Subject: Supervisory Functions of Consuls General

From the very beginning of my service in 1914 in the Consular branch of the State Department representation abroad I became very much interested in the administrative practices of the service in the field and in the administrative practices of the Department. I entered the service at a time when a great change was taking place not only in the character of the work of the Department of State but its scope. With the responsibilities of the war in 1914 the work of the Department increased very greatly in volume and became more important than it had ever been in the history of our country, although it had always been important. We were along the beginnings of the road towards being a world power. Our people in our country had to begin to think in concrete terms of far distant countries. We had for some decades previous to the outbreak of the war in 1914 been interested in expanding the markets for our manufacturing industry in the United States and for our agricultural products. These markets were becoming increasingly important to the maintenance of our own level of production and employment and income in the United States. We had to begin to think not only in terms of markets but also of political problems. Matters which had seemed to us of very secondary interest from the point of view of the vital effect they might have on our own country began to assume an entirely different aspect. Problems which had developed in the political and economic field in many distant countries as well as near countries, which we had become accustomed to look upon with a certain complacency, thinking that they were the primary responsibility of others, were rapidly becoming our problems. All this was a very slow process. The thinking of our people in our country did not change overnight. It was really, however, not until around 1914 that these matters abroad, political and economic and social, began to take on a new significance for us. Perhaps it is an exaggeration to say that too many of our people began to think in realistic terms of this change in the position of our country and its responsibilities and opportunities, but it is not too much to say that a very considerable number of our thoughtful people
in intellectual, banking, business, commercial and government circles began to realize
the import and implications of what was happening in far distant places.

Although I had spent the years from 1900 to 1914 in school work in Pennsylvania and in Delaware, I had during the latter years of that period had a good deal
of administrative responsibility in connection with the building up of the public
school system in the state of Delaware. I will refer to this elsewhere in these
notes. It was as a result of the work which I had done during 1900 to 1914 that I
perhaps was one of those who entered the service in the lower ranks who had a keener
perception of the importance of the administrative factors in the carrying through
of policy. I had realized during the work that some of us were endeavoring to do in
the State of Delaware in order to improve the quality of the instruction in the
schools, modernizing the courses of instruction and getting better buildings, that
all these things on the level of policy in our school system could not be carried
through unless we had the administrative machinery and the instruments in order to
implement the new and what we believed to be better policy for our public instruction.
I learned that any decisions with respect to policy or planning taken at the top,
unless there was adequate administrative machinery and the appropriate human instru­
ments and others available, there was no way of implementing such policy and turning
it into reality. The post to which I was sent in the middle of 1914 was Fort Erie
and there was perhaps no less important post in the Consular Service at that time.
It was one of the very first of the consular establishments created by our govern­
ment towards the end of the 1700's. It was the first consular establishment that
we had in Canada. It was just across the river from Buffalo. As time went on and
Canada developed we began to establish consular posts in various parts of Canada.
When I arrived in Fort Erie there was really nothing to do there. The post should
have long since been abandoned and the work of that district transferred to a nearby
more important consular establishment which had been set up years before. I found
that I really had literally nothing to do, for the routine work of the small post
took only an hour or so a day and no matter how much initiative I might have had,
there was no room for it in the very small area which comprised the district. I therefore had plenty of time to think. My switch-over from schoolwork to the consular service was rather a sudden one. Among the things I did to occupy my time at Fort Erie was to study the consular regulations. I found that they needed revision very badly in the light of new times and new practices. Although I was a complete neophyte in the service, I had spent 1½ years with my nose on the grindstone facing the actual realities of life. I therefore spent practically all my time during the stay in Fort Erie in undertaking a revision of the consular regulations. I knew there was no use presenting this to the Department of State, for it would have been looked upon as a pretension and almost arrogance, and with reason. The revision which I made of the consular regulations at Fort Erie never went beyond my own desk, but the actual doing of the job gave me a view of the work of the consular branch of the departmental service abroad and an understanding of its administrative problems which I would not otherwise have had. It served me most usefully when I left Fort Erie and gradually went to busier and more important posts.

