YOUNG MEN AND THE FOREIGN SERVICE

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NATION'S foreign service is an amalgam of two traditions, one international, the other domestic. The basic pattern is determined by international habits; the spirit of diplomacy is informed by national characteristics.

That the forms of foreign service should be set by international custom is inevitable. Without tacit agreement to have ambassadors, ministers and consuls there would be such a chaos of functions and titles as to make the ordinary conduct of business difficult, or even impossible. Historically this has been demonstrated again and again. When other Far Eastern nations sought to have no foreign service at all the situation became intolerable; hermit nations were forced to conform to the general pattern.

We are likely to forget that the United States once thought it need take little part in international relations. Under the Confederation there had been a Department of Foreign Affairs. When the Constitution was adopted and the new government organized, the first department to be established was that of foreign affairs. After the Treasury and War Departments were set up, it was suggested that there should be a Home Department. Instead the duties were combined with foreign affairs and the Department of State was founded in the belief that duties of an international character would diminish into insignificance as soon as "perpetual" treaties of commerce and friendship were made with enough nations. In the words of one Representative, "a time would come when the United States would be disengaged from the necessity of supporting a Secretary of Foreign Affairs."

The small number of permanent diplomatic missions abroad, the neutrality policy of 1793, and the tone of Washington's Farewell Address were all evidence of the conviction that foreign affairs would "wither away," or at least decline greatly in significance.

If it had been possible for a nation to resist adapting itself to the international pattern the United States was by location, character and desire in the best position to do so. Nonetheless, the attempt failed; except for a temporary suspension of some legations and consulates the growth of our representation abroad proceeded, albeit slowly. As if to emphasize our recognition of the
dominance of the established international pattern, we ultimately took the initiative in forcing Japan to adjust her habits to that norm.

Our own slow accommodation to international practice was reflected in the tardiness of legislative provision for a foreign service. The statute setting up the Department of State was the shortest for any department, and the most general in its terms. There was some legislative definition of consular duties in the first days under the Constitution; thereafter Congress neglected the “organization” of foreign affairs until 1855, and no further basic legislation was passed until this century. Not until after the First World War did the Rogers Act of 1924 give a really solid statutory basis for the Foreign Service, uniting the diplomatic and consular branches, providing for recruitment, tenure, promotion and other essentials of a career service. It was the final and definitive evidence that the idea of withdrawal, dominant at the outset of our government, had been abandoned.

When attention is shifted from the fabric of foreign relations to the spirit in which diplomacy is conducted, domestic forces have much freer play. In the beginning the United States regarded diplomacy as vital. This was a revolutionary nation in a world hostile to the revolutionary ideal. The United States was considered not only a newcomer but a dangerous upstart. To meet this adverse situation talents of a high order were required. Benjamin Franklin, John Quincy Adams and others well deserved to be called professional diplomats. The seriousness with which Washington viewed the problem was revealed by the fact that he read all the previous diplomatic correspondence, making notes in the margins; it is reflected in his appointments, such as that of Chief Justice Jay to negotiate with Great Britain, and of Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State. Only first-class brains, sturdy character and great deftness, combined with dignity, could win essential recognition of our place in the world.

That era of intense diplomatic activity was recognized as a transient phase; in such an atmosphere no concept of a permanent diplomatic service could develop. However able the early practitioners of the art, the belief in the temporary nature of important international relations offered no incentive for a man to choose diplomacy as a career; there was even less reason for Congress to make elaborate provision for such a service. With the advent of Jacksonian concepts and dogmas, the last rem-
nants of professional diplomacy disappeared; foreign appointments became part of the "spoils of office." They were sought by the socially ambitious, by some who wanted to live abroad for literary or other purposes, or by mere placemen.

Occasionally during the spoils era a real diplomat appeared, such as Charles Francis Adams during the Civil War. Even in that instance President Lincoln regarded the appointment as political and shocked his new envoy upon their first meeting by making virtually no reference to his mission; the President plunged into a discussion with Seward regarding a postmastership.

Until the United States conceived of itself as a World Power and was accepted as such by other nations no adequate basis for a professional foreign service was available. The years immediately before and after the turn of the century proved decisive in that respect. The War with Spain, the annexation of Hawaii, the control of the Philippines and Guam, the enunciation of the Open Door and Integrity of China policies, the partition of Samoa, and the reversal of the tradition of animosity to Great Britain were compressed within those few years.

