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Steers, Barry
Background paper on Foreign Service
consolidation
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STEERS REPORT

Report on Personnel Management of the Foreign Service.
Aug. 22, 1979. By Barry Steers.

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Steers report: "Background paper on foreign service
consolidation" (Office of the Prime Minister,
Mar. 12, 1980) Located in V.F. under "Dept. of
External Affairs - Consolidation".

Barry Steers was Consul-General, New York

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Background Paper on
Foreign Service Consolidation

There are approximately 1,450 public servants doing foreign service work of whom 1,300 are classified as Foreign Service officers (FS). They are divided among External Affairs (750), the Trade Commissioner Service of ITC (300) and the Canada Employment and Immigration Commission (250). The balance is made up of 55 non-rotational officers of CIDA and a similar number of employees of the Canadian Government Office of Tourism plus a handful of officers of such departments as Finance, Labour, National Health and Welfare and Agriculture who serve abroad on the basis of single assignments. None of these enjoy the same status or career opportunities as Foreign Service officers

As a consequence of a 1970 Cabinet decision to move toward gradual integration of the foreign service, technical, clerical and stenographic support at posts abroad has been integrated and is now provided by employees of the Department of External Affairs.

The general policy which guides the management of the various foreign services abroad is coordinated in Ottawa through various interdepartmental mechanisms presided over by the Department of External Affairs. The principal such mechanism is the Interdepartmental Committee on External Relations (ICER).

Among the problems with which foreign service reorganization is designed to cope are the following:

- a) while the demands on our foreign service by all levels of government and by the public are ever increasing, the resources which are available for all of the government's foreign operations are limited, with no prospect of significant increase;
- b) the management of our foreign service resources is fragmented and, consequently, they cannot be deployed or utilized with the required degree of effectiveness and efficiency;

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- 4 -
- c) the training of Foreign Service Officers is narrowly departmental in focus and, consequently, Foreign Service Officers' appreciation of non-departmental government-wide objectives and rationales is deficient and can lead to less than effective or even counter-productive representation of Canadian interests;
 - d) our foreign operations tend to compartmentalize activities related to economics and financial concerns or trade problems and promotion rather than pulling all of these together, i.e., they do not necessarily give expression to the conviction that our foreign policy and the state of our economy must be seen as inextricably joined;
 - e) our posts abroad don't necessarily function, and are not always perceived as functioning, as representative of the whole of the Canadian Government - rather, they can seem to be collections of individual representatives of individual departments;
 - f) the difficulties associated with secondments and lateral transfers from the domestic service to the foreign service and from one branch of the foreign service to another create artificial barriers to the best use of scarce resources and to cross-fertilization between the domestic and foreign services at the level of potential and actual senior managers;
 - g) Heads of Post, who should be the unifying and cohesive force in their missions, have been given authority over all post operations, but, because their control of post personnel is incomplete and because their own career development has usually not provided them with sufficiently broad experience either at home or abroad, they are not often capable of fulfilling this function as effectively as should be the case.

The context in which these problems have been addressed in the foreign service consolidation scheme which the Prime Minister has announced takes into account the complementary requirements for a solution

- which does not interfere with the mandates of the existing foreign service departments and agencies;
- which takes account of new mechanisms now being put in place for deciding resource allocation questions;
- which does not detract from the accountability which may properly be exacted from the Deputy Heads of foreign interests departments and agencies; and
- which will enhance the ability of the foreign service to serve its various governmental and non-governmental constituencies.

In the past, attempts have been made to deal with these problems through a process of incremental consolidation which has not, however, been focussed or been part of an overall, cohesive plan. Among the measures which have been put in place are

- i) allocation of all programme staff (and indirectly of support staff) is done interdepartmentally;
- ii) all support staff have been integrated and their management is now the responsibility of the Department of External Affairs;
- iii) efforts have been made to clarify and strengthen the role, authority and accountability of the Head of Post with respect to all post programmes and personnel;
- iv) Heads of Posts performance is appraised through an interdepartmental process conducted under ICER auspices;
- v) Heads of Post play a major role in the appraisals of their programme managers;

- vi) recruitment into the foreign service is through an open competition in which the three existing foreign service departments participate and from which each derives its own list of new Foreign Service Officers; and
- vii) promotion boards in each of the foreign service departments include some representation from the others.