This interest which I acquired in the administrative practices of the Department and of the consular branch of the Foreign Service grew as I went on from post to post in the service. I found, strangely enough, that there were very few people in the Department who were thinking of improvements in administrative practice and that in the field there was a great reluctance to make suggestions to the Department as to useful changes in practice which occurred to officers at busy posts and who actually had to handle the problems. There was a certain resistance in the Department to considering recommendations received from the field with regard to changes in practices. This did not deter me from giving constant thought to improving the methods of implementation of policy in the Department and in the field. Perhaps I may have seemed a little bit overbearing and sometimes a little bit too zealous to some of my superiors. My post at Curacao and the one at Fort Erie and afterwards
the one at Curacao were what we called one-man posts. At both of them there was
only one other responsible officer and he was an honorary Vice Consul. It was not
until I went to my third post at Antwerp, Belgium, that I really had a post where
there was considerable work in the political, economic, and financial fields. It
was the first post where I had a fairly considerable staff. I found that the officers
had been accustomed to work in their little compartment in charge of particular sec­tions of the work and that it had not been the practice in the Consulate General for
the head of the office to meet at regular intervals his associates and to discuss with
them the work of the office as a whole and to get therefore proper coordination within
the office and the broader interest on the part of the officers in the work of the
Consulate General. I therefore initiated at Antwerp the holding of staff meetings
with the officers every week and later twice a week. At these meetings the new
instructions of the Department as they were received were given careful study and
interpretation and implementation. The principal problems which the Consulate
General had to deal with, whether they were in the political, economic, financial
or social field, were discussed. I did everything to encourage full and free dis­cussion. This meant that the officers had to be much more active in making con­
tacts in the appropriate fields of activity in Belgium in order that they might play
their appropriate part in the work of the Consulate General. These meetings were a
great stimulus to the officers of the Consulate General. It was I believe the first
time that in the service such staff meetings became an established practice. It had
up to that time been the practice for the head of the office to consult separately
and individually with the officers charged with specific aspects of the work. While
the weekly staff meetings did not of course eliminate this direct consultation with
individual officers on special problems which lay in their field, it became apparent
I believe to all of the officers that these staff meetings were serving a very useful
purpose not only in the conduct of the work of the office but to themselves also.
Later when my assignments carried me to capitals where our diplomatic mission was
located, I found that there was practically no direct relationship between the mission and the consular establishment. A good many of our chiefs of mission, whether they were of the career or political appointments, seemed to think that the work of the mission was particularly political. Times had completely changed. There were no more purely political problems. It was the economic factors in the relationships between states which were increasingly determining political policy. It was the economic factors that lay practically at the basis of every important political problem which we had to deal with in our relations with a particular state. It was not until I was assigned to Buenos Aires as Consul General that I really had the opportunity to do something which proved to be useful in coordinating the work of the diplomatic mission and the consular establishments. By the end of the 1930's the Department of State and the Department of Commerce and the Department of Agriculture had separate staffs in practically every capital. These Commercial and Agricultural Attachés were attached to the diplomatic establishment and supposedly under the direction of the chief of mission. As a matter of fact, the Consulate General, the office of the Commercial Attaché and that of the Agricultural Attaché and of the Treasury Attaché, where one existed, went their own and separate ways. For very natural reasons the duplication between the activities of these establishments became very great. Staffs became much larger than was really necessary. It was in Buenos Aires that we succeeded in getting real coordination between the work of the Embassy and of the Consulate General and of the various attachés. The problem had become complicated by the military and naval attachés in capitals not confining their reporting to purely military and naval matters. This was not due to the military and naval attachés in the field. Their departments in Washington increasingly began to realize the importance of economic and financial and social factors in the military and naval problems with which we had to deal, and from Washington there began to go out instructions from the Army and Navy to their men in the field to make reports on all kinds of subjects which lay outside of the scope of the purely military
field. They were expected to report on commercial and industrial and financial matters. These officers, competent as they were in their respective fields, were not trained to do this kind of work. They had no background whatever in it. As a result, the reporting from many capitals was of a most confused character. On a particular problem the Embassy might report one thing, the consulate general another, the office of the commercial attaché and the agricultural attaché and of the military attaché, and in some cases a treasury attaché, might present an entirely different viewpoint. Completely aside from the duplication involved, we began to get a very confused picture of the situation in the various countries in Washington in the different departments and agencies concerned. There were many of us in the field in those days who realized the importance of getting this coordination and reducing duplication. It was becoming really dangerous.

The first thing I did in the Argentine in order to really endeavor to improve this situation was, aside from the regular staff meetings of the officers of the Consulate General, to persuade, who was a very intelligent and understanding man, Mr. Robert Woods Fliss, of the desirability of having staff meetings in the Embassy to which the heads of all the establishments were invited, that is the Consul General and all the attachés. The innovation was not looked upon with too much favor by all of these attachés. Some of them preferred to work in their own way and in their own compartment. Some of them were encouraged by their own Departmental and agency chiefs in Washington to maintain a certain attitude of aloofness, but these staff meetings in the Consulate General and these staff meetings in the Embassy in which all the officers of our government in the capital with specific responsibilities were brought together at weekly intervals, began to work a tremendous change in the efficiency of the work accomplished.

