquez,” January 5, 1977, Papers of George Lister.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, “Status Report on Some Policies and Tactics,” September 14, 1967, p. 2.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

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- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Memo, George Lister to Mr. Williams, "Allende's Paese Sera Interview," August 5, 1964.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Memo, George Lister to W. Averill Harriman, "Two Suggestions Concerning Vietnam," May 31, 1967, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>36</sup> Memo, George Lister to W. Averell Harriman, "Hanoi and National Liberation Front Statements for Nasser and Against Israel," June 2, 1967, Papers of George T. Lister
- <sup>37</sup> Report, "Narrative Comments on Performance," June 2, 1966, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup> Memo, George Lister to Covey Oliver, "Status Report on Some Policies and Tactics," September 14, 1967, p. 5.
- <sup>39</sup> Report, "Narrative Comments on Performance," June 2, 1966, p. 2.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Speech, George Lister, February 1, 1968, Papers of George T. Lister, p. I, 1.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. II., 2-3.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. II, 1.
- <sup>46</sup> Ibid., pp. II, 1-2.
- <sup>47</sup> Memo, Robert W. Adams to Jacob Canter, "Role of Mr. George Lister in Briefing Student Groups," January 22, 1965, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Library of Congress.
- <sup>48</sup> Report, "Narrative Comments on Performance," June 2, 1966, p. 2.
- <sup>49</sup> Letter, Arnaldo Borrego to George Lister, March 6, 1968.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Memo, "'What is to be Done' -- In Chile," undated, p. 6.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 7.
- <sup>53</sup> Memo, George Lister to Lois Carlisle, "Comments on Draft Comprehensive Policy Paper for Chile," September 4, 1963, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>55</sup> Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003), p. 5.
- <sup>56</sup> Memo, George Lister to Jerome Fried, "Comments on Preliminary Draft of National Policy Paper for Chile," February 12, 1965, p. 1-2.
- <sup>57</sup> Memo, "'What is to be Done' -- In Chile," undated, p. 1.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 10.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid., p. 12.
- <sup>61</sup> Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File*, pp. 79-80.
- <sup>62</sup> George Lister, "Political Lessons: Italy and Chile," in *Italian Socialism: Between Politics and History*, ed. Spencer M. Di Scala (Amherst: Amherst : University of Massachusetts Press, 1996), p. 193.
- <sup>63</sup> Cable, "Santo Domingo 827," May 5, 1965, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>64</sup> Eric Thomas Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 2.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>67</sup> Memo, Unknown to William Boswell, November 16, 1967, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>68</sup> Outgoing Telegram, May 5, Santo Domingo, p. 1.
- <sup>69</sup> Memo, Unknown to William Boswell, November 16, 1967.

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- <sup>70</sup> Eric Thomas Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies*, p. 55.
- <sup>71</sup> Cable, "For Baber and Adams From Lister," May 9, 1965, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>72</sup> Memo, George Lister to Mr. Vaughn, "Comments on Dominican Crisis," June 3, 1965, Papers of George T. Lister pp. 5-6.
- <sup>73</sup> Cable, "For Adams From Lister," May 12, 1965, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1; Memo, Lister to Vaughn, "Comments on Dominican Crisis," June 3, 1965, p. 1.
- <sup>74</sup> Memo, Lister to Mr. Vaughn, "Comments on Dominican Crisis," June 3, 1965, p. 2.
- <sup>75</sup> Cable, "For Baber and Adams From Lister," May 9, 1965, p. 2.
- <sup>76</sup> Memo, Lister to Mr. Vaughn, "Comments on Dominican Crisis," June 3, 1965, p. 3.
- <sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.
- <sup>78</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Harry Shlaudeman, former State Department official, April 15, 2007.
- <sup>79</sup> Memo, Unknown to William Boswell, November 16, 1967.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>81</sup> Report, Thomas L. Hughes, "U.S. Department of State, "Patters of Latin American Views on the Dominican Crisis: The First Month," June 17, 1965, Papers of George Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>82</sup> Eric Thomas Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), p. 4.
- <sup>83</sup> Eric Thomas Chester, *Rag-Tags, Scum, Riff-Raff, and Commies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001), pp. 9-10.
- <sup>84</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Harry Shlaudeman, April 15, 2007.
- <sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>86</sup> Lister to Vaughn, "Comments on Dominican Crisis," June 3, 1965, p. 4.
- <sup>87</sup> Memo, Unknown to William Boswell, November 16, 1967.
- <sup>88</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Sandy Pringle, former State Department official, April 14, 2007.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>90</sup> Memo, W. Averell Harriman to George Lister, "Call George Lister," November 13, 1967, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Library of Congress.
- <sup>91</sup> Walter Isaacson, *The Wise Men* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), p. 638.
- <sup>92</sup> Memo, W. Averell Harriman to George Lister, "Call George Lister," November 13, 1967.
- <sup>93</sup> Memo, George Lister to W. Averell Harriman, December 6, 1967, Papers of W. Averell Harriman, Library of Congress.
- <sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>95</sup> Memo, George Lister to John Crimmins, "ARA/LA and the International Police Academy." October 1, 1970, Papers of George Lister, p. 2.
- <sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>97</sup> Michael T. Clare and Nancy Stein, "Handcuffs, Mace and Armored Cars: Exporting the Tools of Repression," *The Nation*, (October 16, 1976), pp. 365-366.
- <sup>98</sup> Nomination for the Warren M. Christopher Award, undated (1997), Papers of George T. Lister., p. 2.
- <sup>99</sup> Memo, George Lister to John Crimmins, "Rockefeller Visit to Brazil," June 12, 1969, Papers of George Lister, p. 2.
- <sup>100</sup> Library of Congress, "El Salvador, Dashed Hopes," Online. Available: [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+sv0020\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+sv0020)). Accessed: May 1, 2007.
- <sup>101</sup> Memo, George Lister to Elliott Abrams, "Lost Opportunities," May 19, 1983, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>102</sup> Email from Mark T. Hove, Historian, Office of the Historian, Department of State, "RE: Acting Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs 1972," to Gregory Krauss, May 3, 2007.
- <sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> CNN, *Jose Napoleon Duarte Fuentes*, Online. Available:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/cold.war/kbank/profiles/duarte/>. Accessed: May 2, 2007.

<sup>108</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with John Crimmins, April 5, 2007.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter 4. Building a Human Rights Policy

The term “human rights” was not one that Lister would frequently have heard during the first 32 years of his State Department career. In his job at the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Lister emphasized democracy, telling his audiences that the U.S. government “has a clear, positive pro-democratic ideology.”<sup>1</sup> During the 1950s and 1960s, the idea of giving “human rights” an emphasis in U.S. foreign policy was, according to historian Lars Schoultz, considered utopian.<sup>2</sup> Human rights also connoted a concern with how governments treated individuals within their borders. Professional diplomats, however, have been traditionally “guided by the idea that what a country does to its own citizens is not in any way something that another country should engage in,” noted John Shattuck, Assistant Secretary of State for Democracy, Human Rights and Labor from 1993 to 1998.<sup>3</sup>

The stirrings of the human rights issue were nonetheless evident from the very beginning of Lister’s career. The U.S., in fact, had been involved in the creation of some of the foundational human rights documents. In July 1941, as Lister was beginning work at the U.S. Embassy in Bogotá, Roosevelt and Churchill issued the Atlantic Charter, a statement of democratic principles that they hoped would guide nations after WWII. In 1948, during Lister’s tour of duty in Poland, the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document which had been drafted under the leadership of Eleanor Roosevelt. In the 1970s, when human

rights suddenly became a major U.S. foreign policy concern, Lister was already nearing retirement age. The human rights issue emerged just in time to open up a new chapter in his career, a chapter in which he would make a greater impact than at any previous time.

Between 1973 and 2002, Lister would devote his career almost entirely to human rights issues. Many of his contributions were made over the course of one or two decades, and for this reason I have chosen to address the period as a whole. The following discussion begins with background on the development of human rights in U.S. foreign policy and on George Lister's human rights career. The remainder of the chapter looks at Lister's role in institutionalizing human rights in the State Department and his impact on the human rights movement. In Chapter 5, I examine Lister's contribution to human rights and democracy in several countries. Finally, Chapter 6 will offer some theories as to why Lister was successful at human rights work and what lessons can be drawn from Lister's example.

## **Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy**

### **Emergence of the Issue**

Several factors converged in the early 1970s to make human rights issues a larger factor in U.S. foreign policy. In many Latin American countries, including Chile, Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay, military dictatorships were replacing democratically-elected governments.<sup>4</sup> Freedom of speech in these countries was

becoming curtailed by regimes willing to use violence and torture to maintain their hold on power. Meanwhile, discontent with the U.S. involvement in Vietnam and the Nixon and Ford administrations' realpolitik approach to foreign policy created a yearning for a greater dose of morality in U.S. foreign relations. Human rights advocates were particularly incensed about U.S. complicity in the Chilean coup.

U.S. political dynamics were also shifting. The excesses of the Watergate era had persuaded Congress to take a more assertive role in foreign policy; one of the ways it did so was by passing legislation on the human rights front and by engaging in oversight to ensure the Executive was taking human rights into account. Another power shift was the emergence of human rights organizations. Aided by the beginnings of globalization and the information age, these groups grew rapidly in the early 1970s.<sup>5</sup> Some of the groups, such as the Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), were small and U.S.-based. Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and other organizations were large and multinational. According to Kenneth Cmiel, the efforts of human rights non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the 1970s altered the foreign policymaking dynamic so that individuals and groups, not just nation-states, could exert major influence on U.S. foreign policy.<sup>6</sup>

Major Congressional involvement in human rights concerns began in 1973, when the House Subcommittee on International Organizations and Movements, led by Minnesota Representative Donald M. Fraser, began holding a series of hearings on the issue.<sup>7</sup> Non-governmental organizations, U.S. government officials, and other

international human rights experts were invited to testify.<sup>8</sup> Following the hearings, Fraser made 29 specific recommendations, which included the establishment of a Bureau of Humanitarian Affairs in the State Department and the designation of human rights officers in every regional bureau.<sup>9</sup> The legislation did not immediately pass, but the State Department still was persuaded to act in anticipation of future legislation. In 1974, it opted to designate human rights officers in every regional bureau.<sup>10</sup>

Legislation passed on human rights over the course of the 1970s would accomplish a number of goals. First, Congress went ahead with institutionalizing human rights in the State Department bureaucracy. In 1975, the State Department created a coordinator for humanitarian affairs, and in 1976 the Congress formally mandated the position in legislation.<sup>11</sup> In 1977, as part of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, the coordinator position was raised to the level of Assistant Secretary of State.<sup>12</sup> This Assistant Secretary was tasked with managing a new human rights bureau, the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs.<sup>13</sup> In addition to the creation of the human rights bureau, major legislation passed in the 1970s included requirements that economic and military aid be linked to human rights performance; that the State Department provide annual reports to Congress on human rights in countries around the world; that the U.S. oppose loans in international financial institutions to countries committing human gross human rights violations;

and that the U.S. deny most-favored nation trading status to non-market economies restricting emigration rights.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Executive Branch's Stance**

The implementation of human rights policy has varied in each presidential administration. Congressional pressure on the issue, however, has been a factor for every President. The Nixon and Ford administrations, the first to be squarely confronted with human rights pressure, were at most mildly supportive.<sup>15</sup> President Nixon never discussed the issue publicly while in office.<sup>16</sup> Under Ford, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger began to discuss the importance of human rights, but he was not committed to the issue.<sup>17</sup> One of Kissinger's strongest statements of support for human rights came in a speech he gave in Chile in June 1976 to the sixth general assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS).<sup>18</sup> However, recent declassified documents show that in a briefing to Pinochet prior to the speech, he told the dictator that the speech "was not aimed towards Chile" and that the speech had been necessary for him to appease Congress.<sup>19</sup>

With the election of Jimmy Carter in 1976, human rights issues took on a larger profile. Carter had campaigned on the human rights issue, he had highlighted it in his inaugural address, and he continued to speak on human rights as president.<sup>20</sup> Carter was the first President to explicitly assign human rights a value in foreign policy decisions.<sup>21</sup> On the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human

Rights, Carter reiterated that U.S. human rights policy was not a “decoration” but the actual “soul of our foreign policy.”<sup>22</sup> Lars Schoultz writes that President Carter’s statements for the first time gave human rights “an unparalleled prominence in foreign policy decision making.”<sup>23</sup>

Carter nevertheless often let other concerns trump human rights. Economic interests, for example, persuaded him to appear at a signing ceremony for the Panama Canal treaty with dictators Pinochet of Chile and Jorge Videla of Argentina.<sup>24</sup> As under the Nixon and Ford administrations, Congress continued to pressure the Executive on human rights. Sometimes Carter himself was scrutinized, but Congress also questioned whether the State Department’s ingrained culture was inconsistent with a strong human rights policy. In an essay published in 1979, Sen. Daniel P. Moynahan complained about resistance to a meaningful human right policy from “the career officers in the State Department who make up the permanent government....”<sup>25</sup>

Perhaps the real test of the durability of human rights in U.S. foreign policy came at the outset of the Reagan administration. As a candidate, Reagan had solicited foreign policy advice from Jeane Kirkpatrick, a critic of the Carter human rights policy best known for the argument that the U.S. ought to adopt a more permissive stance towards authoritarian regimes, or friendly right-wing dictatorships, as opposed to totalitarian or Communist regimes.<sup>26</sup> In his first days in office, Reagan continued to signal an end to Carter’s focus on human rights.<sup>27</sup> His nominee to lead the human rights bureau was Ernest Lefever, who had publicly advocated eliminating all human

rights legislation and ending the production of human rights country reports.<sup>28</sup>

