
REPORTS

THE SCHOLAR-DIPLOMAT SEMINAR ON LATIN AMERICAN AFFAIRS: THE PROMISE AND ILLUSIONS OF THE STATE DEPARTMENT REFORM MOVEMENT

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WE LIKE TO BELIEVE THAT IDEALS AND CONSCIOUS MOTIVATION GOVERN HISTORY. In an area so controversial as United States-Latin American relations, a preoccupation with ideological determinants of policy and action has been part of a standard approach to problems and issues of Latin American economic, social, and political development, especially in the past decade. The influence of beliefs in the efficacy of the motive in history is illustrated by periodic harassment and quasi-purges of the Department of State, which is perceived by congressional critics as an organizational haven for the disloyal, weak, or misguided, and by diatribes from the left against official Washington which are typically based on some variation of the view that the state department harbors men with evil ideas.

The Department of State and elements of the academic community have begun to compound some of these illusions. The state department, the International Studies Association (a group of social scientists interested in foreign policy), and the American Foreign Service Association (an autonomous organization of present and former foreign service personnel)—comprising key components of what has been designated, somewhat euphemistically, as the “foreign affairs community”¹—recently initiated a series of Washington meetings between young university professors and officials of the Department of State. Five Scholar-Diplomat Seminars were held during the 1969–70 academic year. Their chief purpose, according to the state department’s Bureau of Public Affairs, is to provide a forum for “constructive dialogue between international affairs professionals in and out of Government.” Following the last annual meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, a Scholar-Diplomat Seminar on Latin American Affairs was held at the Department of State, during the week of April 20–24, 1970. The Seminar on Latin American Affairs, attended by some dozen academic participants including the present author, raised

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interesting questions about relations between academia and the state department, about issues of state department adaptiveness and reform, and about United States-Latin American relations generally. Since one of the most important tasks of the professional scholar is the identification and clarification of public beliefs, both for the sake of pursuing transcendent ideas associated with the discovery of truth and for practical purposes related to the realization of a more desirable state of affairs in societies, we should begin to examine some of the more important implications of the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars and the state department reform movement generally. A critical examination of the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars is particularly pertinent at the present time, for a series of seven Seminars were held during the 1970–71 academic year, and the program is expected to continue.²

THE SCHOLAR-DIPLOMAT SEMINARS: AN OVERVIEW

The chief purposes of the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars include realization of a number of goals. The Seminars are designed to facilitate contact, communication, and a measure of interaction between the Department of State and the academic community, in particular younger and ostensibly more imaginative and critical members of academia concerned with foreign affairs. Second, it is hoped that the governmental element of the foreign affairs community will be able to utilize insights, opinions, and knowledge possessed by the academic community to pursue better its official tasks. This objective presumably includes reconceptualizing activities and problems of the state department, and is closely related to demands within the American Foreign Service Association for more openness of the department to its environment, constituted by other elements of the foreign affairs community. Third, the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars are designed to provide resource materials—including personal interviews, policy statements, public documents, cables to and from area desks—for participants engaged in scholarly pursuits related to international and internal political problems of Latin America, Asia, Africa, and other areas of the world. Lastly, it is hoped that the Seminars will promote better relations, and even rapport, between the department and the academic community. The latter goal is facilitated by personal contacts and interaction between professionals in and out of government, and by the establishment of a network of interinstitutional relationships with universities. Interinstitutional relationships provide an opportunity for Foreign Service Officers to visit academic institutions and serve as speakers on selected topics related to United States foreign policy.

The existing structure and organization of the Seminars seems largely to fulfill the achievement of the first goal. The opportunity for scholars to spend a week with various decisionmakers and specialists in foreign affairs, both in individual situations, in area meetings, and in special meetings with division heads and staff, offers an illuminating general introduction to the operations of the department. It is most interesting, for example, to observe and follow the actions of department personnel in reaching decisions to dispatch the Caribbean Ready Fleet towards Trinidad and

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Tobago. The participant-observer gains insight into relations between various agencies in the executive branch concerned with foreign policy formulation, and may even begin to appreciate the immense difficulties of effectively communicating policy goals and values to news media which very often contribute to perceptual anarchy concerning crisis situations in foreign affairs.