These measures, however, still leave the problems outlined earlier largely unresolved. What is required is a systematic, concerted approach.

The objectives which foreign service consolidation should serve are the following:

- to contribute to improving the method of setting priorities and to improving the resource allocation process for foreign operations;
- to ensure the development of a pool of highly qualified career foreign service officers from whom Heads of Post and senior managers in the foreign service departments would be selected and to which other departments would have access as required;
- to ensure the best possible career development opportunities for members of the foreign service including the breadth of career experience necessary to the development of potential Heads of Post;
- to enhance the accountability of Heads of Post for post operations without diminishing the accountability of Deputy Ministers for programmes;
- to obtain maximum benefit from the limited resources allocated to foreign operations;

- to leave undisturbed, first, the foreign policy and programme development roles at home of the different programme departments (i.e. to ensure that departments maintain their responsibility for the development and design of external programmes related to their own domestic policies) and second, the responsibility of the Department of External Affairs for developing, coordinating and implementing general external policy;
- to ensure that each of our posts abroad functions, and is seen to function, in its totality as representative of the whole of the Canadian Government rather than as a collection of individual representatives of individual departments;
- to allow Heads of Posts to be held fully accountable for their post programmes and operations by strengthening their control of the personnel resources dedicated to those programmes and operations and by ensuring that their career development has provided them with the broad experience and exposure necessary;
- to facilitate secondments and lateral transfers from the domestic service to the foreign service in order to eliminate artificial barriers to the best use of scarce resources and to ensure cross-fertilization between the domestic and foreign services at the level of potential and actual senior managers;
- to give to members of programme departments and agencies, such as, but not exclusively, Finance, Agriculture, Labour and CIDA, who are on foreign service the same status and advantages as Foreign Service Officers from the departments of External Affairs, IT&C, and Employment and Immigration; and
- to ensure the greatest possible opportunities for career development and promotion for all public servants engaged in foreign service work notwithstanding the nature of that work.

Apart from satisfying these objectives certain principles should be respected in any consolidation of the foreign service. In particular, any such scheme should

- ensure equity of treatment for all public servants on foreign service;
- permit the development of both specialist and generalist officers, all of whom should have, or be developing, skills in both programme implementation and policy formulation; and
- take into account the diverse nature of foreign service work. To do this, functional areas or streams have been identified. These streams represent the functions now carried out by the foreign service in the development and implementation of government programmes. They are
 - i) Political and Economic Affairs (responsibility generally of External Affairs);
 - ii) Development Assistance (CIDA and External);
 - iii) Trade and Tourism (IT&C through TCS and CGOT);
 - iv) Public Affairs (External);
 - v) Immigration (Employment and Immigration); and
 - vi) Consular Affairs (External).

In order to derive maximum benefits from our foreign service expenditures, this reorganization of the foreign service takes account of the similarities in the work in the various streams. For example, consular and immigration work have many elements in common and require similar skills yet up to now they have rarely been carried out by the same people. This must change and to this end the Prime Minister has decided

- a) that all of the senior officers of the existing foreign services of the departments of External Affairs, Industry, Trade and Commerce and Employment and Immigration will be merged into an "Executive" level of the foreign service which will be part of the Department of External Affairs;

- b) that the foreign operations personnel of the Canadian Governmental Office of Tourism will be integrated into the Trade Commissioner Service with appropriate safeguards maintained so that officers unable to cope with the full range of foreign service responsibilities will not be thrust unwillingly into a stream in which they could not compete;
- c) that External Affairs will provide programme services abroad to CIDA and that CIDA personnel will be given the opportunity to become full members of the foreign service;
- d) that transfers of Immigration Foreign Service Officers into External Affairs will begin taking place at once and that Immigration operations abroad will be merged into those of External Affairs;
- e) that all public servants serving abroad will do so in positions which will be on the establishment of the Department of External Affairs.

This will leave Canada with a fully consolidated foreign service at the executive level and with essentially two personnel management systems at the operational level while leaving intact the policy and programme responsibilities of all departments with foreign interests.