As the nation entered more actively into world affairs, a professional foreign service began to form. In so far as this beginning was officially recognized or assisted, the initiative was taken by the President through executive orders in 1895, 1905, 1906 and 1909. Not until 1915 did Congress accept the merit principle and give it statutory sanction. One favorable circumstance for the growth of a professional service was the fact that for a long period, from 1897 to 1913, one party remained in power; thus there was no partisan occasion to "turn the rascals out" to make place for political "friends."

When a change in party control occurred there arose an inevitable threat to the career principle. Secretary Bryan wanted appointments for "deserving Democrats;" in one instance the tradition of shirtsleeve diplomacy was carried a layer deeper—an envoy extraordinary to a Caribbean nation received callers in a red flannel undershirt. This episode and one or two other shoddy experiences helped rouse appreciation of the need for a truly professional service. Two world wars reinforced the concept. Nevertheless, after 20 years of control of patronage by one party, change again brought demands for "new faces." The legacies of isolation and the spoils system are hard to extirpate.
During its early period the Foreign Service “just growed” like Topsy. Moreover, it emerged not as one service, but two; soon after the end of the First World War the élite corps of diplomatists numbered over 100; the much less highly esteemed consular service had expanded to over 500. Clearly the time had come for comprehensive statutory recognition and organization. That was achieved by the Rogers Act of 1924, an extraordinarily successful piece of legislation which survived without vital change until replaced by the Foreign Service Act of 1946.

The Rogers Act reflected a desire for a career service as fully professional in spirit as the Army and Navy. Like the armed forces, the Foreign Service was to have its own management, but the Secretary of State was to have effective ultimate control. The Foreign Service Act of 1946 was drafted by Foreign Service Officers; it so emphasized supervision of its own affairs by the Service as seriously to impair the Secretary’s control. In 1949 an amendment, proposed by the Hoover Commission, sought to restore his managerial dominance.

Before Congress got around to legislative action, however, some tendencies had already hardened into tradition. The best development was a strong esprit de corps, which proved tough enough to accommodate itself to all subsequent changes—legislative, administrative and political. When the Rogers Act amalgamated the diplomatic and consular branches, many feared that this strong esprit de corps, which had been dominantly the possession of the diplomatic branch, would be weakened or destroyed. When the foreign services of the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture were absorbed in 1939, the same fear reappeared. Again, after the Second World War, when the Manpower Act provided for “lateral” recruitment to the higher grades, the same concern was expressed. In each instance the resiliency of the esprit de corps was remanifested. It is a sound tradition and seems likely to survive further reforms.

The second tradition, which also dates from the informal beginnings of the Foreign Service, was as unhappy as the development of esprit was fortunate: it was a reputation for snobbism. The stereotype of the diplomatic officer as a social butterfly has lingered in the public mind, and public prejudice is proving exceedingly difficult to eradicate.

The origin of the idea is obvious. Congress made niggardly provision for diplomatic and consular officers and most of the
nation was indifferent to the plight of those who went abroad: out of sight, out of mind. As a consequence recruits lacking private means could not look forward to a career in diplomacy. Often a young man of "good family" got his start as "private secretary" to a family friend who had been appointed ambassador; several such apprentices stayed in the service and became professionals. This was not a novel mode of introduction to diplomacy; John Quincy Adams had begun that same way. The custom had been followed sporadically, and it simply became more common as preoccupation with foreign affairs increased.

Some who gained tenure had more social grace than political insight. Ambassador Hugh Gibson, testifying in 1925 before a congressional committee, said: "There are now in the service a 'noisy minority' of trouble makers: that is, 'boys with white spats, tea drinkers, and cookie pushers,' who are a reproach to the American Foreign Service, and because it is almost impossible to get rid of these undesirables it is a very difficult matter to maintain the discipline necessary to make the Service the all around efficient machine it should be."

Anyone then well acquainted with the Service would have had to agree with his comment, but even at that time the number of such specimens was relatively small. Many influences have operated since then toward further democratization both socially and economically. Moreover, the new methods of appointment and the "selection out" process have eliminated such officers.