A second goal of the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars involves state department reform. Here questions of changing attitudes, orientations, and policy processes within the department assume great importance. It is highly unlikely, however, that significant changes in the formulation and execution of United States foreign policy, generally and in the Latin American context, can be achieved through a program which provides for a week's participation at the department. The Seminars are designed primarily as a learning experience for academic participants. The period of time devoted to statements from participants—whether in the form of recent studies, in individual dialogue with officials, or in open discussion sessions—is extremely short. Attainment of the second goal depends also, of course, on the substance and value of subsequent written statements and analyses by participants in the Seminars. But the first and second goals are relatively less important than the two remaining, both because of inherent limitations imposed by programs of this type and because of the character of the state department as an immense public bureaucracy.

The importance and potential impact of the Seminars lies in the area of scholarly resources and human relations. The Seminars, notwithstanding their comparative brevity, do provide important resource materials for academics. It is important to increase awareness among professional foreign affairs analysts from outside government about the vast amounts of written factual materials available within the department concerning foreign nations. Knowledge of the formidable difficulties encountered in systematizing and interpreting information, and of the problem of converting knowledge into policy and action, provides a useful background for academics who encounter comparable problems daily, but problems which have far less data and informational complexity. Most important, the opportunity to reflect on such problems can produce a somewhat paradoxical conclusion: that the problem of processing, systematizing, and interpreting vast amounts of information is really ancillary in importance to the problem of developing conceptual clarity by means of the employment of social and political theory and techniques of policy analysis. One may reach the conclusion that department activities suffer most from lack of a systematic theoretical orientation, and not from an incapacity to process all relevant information available on foreign policy matters. In short, the assessment that an information "overload" exists within the department is clearly misleading. The problem is rather one of developing conceptual precision and clearly identifying priorities, for which the capacity to process more available information is relatively unimportant. It is interesting to speculate whether effectiveness of decision-making would not increase measurably by limiting information available to policy makers. Major problems of United States-Latin American relations—including international stratification and relative deprivation, political manipulation of Latin American gov-

ernments by United States government agencies and by corporate enterprises, military and paramilitary involvement and pressure from officials possessed by values of political stability and security—none of these problems is illuminated by misleading and quasi-scientific prescriptions to obtain more and better data and to become more systematic and “objective.” Foreign policy problems cannot be reduced to questions of technique.

The human relations dimension of the Seminars is perhaps the best-achieved goal of the program. It is important for members of the academic community to acquire awareness of the extent to which individuals in the department are non-stereotypical, and to discover the extent to which the department, as a large and complex organization, includes staff whose personal values and attitudes are often similar to those possessed by individuals within the academic community. In cases where substantial value conflict exists between individuals in the department and individuals in academia, even then personal knowledge and a measure of empathy tend to encourage a more humanistic foundation for vigorous and critical orientations held by members of the academic community. In short, the personalization of relationships can as easily produce a more humanistic-critical orientation as it can an attenuation of a critical spirit, although the insecure or tender-minded may not support this evaluation.

PROBLEMS OF POLICY, ORGANIZATION, AND PROCESS

Utilizing recent published research on the Department of State³ as a framework for ordering observations made during the course of the Seminar, it is possible to raise several key problems of policy, organization, and process. These include:

(1) ambivalence or measured antipathy to ideas and suggestions for advance planning, one important result of which seems to be a lack of awareness of the range of permissible responses to particular situations;

(2) general lack of conceptual, problem-solving, and theoretical capability among personnel, especially in the crucial area of relating knowledge to policy determination and action (“policy science”);

(3) often suspicious and sometimes negative orientations toward social science research;

(4) an inclination to assume a protective stance, according to which criticism from within the department and from the academic world may be circumvented or substantially diluted;

(5) presence of questionable and largely anachronistic doctrines, including that of the “prudent professional” as the embodiment of superior capability to analyze foreign affairs, ostensibly because the professional possesses longevity of experience, supposed greater “knowledge” than outsiders, and presumed intuitive qualities of leadership;

(6) profoundly misleading, equivocal, or vague use of language in the discussion and analysis of problems—a list of widely employed clichés includes “stability,”

“communism,” “participation,” “development,” “black power,” “democracy,” and “constitutionalism;”

(7) disturbing absence of serious efforts to assume a more active role with respect to dominant non-governmental institutions of foreign policy—in particular, the multi-national corporation and international business activities generally—and a resulting situation in which traditional values of diplomacy (diplomatic protection) effectively fail to complement more recent values of foreign policy (economic and social development) and create a situation of policy contradictions;

(8) strong group identity among personnel, one consequence of which is a tendency toward conformity and frustration of deviance.

