IX

The Rise of the Department of State

THE CONDITION OF NATIONAL SOVEREIGNTY MAKES IT natural for the control of all official contacts between governments to be concentrated in one responsible agency. In every state a single voice must dominate in the negotiating and making of agreements with others.

That situation, however, is one that automatically tends to increase the power of the executive. And it follows that the more numerous the official contacts of any one government with others, the greater will be the tendency for the executive to become dictatorial—towards its own subjects rather than towards the foreigners with whose spokesmen contracts of various kinds are being continuously made.

Thus we have the political paradox, first observed by Plato, that the more numerous the international contacts of a democratic government, the more likely it is to be transformed into a dictatorship. Applying the Platonic reasoning to the American scene the great French political scientist, Alexis de Tocqueville, in Andrew Jackson's day expressed grave apprehension as to the future of American democracy. "The older a democratic community", he said, "the more centralized will its government become." [1]

[1] Alexis de Tocqueville: *Democracy in America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf; 1945), Vol. II, p. 294n.

The founders of the American Republic were as well-informed and far-sighted a group of political thinkers as have ever been assembled at one time and place. They realized, as every student of *The Federalist* knows, that the problem of control over foreign policy was one of the most difficult with which they had to grapple in drafting the Constitution. And their anxieties were sharpened by the realization that this country was destined to become one of the most powerful on earth. Benjamin Franklin in 1751 predicted that the American population "will in another century be more than the people of England." James Madison overshot the mark somewhat by estimating, in 1787, that a census of the United States in 1930 would count 192,000,000 inhabitants.[2]

Therefore, to safeguard and insure perpetuity for the Republic they were establishing, the members of the Constitutional Convention of 1787 created a duality of authority over foreign affairs, over and above the general separation of executive and legislative power. The direction of the foreign policy of the United States was made an executive function, but with more and sharper qualifications than are imposed on most modern governments. One voice would speak, but with provision for contradiction in case of arrogance.

These legal limitations on the executive control of American foreign policy will be considered in due course. But their import becomes more clear after examination of the actual development and functioning of the Department of State, established after some fumbling by the

[2] *The Madison Papers* (Mobile: Allston Mygatt; 1842), Vol. III, Appendix 4.

first Congress of the United States, in legislation approved by President Washington on September 15, 1789. For this department, in spite of its incongruous name, is the executive office to which the conduct of foreign policy has been entrusted since the adoption of the Constitution.

2.

DOWN TO and including Dean Gooderham Acheson there have been 51 Secretaries of State, not counting those who have acted in that capacity, from a few days to a few months, without formal appointment and requisite Senatorial approval. The first of this long line, who like the latest had many troubles in that office, was Thomas Jefferson. In addition to the conduct of foreign relations this Secretary was at first given responsibility for the Mint, the Patent Office, the deposit of copyrights and the conduct of the census.

Despite these multifarious duties, which of course were all embryonic in Jefferson's day, the first Secretary of State ran the new department with a frugality never mentioned at contemporary party dinners in his honor. His initial staff consisted of five clerks, one interpreter and two messengers. Jefferson's first budget for one year's expenses of the department, drawn up in June, 1790, amounted to $7961, counting his own salary of $3500 but excluding the cost of the very small foreign service. A

decade later, when John Marshall resigned as Secretary to become Chief Justice, the personnel of the Department of State, then established in Washington, numbered only ten, with an annual salary outlay of $11,500.[3]

Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, J. Q. Adams, Van Buren and Buchanan, respectively the first, fifth, seventh, eighth, tenth and seventeenth to hold office as Secretary of State, went on in each case to occupy the White House. No Secretary of State has done so since the Civil War. But this early tendency of movement to the Presidency shows that the responsibility for foreign policy was taken very seriously by the electorate of those days. There is further evidence in the high calibre of the men usually chosen for the first American diplomatic missions abroad.

If Jefferson had gone direct from the State Department to the White House, and if Edmund Randolph and Timothy Pickering, the second and third Secretaries of State had been more successful in that office, a precedent of great moment in American politics might easily have been established.

However, the resignation of Randolph under unfortunate circumstances, and the actual dismissal of Pickering,[4] served strongly to emphasize the subordination of the Secretary of State to the President. While various Chief Executives have often allowed their Secretaries great latitude in the conduct of foreign policy, and while many

[3] Graham H. Stuart: *The Department of State* (New York: The Macmillan Company; 1949), p. 36. That comprehensive history has been extensively used in the summarization of this and the following chapter.

[4] The circumstances are conveniently summarized in Stuart, *op. cit.* pp. 27–33.

very able men have headed the Department of State, in times of crisis the President has always called the turn.

In fact, as well as in theory, every President "is ultimately responsible to the American people for the formulation, execution and co-ordination of foreign policies." [5] As it came to be realized that the Secretary of State is politically an understudy for the President it also became less likely that the Secretary would receive the party nomination. Furthermore, reluctance towards active participation in domestic politics soon began to develop among these foreign ministers themselves.