Immediately after taking office, Reagan also asked Congress to resume military aid to Argentina, Chile, Guatemala and Uruguay, all of which had been denied aid under Carter for human rights reasons.<sup>29</sup>

However, the Senate's rejection of the Lefever nomination and the resulting negative publicity forced the Reagan administration to reconsider its stance.<sup>30</sup> A memorandum by Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for international organizations, proposed that the administration take a new approach. Abrams, writing that human rights "is at the core of our foreign policy," suggested a human rights policy that would be both moralistic and reoriented to the fight against Communism—for Reagan an appealing combination.<sup>31</sup> Reagan nominated Abrams to head the human rights bureau, and Abrams was quickly approved by Congress.<sup>32</sup>

To many Reagan administration critics, it may have appeared that Reagan did not have a human rights policy. Reagan's critics found him too supportive of authoritarian regimes, from Chile to the Philippines. Of particular concern was military aid to Central American countries such as El Salvador and Guatemala, where Reagan sought to take a harder line against leftist rebel movements.<sup>33</sup> In El Salvador, for instance, human rights organizations estimated that the Salvadoran government and paramilitary groups in 1982 had killed 6000 noncombatants.<sup>34</sup> Yet, State Department officials including Abrams contended that El Salvador's overall human rights record had improved enough since 1980 to justify \$25 million in military aid.<sup>35</sup>

Reagan's human rights policy was, undeniably, different from Carter's. The Reagan administration, at least in its rhetoric, treated human rights less as an absolute matter and more as a policy factor to be considered in a geo-strategic context.<sup>36</sup> However, the Reagan administration by no means dismantled U.S. human rights policy. The human rights reports required by Congress were kept objective.<sup>37</sup> Within the Department, he took a less combative approach than had Patricia Derian, his predecessor under Carter, although he reportedly challenged administration policy toward countries including Chile, Argentina, and Guatemala.<sup>38</sup> He preferred quiet diplomacy with foreign governments as opposed to public condemnations, but arguably such a strategy could be effective.<sup>39</sup> Eventually, the Reagan administration did publicly discuss human rights problems in countries such as Haiti, Chile, and the Philippines.<sup>40</sup>

Some of the difference was also a matter of tactics. The Reagan administration shifted emphasis away from individual human rights violations to the development of democratic institutions, which in the long-term it believed would be a better guarantor of human rights.<sup>41</sup> Abrams' introduction to the 1982 country reports stated that the administration's new approach was to ““treat not only the symptoms but the disease.””<sup>42</sup>

Since Reagan, a human rights emphasis has not been exclusively associated with either Democratic or Republican ideology. Rather changed circumstances—as well as shifting Presidential priorities—have meant that human rights policies

continue to evolve with each administration. Abrams' replacement in the human rights bureau, Richard Schifter, began in 1985 and continued through the George H.W. Bush administration, providing some continuity. During the Clinton administration, under the tenure of Assistant Secretary of State John Shattuck, the name of the human rights bureau was changed to the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor (DRL) to emphasize the importance of building democratic institutions and a larger emphasis on worker rights.<sup>43</sup> With the end of the Cold War, different priorities emerged; Shattuck, for example, was preoccupied with decisions about whether the U.S. should intervene to prevent genocide.<sup>44</sup> President George W. Bush, much maligned for human rights abuses related to the war on terror, has nonetheless led on human rights issues such as human trafficking.<sup>45</sup>

## **Lister and Human Rights**

Lister was a participant from the very beginning of Congressional involvement in human rights issues. Fraser's human rights hearings in 1973 created a "confrontational" relationship between Congress and the State Department, recalled John Salzberg, who at the time of the hearings was the Fraser staff member working with the subcommittee.<sup>46</sup> Although the State Department was under heavy political pressure, George Lister was supportive of the hearings.<sup>47</sup> He was not invited to testify, but he took the step, a sensitive one for a mid-level bureaucrat, of maintaining contact with Fraser, Salzberg and the subcommittee.

When, as a result of the hearings, the State Department appointed human rights officers in every regional bureau, Lister was appointed as the Human Rights Officer for the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs. Most of the first human rights officers appointed were labor experts, and they were expected to continue their regular duties and not devote themselves full-time to human rights.<sup>48</sup> Lister, however, appears to have applied himself to the issue assiduously. Brandon H. Grove, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in the Carter administration, recalled Lister's dedication to human rights. He "prowled the halls with a slight stoop," constantly making the case for human rights, Grove said.<sup>49</sup> When Lister sent Grove a memo, Grove knew that Lister would want to initiate a follow-up conversation within several days—or else that Lister would send a second memo referencing his first one. Lister "annoyed a lot of people by his insistence," said Grove.<sup>50</sup>

### **Why Human Rights?**

To some degree, it is surprising how assiduously Lister applied himself to the human rights cause. It would have been easy for Lister, at the age of 60, to regard the human rights movement with passing interest and to quietly retire without becoming involved. Yet, Lister had the resolve and energy to push a cause which was still in its infancy. Lister, according to Eubank, voted with the Democrats, but the human rights movement was probably further to the left than Lister;<sup>51</sup> most American human rights

activists were solidly anti-war. As noted in Chapter 3, Lister had supported the Dominican intervention in 1965, and he had later supported the Vietnam War.

For other reasons, though, Lister's devotion to human rights was not surprising. Lister was already a grizzled veteran of his own personal struggle against the State Department bureaucracy. Although nearing retirement age, perhaps he relished the chance for one more battle with State Department policymakers. Also, despite his support for the Vietnam War, Lister was sensitive to the way in which militaries could be used as a tool of repression. In the late 1960s, without using the term "human rights," he had even begun to speak out about U.S. military aid to right-wing dictatorships in Latin America. Finally, since his days as an FSO in Poland and Russia, he had cared deeply about the plight of people living under totalitarian regimes. In a speech in 1998, Lister said that freedom of speech and women's rights were the "two key human rights" in his opinion.<sup>52</sup> "He was not a religious man but I think he had a sense for the ways that governments can treat their fellow citizens in an inhuman and hideous way," said Joseph Eldridge, who served as director of WOLA from 1974 to 1986.

Human rights work furthermore dovetailed nicely with the kind of work Lister already advocated and excelled at. Lister had written Averell Harriman in 1962 that he desired to be a "global anti-communist activist." The human rights issue gave Lister a new way to take an activist approach against Communism around the world. Lister had also called for more "effective political dialogue" with Latin Americans.

Human rights were rhetorically useful for convincing Latin Americans that U.S. foreign policy objectives were not malevolent.

Additionally, although Lister had often been a host to visiting Latin Americans, his opportunities to personally conduct dialogue with political leaders, especially those out of power, had dwindled since his last overseas assignment in Italy. Despite his calls for diplomats at U.S. Embassies to conduct such dialogue, the results were frequently disappointing—especially with regards to Chile and with establishing ties with the democratic left. However, under the banner of human rights, Lister could re-engage himself in diplomacy. He now had a reason to maintain a relationship with any Latin American political dissident who was living in or visiting Washington, D.C.

### **Human Rights Career Overview: 1973-2002**

Beginning with his appointment as a human rights officer in 1974, Lister would work 28 more years at the State Department. As of August 14, 1974, Lister was already receiving a pension and working full-time in a consultant capacity to the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs.<sup>53</sup> He continued at the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs until October 1979, when his employment records indicate that he technically retired.<sup>54</sup> Assistant Secretary of State Viron P. Vaky, according to Eubank, reportedly tried to get Lister to leave the State Department at that point, but Lister continued on. In July 1981, Lister switched to the Bureau of Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, where he would serve as an unpaid consultant until 2002.<sup>55</sup>

His activities on behalf of human rights were multifaceted. From the 1970s through the end of career, Lister did his best to educate and influence top policymakers on human rights issues. One specific task of Lister's as a human rights officer during the 1970s, to oversee the creation of human rights reports, would leave a clear, lasting legacy. But Lister took his job beyond State Department walls, maintaining regular contact with Members of Congress, dissidents, and U.S. human rights activists.

Lister, who was divorced in 1970, dedicated himself around the clock to human rights, Eubank said.<sup>56</sup> He would begin his day by reading the newspapers, usually clipping out some items on human rights.<sup>57</sup> In *The Washington Times*, he would check for any relevant Congressional hearings.<sup>58</sup> He would then walk from his Dupont Circle apartment to the State Department, where he would usually begin by reading reports from the Foreign Broadcast Information Service.<sup>59</sup> His day would be filled with memorandums and office work, but also meetings with State Department visitors, press briefings, and Congressional hearings.<sup>60</sup> Evenings and on the weekends he would regularly attend human rights movement events.<sup>61</sup>

Lister's success at influencing foreign policymaking depended on the administration. Harry Shlaudeman, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs at the end of the Ford administration, did not remember Lister as being particularly effective. "I don't remember him ever doing anything

substantial,” Shlaudeman said. “Just a lot of gossip about the [human rights] movement. I don’t know really what he was trying to do.”<sup>62</sup>

Lister probably had more impact during the Carter administration, when human rights concerns were given more weight. Brandon H. Grove, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs in the Carter administration, remembers Lister as someone who effectively promoted the need for the bureau to take human rights into account. “He had a lot of influence in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs and not everybody wanted to hear it,” Grove said. “In that sense he was quite a hero.”<sup>63</sup>

Lister, who as a boy had been introduced to “Uncle Joe” Cannon, expanded his influence through his contacts with Congress, Grove said. Some State Department officials were concerned that if they appeared too resistant to human rights that Lister would notify his friends on Capitol Hill. “That was a device of his own making that pinned the State Department down a bit,” Grove said.<sup>64</sup> “So people were careful about trying to look responsive to what he, George, was [saying].” Lister’s relationships with the Congress also equipped him to give advice to State Department officials on relations with Congress; a memo from July 1977 to Terence Todman, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, shows Lister giving advice about how to address Congressional concerns regarding Carter’s policy towards Nicaragua.<sup>65</sup>

Lister did some of the most valuable work of his career during the 1980s under Elliott Abrams, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and

Humanitarian Affairs, and Abrams' successor, Richard Schifter. A 1985 performance evaluation of Lister by Abrams strongly praises Lister's diplomacy and describes Lister's astounding network of human rights activists in the U.S. and abroad.<sup>66</sup> (I define "human rights activist" to include both U.S. human rights activists and foreign dissidents.) Abrams notes that Lister helped initiate contact between the State Department and Solidarity leaders in Poland; served as the department's contact with Kim Dae Jung, the South Korean dissident who later became president; built relationships with the democratic opposition to Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet; worked with Congressional leaders; acted as the department's main contact with human rights NGOs; and in other ways furthered the human rights cause.<sup>67</sup>

By the 1990s, Lister was beginning to receive recognition for his work. Yet, his status at the bureau increasingly was challenged. Technically, after 1981 Lister was an "intermittent expert" meaning he was not supposed to work full-time—but Lister still reported to work each day. In 1993, the State Department's Inspector General Office criticized him in a report for working twice as much as authorized and acting too much like a paid Foreign Service officer.<sup>68</sup> The report complained that the human rights bureau had "come to resemble a bureau of solo performers" that was beyond "management control."<sup>69</sup> In "Recommendation 18" of the report, the Inspector General called for Lister's termination.<sup>70</sup>

Lister, who was not battling a potential dismissal from the State Department for the first time in his life, rallied friends to his support. Schlesinger described him to

a reporter as “Mr. Human Rights.”<sup>71</sup> Rep. Bill Richardson (now Governor of New Mexico) praised Lister in the Congressional record and wrote a letter to the State Department asking them to “make good use of George’s unique talents and experience.”<sup>72</sup> The dispute was covered in an article in *The Washington Post* titled “Risky Work at the State Department.”<sup>73</sup> Lister’s job was spared again, but as he grew older, he continued to battle to maintain his position.<sup>74</sup>

## **Impact on the Institutionalization of Human Rights in the State Department**

Human rights legislation in the 1970s tried to create durable mechanisms by which U.S. foreign policymakers would be forced to take human rights concerns into account. An important part of this legislation was the establishment of a bureaucratic structure in the State Department which would be forced to consider and promote human rights issues. The structure that was settled upon had three core elements: the creation of a human rights bureau in the State Department, the assignment of human rights officers to regional bureaus, and the requirement that the State Department produce annual country reports on human rights practices.

George Lister did not himself design this bureaucratic structure, but he was critical to its implementation. Partly as a result of Lister’s efforts, U.S. human rights policy became ingrained into the State Department bureaucracy—meaning that all

presidential administrations must now give some deference to human rights when making and explaining their foreign policy decisions.

### **Human Rights Reporting**

Human rights reporting requirements grew out of legislation tying military and economic aid to human rights performance. In 1974, Congress added Section 502b to the Foreign Assistance Act, a non-binding statement to the effect that the President should deny military assistance to countries committing gross human rights violations.<sup>75</sup> Subsequent revisions to Section 502b made the provision binding,<sup>76</sup> and required the State Department to issue human rights reports on countries receiving military assistance.<sup>77</sup> In 1974, Congress also passed the “Harkin amendment” introduced by then Rep. Tom Harkin; the legislation amended Section 116 of the Foreign Assistance Act to link development assistance to a country’s human rights record as reported by the State Department.