There was a further step. Although the Argentine is a large country, we had only a few consular establishments in the country. The Consulate General was supposed to exercise supervisory direction and control over these officers. This obligation
had been taken in a rather perfunctory way not only in the Argentine but in many countries. I began the practice in the Argentine of visiting regularly our Consular establishments. Their work was coordinated with that of the Consulate General and with that of the other agencies of our government represented in Buenos Aires.

At this point I should say that in this work in the Argentine in bringing about coordination and greater efficiency in our representation I was greatly aided by one of the very junior officers in the Consulate General. Joe Grey was what we called in those days a non-career vice consul. He was an unusually intelligent and hard working officer. He understood the importance of these administrative problems and at the same time had a broad understanding of the nature of these problems. He helped me to bring about all this work which we accomplished in Buenos Aires in those days.

Some of the officers in other major capitals were thinking along the same lines that we were in Buenos Aires and were doing much the same kind of work. Many of us corresponded with each other and told each other what we were doing and we benefited each by the experience of the other. This coordination was really stimulated in the field and brought about in the field, rather than through any influence or direction in the Department.

When I went to Berlin as Consul General in 1930 with supervisory functions in connection with all our consular establishments in that country, I had the best opportunity that any officer could have in order to try out these practices. We had in Germany something like 30 consular establishments. Joe Grey was assigned to the Consulate General. Aside from the specific responsibilities he had in the commercial and economic reporting section of the Consulate General, he became my principal assistant in carrying through my supervisory functions and in the coordination of our establishments in that capital. He was a man of great tact and understanding. Raymond Geist, who was the No. 1 assistant to the Consul General, and Joe
Harry McBride, an experienced Foreign Service officer who was the secretary of Mr. Hull, was about to retire. McBride was one of the most useful Foreign Service officers we have had. After having served very usefully in the career for some years he had left the Service as he found the income inadequate in order to meet the needs of his family. He deliberately retired from the Service, that is resigned, and went into business and accumulated some money and then returned to the Service.

The relationship between Secretary Hull and McBride was a fine one. When McBride decided to retire definitely Secretary Hull was greatly distressed, for he had become so dependent upon McBride in many ways and properly so. Mr. Hull at that time was a member of the Board of the Mellon Galleries and through him McBride became the administrative officer of that great art institution. I recall that McBride said to me one day just before he was leaving the Department that the Secretary had asked him to recommend three names of Foreign Service officers who would be able to take his place. McBride and I were both very fond of Mr. Hull. McBride suggested that he and I each put three names on a piece of paper of the officers who we thought would best fill this post of secretary to Mr. Hull. I wrote on a piece of paper, "Joe Grey, Joe Grey, Joe Grey". McBride wrote some names on a piece of paper. We exchanged our papers. McBride had written on his slip, "Joe Grey, Joe Grey, Joe Grey". The Secretary appointed Joe Grey as his secretary and there are many officers of the Department, many chiefs of mission and hundreds of Foreign Service officers
as well as officers of other Departments at that time in Washington who can bear witness to the extraordinarily efficient way in which Joe Grey carried through his functions as secretary to Mr. Hull.

I have elsewhere in these notes referred to the work which we did during my stay in the Department from 1937 to 1940 in the reorganization of the Department to meet its increased responsibilities and what we did in the way of implementing the President's and Secretary's decision to consolidate the Foreign Services of the Departments of Commerce and Agriculture into that of the Department of State. It was during those three years that I was in the Department charged with these administrative responsibilities that we were able to bring to fruition and into general practice so many of the ideas on which many of us in the Department and in the field had been working over several decades. In addition to carrying through the reorganization of the Department of State in a quiet but I hope effective manner, and in addition to the consolidation of the Foreign Services into one unified service, that of the Department of State, we were able to make effective in the field the practice of holding staff meetings, not only in capitals but in all other posts. In other parts of these notes I have referred to the steps which were taken to coordinate policy making at high levels and which steps were the fore-runners of the present National Security Council and National Advisory Council. In addition to this we were able to bring about the enactment of new legislation strengthening the pension system for the Foreign Service and broadening it to include the widows of Foreign Service officers. It was through the assistance of men like Joe Grey in the Secretary's office and that of Charlie Hosmer, Nathaniel Davis and Fletcher Warren, then stationed in the Department, and of many other officers in the Department and in the field that it was possible to carry through to fruition these important and fundamental changes in the administrative practice. To me it was a tremendous satisfaction to be able to see these things made effective not only at individual posts where there happened to be officers of initiative, but to become a general and
obligatory practice throughout the Service. It is not because I was one of those who helped to bring these ideas to fruition and not because so much of this work was done while I was serving in the Department of State during the three years from 1937 to 1940 that I say that I believe that at that time we had achieved the maximum efficiency in the Department and in our establishments in the field. It was I believe the period in which we had the highest morale and the greatest effectiveness which we have had in the Foreign Service. I want to make it clear that this is not an egotistic statement and that I make any pretense to having been responsible for all this work. I have lived long enough and then had lived long enough to know that any important accomplishment whether it be in government or in business or in any walk of life, is only possible through the collaboration of many right-thinking, earnest and devoted people. There are always those who have to take leadership. There are always those who have to have the courage at certain stages to take the initiative and to overcome accumulated inertia. There are always those who have to have the overall picture in mind and who have to exercise a certain leadership. Perhaps in the measure possible to me and within my capacities I had exercised over several decades, and principally during the period that I was Assistant Secretary of State, such initiative and leadership. In any event, as I look back on my long years of service with the Department in so many posts in different parts of the world one of the things out of which I take the greatest satisfaction is that we were able to bring about better administrative practices not only in the Department but in the field. We were able to bring about an understanding as to the necessity for coordination in the making of policy at high and lower levels. We were able to take the necessary steps to increase morale of the officers of the Department and in the field. We were able to stimulate initiative. We were able to reduce personnel on the whole rather than to increase it through the elimination of duplication in reporting and in various activities and in eliminating duplication between departments and agencies of our government.
In this connection it may be interesting to note that the movement towards increasing efficiency in the Foreign Service and in the home office was not confined to our country. The same thing was going forward in the Foreign Office in London and in its foreign service. One of the most effective and devoted and constructive officers of the British Foreign Office over a long period of years was Sir Walford Selby and he had a long period of service in the Home Office of the Foreign Office in London. In the introductory chapter of his book "Diplomatic Twilight 1930 - 1940", Selby gives a very interesting picture of what was taking place in London during these years and it is interesting to note that the same inertia and the same difficulties were encountered in bringing about these improvements in the British service as we had to solve in our own.