The internal organization of the Department did not keep pace with its increasing duties and responsibilities. After John Quincy Adams accepted the nomination of Secretary from President Monroe, in 1817, he protested that he found "all in disorder and confusion" [6] in the State Department, a complaint echoed by many who have filled the position since. This secretary, however, proceeded to do something about it.

Without any typewriters or modern office equipment, with responsibility not only for foreign policy but also for conducting the 1820 Census, for standardizing weights and measures and other extraneous duties, with only a handful of employes and a farcical budget, Adams was nevertheless able to reorganize his important office into a high state of efficiency. Simultaneously he did much of the diplomatic spadework for the Monroe Doctrine and other important policy measures. Professor

[5] Report of the [Hoover] Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government: *Foreign Affairs*, p. 10.

[6] *Memoirs of John Quincy Adams*, Charles F. Adams, editor (Philadelphia: J. P. Lippincott and Company, 1875), Vol. IV, p. 100.

Stuart, reviewing the entire galaxy of Secretaries up to Acheson, defines John Quincy Adams as "the Department's greatest". So it is the more interesting to recall the political philosophy of this indefatigable worker, who believed that "the more of pure moral principle is carried into policy and conduct of a government, the wiser and more profound will that policy be." [7] Only an ethical foreign policy, thought Adams, can be successful.

3.

SENATOR HENRY CABOT LODGE, in his biography of Daniel Webster, placed that Secretary of State second only to John Quincy Adams as a successful administrator. Certainly Webster's staunch isolationism, his refusal to consider the seizure of Hawaii and his insistence on non-intervention as a fundamental principle, helped greatly to delay the development of American imperialism. Webster had to be removed before the United States could annex Texas and wage aggressive war against Mexico. He is also notable for having returned to this secretaryship seven years after his resignation, dying in office during the second term.

Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun are among the other notable early Secretaries of State, though in these cases perhaps less distinguished in that office than as Senators. But an effort to appraise the functioning of the Depart-

[7] *Ibid.*, Vol. V, p. 47.

ment, rather than merely to catalog its various executives, may properly jump to Hamilton Fish, still remembered for his administrative as well as his diplomatic skill.

Fish was Secretary of State through both terms of President U. S. Grant. The record of the two men in their respective offices confirms the not wholly reliable belief that a strong man in the White House means a weak Secretary, and vice versa. Certainly few State Department heads have ever chided their chiefs more witheringly than in the words used by Fish to Grant when the latter proposed to make a quartermaster general Minister to Moscow, because allegedly unsatisfactory in his army post. "Pardon me, my dear General," wrote Fish, "should I seem a little sensitive in respect to having one who is held to be unfit to discharge the duties of a Bureau in the War Department [held] as competent to discharge the most important diplomatic duties under the Department of State." [8]

While Fish tacitly backed the Senate, in its successful fight to keep Grant from annexing Santo Domingo, and simultaneously smoothed the ruffled Senators who wanted the British to pay upwards of $2,000,000,000 to settle the *Alabama* claims, an equally vital achievement was in careful reorganization of the State Department.

Congress "had reduced the number of clerks from 48 to 31 for the fiscal year beginning July 1, 1869." [9] Even so, or perhaps because of the economy pressure, Fish divided the departmental work among bureaus in a system

[8] Quoted, Allan Nevins, *Hamilton Fish* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Company; 1936), p. 727.

[9] Stuart, *op. cit.* p. 142.

that remained essentially unchanged until 1909. He also expedited routine operations in many ways and made the employes strictly observe the working hours of 9:30 to 4:00, with half an hour for lunch.

Secretaries of State have frequently compiled tabulations for Congress on the astronomical hours of "overtime" worked in that department. Few have been as frank as Hamilton Fish in pointing out that working conditions there are unusually pleasant and that a six-hour day was normal in the State Department as far back as 1870. When John Hay became Secretary, in 1898: "He went to work at 10:30 but couldn't catch up, and therefore decided to start at 9:30 . . . with his hours from 9:30 to 5:00, he declared that he was disgustingly busy and expected conditions to be worse when Congress met."[1]

Nevertheless Hay, the architect of the Open Door, was a hard-working as well as superlatively able Secretary of State, who died in harness. Appointed by President McKinley he came, as have several other Secretaries, to Cabinet office direct from the Court of St. James. Hay, who was throughout pronouncedly Anglophile, did not get on too well with the Senate, yet secured the ratification of 15 treaties in his seven years of office. Moreover, he never asserted the need of lavish appropriations and a horde of employes for his accomplishment.

"There were 82 on the payroll of the Department when he entered in 1898 and 119 when Root took office. The cost of the Department had increased from $135,000 in 1898 to $191,000 in 1905."[2]

[1] *Ibid.*, p. 194. [2] *Ibid.*, p. 201.

4.

THE PLAN of geographical divisions, under expert diplomatic administration, was first proposed during Elihu Root's tenure of the State Department but was not made really effective until after Philander C. Knox became Secretary, with Root's blessing, as President Taft's appointee.