As the human rights officer in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, Lister oversaw the production of the first human rights reports written on Latin America. The reports began modestly. His memo of July 15, 1975, addressed to ARA Office Directors—the officers with responsibility for individual Latin American countries—specified that the reports “are to be short, terse and factual, and should not exceed two pages, single spaced.”<sup>78</sup> The reports were to include a “brief summary of the human rights situation” followed by analysis of what approach the U.S. should take to

encourage improvement. As if to underscore that the undertaking was not a massive one, Lister asked for drafts to be submitted to him by July 22, only one week later.<sup>79</sup>

A year later, the reports had broadened in scope. Lister's memo to ARA Office Directors from 1976 outlines a more complex structure; the reports were to systematically provide information on the civil and political rights delineated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Rights covered included those related to integrity of the person, such as slavery, torture, arbitrary arrests, and fair trials; as well as other liberties such as freedom of assembly, religion, and movement.<sup>80</sup>

It is unclear to what extent Lister himself shaped the structure of these first reports. Beyond the congressionally-mandated requirements, Lister's correspondence suggests that the outline for the reports was largely determined within the Office of the Coordinator for Humanitarian Affairs and the subsequently-created human rights bureau.<sup>81</sup> Much debate also pertained to whether draft text for the reports should first be prepared in Washington, D.C. or by embassies in the field. During the drafting process in 1977, it had initially been decided that each regional bureau in Washington, D.C. would have discretion to determine whether the first drafts were prepared in Washington, D.C. or by embassies in the field. In June 1977, Lister wrote to inform ARA officers that "at a Departmental meeting" it had been decided that all first drafts would be prepared by the regional bureaus in Washington, D.C., subsequently approved by the human rights bureau, and then sent "to the field for comment and recommendations."<sup>82</sup>

Lister had an effect on the drafting process that eventually became standard. In 1979, Lister, according to his nomination for the Warren Christopher Award, wrote a memorandum offering several suggestions for improving the preparation of human rights reports.<sup>83</sup> One of his recommendations led to the creation of country reports teams.<sup>84</sup> Under this system, human rights reports are prepared at the embassy level by a team of specialists from different areas of the embassy.<sup>85</sup> This is the system still in place today. Draft reports are prepared by teams at the embassy level before being sent to Washington, D.C. for revision and approval.<sup>86</sup>

Besides shaping the process by which the reports were produced, Lister had a significant hand in editing the reports for objectivity and accuracy. Lister wrote to Shlaudeman on December 10, 1976 that the ARA should review the draft reports given that they would receive “careful, often hostile scrutiny in human rights and Latin Americanist circles in this country and elsewhere.”<sup>87</sup> Lister went on to criticize what he perceived to be common weaknesses in the reports. He found, for instance, that the drafts too consistently characterized government and right-wing violence as a reaction to left-wing violence. “That is sometimes true, but it should be remembered that some left wing violence is a reaction against undemocratic, repressive rule,” he observed.<sup>88</sup> Lister also drew attention to a tendency in the reports to portray victims of human rights abuses as “left wing terrorists and extremists.” His memo asks, “What about completely innocent civilians?”<sup>89</sup>

Lister won plaudits from Patricia Derian, Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs under Carter, for his work preparing the 1978 human rights reports. Derian reported to Ambassador Viron P. Vaky, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, that Lister had “performed a very difficult and sensitive task superlatively.”<sup>90</sup> The Latin American bureau “led in timeliness throughout the process” of drafting the reports and “credit for this achievement...goes to George,” Derian wrote, continuing:

More importantly, during the several months which were required for the preparation of the Country Reports, George was unfailing[ly] patient, actively seeking to insure [sic] that the final Reports met the Deputy Secretary’s requirement that they be objective, specific and responsive. His steady delineation of ARA’s concerns was of immense help to my colleagues; the quality of the ARA reports demonstrate that he was also fully able to explain HA’s [the human rights bureau’s] needs to members of your Bureau.

Of course, Lister was just one of the many people who shaped the evolution of State Department human rights reports. Nonetheless, his contributions should be considered in light of the importance of the endeavor. The reports created the foundation for the Carter administration’s new human rights policy. On the basis of the information compiled in human rights reports, the U.S. opposed 52 loans to 16 countries on human rights grounds by the end of 1978.<sup>91</sup> Military aid to a dozen countries was altered in both 1977 and 1978.<sup>92</sup> Besides serving as a basis for U.S. foreign policy decisions, the reports became an important, objective source of information for human rights activists worldwide. “I do believe of all of the changes that we made, apart perhaps of setting up the Bureau of Human Rights in the State

Department, that requiring the development and publication of these reports was probably the most useful result of our efforts,” Fraser reflected.<sup>93</sup>

Human rights country reports, on the other hand, did not take care of Congress’ human rights information needs completely. Some Members of Congress liked to receive updated information on particular human rights issues—information which Lister was willing to supply, often from his contacts in the human rights movement. Fraser recalls Lister as able to “provide information and insights about events everywhere that touched on human rights practices.”<sup>94</sup> Lister also spoke about human rights as often as he could. “There were people whom he’d see at receptions or at different informal events, he’d talk with them, he’d make sure that they were aware of what was going on,” said Diane La Voy, one of the founders of the Washington Office on Latin America. To Lister, it did not matter that distributing information about human rights to Members of Congress and others was not necessarily within his job description. “There was not one shred of doubt or question as to who [Lister] was serving,” La Voy observed. “He was serving the American people and the government. He saw it all as one government.”<sup>95</sup>

## **Building a Human Rights Bureau**

### *Fraser Subcommittee*

The human rights hearings held by the Fraser subcommittee did not directly produce the legislation that institutionalized human rights in the State Department,

but the hearings were the starting point. The subcommittee's recommendations for the creation of a human rights bureau and the designation of human rights officers eventually were adopted. As already observed, Lister was in contact with the subcommittee during the hearings. Although it is unclear how precisely Lister shaped the subcommittee's recommendations, Lister's nomination for the Warren M. Christopher Award in 1997 notes that Lister "worked closely with Fraser and his staff" and states that "[p]erhaps George Lister's greatest lifetime achievement was his role in the creation of the State Department's Bureau of Human Rights."<sup>96</sup>

Fraser recalls that Lister took the initiative to meet him to share his foreign policy ideas "well before" the hearings took place.<sup>97</sup> Lister, Fraser said, was a "constant source of support and interest" in the subcommittee's activities, placing Lister among a "cadre of people" in Washington who had coalesced around the issue.<sup>98</sup> Salzberg recently described Lister's contribution as being mainly one of keeping the Fraser subcommittee informed about the "disquiet" being caused within the State Department during the hearings.<sup>99</sup> Perhaps one of Lister's main contributions was to let legislators know that, although there would be a lot of resistance in the State Department to a Congressionally-mandated human rights policy, there were also people, like himself, who would work tirelessly to implement it. Lister's contact with Fraser also had the beneficial effect of fostering a long relationship between Lister and Members of Congress active on human rights issues.

### *Implementing the Bureau*

Lister's work to help the human rights bureau operate in its early years was probably even more important than the support he gave the Fraser subcommittee. Although Lister did not join the human rights bureau himself until 1981, he worked closely with it before then. In his first years dedicated to human rights between 1974 and 1977, there was actually very little in terms of a human rights bureau for Lister to assist. James M. Wilson, Jr., appointed as coordinator for humanitarian affairs in 1975, led a small office that had little impact on policy.<sup>100</sup>

When the human rights bureau came into existence in 1977, it was comprised of Assistant Secretary of State Patricia Derian and just two other professionals.<sup>101</sup> By 1979, the bureau was slightly larger, with 13 officers, but it still was a small bureau trying to wield influence in a large bureaucracy.<sup>102</sup> Derian was also just one member on an interdepartmental committee, chaired by Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher, which had most of the responsibility for coordinating human rights policy.<sup>103</sup> Derian aggressively challenged other bureaus and departments to take human rights issues into account, and she was not always well-received.<sup>104</sup> In Lister, she at least had an ally in the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs who agreed with her on the importance of human rights. As noted above, the two worked together productively on human rights reports.

Lister's biggest contribution to the human rights bureau came after his move to the bureau at the beginning of the Reagan administration. Lister arrived at a critical

moment. The bureau had already been through a period of instability at the end of the Carter administration. In 1979, Senior Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Mark Schneider had left the bureau, and in 1980, Derian had taken a leave of absence. Other staff people were also leaving at the end of the Carter administration due to the upcoming election and the perception that the administration had lost its human rights focus.<sup>105</sup> The appointment of Stephen Palmer as Acting Assistant Secretary of State kept the bureau afloat, but it continued to languish.

The true test of the durability of the bureau was whether it could survive a change in administration. When Reagan took office in January 1981, morale had never been worse in the human rights bureau. As noted above, Reagan initially was against a strong human rights policy; he had nominated Ernest Lefever, an opponent of drawing human rights into U.S. foreign policy, to head the bureau. Bureau officials admitted that during the Lefever episode the human rights bureau was the “laughing stock” of the State Department.<sup>106</sup> Lister later recalled that “there were some, in and out of government, who assumed that our human rights policy was finished.”<sup>107</sup>

Lister joined the human rights bureau in July 1981.<sup>108</sup> He was followed in December by Reagan’s second nominee, Elliot Abrams, who had written the memorandum outlining what would be Reagan’s new human rights approach.<sup>109</sup> Abrams, in his early 30s, was a conservative Harvard law school graduate who had worked on the staffs of Democratic Senators Henry “Scoop” Jackson and Pat Moynihan.<sup>110</sup> He had joined the Reagan campaign in 1980, and in the first months of

the Reagan administration, had served as Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs.<sup>111</sup>

Abrams' first impression of Lister was that he was an oddity. Already, Lister was a "slightly legendary figure" because he was continuing to work at the State Department after retiring, Abrams said.<sup>112</sup> Abrams' next impression was one of astonishment at the number of "important human rights figure[s]" Lister invited to the State Department. "They'd come in and they'd sort of look around and say hello and they'd see him and say, "George!" And rush across the room for an embrace," Abrams remembered. "So, it was very clear that he was not a typical figure in the building."<sup>113</sup>

Abrams proved to be a competent manager, but Lister would be critical to Abrams' efforts to reinvigorate the bureau. In later years, Lister de-emphasized Abrams' role or his own role in rescuing the human rights bureau at its nadir. Instead, he argued that bipartisan support in Congress and the fact that human rights legislation was still in force were the critical factors to the bureau's continuation.<sup>114</sup> But even if the bureau's existence was not at risk, Lister helped the bureau to continue growing as an institution when its development was at a standstill.

#### Bringing Contacts to the Bureau

The work of the human rights bureau depended to a large extent on relationships with Members of Congress, the human rights movement, and foreign

democratic opposition leaders. Lister brought to the bureau his relationships with all of these parties at a time when relationships with the State Department were becoming strained. Edmundo Vargas, at the time a Chilean opponent to the Pinochet regime, recalled that during the Reagan administration it became difficult for the Chilean opposition to find friends at the State Department. "...And then the role of George was really, really important," Vargas recalled. "I think that he was our best friend in the U.S. government."<sup>115</sup>

Lister, according to Abrams, provided an "especially valuable service" by acting as the bureau's "main contact" with the human rights movement and NGOs based in Washington, D.C. and abroad.<sup>116</sup> Lister was a fixture at human rights movement meetings, debates, receptions, rallies, demonstrations and events, according to Abrams, and he was "almost always" the only State Department official who attended.<sup>117</sup> Lister also tried to increase contact between the movement and Abrams himself. In the first month of Abram's tenure, Lister urged Abrams to make regular overtures to the human rights movement.<sup>118</sup> Although human rights NGOs were quite critical of Reagan's human rights policy, dialogues with the movement did take place. "The main thing is that there was an open, candid exchange of views, with participants really listening to each other," Lister wrote after a meeting between the bureau and NGOs in September 1983.<sup>119</sup>

#### Making Human Rights Policy Objective

Lister probably affected the bureau most by his relationships with opposition leaders from abroad. Abrams' performance evaluation of Lister, written in 1985, stresses the astounding array of countries in which Lister had established relationships with opposition leaders, including Guatemala, Chile, Nicaragua, Poland, South Korea, El Salvador, Uruguay, Uganda, the Philippines, the USSR, the Dominican Republic, Yugoslavia, Paraguay, and Cuba.<sup>120</sup> Lister also knew Panamanians, Argentines, South Africans, and Czechs, Abrams noted recently.<sup>121</sup> Opposition leaders often sought help with a short-term problem, such as the release of a political prisoner, and sometimes sought larger changes in U.S. policy. Regardless of whether the human rights bureau or the State Department decided to do nothing or take action, by giving democratic activists an entrée to the administration via the human rights bureau, the bureau became a starting point for policy discussion.

Lister's extensive range of contacts with opponents of both left-wing and right-wing regimes also helped the human rights bureau to treat human rights concerns more objectively than it might have. Abrams, in his memorandum outlining his vision for U.S. human rights policy prior to taking charge of the bureau, had emphasized the fight against Communism as the principal value of a human rights policy. Although Abrams advocated a moralistic foreign policy, his identification of Communist governments as the principal object of Reagan's human right policy echoed Jeanne Kirkpatrick's distinction between authoritarian and totalitarian regimes. However, Lister's contacts shaped Abrams' agenda, causing him to give

greater attention to human rights violations by right-wing regimes. "I think George had an influence there on me and on others in bringing [opponents of right-wing dictatorships] around and making it clear to them, and for that matter to the department, this was a relationship that needed to prosper if we were going to fight for democracy in a lot of countries around the world," Abrams stated.<sup>122</sup>

Frequently, the regional bureaus would object when Lister desired to invite an opponent of a right-wing dictatorship with which the U.S. had friendly relations. "We would meet with the Tibetans, who were not literally permitted to set foot in the building, in some hotel lobby. He would bring around dissident Chileans whom the Latin American Bureau did not wish to see," remembered Abrams.<sup>123</sup> The human rights bureau and the corresponding regional bureau often worked out a deal where the opposition leader would be received in the human rights bureau only.<sup>124</sup> Such arrangements may not have been to the liking of the opposition leaders, but, to the extent that the human rights bureau became the State Department's locus for dialogue with opposition leaders worldwide, the bureau's standing was elevated within the department.