With the advent of Stettinius as Secretary of State a new reorganization of the Department was undertaken. It was well meant but it was the beginning of a succession of steps which have done much to break down the high efficiency which had been developed in the Department and the beginning of those practices which have resulted in so greatly decreased morale of the Foreign Service. Stettinius' life up to the time he became Secretary of State, or rather until he came into the Department, had been entirely in business. What success he had as a business man his contemporaries in the business field are better able to judge. He brought to the Department a complete lack of experience in the work of the Department itself and a complete lack of knowledge of the Foreign Service. He brought in a number of men who were equally inexperienced in the conduct of foreign relations at home and abroad. They were well meaning and earnest but they began to apply norms in departmental practice and organization which were altogether ill considered. They did not take into account that the conduct of foreign relations is in many respects a very special thing and that the formation of policy and its implementation are matters which cannot be improvised. From that time on a series of steps were taken in the Department and in the Foreign Service which led to decreasing efficiency and lowered morale.
in the Foreign Service, that is, decreasing efficiency in the Department and lower morale in the Foreign Service. This situation began to give great concern to those in our country who realized the importance of the proper and adequate machinery for the conduct of our foreign relations. The matter was given study from time to time but no effective measures have yet been taken. In the early days of Mr. Dulles in the Department as Secretary the increasing concern in informed circles throughout the country with regard to this problem made it necessary for action to be taken, and the so-called Wriston committee was set up. The principal objective of the Wriston Committee was to find the ways and means by which the personnel of the Department and of the Foreign Service could be brought into one service. This is an even much more complicated problem than the consolidation of the Foreign Services abroad into one service under the Department of State. It is too long and too complicated a problem to enter into here. The committee headed by Dr. Wriston has made a serious endeavor to find the solutions for better administration in the Department and increased efficiency in the field, and to bring about the return of that morale which it had been possible to build up and which while it lasted made our Foreign Service the best of all the Foreign Services at the disposal of any government. One of the things that is eternally to the credit of the men who compose the Foreign Service of the Department of State today is that in spite of the inadequate treatment which the service has received ever since Stettinius became Secretary of State, it remains today the best of the Foreign Services of any government. This does not mean, however, that there are not serious problems to be solved, and the work of the Wriston Committee is only going to be at the best a beginning of the solution of those problems.

The burdens falling upon the Department of State in the times in which we live and in which we shall live for many years to come are such that it has to be the best organized, best equipped and most efficiently operating agency of our government. One of the regrets which I have and perhaps one of the greatest regrets
I have at my age is that I cannot at least in a small measure contribute towards the constructive solution of the problems before the Department. It would give me a particular personal satisfaction as well, in view of the fact that I am reaching the conclusion that Foster Dulles has already proved himself to be not only the Secretary of State with the greatest responsibilities that any man in that office in our country has ever carried, but also the man who is carrying them through with the greatest courage, energy and constructive genius. I hope elsewhere in these at least notes to be able to give a fairly adequate appreciation of what I feel, out of my experience, is the measure of his performance and service to our country.