These observations are “problems” only when one makes certain assumptions about goals and appropriate organizational and procedural elements of United States foreign policy. The idea of “dysfunctionality” presupposes the specification of goals and values of an organization such as the Department of State. Accordingly, the problem of conservation and survival as opposed to innovation and adaptiveness within the department depends for its solution on the values and attitudes of members of state department sub-cultures, critics and defenders alike. Hence, strong group-identity, facilitated by patterns of career service (as distinguished from a merit system) may indeed induce conformity—but conformity may be closely associated with the measure of consensus and legitimacy required by an organization that makes substantial demands and claims on personnel. Similarly, it is by no means clear that possible changes within the Department of State intended to correct or meliorate “dysfunctionalities”—including supposed deficiencies of the career service, insular socialization processes for junior officers, and strained relations with other elements of the foreign affairs community—would promote the kinds of adaptive policies and processes that are advocated by nearly all well-meaning critics of the department. In short, the characteristic reformist zeal of North American analysts of public affairs may be largely misinformed and, taking a comprehensive view of issues involved, may in fact obfuscate real problems.

The case of the critics of the state department possesses validity in other areas. While control of international and multinational corporate capitalism is an issue with necessarily value-laden dimensions, other issues may be viewed as essentially scientific and technological. There are serious problems of language, concept-formation, theoretic capability, and planning within the department, although a qualification should be introduced. Department antipathy toward social science research is sometimes justified, primarily because many activities undertaken under that banner have been almost useless. Much political science has resembled a form of political morphology in which the elaboration of abstract propositions (really definitions), substitutes for scientific discipline and empirical tests. But these conditions have not been universal, nor are they unchanging.

A great deal of social science research⁴ is directly relevant to foreign policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. Moreover, one of the functions of social science is the critical evaluation of widely shared public beliefs including the belief

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that the foreign policy professional, the "insider," has special knowledge and personal qualities that make him better qualified than social scientists to evaluate foreign policy. From that point of view of social science and scientific method, this belief has little to recommend it. But the social sciences have also failed to demonstrate that they have concrete answers to problems (social scientists have not yet developed a theory to explain the French Revolution, for example, let alone elaborate a sociology of revolution for the Third World). The point here is that social science can be employed to evaluate and reevaluate problems, to propose, confirm, and refute relevant hypotheses, and to produce a body of conclusions useful for policy analysis. But doctrinaire commitments to "professionalism," to "the insider," to "realism," and to "social scientism" itself, are counter-productive of effective policy analysis and implementation in any organization.

THE ISSUE OF STATE DEPARTMENT ADAPTIVENESS AND REFORM

A view prevalent in much modern organization theory, that systems are more effective if they have characteristics of openness, flexibility, and adaptiveness, is pertinent to the issue at hand. A number of observers⁵ have urged state department reform to cope with the challenges of an increasingly fluid and complex international environment. While there is not sufficient space here to elaborate deficiencies of some of these positions, it is possible to make several points.

Problems of international relations and foreign policy derive primarily from the social, economic, and political milieu in which foreign offices, ministries, and departments operate as large public bureaucracies. Accordingly, international stratification, increased international communication, demonstration and compression effects, and socialization into egalitarian and anti-elite values and attitudes (to cite but several factors) have a good deal more to do with the capacity of the state department to adapt to its environment than do such factors as bureaucratic subculture, patterns of career service, and even inter-executive relations. Second, a review of studies of public bureaucracies suggests that large public organizations have very seldom reformed themselves from within. Most importantly, large organizations have never constituted a means for the formation and mobilization of the kinds of new and innovative political values which fundamental changes in the international system definitely presuppose. Political mobilization for a new foreign policy typically comes from extra-governmental organizations—from loosely organized movements, to organized interest groups, to political parties—and is usually anti-bureaucratic in orientation. In short, even if we hold that state department reforms such as increased lateral movement between sectors of the foreign affairs community is desirable, we must acknowledge the fact that bureaucratic reform cannot begin, in and of itself, to alter the conditions of international relations and foreign policy. Reformist zeal may in fact further obscure sources of conflict, oppression, and underdevelopment in international society.