In some instances, after the human rights bureau had already established contact with an opposition leader, the regional bureau would relent. As noted in the following chapter, the East Asian bureau originally objected to contact with South Korean opposition leader Kim Dae Jung.<sup>125</sup> But once Lister had established a relationship with Kim, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

Paul Wolfowitz agreed to a meeting.<sup>126</sup> The choice for regional bureaus was thus either to allow the human rights bureau to manage relationships with opposition leaders, or to engage the leaders themselves. If the former, the human rights bureau controlled an important aspect of diplomacy; if the regional bureau agreed to a meeting, then the human rights bureau won a policy victory. Either way, the human rights bureau gained.

Another of Lister's contributions, also furthered by his contacts with opposition leaders, was to help maintain the Carter administration's focus on individual instances of human rights abuses.<sup>127</sup> The Reagan administration made a show of shifting away from dealing with individual human rights problems to the development of democratic institutions. As part of this approach, in December 1983, the administration created the National Endowment for Democracy, a privately funded corporation with the goal of strengthening democratic institutions worldwide.<sup>128</sup> Nevertheless, according to Abrams, Lister kept the policy balanced, reminding Reagan officials that "no one will believe you mean it if you don't actually protect the people and work with the people who are trying to achieve these things."<sup>129</sup>

Abrams expressed early in his tenure that there was more continuity between the Carter and Reagan human rights policy than critics believed.<sup>130</sup> To the extent that this turned out to be true, Lister may deserve some of the credit. Lister kept the bureau as honest as possible—focused on human rights abuses wherever they

occurred. Lister's own toughness and dedication to human rights would have made it difficult for Abrams, inside or outside the bureau, to treat human rights lightly, so long as Lister remained on staff. Contrary to perceptions that Abrams only considered human rights as a wedge against Communism, Abrams did care about victims of right-wing oppression. "It's going to be a terrific place when these guys throw Pinochet out," Abrams scribbled on one of Lister's memorandums after one fruitful dialogue with Chilean dissidents in November 1983.<sup>131</sup>

In July 1985, Abrams left the human rights bureau to become Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs. Lister continued a close working relationship with Abrams' successor, Richard Schifter. Lister's work, though, was less critical to the bureau as he grew older—mainly because the process he had furthered of institutionalizing human rights had been successful. Lister continued many of the same activities, but he also began to act as something of a bureau historian. "George was as much as anyone the institutional memory of the Human Rights Bureau," said Harold Koh, leader of the bureau from 1998 to 2001.<sup>132</sup> "There is a lot of stuff that is not written down anywhere and he knew it. That was very valuable in making sure that we were staying on course."<sup>133</sup>

## **Impact on Human Rights Movement**

Both human rights country reports and the State Department's human rights bureau were critical pieces of the institutional architecture that helped to create a

larger role for human rights in U.S. foreign policy. However, at the same time that Lister was helping to build human rights policy from within the State Department, he was shaping how others outside the State Department were pressing the human rights cause. Lister also had a substantial impact on the place of human rights in U.S. foreign policy by encouraging young people to pursue their human rights goals.

### **Encouraging a Culture of Objective Advocacy**

#### *Persuading Activists to Lobby the U.S. Government*

Lister's ubiquitous presence at human rights meetings and events in Washington, D.C. often puzzled some activists. "So George started popping up at all kinds of events, solidarity events," said Eldridge.<sup>134</sup> "I mean I'd look around the room and there you'd have a bunch of hardcore leftists and George was sitting over in the corner." Some activists suspected Lister was a spy, but he was too conspicuous for that. "I thought...if they're spying on us this is a darn clumsy way to do it," said Eldridge. "He was the only one with a coat and tie, for heaven's sakes, and it just didn't compute."<sup>135</sup>

Lister had a number of reasons to go to human rights events—aside from the fact that he probably found them interesting. As mentioned above, Lister was the main contact between the human rights bureau and the human rights movement during the 1980s. To some degree, he was, indeed "spying." Attending the events helped him to get good information on human rights issues, and it gave him the

ability to update the State Department about the concerns of activists and their plans for advocacy. Lister, however, was not opposed to human rights advocacy. In fact, Lister's memorandums on human rights events, which went directly to the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the human rights bureau, performed some degree of advocacy for activist positions without so much as a request from the activists. Yet, Lister also wanted activists to directly lobby the State Department and the Congress. Often, they were fighting for the very same human rights concerns that he—and the human rights bureau—were advocating within the State Department. “Human rights advocates, both in and out of government, can help each other,” he noted in a speech at Florida International University in 1988.<sup>136</sup>

NGOs had testified at the Fraser hearings and generally could expect a more sympathetic hearing in Congress than from the administration. It was not always a given that human rights activists would think to communicate with the U.S. State Department. This was particularly true during the Reagan administration, which many activists believed cared little about human rights. Lister sometimes encountered the attitude that Reagan had completely eliminated human rights as a foreign policy factor. On April 25, 1983, Lister attended a luncheon at the Women's National Democratic Club where Patricia Derian gave a speech critical of Reagan's foreign policy. The women at Lister's table were surprised to learn that Lister was with the human rights bureau; they assumed that the bureau had been abolished.<sup>137</sup> Lister politely informed them that the human rights bureau was, indeed, still functioning.<sup>138</sup>

One of Lister's significant accomplishments was to make communication with the State Department a regular activity for both U.S. and foreign human rights activists. Lister's first step was often to demystify the State Department; his own slightly awkward presence at human rights events helped to accomplish this. Another common practice was to invite activists to have lunch with him at the State Department. In 1974, Lister made his first such lunch invitation to Eldridge, who remembers entering the State Department with "a little apprehension, fear and trembling." Eldridge had lived in Chile at the time of the coup, and he held the State Department and Kissinger partly responsible.<sup>139</sup> Lister gave Eldridge the State Department tour, taking him to the 7<sup>th</sup> floor, where they walked by Kissinger's office, and then stopped with him to look out over the Washington Monument and the Mall.<sup>140</sup> When they entered the cafeteria, where hundreds of State Department employees were having lunch, Lister turned to Eldridge and said, "Now look at all those people, they don't all look like fascists, do they?"<sup>141</sup>

In trying to persuade activists that it was worth lobbying the State Department or the U.S. government, Lister could be quite direct. In September 1983, he met with Sergio Bitar, part of the democratic opposition to Pinochet and the former Minister of Mines under Allende.<sup>142</sup> Dialogue between the U.S. government and the democratic opposition to Pinochet to that point was almost non-existent.<sup>143</sup> Lister told Bitar that Chilean democratic opposition leaders were wrong to assume that the U.S. government could not be convinced to take a harder line against Pinochet.<sup>144</sup> "This is

a wide open society, essentially democratic, and there are many legitimate opportunities for influencing USG policy,” he reported telling Bitar.<sup>145</sup> Lister urged Bitar to begin dialogues with the human rights bureau and to start lobbying the Congress. “I promise to help,” he added.<sup>146</sup>

### *Helping Activists Make an Objective Case*

Once Lister had succeeded in opening a conversation between the U.S. government and human rights activists, he helped activists to make their case. (Lister, for example, was true to his word in helping Bitar and the Chilean democratic opposition. More about Lister’s assistance to the Chilean opposition is discussed in Chapter 5.) Lister, Eldridge said, would often say that to change U.S. foreign policy, human rights activists had to be smart. The key, Lister believed, was information. “We have to have good facts, good information, good analysis and then move forth, and that’s the way to do it,” Lister would say, according to Eldridge.<sup>147</sup>

If activists had good, credible information and analysis, Lister was more than willing to help them spread it. Lister not only provided activists with access to the State Department, but he also helped them get their information to Congress. Sometimes, Lister would arrange meetings, especially for foreign dissidents, with Members of Congress.<sup>148</sup> In other circumstances, he would simply send along documentation. Mihajlo Mihajlov, a Yugoslav dissident who came to the U.S. in 1978, wrote a *New York Times* op-ed in April 1978. Lister made sure the op-ed got

noticed by widely distributing it to Members of Congress.<sup>149</sup> Shlaudeman recalls that in the Ford administration, “Lister was always Xeroxing things.”<sup>150</sup> Part of what Shlaudeman may have observed was Lister performing this sort of activity—helping activists to spread information about human rights.

Some of the time, though, Lister was dismayed that activists were not providing objective information. In 1981, Uruguayan human rights activist Juan Ferreira, son of the exiled Uruguayan politician Wilson Ferreira, was asked to testify before Congress about the human rights situation in his home country, which had been under military rule since 1973.<sup>151</sup> Lister told Ferreira the night before the hearing that he “hoped he would be objective and accurate...and that he would include improvements, as well as shortcomings, in Uruguay in his testimony.”<sup>152</sup> Ferreira replied that he intended to discuss some improvements, and provided Lister with a copy of his opening statement, which was apparently not completely to Lister’s liking.<sup>153</sup> Lister attributed Ferreira’s bias mainly to a sense of patriotism. “Uruguay is closest to his heart and it is more difficult for him to be objective on that subject,” Lister wrote.<sup>154</sup>

However, the most common kind of bias that Lister encountered among human rights activists was left-wing bias. U.S. human rights activists in particular had a tendency to criticize the human rights practices of right-wing dictatorships but not those of Communist countries, such as Cuba. Lister urged them to be objective, or face losing credibility. “He reminded everyone that if you’re against torture by right-

wing regimes, you had to be against torture by left-wing regimes,” said Frank Calzon, executive director of the Center for a Free Cuba, upon Lister’s death.<sup>155</sup> “He insisted that the human rights community could not be selective in its concerns.”<sup>156</sup> La Voy said Lister reminded her to be “ethically consistent.” “[H]e was very concerned that if I speak about human rights in Guatemala for example, or in any place where the United States was, in my view, on the wrong side...that I be very very clear and equally eloquent about Poland or about Cuba,” remembered La Voy.<sup>157</sup>

The issue of objectivity was, of course, the same one that Lister dealt with within the State Department, only the bias was usually of opposite kind—an emphasis on the human rights abuses of Communist dictatorships but not on those of right-wing regimes. Lister thus found himself wedged between two communities, which displayed opposing biases, and he strove to be an arbiter of what constituted objectivity.

### **Encouraging Human Rights Careers and Ambitions**

A second way Lister made a significant impact on the U.S. human rights movement was by encouraging people to pursue human rights careers. Eubank recalls that Lister was always trying to recruit people—including her—to the human rights cause.<sup>158</sup> Some took his advice. Lister met Juan Ferreira in 1974, when Ferreira was visiting the U.S. with his exiled father.<sup>159</sup> Lister urged Ferreira to stay in Washington, D.C. to try to improve U.S. human rights policy.<sup>160</sup> Ferreira was persuaded to work in

Washington, and Lister helped Ferreira to obtain a visa.<sup>161</sup> During the 1970s and early 1980s, Ferreira worked for a number of human rights organizations, including WOLA, and he finally launched his own organization, Convergencia Democrática.<sup>162</sup>

Perhaps the most significant result, albeit indirect, of Lister's mentoring activities was the founding of WOLA. Lister first met Diane La Voy in 1971, when La Voy, then a recent college graduate, was participating in a U.S. Information Agency travel grant program.<sup>163</sup> In the early 1970s, La Voy worked nearby the State Department at the Organization for American States, and Lister and La Voy would sometimes meet for lunch.<sup>164</sup> Lister "hammered across" his points about human rights advocacy, La Voy recalls, "over many a sandwich, or, you know, a banana eaten in a park."<sup>165</sup>

La Voy at the time had been participating in meetings for the Latin American Strategy Committee (LASC), a group of leaders from the Roman Catholic Church and various Protestant denominations who were concerned about human rights in Latin America. LASC was already becoming a mechanism by which church groups were voicing human rights concerns in a unified way. La Voy noticed that the group was also receiving "very fresh, very real time" information about human rights abuses from missionary groups and churches throughout Latin America, but that little of this information was reaching Members of Congress or other policymakers.<sup>166</sup> During their lunch conversations, Lister had shared with her many examples about the ways in which he provided timely information to Members of Congress. La Voy became

convinced that clear, reliable information delivered in a timely way could affect policy decisions.<sup>167</sup>

Lister provided the spark for an idea. La Voy went to LASC and they agreed together to open a one-person office—with La Voy to be the lone staff person—to begin purveying objective, detailed information on human rights violations in Latin America.<sup>168</sup> Much of the information could come from LASC’s contacts.<sup>169</sup> Shortly before La Voy was to open the office, she mentioned to Lister during a walk along 16<sup>th</sup> Street that some concerns of hers might require her to postpone the opening.<sup>170</sup> La Voy vividly remembers that Lister abruptly ushered her into the lobby of the A.F.L.-C.I.O headquarters and directed her to sit down. “Put some iron in your pants,” he demanded, trying to convince her to follow through, which she did.<sup>171</sup>

In the summer of 1974, the Washington Office on Latin America opened on a shoestring budget of \$400/month.<sup>172</sup> La Voy would leave WOLA that fall and Eldridge would take over, but the organization would quickly grow in prominence.<sup>173</sup> In 1981, Lars Schoultz called WOLA “the organization that government officials can contact for a correct answer or an informed opinion regarding United States foreign policy towards Latin America.”<sup>174</sup> WOLA today engages in a variety of human rights advocacy activities, but it won influence among policymakers by providing, according to Schoultz, “the most reliable data available on repression of human rights in Latin America.”<sup>175</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The rise of the human rights movement and the beginning of the institutionalization of human rights in U.S. foreign policy opened the most successful chapter of Lister's career. Launching himself wholeheartedly into the human rights cause, Lister did a great deal to make human rights an established part of U.S. foreign policy.