Candor, however, compels the observation that we still have some distance to go to achieve a genuinely representative, democratically oriented Service. If he is capable, industrious, and socially deft any young man who enters the Service may look forward to becoming a career minister through merit; he may take heart in the fact that all the consuls-general and two-thirds of the chiefs of mission are career officers, appointed to their high positions without any political influence. Nonetheless, unless he has private means, the ambassadorial posts in London, Paris, Rome are virtually closed to him. Until Congress takes a different view of salaries, "representation allowances" and other inescapable costs, that will continue to be the case. It ought to be a matter of chagrin to Americans that the British Government could send a person without a private fortune like Sir Oliver Franks to represent a kingdom with orders of nobility while this democratic republic could not "afford" to send to London a per-
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son with like background and resources. For years France has been represented in Washington by M. Henri Bonnet, an intellectual of great distinction; it would be impossible to send an American of like financial status to Paris.

Most nations have made more rapid strides in this respect than we have. There is no reason to discriminate against men of independent means, but to make wealth a *sine qua non* for some posts is an anachronism. Barriers to the ambition of attaining the highest posts of our Diplomatic Service are utterly wrong; public sentiment should compel Congress to clear the path to the top. It would furnish a marked incentive both for the recruitment of strong candidates and for their development in service.

The United States lags in another important respect—the integration of service at home and abroad. For a century our diplomatic duties were performed primarily by people only transiently in office. The Department of State, on the other hand, developed considerable stability. Three men—Hunter, Adee and Carr, each of whom occupied significant administrative posts—together held office well over a century. Reform of the Civil Service, to which Department of State employees belonged, moved more rapidly than progress toward a merit system for service afield. Thus the two arms of diplomacy, the center in Washington and the missions and consulates abroad, grew separately and their patterns hardened in different forms.

It should not need elaborate argument to make clear why an interplay of personnel between the two arms of diplomacy, the domestic and the foreign, would prove of value to both. Every other Great Power has completed their integration; the need has long been recognized in the United States. Nearly 40 years ago the Act of 1915 provided that members of the diplomatic corps and the consular service should have periods of service in the Department of State. The idea was a time for “re-Americanization,” an expression acutely distasteful to the Foreign Service. There were also other objectives, such as acquaintance with the way in which policy is formed and instructions decided upon, and familiarity with departmental procedures. It was hoped to produce greater harmony of effort.

The Rogers Act and the Foreign Service Act of 1946 gave renewed sanction to the practice. Moreover, an “exchange program” was devised which made the plan reciprocal by sending departmental officers to missions abroad for periods of experi-
nation between them and Washington. These ends can be attained only if all participants understand each other’s functions and methods. Without integration that goal is unattainable.

One ambassador, in private conversation, expressed himself with vigor regarding the results of this failure. Young men, not long out of college, are sent abroad and kept there. Many have had no active practical experience in any phase of American life; often they have not traveled as much in their own nation as they do in countries abroad. They have had no contact with the immensity of our land, the infinite diversity of its terrain and its industry; they know little at first hand of the various regional points of view, and how grass-roots opinion is formed. As Americans they are provincial. Their “indoctrination” in the Department of State has been brief and formal; they have no real knowledge of domestic governmental operation. This, the ambassador felt, was quite wrong. There is something inherently absurd in keeping a man out of the country, save for very brief visits, for 10 or 20 years while expecting him to interpret the current mood and situation of the United States to foreigners.

All this should be perfectly obvious. Therefore the Act of 1946 required that every Foreign Service Officer should be assigned to Washington for three out of his first fifteen years in the Service. Yet no real beginning has been made to carry out that mandate. Indeed “progress” has been backward, rather than forward; there are fewer Foreign Service Officers in the Department now than a few years ago, and no system has been developed to reverse the trend. Actually there are not enough posts available in the Department to make obedience to the law practicable unless vigorous, not to say drastic, action is taken. However, Congress is certain to take a very dim view of failure to conform to the statute; and time is running short.

We may as well face the fact that there is no painless way to effect this essential reform. Every delay, every postponement has exacerbated the problem and made it more intractable. What could have been done with relative ease through consistent gradual action must now be done a harder way. Bureaucratic incrustations will have to be broken, not merely scraped. But we shall have to make the effort, and endure the pain; the urgency is too great for continued attempts to fend off the inevitable.

Still another anomaly in the situation as it has been allowed to develop makes integration needlessly difficult. Admission to
far more complex than those usually exploited. After a period of notable success, typified by the Marshall Plan and NATO, Western diplomacy has suffered a series of setbacks. Successive reverses are not conducive to high morale; they have affected adversely the diplomatic professionals among our allies also.

The great majority of Foreign Service Officers have had all their experience during two decades under a single party. A shift in control was bound to raise questions regarding political vulnerability, particularly in the light of the prominence of foreign issues in the election campaign.