Western European, Near Eastern, Far Eastern and Latin-American divisions were then established, with each geopolitical section under a career diplomat as chief of division. The office of Counsellor was created, to centralize and more efficiently handle the important and growing legal work of the department. A Division of Information was added, with what was then regarded as the extravagant staff of six. Existing bureaus were overhauled and even expanded, so that by the end of 1909 the Department of State, excluding foreign service officers, had the unprecedented number of 210 employes on its payroll.[3] Thus it stood when the Democrats came into power, after sixteen years of exile, and William Jennings Bryan was named by Woodrow Wilson as Secretary of State.

Over the years, somewhat fitfully and with setbacks, the theory of a career service in American diplomacy had gained ground. The establishment of four geopolitical divisions, guided by experts on those areas, had been its formal recognition. Civil service regulations protected

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 219.

the clerical workers. That very fact, however, made political pressure for the professional jobs the stronger. Secretary Bryan did very little to resist that pressure, and even coined the classic phrase "deserving Democrats", in his famous letter to the new Receiver General of Customs at Santo Domingo:

"Now that you have arrived and acquainted yourself with the situation, can you let me know what positions you have at your disposal with which to reward deserving Democrats? Whenever you desire a suggestion from me in regard to a man for a place down there, call on me. You know . . . how difficult it is to find suitable rewards for the deserving. . . . You will find Sullivan a strong, courageous, reliable fellow." [4]

The Sullivan referred to was James M., a New York "police court lawyer" who was appointed by Bryan as Minister to Santo Domingo, replacing a career officer of eighteen years' standing (William W. Russell). The American grip on this nominally independent Caribbean republic made diplomatic appointment there a profitable and convenient "reward for the deserving", as Secretary Bryan put it.

In 1900, John Hay had written caustically that cooperation with Great Britain was made difficult for him "because all Irishmen are Democrats and some Germans are fools." [5] Various Democratic Presidents have seemingly sought to support at least that part of the observation bearing on the politicians of Irish descent. Wilson named Sullivan Minister to Santo Domingo. In 1943,

[4] Quoted, Stuart, *op. cit.* p. 229.
[5] Letter to John W. Foster, quoted by Stuart, *op. cit.* p. 197.

Roosevelt named Edward J. ("paving blocks") Flynn as Minister to Australia, to replace career officer Nelson T. Johnson. The Senate would not confirm this weird appointment, which did not keep President Truman from naming ex-Mayor O'Dwyer of New York as Ambassador to Mexico in 1951.

Woodrow Wilson was not happy about the secretaryship of Mr. Bryan, admittedly appointed as a political obligation. The career personnel of the State Department were not happy either, for Bryan in his first six months of office replaced more than half of the chiefs of diplomatic missions with utterly untrained party henchmen.

The consequent deterioration in State Department morale was used as illogical justification for a Wilsonian innovation of very dubious import—the utilization of private Presidential agents, instead of responsible diplomatic officers, to formulate American foreign policy. The curious fatality that seems to plunge the United States into war under Democratic Presidents also plays a part here, because in wartime there is naturally less public and Congressional criticism of the executive conduct of foreign policy.

5.

THE DOMINATION of Woodrow Wilson's foreign policy by his "silent partner" Edward M. House can be impartially examined in Charles Seymour's revealing com-

pilation.[6] Here we merely note that the precedent set in this case was followed by President Roosevelt with Harry Hopkins, to mention only the outstanding member of that Chief Executive's corps of private diplomatic agents, and by President Truman with W. Averell Harriman, whose extra-departmental position became formalized as "foreign affairs advisor" to the President, which of course is what the Secretary of State himself is supposed to be.

How far this trend has gone was well illustrated by an editorial entitled "Impasse in Iran" in the *Washington Post* of July 7, 1951. After paying somewhat perfunctory tribute to the experienced American Ambassador, Dr. Henry F. Grady, then stationed in Teheran, the editorial said: "If a new figure is required, surely, for various reasons, a personal representative of the President would be better than another diplomat." None of these "various reasons" were made available to the reader by this strongly pro-Administration newspaper. But, by noticeable coincidence, Mr. Harriman was assigned a few days later, over Ambassador Grady's head, as Presidential "trouble-shooter" in Iran.

Although resulting in an occasional brilliant success, this sort of personal, extra-departmental diplomacy is essentially irresponsible and tends to circumvent the Constitutional provision for Senate approval of those entrusted with the conduct of our diplomacy. It finally broke down the patience of Secretary Hull, leading him to say that the utilization of private Presidential envoys "tended

[6] Charles Seymour: *The Intimate Papers of Colonel House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company; 1926–1928).

in many instances to create havoc with our ambassadors or ministers in the capitals they visited, even though the envoys themselves had no such intention".[7]

[7] Cordell Hull: *Memoirs* (New York: The Macmillan Company; 1948), Vol. I, p. 200.