It may seem somewhat paradoxical that Lister, who battled the State Department bureaucracy for most of his career—and who rarely stepped into a management role—would make such a large contribution to institutionalizing human rights in the State Department. Yet, he did so in at least two ways. In the 1970s, as a human rights officer, Lister shaped the first human rights reports as well as the process by which the reports are now produced. His switch to the human rights bureau in 1981 came precisely at the bureau's low point. Working with Elliott Abrams, Lister helped to reinvigorate the bureau. His contacts with foreign democratic opposition leaders were especially helpful in causing the bureau to focus on human rights abuses by right-wing dictatorships, even though the Reagan administration preferred to orient its human rights policy against Communist regimes.

Lister also shaped the development of the U.S. human rights movement—one of the principal sources of pressure for a strong human rights policy. In order to convince activists to lobby the State Department, he demystified the Department, and he openly argued with some activists to make their case to the U.S. government. Once

he had reduced mistrust, Lister helped them to make their case—always reminding them that their credibility would be improved if they treated human rights violations by Communist regimes as seriously as those by right-wing dictatorships. Besides helping activists to influence the U.S. government, Lister mentored young activists. His mentorship of Diane La Voy was instrumental in persuading her to found WOLA, one of the key human rights organizations working on Latin America.

Overall, Lister was more successful in the 1970s and 1980s than at any time previously in his career. In human rights, Lister found a cause which he was effective at promoting. Some of the reasons for his success will be further explored in Chapter 6. Before turning to that subject, however, it is necessary to examine one more realm of impact—that of how Lister affected human rights and democracy in countries worldwide.

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<sup>1</sup> Speech, George Lister, February 1, 1968, Papers of George T. Lister, Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection, University of Texas at Austin, p. I, 2 [papers hereinafter “Papers of George T. Lister”].

<sup>2</sup> Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Interview by Karen Engle and Gregory Krauss with John Shattuck, CEO, John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Foundation, Boston, Mass., July, 2006.

<sup>4</sup> Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Kenneth Cmiel, “The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States,” *The Journal of American History* vol. 86, no. 3 (December 1999), pp. 1233-1234.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 1231.

<sup>7</sup> Speech by George Lister to Matias Rome Institute, Mexico City, Mexico, “U.S. Human Rights Policy: Origins and Implementation,” May 26, 1987, Papers of George Lister, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, p. 123; Speech by George Lister, “U.S. Human Rights Policy: Origins and Implementation,” p. 1.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 124.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 125-126.

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- <sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 124-126.
- <sup>14</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1988), pp. 8-14.
- <sup>15</sup> Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, pp. 110-112.
- <sup>16</sup> Schoultz, p. 110.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid, p. 111.
- <sup>19</sup> Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003), p. 233.
- <sup>20</sup> Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, p. 113.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., pp. 114-117.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 115.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 117.
- <sup>25</sup> Daniel P. Moynahan, "The Politics of Human Rights," in *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy*, ed. Barry M. Rubin and Elizabeth P. Spiro (Boulder: Westview Press, 1979), p. 85.
- <sup>26</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," *Foreign Affairs* (Summer 1986), p. 1066; David Carleton and Michael Stohl, "The Foreign Policy of Human Rights: Rhetoric and Reality from Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan," *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 2. (May, 1985), pp. 208-209.
- <sup>27</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," p. 1066.
- <sup>28</sup> Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Bureaucracy and Diplomacy* (New York: Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, 1988), pp. 6-8.
- <sup>29</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," p. 1069.
- <sup>30</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," pp. 1069-1070.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 1071.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 1072.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 1073.
- <sup>35</sup> Josh M. Goshko, "El Salvador Merits Military Aid," *The Washington Post* (January 22, 1983), p. A-12.
- <sup>36</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," p 1078.
- <sup>37</sup> Ibid., pp. 1072-1073.
- <sup>38</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered*, p. 123.
- <sup>39</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," p. 1081.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 1084.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 1075.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid. (quoting 1982 country reports).
- <sup>43</sup> John Shattuck, "Diplomacy with a Cause: Human Rights in U.S. Foreign Policy," in *Realizing Human Rights*, ed. Samantha Power and Graham Allison, (New York: 1997), p. 284.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., pp. 265-268.
- <sup>45</sup> U.S. State Department, *Bush Administration Takes New Steps to Combat Trafficking*, Online. Available: <http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2004&m=July&x=20040716123438AJesroM0.601864>. Accessed: May 2, 2007.
- <sup>46</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with John Salzberg, Chair of the Washington Interfaith Alliance for Middle East Peace, Washington, D.C., June 2006.
- <sup>47</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, "Memorial Statement of Donald Fraser," February 21, 2004, p. 10.
- <sup>48</sup> Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy Toward Latin America*, p. 124.

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- <sup>49</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Brandon Grove, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, April 12, 2007.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>51</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Margaret Eubank, Retired Foreign Service Officer, April 15, 2007.
- <sup>52</sup> Speech by George Lister, "Human Rights – Our World's Best Chance," George Washington University, February 5, 1998, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 5.
- <sup>53</sup> Letter from unknown to Jack B. Kubisch, Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, August 14, 1974, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>54</sup> "Career History," undated, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>55</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>56</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Margaret Eubank.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>59</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>61</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>62</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Harry Shlaudeman, Former Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, April 15, 2007.
- <sup>63</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Brandon Grove.
- <sup>64</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>65</sup> Memo, George Lister to Terence Todman and Frank Devine, July 16, 1977, Papers of George T. Lister.
- <sup>66</sup> Memo, Elliott Abrams to the file, "George Lister, Intermittent Expert: Performance Evaluation," May 27, 1985, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
- <sup>67</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>68</sup> Guy Gugliotta, "Risky Work at the State Department," *The Washington Post* (October 19, 1993), p. A-21.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>71</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>73</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>74</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with Gregory Stanton, President of Genocide Watch, April 20, 2007.
- <sup>75</sup> John Salzberg and Donald Young, "Parliamentary Role in Implementing International Human Rights: A U.S. Example," *Texas International Law Journal*, vol. 12 (1977), p. 270.
- <sup>76</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered*, p. 9.
- <sup>77</sup> Salzberg and Young, "Parliamentary Role in Implementing International Human Rights: A U.S. Example," p. 273.
- <sup>78</sup> Memo, Lister to Bartch, et al., "Human Rights Reports for Congress," July 15, 1975, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.
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- <sup>80</sup> Memo, George Lister to ARA Office Directors, "Human Rights Reports," March 17, 1976, Papers of George Lister; Memo, Ronald D. Palmer to Jack Whiting, et al., March 16, 1976, "Content and Format of Human Rights Reporting for FY 1977 Security Assistance Congressional Presentation Document."
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- <sup>85</sup> Telephone Interview by Gregory Krauss with William Farrand, former Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Human Rights and Humanitarian Affairs, April 27, 2007.
- <sup>86</sup> Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, *Bureaucracy and Diplomacy*, pp. 56-59.
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- <sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 11.
- <sup>93</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Donald Fraser, former Representative, Austin, Texas, December 1, 2006.
- <sup>94</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, "Memorial Statement of Donald Fraser."
- <sup>95</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Diane La Voy, founder of Washington Office on Latin America, Washington, D.C., June 2006.
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- <sup>97</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Donald Fraser.
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- <sup>103</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Human Rights and U.S. Foreign Policy: Congress Reconsidered*, p., 121.
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- <sup>107</sup> Speech by George Lister to Matias Rome Institute, Mexico City, Mexico, "U.S. Human Rights Policy: Origins and Implementation," p. 1.
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- <sup>115</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Edmundo Vargas, Secretary General of the Agency for the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons in Latin America, June 2006.
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- <sup>128</sup> Tamar Jacoby, "The Reagan Turnabout on Human Rights," p. 1075.
- <sup>129</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Elliott Abrams, Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy.
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- <sup>131</sup> Memo, George Lister to Elliott Abrams, November 28, 1983.
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- <sup>133</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>134</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Joseph Eldridge, University Chaplain at American University, June 2006.
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- <sup>149</sup> Telephone interview by Gregory Krauss with Mihajlo Mihajlov, former Yugoslav dissident, April 16, 2007.
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- <sup>155</sup> Patricia Sullivan, "George Lister Dies; Human Rights Pioneer," *The Washington Post* (February 14, 2004), p. B-6.
- <sup>156</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>157</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Diane La Voy.
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- <sup>173</sup> Ibid.
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## Chapter 5. Human Rights Case Studies

George Lister would frequently end conversations and speeches with a signature slogan: “To Our Hopeless Cause!” he would say with a fist raised in the air. A passage by Elliott Abrams written for Lister’s memorial service speculates that Lister’s hopeless cause was “getting the U.S. Government to enlist, always, and everywhere, and forever” in the cause of human rights.<sup>1</sup>

Abrams is correct that Lister’s personal lifelong struggle was to get the U.S. government to do more on behalf of human rights. But Lister’s own explanation of the phrase suggests that, ultimately, he hoped that a more human rights-friendly U.S. foreign policy would make a difference in the lives of people around the world. In a 1998 speech at George Washington University, Lister said that the phrase had come from political dissidents under the Soviet dictatorship. “To Our Hopeless Cause!” Lister told his audience.<sup>2</sup> “By that,” Lister explained, “the Russian human rights activists meant that even though they didn’t think they were going to win, they were going to give human rights their best effort. But of course in the end they did win.”<sup>3</sup>

By the end of Lister’s life he had witnessed the fall of the Soviet Union and the shift of many other countries to democratic governance. Lister was jubilant about the progress. “Who would have thought, even a few years ago, that the Soviet Union would disappear without a war, that Blacks and Whites would shake hands in South Africa, and that we now receive human rights visitors from China?” Lister asked.<sup>4</sup>

Although all of these democratic victories were facilitated by factors other than individual influence, people like George Lister had an impact along the way. “He was such a pest when it came to Human Rights; he actually made a big difference and probably saved a lot of lives,” wrote Bill Richardson in his statement for Lister’s memorial service.<sup>5</sup>

The countries and human rights issues that Lister fought for were so numerous that only a much larger project could uncover all the ways in which he made a difference. In this chapter, I look at Lister’s influence, during the years after 1973, on U.S. policy and resulting democratic development in four countries: Nicaragua, the Dominican Republic, South Korea, and Chile. In each of these countries, Lister’s work was only one factor in a web of influences, but in many cases Lister clearly gave democracy a helpful push forward.

## **Nicaragua**

Nicaragua presents an example of a country in which Lister became intimately involved—but in which his efforts made only a marginal impact. In the late 1970s, the question of U.S. economic and military aid to the regime of Nicaraguan dictator Anastasio Somoza was one of the top issues on the agenda of the human rights movement. In response to left-wing guerrilla violence by the Sandinista National Liberation Front, in late 1974 Somoza had declared a “state of siege” and unleashed a counter-insurgency campaign that resulted in killings, tortures and disappearances.<sup>6</sup>

The Carter administration had campaigned on a human rights platform, but upon taking office it argued that the human rights situation had improved, and chose to continue military aid.<sup>7</sup> Liberal members of Congress, however, objected vehemently.<sup>8</sup>

By 1979, continued human rights abuses had persuaded the Carter administration to halt military aid.<sup>9</sup> But the key issue became support for the Somoza dictatorship, which was tottering as a coalition of Nicaraguan groups, including the Sandinistas, were close to unseating him. The administration was willing to abandon Somoza, but it wanted to transition to a moderate, democratic government that did not include the left-wing Sandinista party.<sup>10</sup> On June 16, the Nicaraguan opposition—which included the Sandinistas—formed a transitional government in Costa Rica.<sup>11</sup> At a meeting of the Organization of American States between June 21 and June 23, the U.S. introduced a resolution for a multinational peacekeeping force to stabilize the country.<sup>12</sup> Most countries in Latin America balked; instead they passed a resolution that omitted the peacekeeping force and indicated support for the transitional government—a resolution to which the U.S. ultimately agreed.<sup>13</sup>

As the OAS debated its stance towards Somoza, Lister was the one facilitating discussion between the U.S. government and opposition forces in Nicaragua. It happened that Lister had known the Nicaraguan provisional government's foreign minister, Father Miguel d'Escoto, a priest and a Sandinista supporter, since the late 1960s.<sup>14</sup> d'Escoto was representing the provisional government before the OAS. On June 20, the day before the OAS meeting, d'Escoto gave Lister a phone call to

discuss the next day's event.<sup>15</sup> Lister wrote to Brandon Grove that d'Escoto wished to meet him and Viron P. Vaky, the two top officials in ARA.<sup>16</sup>