Economies, a severe reduction in force, accelerated “selection out” and forced retirements, a halt in promotions, altered rules regarding leaves—all combined to dislocate plans and frustrate expectations. On top of these came the stringent revised security program, which was committed to political appointees whose words and acts justified doubts as to their judicial impartiality. The new screening approaches completion and that storm is abating. Fundamental improvement of morale, however, is dependent upon diplomatic successes.

Both in Washington and abroad there are thousands of able, devoted and industrious public servants; there are others much less able, and still others not adequately industrious. Unhappily ability, devotion and industry are not indissolubly linked; indeed the union of all three in a single individual is unusual. No system, of course, will infallibly identify these traits; on the other hand, lack of system will continue to conceal them and to confuse administration. This is particularly true since none of the qualities—nor others such as ambition, initiative, readiness to accept responsibility—is a fixed attribute. Many a man who has made a brilliant start fails in maturity to fulfill the promise of his youth; many a slow starter gains by experience and determination characteristics valuable for diplomacy.

One of our greatest needs, therefore, is an administration of the Department and of the missions abroad which will evoke the best that is in their personnel. Nearly all who enter the Foreign Service are able, at least so far as tests can determine ability. But much that is done to them after they begin tends to offset or neutralize the effectiveness of that essential asset.

Even the induction policy is not well adapted to current circumstances. College graduates, particularly able ones, have been living in a period of saturated employment. Any young man ca-
pable of meeting the standards required for admission to the
Foreign Service can start promptly in industry upon a job “with
a future” at a salary better than the Government will pay. These
are formidable handicaps to be overcome; both thought and
action are needed to do so. Instead, much is done to repel the
eager, the ambitious, the energetic. The protracted process of
examination, the long time taken for security clearance, and the
rigorous physical check-up require from one to two years; then
the successful candidate may wait as much as two years for an
appointment. In defending this leisurely pace a Class One For-
eign Service Officer reminded me that he had waited four years—
but his appointment was during the depth of the depression:
and he could not claim the long delay had done him any good.

Under current circumstances it is a severely negative incentive
to force a sterile period of two or three years upon a young man
while his fellows are finding their way in the world. It is pre-
cisely the kind of procedure which has given bureaucracy a bad
name. Any employer knows that the most careful screening does
not eliminate all who may prove to lack qualifications. More
speed in appointment combined with more rigor in subsequent
discipline and appraisal would pay better dividends.

Both these matters—discipline and appraisal after appoint-
ment—are better handled in the Foreign Service than in the De-
partment. There is a marked tendency to give all civil servants
a “satisfactory” endorsement on the personnel record, and never
“superior” or “unsatisfactory.” The Foreign Service, on the con-
trary, does grade its members both through the chiefs of mis-
sion and the inspection system; and the “selection out” process
is well established. That is the negative side of appraisal; positive
incentives, however, are not as well developed.

For 30 years, at least, the law has provided for accelerated pro-
motion for “extraordinarily meritorious service.” Since the pas-
sage of the Foreign Service Act of 1946, however, not a single
such promotion has been made. The law of averages alone would
suggest that in a period of eight years, with all that has trans-
pired in the world, there must have been many instances worthy
of special consideration. There is also direct, first-hand evidence:
men who have held high positions during the period state frankly
that several cases of conspicuous service have come to their per-
sonal attention. It is puzzling why such a positive incentive, long
shown to be valuable in the armed services and well tested ear-
urgent occasion to reward promptly and conspicuously those who perform exceptionally well.

Among the positive stimulants to effectiveness none is more important, and none has been more neglected, than wise assignments. The operative theory has been that every man should be a "generalist" not only willing but able to practise the delicate art of diplomacy anywhere, at any time. Even if that concept were valid under current conditions, it has a most unfortunate collateral effect: it has retarded the orderly development of careers. The "generalist" philosophy has made the "slots and bodies" method of assignment seem rational by asserting that wherever a man was sent he was gathering "experience." The inference was that the sequence of such an accumulation made little difference. However, any careful review of assignments over the last decade shows clearly that this system—or rather deliberate lack of system—is hostile to real growth during a career.

There was a time when there were very few sensitive areas where American diplomacy was critically important. If a man knew French, "the language of diplomacy," he was linguistically equipped. Two decisive changes have altered that situation. In the first place, the number of sensitive spots is no longer small, it is legion, and in most of them the United States now has vital interests whereas in earlier times its responsibilities were marginal.

