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A modest note to future archivists, historians and other scholars:

The research scholar may have some problem in ascertaining the roles of individuals when confronting the mass of documentary materials such as that in the LBJ Library. During my eight years as Secretary of State more than 2,100,000 cables went out of the Department with my name signed to them. In addition, there were tens of thousands of memoranda within the Department and large numbers of communications from the State Department to the White House. On every working day throughout the year almost a thousand cables went out of the Department of State. On a normal day, the Secretary of State would see personally perhaps 6-8 of these cables before they went out; the President might have seen one or two. Of course a Secretary of State is responsible for everything which went out of the Department of State during his tenure -- and I don't wish to evade that responsibility.

There was one simple device which I used to indicate what I had approved and what I had simply read for information and "noted." When I read a document on which I was not making a decision, I would use the initials "DR" with a horizontal line drawn through them. This distinction is not infallible because there may have been an occasional exception. But it was a general practice and would cover more than 95% of the documentation. Perhaps it should be noted that my approval of outgoing telegrams was given on the original green sheet which went to the Code Room; therefore, the pink copies which were distributed around government might or might not show the distinction mentioned above.

Further, communications to the President from me were always seen and signed by me personally. For example, I always saw and signed the daily report of miscellaneous items which went over to the President for his "evening reading." The only exception to this rule had to do with purely formal documents which were recognized as formalities both in the State Department and in the White House. An example would be a forwarding of a request from a foreign government for an agrément accepting the foreign government's nomination of an ambassador to Washington. Not once in the history of the United States have we refused to receive an ambassador nominated by another country. This sort of thing, therefore, was handled purely routinely and did not carry my own signature; whether the return document from the White House was signed personally by the President, I am not sure that I know -- but it is of no importance.

In addition, it was my practice never to dictate memoranda of conversations between myself and President Kennedy or President Johnson. I did not keep an office diary like a Harold Ickes or a James Forrestal. My view was that a President was entitled to have a completely private conversation with his Secretary of State if he wished to and that if he wanted a record of it, it would be his choice. I would, of course, translate my conversations with the President into instructions to my colleagues in the Department. In doing so, I did not always tell my colleagues that these instructions derived directly from the President because I felt it was my role to stand as a buffer between the President and the bureaucracy with respect to matters of considerable controversy. I make this notation for the record because future research scholars may spend time looking for memoranda of conversation between me and my Presidents, which are simply not there.

Finally, I had no mechanical means in my office at any time to record telephone conversations or other conversations in my office. When I first became Secretary of State I was unaware that the practice had developed that the principal secretary to the Secretary of State would often remain on the telephone to take notes on conversations between the Secretary of State and the President. When I discovered this practice, I asked that it be discontinued and I had a telephone in my own office connected with the White House which could not be listened to by anyone in my outer office. Again, my attitude was based upon my feeling that a President is entitled to privacy if he wants it. It is possible that State Department files will show a few of these telephone notes which were circulated to a few officers in the Department who were involved in the particular question. If the research scholar finds that this type of notation suddenly dried up, it was based upon my own decision to discontinue the practice.

The notes of the Tuesday luncheon meetings with President Johnson will be of special importance on certain subjects such as Vietnam. These notes were made -- to the extent that they were made -- by a member of the President's staff, such as Walt Rostow, Tom Johnson, or someone else. Those notes were not circulated to the other participants for checking before going into the record, but I have no reason to think that they are not very accurate indeed.

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