Lister worked hard to broker a meeting between ARA leadership and d'Escoto. On June 22, Lister went to speak with d'Escoto in an anteroom at the OAS, where d'Escoto was preparing for a speech to the assembly.<sup>17</sup> The priest still had not met with Grove or Vaky.<sup>18</sup> Lister emphasized in a memo to Vaky later that day that failing to meet with d'Escoto would cause the priest to "complain loudly...and the incident will be magnified, exploited and misinterpreted out of all proportion."<sup>19</sup> This time, Vaky took Lister's advice. Lister's next memo, from June 23, thanks Vaky for meeting with d'Escoto, but reports that d'Escoto had not been impressed.<sup>20</sup> Lister told Vaky that a longer, more substantive discussion with d'Escoto would be necessary. By June 25, a meeting had taken place between d'Escoto and the U.S. Ambassador to Nicaragua, Larry Pezzullo.<sup>21</sup> Lister wrote that the meeting had been a good idea because the "top Sandinista leaders are as abysmally ignorant of us as we are of them."<sup>22</sup>

Somoza fled Nicaragua on July 19 and a Sandinista government soon came to power.<sup>23</sup> Lister's correspondence from the late 1970s suggests that he was hoping to establish a working relationship between the U.S. government and the Sandinistas. Lister sought to facilitate a dialogue with the Sandinista government in order to influence them to come within the U.S. orbit in the Cold War context. He had advocated a similar policy when Allende came to power in Chile in 1970. However,

the Sandinista government became increasingly anti-American and autocratic, and it turned to Cuba and the Soviet Union for military and economic assistance.<sup>24</sup> After Reagan took office, the U.S. began supporting the Nicaraguan contras, an armed insurgency against the Sandinista regime.<sup>25</sup> Abrams, after leaving the human rights bureau to lead ARA, would become involved in the Iran-Contra scandal over a secret National Security Council operation to fund the contras with arms sales from Iran. He pled guilty in October 1991 to two misdemeanor counts for withholding information about the operation from Congress.<sup>26</sup> He received a pardon from President George H.W. Bush in 1992.<sup>27</sup>

Lister, working directly beneath Abrams, did not oppose Reagan's position on Nicaragua. He believed the Sandinista government had reached an anti-democratic point where the U.S. government should oppose it, rather than try to negotiate with it. According to Eldridge, Lister believed that both the Sandinistas and the left-wing insurgents in El Salvador "were beyond the pale" although Eldridge and others thought the Sandinistas could be negotiated with.<sup>28</sup> In opposing the Nicaraguan government, Lister returned to the political warfare tactics he had used earlier in his career. For example, on July 1, 1985, Lister brought to Abrams' attention a cable indicating "solidarity" between the North Korean government and the Government of Nicaragua.<sup>29</sup> "I hope we can exploit this blunder effectively by asking such questions as: is North Korea representative of the type of 'democracy' [Nicaraguan President] Ortega has in mind for Nicaragua?"<sup>30</sup>

The Reagan administration also began a campaign to publicize human rights abuses by the Nicaraguan government.<sup>31</sup> The campaign was successful in raising public concerns even though government human rights abuses were much worse in neighboring countries such as Guatemala and El Salvador than they were in Nicaragua.<sup>32</sup> Although Lister was actively trying to generate negative publicity for the Nicaraguan government, he still insisted that the U.S. treat Nicaraguan human rights abuses objectively. In August 1984, the White House requested that the human rights bureau write a special paper on human rights violations in Nicaragua.<sup>33</sup> Lister wrote to Abrams to urge that the paper include “at least a couple of passing references” to the Nicaraguan government’s education and health initiatives and the “lousy record” of Somoza.<sup>34</sup> “An honest, objective evaluation of GRN performance will be far more effective than heavy-handed propaganda, and no Government’s record is all bad,” Lister wrote.<sup>35</sup> The person slated to draft the paper, Ken Peoples, wrote back to Lister that he agreed with Lister’s suggestions.<sup>36</sup>

Altogether, in both the Carter and Reagan administrations, Lister nudged U.S. policy on Nicaragua slightly, though his impact was marginal. Under Carter, he established the first links between the Sandinista Foreign Minister and the State Department. These links, however, did not form the basis of any lasting working relationship between the U.S. and the Sandinistas. Under Reagan, Lister may have kept the administration more honest about its allegations of human rights abuses by

the Sandinistas, but he did not change or oppose the anti-Sandinista thrust of Reagan's policy.

## **Dominican Republic**

The amount of time Lister gave towards a country was not always proportionate to his impact. Lister worked for years on U.S. policy towards Nicaragua, but he probably accomplished more in the Dominican Republic on behalf of human rights and democracy in just a few weeks. In the Dominican election of 1978, Lister stood up for the integrity of the voting process, and this helped assure that the results of the election were honored.

The 1978 election was between Antonio Guzmán Fernández of the Partido Revolucionario Dominicano (PRD ) and Dominican President Joaquín Balaguer, the former deputy to dictator Rafael Trujillo. Since defeating Juan Bosch in the 1966 election, Balaguer had restricted democratic freedoms.<sup>37</sup> The 1978 election was the first in which Balaguer had faced an opponent capable of defeating him.<sup>38</sup> Prior to the election, the general secretary of the PRD, José Francisco Peña Gomez, whom Lister had known since the 1965 U.S. intervention, came to Washington to meet with Lister about possible attempts by Balaguer to prevent an honest vote.<sup>39</sup> Rep. Fraser, perhaps through Lister, also became aware of the issue. After an investigation by his staff, Fraser wrote to President Carter to notify him about actions by the Balaguer government to interfere with the Guzman campaign and to restrict voter registration.<sup>40</sup>

As the election proceeded on May 16, early returns showed Guzmán ahead.<sup>41</sup> The following day, however, military units received orders to seize the ballot boxes.<sup>42</sup> Lister urged Congressman Fraser to call President Carter, which Fraser apparently did.<sup>43</sup> Strong pressure by Carter administration officials and Carter himself convinced Balaguer to resume the vote count, and Guzmán was elected.<sup>44</sup> Lister, invited by Peña Gómez, attended Guzman's inauguration on August 16, 1978.<sup>45</sup> The inauguration was the first peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another in the history of the Dominican Republic. Since 1978, most elections in the Dominican Republic have been viewed as honest.<sup>46</sup> Lister received an official commendation from the PRD for his assistance with the elections. He returned to the Dominican Republic as a guest of the PRD for the 1982 presidential inauguration.<sup>47</sup>

## **South Korea**

One of Lister's greatest accomplishments in the human rights bureau was to establish a relationship in the early 1980s between the State Department and Kim Dae Jung, the South Korean dissident. Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, South Korea had mostly been ruled by autocrats, who justified restricting democratic freedoms due to the need to maintain stability in the face of the North Korean threat. The U.S. was willing to accommodate friendly dictatorships in South Korea as long as they worked with the U.S. to maintain the armistice. U.S. policy towards South Korea eventually changed, helping democracy there to take a leap forward by the end

of the 1980s. Lister's relationship with Kim may have helped change the U.S. position.

South Korea came under autocratic rule with a military coup by General Park Chung Hee in 1961, after which Park restricted democratic opposition and dissolved the legislature.<sup>48</sup> Kim, who had been elected to the National Assembly three days before the coup, became a vocal opponent of the Park regime. During the 1960s he served as a legislator in the reconstituted Korean National Assembly, and in 1971 he ran against President Park, garnering 46 percent of the vote despite election fraud by Park.<sup>49</sup> During the 1970s, Kim continued to speak out. He was physically attacked on several occasions, suffering a permanent leg injury, and he was periodically imprisoned or sentenced to house arrest.<sup>50</sup> Park was assassinated in 1979, but before a democratic transition could take place, General Chun Doo Hwan seized power and soon Kim was again imprisoned.<sup>51</sup> In December 1982, Kim's 20-year term was suspended, and he was allowed to travel to the United States.<sup>52</sup>

Kim initially came to the Washington, D.C. area, where he rent an apartment in Alexandria, Virginia with his wife and family.<sup>53</sup> Lister quickly established contact with Kim. At a reception for Kim on March 17, 1983 by the North American Coalition for Human Rights in Korea, Lister had a conversation with Kim in which Kim expressed an interest in coming to meet Abrams.<sup>54</sup> Due to the security situation on the Korean peninsula, the U.S. maintained a close relationship with the South Korean government. Inviting Kim, a political dissident, to the State Department was a

symbolic gesture which the Bureau of East-Asian and Pacific Affairs was uneasy about. Abrams recalls that the East Asian bureau actually “did not want to let [Kim] in the building.”<sup>55</sup> The East Asian bureau regarded Kim as a “‘troublemaker’ and a ‘flake,’” Lister wrote in 1999.<sup>56</sup> But, according to Abrams, “Lister quietly persisted on Kim’s behalf” and after several months Abrams met with Kim.<sup>57</sup> The meeting “went off very well,” Lister recalled.<sup>58</sup>

Kim accepted a fellowship at Harvard University in 1983 and 1984. Meanwhile, Lister and Kim established closer contact. Lister was personally invited to dinner with Kim and his family on September 10, 1984.<sup>59</sup> Kim was already preparing his return to South Korea, but over dinner Kim asked Lister if it would be possible for Lister to arrange a meeting with Paul Wolfowitz, then the Assistant Secretary of State in charge of the East Asian bureau.<sup>60</sup> The meeting happened. Kim phoned Lister on October 14, 1984 to say that he had recently met for one hour with Wolfowitz.<sup>61</sup> On November 2, 1984, Kim wrote to Lister asking him to accept a scroll of Kim’s calligraphy as a gift. The calligraphy, Kim wrote, “is an expression of my friendship toward you and my appreciation for your support for the Korean people and myself.”<sup>62</sup>

Before Kim Dae Jung returned to South Korea in early 1985, Lister would help Kim one more time. He arranged for Kim to give a speech at the Open Forum, which was a speaker series at the State Department established in 1967 to encourage open dissent and debate.<sup>63</sup> Several days before the speech, Kim requested Lister’s

opinion of the text. Lister suggested several changes which made the text less confrontational but probably more likely to garner support from State Department officials for Korean democracy.<sup>64</sup> Kim accepted Lister's changes, and he gave the speech to a standing room crowd on January 23, 1985. The speech was a "great success" and was met by "much applause" Lister reported to Abrams that day.<sup>65</sup> After the speech, Kim lunched at the eighth floor restaurant with various officials, mainly from the East Asian and human rights bureaus.<sup>66</sup>

Soon after the speech Kim returned to South Korea and was placed under house arrest. His return, however, helped intensify the pro-democracy movement.<sup>67</sup> At the human rights bureau, Lister became "inundated" with visits from Korean democratic groups.<sup>68</sup> U.S. policy towards the South Korean regime finally started to change. Ambassador David Walker, who had refused to meet with the democratic opposition, was replaced in 1986.<sup>69</sup> In February 1987, Assistant Secretary of State Gaston Sigur, Wolfowitz's successor at the East Asian bureau gave a speech in which he called on the Korean government to democratize or face losing U.S. support.<sup>70</sup> Sigur's comments were followed by more U.S. pressure.<sup>71</sup> In June 1987, Chun agreed to relinquish the South Korean presidency and allow direct elections.<sup>72</sup> Kim Dae Jung ran in those elections and lost, but democracy in South Korea had been largely restored.

James Fowler has written that U.S. public pressure was one of the keys to Chun's decision to permit elections in 1987.<sup>73</sup> Attempting to explain U.S. policy,

Fowler posits that success in using public pressure to restore democracy in the Philippines in 1986 helped persuade the U.S. government to support the democratic opposition.<sup>74</sup> Another possible explanatory factor was the relationship between the U.S. government and democratic opposition that Lister had initiated during Kim Dae Jung's exile. Lister wrote in October 1999 that "Kim Dae Jung's case became the key turning point in our South Korean human rights policy."<sup>75</sup> Kim also said that he regarded his Open Forum speech and subsequent lunch "as his greatest success in the U.S."<sup>76</sup>

Lister and Kim remained in touch throughout the 1990s. In 1994, Lister was invited by Kim's foundation, the Kim Dae Jung Peace Foundation, to give a speech in South Korea. When Kim was finally elected President in 1997, Lister was invited to attend the inauguration.

## **Chile**

In the aftermath of the Chilean coup on September 11, 1973, General Augusto Pinochet consolidated his dictatorship with harshly repressive measures. In the coming years, thousands of Chileans were imprisoned, tortured, and killed by Pinochet's government. Immediately after the coup, Lister recognized the damage that U.S. involvement in the coup—or the perception of that involvement—would do to the U.S. image in Latin America. "Once again, Chilean developments seem to be playing into the hands of those who want a Latin American left united against us,"

Lister wrote to Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs Jack B. Kubisch on September 17, 1973.<sup>77</sup>

The following year, Lister was still trying to shape U.S. relations with the Chilean government. In a memo to David H. Popper, U.S. Ambassador to Chile, Lister suggested that the U.S. maintain “cordial, diplomatic relations with Chile,” while making it clear to non-government representatives that the U.S. was not taking sides in favor of the Junta.<sup>78</sup> As described in Chapter 3, during the 1960s Lister had advocated for increased contact with the Socialists, but he had been able to have little contact himself from his location in Washington, D.C. Now, in his capacity as a human rights officer, rather than leaving relations with the democratic opposition to the U.S. Embassy in Santiago or to other top policymakers, Lister was able to work directly with the democratic opposition, some of which had fled Chile and was residing in Washington, D.C. The relationships Lister built with the opposition—which included a wide spectrum of former politicians as well as representatives of the Catholic Church—gave them a more favorable impression of U.S. aims. And, as with so many other countries, Lister became a conduit through which the opposition could seek to change U.S. policies.