The second change is even more important: the growth of nationalism has made every people culturally sensitive to an unprecedented degree. French is no longer the language of diplomacy; everyone wants his own language spoken. Switzerland has recognized Romansch as an official language, though it is spoken by only some 50,000 persons; that change is symptomatic of what is happening the world around. For diplomatic purposes knowledge of the local language has an importance today that it never had before. Many individuals are conspicuously competent even in some of the least known languages, but our over-all linguistic deficiency is notorious.

We have one mission of considerable size in the capital of one of the most sensitive spots in the world in which not a single officer speaks or can understand the native language; it is quite different in the Russian embassy to that nation. In one of Russia's largest satellites, only one member of the American embassy staff speaks the language; he is a military attaché. We
have fewer learning the Far Eastern languages in the Foreign Service now than a decade or two ago.

There are a number of reasons for this appalling deficiency, but one of them is the helter-skelter manner in which young men are twitched from one area to another. When one knows that such irrational transfers are common practice, the incentive to master the language of the current assignment is sharply reduced. The best stimulus to learning a language is the knowledge that it will be used; awareness that about the time mastery is within reach a new appointment will make current progress of little value constitutes a negative incentive that should be eliminated. Moreover, there should be salary and promotion incentives to mastery of languages and knowledge of native cultures. The costs would be trivial compared with the benefits.

Language is only a symbol of familiarity with the traditions and temper of a nation, the genius of its people. Such a grasp cannot be acquired in a three or four year assignment. One who knows only the temper of official Paris, for instance, may be sharply deficient in his understanding of the national situation. Without first-hand knowledge of the provinces, their great variety of tradition and tempo, and the contrasts between their modes of thought and action and those of Paris, the officer is handicapped. What is true of France is equally applicable to many other nations and regions.

A young Foreign Service Officer might well have tours of duty in a series of consulates in the same nation, then in the embassy or the “country desk” in the Department. Such a pattern would give him wide and deep acquaintance with the nation, its language, its politics, its modes of thought. It is not necessary that each should be kept in a single nation, but successive assignments could be in one geographic area followed by a Washington assignment to that geographical division of the Department. Of course, it does not follow that a man should make his whole career in Latin America, or Asia or any other single region. Between overspecialization and the current scatter-and-spatter assignments there is a broad zone of intelligent action which should be fully exploited.

Professional growth should be stimulated also by more formal methods. The armed forces have learned that lesson well; the State Department has failed to take advantage of their example and has developed nothing comparable to the Naval War Col-
lege, for example. The day-to-day duties of any career officer are engrossing; details tend to absorb his full energy. As he progresses toward posts of high responsibility, such as deputy chief of mission, he should be given an opportunity to think more systematically, more broadly about problems of policy than daily preoccupation with current issues will permit.

Assignment for a year to the Foreign Service Institute or the National War College supplies that need. In such environments he can relate what he already knows to its broader context, he can think in longer range terms, he can face issues with more reflective calm and less pressure than in the field. No man should be promoted to Class One without this experience, without such testing of his capacity to generalize and develop rational solutions. There is, of course, no substitute for practical experience; there is likewise no substitute for systematic study.

There is no reason to be either defeatist about the current situation or utopian about the future of our diplomatic establishment. The Foreign Service has served us well, but it is the product of the twentieth century, and a great institution does not reach full maturity in so short a period. It has never had adequate attention or support. The Foreign Service Act of 1946 was shepherded through the House by three men, two Democrats and one Republican; they deserve great credit, but a broader interest and participation would have been desirable. The Act passed the Senate without hearings, virtually without debate, almost in a moment of inadvertence. For a great many years salaries went without readjustment; congressional prejudice against adequate expense accounts is still stubborn. Diplomacy is our first line of defense against war; in the light of this reality support for it has been niggardly. All this can be changed. Strong leadership by a few broad-minded and statesmanlike Senators and Representatives on strategic committees could bring marked advances.

Consistent administration is a primary need of the Department of State for a period of years. Its assets are human; it is the height of folly not to exploit those assets to the full. It will require stability, a humane approach and a few modern ideas. That is all. If foreign policy had lagged as far behind the times as personnel policy, we would be in a very bad way. Secretary Dulles realizes that better management will facilitate decision and make action more effective. He has taken a stand for reform that should draw universal support.