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THE SCHOLAR-DIPLOMAT SEMINARS: SOME THOUGHTS ON REVISING THE PROGRAM

Although the Seminars seem sufficiently productive to justify their continuation and even extension, examination of several problems of purpose and organization will benefit the program. In addition to written evaluations of the Seminars, other systematic means for encouraging participants to organize their observations ought also to be employed, including individual and panel critiques presented orally. Follow-up Seminars, involving department officers on campuses as well as return visits to the state department by participants, should be employed to continue dialogue and facilitate further problem-identification and problem-solution. More extensive means for bringing together sectors of the foreign affairs community ought to be pursued, including efforts toward the organization of opinion on foreign policy issues (excluding organization of opinion on electoral issues). Increased attention should be paid to the problem of maintaining individuality and autonomy of sectors of the foreign affairs community, considering the high probabilities of increased conformity and group consensus associated with organizational programs sponsored by the department, especially those which are intended to facilitate increased lateral movement to the Department of State. Lateral movement to the academic sector from the department should be increased by considerably expanding programs for mid-career training and education. Research has demonstrated that such programs are most productive of organizational innovation.

It is most important that dangers of bureaucratizing and co-opting sectors of the foreign affairs community be recognized and checked by adequate means for protecting extra-departmental participants. Capacity for innovation and change is directly related to success or failure in preserving the comparative autonomy and independence of the academic sector. Successes in the latter area will inevitably create conflict within the department and government generally. At the same time, it may be desirable to increase lateral movement to the academic sector, perhaps by strengthening and extending the scope of Diplomat-in-Residence programs, although this presupposes a more serious commitment from the academic side.

Observations on the Scholar-Diplomat Seminar on Latin American Affairs tend to support a set of mixed conclusions. The Seminars, generally and with an area focus on Latin America, hold some benefit for the academic professional, but United States foreign policy remains very far indeed from workable solutions to major problems. It may even be worthwhile reflecting on the proposition that, given the present state of North American knowledge, understanding and appreciation for Latin America, major problems of United States-Latin American relations may be irrevocably beyond solution, at least in terms of traditional values, beliefs, and attitudes toward the conduct of United States foreign policy. In this context, there is ample justification to criticize vigorously some of the dominant beliefs associated with the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars and the state Department reform movement of which the Seminars are a part. But perhaps the Scholar-Diplomat Seminars, by raising problems and issues and by generating conflict, will provide conditions for change.

NOTES

1. The "foreign affairs community" comprises the Department of State and related government agencies concerned with foreign affairs (USIA, CIA, ACDA, DOD), academic institutions, and businesses with foreign interests. For a recent analysis of the "foreign affairs community" and state department reform see Andrew M. Scott, "Environmental Change and Organization Adaptation: the Problem of the State Department," *International Studies Quarterly*, 14:1 (1970), 85-95. The American Foreign Service Association, it should be noted, distinguishes two principal communities concerned with foreign affairs: the "foreign affairs community," comprising key government agencies (State, AID, USIA), and the "academic, business, and media communities." See American Foreign Service Association, *Toward a Modern Diplomacy: A Report to the American Foreign Service Association* (Washington: American Foreign Service Association, 1968), 115-16.
2. Scholar-Diplomat Seminars held in 1970-71 include the following areas and subjects: Latin American Affairs; African Affairs; Near Eastern and South Asian Affairs; and International Organizations, Politico-Military Affairs and Comparative Politics. Each Seminar was held at the Department of State over a period of one week.
3. For example, Chris Argyris, "Some Causes of Organizational Ineffectiveness within the Department of State" (1967); The American Foreign Service Association, *Towards A Modern Diplomacy* (1968); E. Raymond Platig, "Foreign Affairs Analysis: Some Thoughts on Expanding Competence," *International Studies Quarterly*, 13:1 (1969), 1-18; John E. Harr, "The Issue of Competence in the Department of State," *International Studies Quarterly*, 13:1 (1970), 95-102; and Raymond Tanter, "Foreign Affairs Analysis: An Activist vs. a Hippie," *International Studies Quarterly*, 13:1, (1970), 102-111.
4. See Tanter, 1970.
5. Scott, 1969, 1970; Harr, 1970.