As early as 1975, Lister was helping the opposition against Pinochet. That year, Renato Poblete, a Chilean priest, came to Washington to represent Chilean Church leaders in their bid for a strong U.S. human rights policy towards Chile and specifically an asylum program for Chilean refugees.<sup>79</sup> Lister arranged meetings with

policymakers including Rep. Don Fraser, Senator Ted Kennedy, the State Department's refugee staff, and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs William D. Rogers. At the suggestion of the refugee staff, Lister arranged another meeting with Edward Loughran, the top staffer to Louisiana Senator James Eastland, and the "most active opponent" of the idea of an asylum program.<sup>80</sup> Loughran initially was incredulous, asking why the U.S. should accept "people who have been put in jail by their own government."<sup>81</sup> However, with Lister's help, by the end of the meeting, Poblete convinced Loughran to soften his position.<sup>82</sup>

In the early 1980s, contact between the Chilean democratic opposition and the State Department had become rare.<sup>83</sup> The U.S. Ambassador in Chile, James D. Theberge, preferred to maintain smooth relations with Pinochet.<sup>84</sup> Many members of the opposition, assuming the U.S. government and especially the Reagan administration was pro-Pinochet at its heart, were skeptical about trying to influence U.S. government policies.<sup>85</sup>

Lister took the initiative to persuade members of the opposition to renew a dialogue through the human rights bureau. One of the first opposition leaders Lister tried to convince was Sergio Bitar.<sup>86</sup> Early in Abrams' tenure, Lister met with Bitar for lunch to urge him to more actively try to influence U.S. government policy in an anti-Pinochet direction.<sup>87</sup> As described in Chapter 4, Lister convinced Bitar to make his case to the State Department and the Congress. "By sitting around complaining

that the USG is pro-Pinochet, you are helping to keep him in power,” he reported telling Bitar.<sup>88</sup> “Your lack of dialogue with the USG is mutually harmful.”<sup>89</sup>

Eventually, dialogue with the Chilean democratic opposition flourished. The human rights bureau regularly met with Chilean exiles living in Washington, D.C. as well as visiting Chileans. Lister, according to Abrams, became a “close friend” of Eugenio Velasco, the unofficial representative of the democratic opposition in the U.S.<sup>90</sup> Opposition leader Edmundo Vargas remembers that Chilean dissidents coming to Washington would sometimes ask him how they could speak with the U.S. State Department. Vargas would respond, “I have a very important friend there, George Lister!” Vargas would then contact Lister, who would always assent to the request. Soon the dialogue dominated the bureau’s schedule.<sup>91</sup> Lister later recalled that on one occasion, he went into Abrams’ office to remind him about four Chileans visiting the following morning.<sup>92</sup> When Abrams groaned, Lister thanked him for “spending more time on Chile than on any other country in the world.”<sup>93</sup> According to Lister, Abrams “put both hands on his head and responded: ‘For God’s sake, George, I’m spending more time on Chile than on all the rest of the world combined.’”<sup>94</sup>

Pinochet, Lister believed, reinforced his rule by fanning the impression that he had support from the Reagan administration.<sup>95</sup> According to Vargas, the discussions that Lister facilitated were important because they “allowed us to say we have some contact with the State Department.”<sup>96</sup> Another function of the dialogues was to help build consensus between the different political factions in the Chilean opposition,

which continued to be divided over some of the ideological issues from the Allende era.<sup>97</sup> Socialists remembered that many political centrists had supported the 1973 coup and tolerated Pinochet's repression.<sup>98</sup> There was also suspicion of Socialist aims; Chile, after all, was the only Latin American democracy in which Marxist leftists had won an election.<sup>99</sup> Within Socialist circles, some continued to prefer an alliance with the Chilean Communist Party rather than join in a united democratic opposition.<sup>100</sup>

Lister worked hard to persuade the Socialists to cooperate with the democratic opposition and not to join with the Communists. In this regard, Lister finally was able to implement the approach he had urged upon the U.S. Embassy in Chile in the 1960s and early 1970s, when he tried to apply the lessons of his Italian experience. The first meeting between the two leading political parties from the Allende era—the Socialists and Christian Democrats—was made possible by the coordination of Abrams and Lister, according to Claudio Grossman.<sup>101</sup> Eleven opposition parties eventually joined together in August 1985 to call for a return to civilian rule, signing the National Accord for Transition to Full Democracy.<sup>102</sup> Although the democratic opposition would again fracture, it eventually united to oppose Pinochet in a 1988 plebiscite that led to Pinochet's ouster.<sup>103</sup>

At least at first, the dialogue probably affected the Chilean opposition more than it changed U.S. policy towards Chile. Abrams fought behind the scenes for a tougher policy against Pinochet, U.S. policy was equivocal.<sup>104</sup> Despite statements of

concern about Chile, the Reagan administration signaled support for the regime in other ways, such as by voting for loans to Chile by international financial institutions.<sup>105</sup> The Bureau of Inter-American Affairs would also sometimes make incorrect or contradictory statements. Lister reported to Abrams in September 1983 about a conversation in which ARA had insisted to a human rights activist that Chile was a democracy—to which Abrams’ tongue-in-cheek response was “ARA does more damage than the CPSU [Communist Party of the Soviet Union]!”<sup>106</sup> There were also statements such as the one by ARA chief Langhorne Motley in February 1985, reported in *The New York Times*, that Chile’s future was “in good hands.”<sup>107</sup> The most definitive opposition to Pinochet was coming from Congress.<sup>108</sup>

With so much ambiguity in U.S. policy, Lister did the next best thing to a policy change—which was to draw attention to instances of State Department support for democracy in Chile. At a press conference on July 11, 1983, a State Department official responded to a question about the Pinochet government’s arrest of former Chilean Foreign Minister Gabriel Valdes. Within the response, the official observed that the U.S. supported the transition to democracy “sought by the vast majority of Chileans.” The statement received little attention in the U.S. press, but it was published verbatim in the Chilean press, and Lister reported that it was “well received” by Chilean opposition leaders.<sup>109</sup>

To highlight and memorialize the statement, Lister asked Senator Tom Harkin to place it in the Congressional Record.<sup>110</sup> Harkin agreed, though by August 10 the

statement still had not been inserted.<sup>111</sup> Lister went to Harkin's office, spoke with Harkin, and discovered that a staffer had decided against inserting the statement at the request of Joseph Eldridge and another human rights activist.<sup>112</sup> However, Lister spoke with Harkin and persuaded him to stick to the original plan, arguing that Pinochet could best be weakened by the perception that the U.S. government did not support him.<sup>113</sup> Harkin placed the statement into the record on July 29, and the statement had an unexpectedly positive effect.<sup>114</sup> On August 5, 1983, 70 Members of Congress signed a letter to Secretary of State George P. Schultz expressing approval of the press briefing statement.<sup>115</sup> Lister then took news of this success to the NGOs. At a meeting between the bureau and various NGOs on September 26, 1983, Lister distributed the letter and other related documentation.<sup>116</sup>

By the time Abrams was replaced by Richard Schifter in October 1985, Pinochet still showed few signs that he was prepared to release his hold on power. When popular discontent mounted in 1983, Pinochet had begun transition talks with the opposition, but then backtracked, declaring a "state of siege" and launching a crackdown on political activity.<sup>117</sup> Pinochet had also rejected the National Accord, the joint agreement reached by the opposition parties in August 1985.<sup>118</sup> However, in March 1986, the U.S. sponsored a United Nations Human Rights Commission resolution that criticized Pinochet for human rights abuses and called for a return to democracy.<sup>119</sup> For the previous six years, the Reagan administration had abstained from or voted against United Nations resolutions that condemned human rights

violations by the Pinochet government.<sup>120</sup> The resolution marked a major reversal of previous U.S. policy favoring quiet diplomacy. Schifter admitted as much. "We go public when our quiet entreaties are not responded to," Schifter told the press at a news conference in Geneva after the resolution had been proposed.<sup>121</sup>

The decision to pursue the resolution reflected both U.S. discontent with Chilean progress on human rights issues as well as Schifter's preference for working in international human rights bodies.<sup>122</sup> Lister was probably not the impetus behind the resolution, but he helped its passage by securing support for it by the Chilean opposition. In February 1986, before the U.S. proposed the resolution, Lister consulted with opposition leader Martin Poblete, who provided comments on the draft.<sup>123</sup> In March, Schifter brought the resolution to the Geneva headquarters of the United Nations Human Rights Commission, while Lister remained behind to work with the Chilean opposition residing in the United States. Most diplomats in Geneva assumed that Chilean democrats would be against the U.S. resolution.<sup>124</sup> But Lister, because he had good relationships with the Chilean opposition, was able to secure the opposition's support; he also urged them to send their own representative to Geneva, which they did.<sup>125</sup> Schifter announced after returning to the U.S. that Lister had played a "key role" in obtaining support for the resolution, Lister recalled in 1993.<sup>126</sup>

On March 15, 1986, with the resolution passed, Eugenio Velasco came to the human rights bureau to pick up the final draft.<sup>127</sup> Velasco told Lister that passage of the resolution was one of the two most significant events for the democratic

opposition since Pinochet took power—the other being the National Accord.<sup>128</sup> “In Chile, the impact was twofold,” recalled Harry Barnes, U.S. Ambassador to Chile from 1985 to 1988. “It annoyed and frustrated the government. And second, it gave a lot of encouragement to the opposition.” Just two years later, the Chilean democratic opposition managed to defeat Pinochet in the 1988 plebiscite.<sup>129</sup> Despite a massive government publicity campaign for Pinochet, 54.5 percent of Chileans voted against the continuation of the military dictatorship.<sup>130</sup> In December 1989, in the first presidential election in Chile since 1970, Patricio Aylwin was elected.<sup>131</sup>

Lister’s principal role in helping restore democracy to Chile was by opening a dialogue between the democratic opposition and the U.S. State Department. The dialogue gave symbolic backing to pro-democratic forces at a time when the U.S. was pursuing a policy of quiet diplomacy, and it helped the Chilean opposition to form a unified front against Pinochet. When the U.S. finally changed to a more overtly critical policy by introducing the U.N. resolution in 1986, Lister was able to go to the Chilean opposition for backing. Dialogue between the U.S. government and the Chilean democratic opposition also opened on a second front in 1985, when Barnes became ambassador and began meeting with opposition leaders.<sup>132</sup> Still, as noted in Chapter 4, Vargas regarded Lister as the Chilean opposition’s “best friend in the U.S. government.”<sup>133</sup>

In 1992, the Chilean government invited Lister to Chile to recognize him for his contributions to the return of Chilean democracy. Lister gave speeches at

luncheons with the Chilean Congress and the Ministry of Foreign Relations as well as at the U.S. Embassy.<sup>134</sup> Those he addressed included former opposition leaders who had become part of the Chilean government. “If you looked at the presidents and foreign ministers of post-Pinochet Chile in the last 15-20 years, I think it would be fair to say that every one of them came through the human rights bureau...as an exile or as an opponent of the regime,” Abrams noted.<sup>135</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The four case studies in this chapter provide a sampling of the work that Lister did to promote human rights and democracy in countries worldwide. Although Lister rode a wave of democratic development in the late 1980s, his role in the democratic development of many countries was remarkable. The recognition he received by leaders in the Dominican Republic, South Korea, and Chile indicates that democratic opposition leaders considered him important to their successes.

Chile was no doubt the country on which he worked the longest and the hardest to bring about democracy. His work on behalf of human rights and democracy in South Korea and particularly in the Dominican Republic did not occupy decades of his career, yet it was still recognized as important by those countries. Of the examples studied, Lister’s work made the least difference in Nicaragua, where Somoza’s right-wing dictatorship was replaced by what Lister perceived as an anti-democratic leftist government.

Lister worked on behalf of democracy in other countries as well—from South Africa to Paraguay. Some of his other successes were notable. For instance, Lister maintained extensive contacts with the Solidarity Movement in Poland; a 1983 meeting at the human rights bureau helped to liberalize U.S. policy on Polish asylum.<sup>136</sup> Lister also worked with the democratic opposition in the Philippines prior to the restoration of democracy in 1986. Despite resistance in the State Department, he was successful in inviting Raul Manglapus to visit the State Department to give a speech at the Open Forum, much as he had done with Kim Dae Jung.<sup>137</sup>

Every country Lister tried to help was unique, yet certain patterns to his work emerge. Lister's signature technique was dialogue. Simply by being available for a conversation, Lister put himself in a position to help many people. Dialogue was effective as a means of information exchange; in the case of the Dominican Republic, Lister's contact with Peña Gomez gave him the information he needed to push Carter to ensure a fair election. Dialogue was also a potent political symbol. It was arguably not much to ask that Lister or the human rights bureau be allowed to speak with people fighting for freedom. Yet, the fact that Kim Dae Jung or Chilean opposition leaders were visiting the State Department gave them, as well as their causes, enhanced recognition and standing.

Lister's success in promoting human rights and democracy can be attributed in large part to his use of dialogue with opposition leaders. But a variety of factors were critical to enhancing Lister's effectiveness. The following chapter will review

how Lister managed to have such a large impact, despite his status as a mid-level bureaucrat.