The essence of this proposal is that the objectives of foreign service consolidation can be achieved with the least disturbance by relating the personnel management of the foreign service to two levels of employees within that service, an operational group and an executive group, the latter corresponding to the three executive levels in the domestic public service. Similarly, the grades in the operational group would parallel the grades in the domestic service below the senior executive levels. The executive group would constitute a pool from which Heads of Post and senior Deputy Heads of Post would normally be selected and from which foreign service departments would draw to staff senior executive positions. Admission to this group would generally be open only to those who had acquired sufficiently broad experience. This group would be treated as a single entity for management purposes while the operational group would continue to recognize the requirement for distinctive streams within the foreign service at that level.

While the management of the foreign service at the executive level will be the responsibility of the Department of External Affairs and at the operational level will be split between External Affairs, and Industry, Trade and Commerce, the fact that the foreign service as a whole will be directly responsible for the delivery of the programmes of a number of departments makes it imperative that an effective interdepartmental consultative mechanism be in place. To this end, the Personnel Management Committee of the Interdepartmental Committee on External Relations, the ICERPMC, will be reconstituted. While the management of the foreign service will be entrusted to IT&C and External Affairs, the policies which inform that management and decisions with respect to selection and promotion standards, post establishments, etc., will be taken within the ICERPMC. The ICERPMC will be chaired by a Deputy Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs and the other departments and agencies will be represented by officials of Assistant Deputy Minister rank. It will report to the ICER and through it to the Ministers most directly concerned.

The ICERPMC will be the essential single focus for the consultation which must underlie personnel management, but it will also be essential for each participating department to feel that its interests are being protected and that it is participating fully in the process. This should be accomplished by having the ICERPMC served by a secretariat staffed by all participating departments through secondments. The secretariat will have to work in close collaboration with the Bureau of Personnel Management of the Department of External Affairs and might be collocated with it.

Foreign Service Officers with a background in the work of a particular department or needing to acquire such a background, will continue to be assigned on a regular basis to the department concerned. The ICERPMC, as part of the detailed implementation of this scheme, will establish numbers of returning Foreign Service Officers which each department will regularly accept on assignment. It will be up to each department to ensure that such assignments develop in foreign service officers the skills necessary to advance its own interests when they return to the field.

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Programme departments with foreign interests, such as Finance, NH&W, Agriculture, etc., should find their interests better served by a consolidated foreign service. This is largely in consequence of the fact that interchanges between the domestic and foreign services will be facilitated and, therefore, departments will more easily be able to place abroad particular individuals with the required mix of skills and experience for particular jobs, both those identified now as "Finance" or "Labour" positions or whatever as well as others which will be identified in the future. Secondly, they will be able to absorb in their headquarters officers from the foreign service who will eventually, as part of their responsibilities abroad, be representing their particular interests and in this way play a more active role in the training and development of those officers.

The roles of the foreign service departments in career development and posting will relate to participation, as was mentioned earlier, in setting the criteria for selection into the foreign service, for screening candidates for the foreign service from their own particular points of view, screening officers coming into their departments for early training and on assignment and screening officers going abroad to positions whose primary work is in their own programmes.

The important consideration for the foreign interests departments is that they will retain the control they require over the external aspects of their own policies and over the development of the systems within which Foreign Service Officers will operate when delivering their programmes.

Once on foreign service, all employees will be directly responsible to the Head of Post who will normally use them in operations in their streams, but who will be free to use them temporarily in other areas as required. Programme policy instruction will be sent by foreign interests departments directly to the Head of Post. Operational links between departments and programme officers will also be direct. This, however, should not detract from the accountability of the Head of Post to the interested department for his programme management nor from the accountability of the officer to the Head of Post.

Heads of Post will generally come from the Executive level of the foreign service. However, because interchange with the domestic service will be facilitated, it will be possible when necessary to go outside the foreign service and indeed the government to get the best individuals to fill particular positions. Also, as a consequence of easier interchange between the two services, Heads of Post will earlier in their careers have had the opportunity to gain more varied experience than would be possible through just foreign service. Even within the foreign service, Heads of Post would have had more exposure, through assignments in various streams, to a wide range of foreign service activities.

The managerial role of Heads of Posts under a consolidated foreign service will become more challenging, but at the same time their accountability to the various foreign interest departments will become more real. At present, Heads of Posts are held accountable to the deputy heads of the various foreign interests departments for the management of programmes at posts, but because the officers who are responsible for the delivery of these programmes have a primary relationship to their own departments, Heads of Posts cannot be said to be in full control and, therefore, the extent to which they can be held accountable for programme management is open to question. Under the proposed system this will no longer be the case.

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