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<sup>2</sup> Speech by George Lister, “Human Rights – Our World’s Best Chance,” George Washington University, February 5, 1998, Papers of George T. Lister, Nettie Lee Benson Collection, The University of Texas at Austin, p. 7. [papers hereinafter “Papers of George T. Lister”]

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Memorial Service for George Lister, Statement of Governor Bill Richardson, February 21, 2004, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Arthur W. Mudge, “A Case Study in Human Rights and Development Assistance: Nicaragua,” *Universal Human Rights*, vol. 1, no. 4. (October-December, 1979), pp. 94-95.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., pp. 95-96.

<sup>8</sup> Memo, George Lister to William Luers, “Nicaraguan Aid,” May 17, 1977, Papers of George T. Lister.

<sup>9</sup> Dennis R. Gordon and Margaret M. Munro, “The External Dimension of Civil Insurrection: International Organizations and the Nicaraguan Revolution,” *Journal of Interamerican Studies and World Affairs*, vol. 25, no. 1 (February 1983), p. 63.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., p. 63.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p. 74-75.

<sup>14</sup> Memo, George Lister to Brandon Grove, “Miguel d’Escoto,” June 20, 1979, Papers of George T. Lister.

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<sup>17</sup> Memo, George Lister to Pete Vaky, “Miguel d’Escoto,” June 22, 1979, Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Joseph Eldridge, University Chaplain at American University, June 2006.

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- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>37</sup> Michael J. Kryzanek, "The 1978 Election in the Dominican Republic: Opposition Politics, Intervention and the Carter Administration," *Caribbean Studies*, vol. 19, nos. 1-2, p. 53.
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- <sup>46</sup> U.S. Department of State. *Background Note: Dominican Republic*. Online. Available: <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/35639.htm>. Accessed: May 2, 2007.
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- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 3.
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- <sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.
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- <sup>84</sup> Pamela Constable and Arturo Valenzuela, "Is Chile Next?" *Foreign Policy*, no. 63 (Summer, 1986), pp. 71-72.
- <sup>85</sup> Speech by George Lister, "Notes for November 18 Ministry of Foreign Relations Luncheon Comments," p. 1.
- <sup>86</sup> Memo, George Lister to Elliott Abrams, "Chile: Socialists/Communists," Papers of George T. Lister, p. 1; Speech by George Lister, "Notes for November 18 Ministry of Foreign Relations Luncheon Comments," p. 1.
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<sup>134</sup> Speech by George Lister, "Notes for November 17 Congressional Luncheon Comments in Valparaiso," November 17, 1992, Papers of George T. Lister; Speech by George Lister, "Notes for November 18 Ministry of Foreign Relations Luncheon Comments," p. 1; Speech by George Lister, "Notes for November 18 U.S. Embassy Supper Comments," November 18, 1992, Papers of George T. Lister.

<sup>135</sup> Interview by Tracy Wahl and Karen Engle with Elliott Abrams, Deputy National Security Advisor for Global Democracy Strategy.

<sup>136</sup> Memo, Elliott Abrams to the file, "George Lister, Intermittent Expert: Performance Evaluation," p. 5.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7.

## Chapter 6. Conclusion

George Lister accomplished more in his career than might be expected of a mid-level State Department bureaucrat—much less one, who, at multiple times in his career, almost lost his job. Lister’s successes do not necessarily undermine models of foreign policy that emphasize high-level decision-making. They do complement such models, however. Lister’s career shows that determined, ideologically-motivated individuals who do not occupy positions of authority can nonetheless shape U.S. foreign policy and leverage U.S. influence to affect foreign countries.

Lister’s most major accomplishment as a diplomat in the first 20 years of his career was to commence a dialogue with the Italian Socialist Party. Partly as a result of Lister’s efforts, the Socialists in Italy were convinced to make a split with the Communist Party. Lister was moderately successful in the 1960s and early 1970s after returning to the State Department. Some of his work may have helped to improve Latin American perceptions of the U.S., but many of the policies he recommended—especially his calls for dialogue with Chilean Socialists—were disregarded.

Beginning in 1973, Lister devoted himself to the issue of human rights in U.S. foreign policy. Lister had the most impact of his career working as a human rights advocate at the State Department. Lister helped to institutionalize human rights policy in the State Department as well as to shape the development of the human rights

movement—in particular, by insisting that both the State Department and the human rights movement treat human rights objectively. He also contributed to human rights and democracy in a range of countries, including Chile, South Korea, and the Dominican Republic.

### **Reasons for Impact**

A mid-level official wishing to have a significant impact on U.S. foreign policy could adopt one of two basic strategies. One strategy would be to try to advance to a higher post within the bureaucratic structure in the hopes of being able to play a future role in high-level decision-making. Another strategy would be to try to immediately influence foreign policy, regardless of the effects on the official's career advancement.

On the continuum between these two strategies, Lister's approach fell at the latter extreme. Although he may not have intended to adopt such a strategy, his decision in Italy to oppose the DCM put him on a course which hampered his possibilities for career advancement. Returning to the State Department, Lister chose to continue to play a maverick role. He was not always well-received, but he still managed to be extremely successful. Below, I outline several of the factors that helped him to achieve success, particularly during his time as a human rights advocate.

## **Political Base**

Lister could not have been successful as a mid-level bureaucrat if he had worked entirely in isolation. Lister was something of a loner but he was also a consummate networker. During the first part of his career, Lister's influence depended heavily on building alliances with those in positions of higher authority. In Italy, he acted relatively independently in his initial outreach to the Socialists, but without Averell Harriman's intervention, his independence would have cost him his job. Harriman introduced Lister to Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., with whom Lister worked productively between 1961 and 1963 to promote an opening to the Italian political left. It was Harriman who helped create Lister's flexible "slot" in the State Department.

Lister's influence grew beginning in the 1970s in large part because he expanded his base of friends and contacts. His relationships with human rights activists and democratic opposition leaders put him in a position in which he was conducting extremely sensitive and important U.S. diplomacy. He was also the first to receive information about human rights conditions in countries worldwide. Lister, who as a child had met "Uncle Joe" Cannon, also built alliances with Members of Congress. Lister's closest friends in the legislature included Donald Fraser, Tom Harkin, and Bill Richardson. As Brandon Grove noted, high-level State Department officials had to give some deference to Lister or risk coming under fire from Congress.

Lister's other political base was the human rights bureau. After joining the bureau in 1981, Lister quickly won the confidence of his bosses, particularly Elliott Abrams. By working in the bureau, Lister was able to align what Halperin calls "organizational interests" with his own personal goal of advancing human rights. Lister's previous battles, both in Italy and within the Bureau of Inter-American Affairs, risked earning him a label as someone who did not have the interests of his organization at heart. In the human rights bureau, however, the more successful Lister was at advancing the cause of human rights, the more he advanced the bureau's mission.

Because Lister had supporters within the State Department, the Congress, and the human rights movement, he was in a position to use all three of them to further the human rights cause. An illustrative episode is the one in which Lister convinced Tom Harkin to enter into the Congressional record a State Department press statement of support for a democratic transition in Chile. When 70 Members of Congress responded with a letter to Shultz to applaud the statement, Lister won a public relations victory for the Department. But he also increased pressure on the State Department to follow through on its commitment to Chilean democracy—and he tried to amplify this pressure by distributing the letter to the human rights movement. In a recent conversation about Lister, Tom Harkin agreed that "George worked both sides."<sup>1</sup>

## **Credibility**

Throughout his career, those who knew Lister found him to be genuine. From the Italian Socialists to the student groups he hosted in the State Department, Lister was good at winning the confidence of people who were often skeptical about U.S. foreign policy aims. Lister could be disarming at times. His pamphlet for Latin Americans on U.S. foreign policy goals admits that the U.S. government is “composed of human beings” who despite good motives sometimes make poor policy judgments.<sup>2</sup>

Lister’s emphasis on treating human rights violations objectively, regardless of the political character of a regime, was another technique that won him credibility both within the State Department and outside of it. His stance might seem incongruent given that he was trained as a propagandist. Yet, Lister realized from early in his career that truth was a potent tool against Communism. In 1956, Lister encouraged the State Department to confront the Polish Ambassador to the United Nations at a forum at the University of Colorado because he recognized that Communist propaganda could not withstand reasoned scrutiny. Lister likewise knew that the idea of human rights could be easily tarnished if used purely as political spin.

Lister’s insistence on treating human rights violations objectively was partly a political tactic to enhance his own credibility and that of the human rights cause. But it was also an expression of the way he genuinely felt, which was that all human rights violations should be condemned. From the point of view of colleagues in the

State Department as well as human rights activists such as Joseph Eldridge, Lister was simply for human rights. Because he was also so well informed, Lister commanded respect when it came to human rights issues.

### **Persistence**

Lister's effectiveness in large part stemmed from his persistence, which he displayed on several levels. He persistently pressed the State Department and the Congress to take human rights into account. He brought his relentless attitude to young activists such as Diane Lavoy, whom he pushed to go ahead with founding WOLA. He was also persistent about fighting for human rights and democracy in certain countries in which he had already invested a stake. Lister's attention to Chilean democracy spanned from the early 1960s, before the coup, until democracy was restored in the late 1980s. Lister's concern for Poland never subsided either, following his years in Warsaw and at the Polish desk.

Lister devoted his life to the human rights cause. He immersed himself in human rights activities throughout the week and until late in the evenings. It is easy to forget that Lister was actually just a volunteer for last two decades of his career. Instead of heading off into retirement, Lister continued the fight until he could no longer physically work.

## **Nature of Human Rights**

Still another explanation for Lister's success was the nature of the human rights issue. To begin, an emphasis on human rights, as opposed to democracy, brought attention to specific violations that could be remedied in a measurable way. Human rights causes could be advanced by grassroots organizing, but also when the U.S. used political influence at the top levels to pressure countries to respect human rights. Thus, for Lister to have an impact on human rights in a foreign country, sometimes all that was necessary was for him to speak up and urge that his superiors make a phone call, as he did in the case of the 1978 Dominican elections.

Second, the human rights cause was one which depended on information. With so many human rights violations occurring around the world, it was the rare person who could stay abreast of the latest developments. Anyone who had credible information on human rights could get a seat at the decision-making table. To some extent, the addition of human rights as factor in foreign policy helped to democratize it;<sup>3</sup> human rights subverted the notion that foreign policy was a game played by intellectual tacticians such as Henry Kissinger. Lister was only a mid-level bureaucrat, but as someone with information, he was able to wield influence over U.S. foreign policy, just as activists at Amnesty International or WOLA were given a voice.

Third, the human rights cause was ideally suited to Lister's strengths, which included networking and conducting dialogue. Human rights gave Lister a reason to

open a political conversation with any foreign dissident. Moreover, human rights helped Lister to conduct the “effective political dialogue” with the democratic left that he felt had been neglected in places such as Chile. Human rights helped insulate the United States against the accusation from the left that it favored right-wing dictatorships.

Finally, the human rights issue was potent because it was morally appealing. During an era when Communism was failing and people beneath right-wing dictatorships were clamoring for democracy, the human rights cause was a winning cause. This seems more evident in hindsight of course; Lister deserves credit for recognizing that giving even a small boost to foreign dissidents could be enough to destabilize some non-democratic regimes.

## **Conclusion**

With the end of the Cold War, the human rights cause may offer fewer opportunities for such dramatic developments. Lamentably, U.S. credibility on human rights has waned to a point where it is difficult to imagine that a single individual working in the State Department’s human rights bureau could be so effective a force for human rights and democracy. But more might be accomplished than is commonly supposed.

Lister’s story may be applicable beyond the context of the State Department. As Lister’s career shows, by taking principled risks, a mid-level person in an

organization can make a difference. Certain strategies can mitigate those risks—such as winning support from unconventional thinkers among an organization’s leadership or by carefully guarding one’s reputation for credibility. Most organizations would not want to have too many George Listers in their ranks—but permitting a few to emerge can sometimes lead to spectacular results.

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with former Congressman Donald Fraser and Sen. Tom Harkin by Steven Inskeep, Austin, Texas, December 1, 2006 (part of the conference held on Lister and U.S. human rights policy hosted December 1-2, 2006 at The University of Texas School of Law.)

<sup>2</sup> George Lister, *United States Foreign Policy: Sterile Anti-Communism*, Papers of George T. Lister (pamphlet), p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Kenneth Cmiel, “The Emergence of Human Rights Politics in the United States,” *The Journal of American History* vol. 86, no. 3 (December 1999), p. 1231.

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### **Readings from Memorial Service for Lister**

- Memorial Service for George Lister, "George Lister, Mr. Human Rights," February 21, 2004. (This is a collection of remembrances of Lister that were read aloud at a memorial service in honor of his life and work.)
- Memorial Service for George Lister, Reading by Margaret Eubank, "Final Reflections." February 21, 2004.
- Memorial Service for George Lister. "Elliott Abrams' Tribute to George Lister." February 21, 2004.
- Memorial Service for George Lister. "Memorial Statement of Donald Fraser." February 21, 2004.

Memorial Service for George Lister. Statement of Governor Bill Richardson.  
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## Vita

Gregory Seth Krauss was born in Albany, New York on February 20, 1978, the son of Paula and Dennis Krauss. He was raised in Barrington, RI, where he graduated from Barrington High School. He attended college at Harvard University, working as a newspaper reporter for *The Harvard Crimson* and graduating with an A.B. in American History and Literature. Following college, he worked as a teacher in Madrid, Spain for nearly two years, then came to Texas to serve as an Americorps VISTA volunteer advocating for the legal rights of low-income tenants. In Fall 2003, he began studies at The University of Texas at Austin, pursuing degrees in Law and in Public Affairs.

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