

Appendix 1 – An analysis of the problems of the Historian’s Office from the inside – the commentary of a long time member of the staff.

Like any institution, the Office of the Historian has its ups and downs, as management rises and falls and employees come and go. This is the normal cycle of bureaucratic life. The current situation, however, is anything but normal. By any standard, the office is in crisis. This crisis is apparent in many areas, from the situation on the ground, where departures have been steadily growing, to the atmosphere in the cubicles, where morale has been steadily falling. With good reason, many have emphasized, as I will below, the alarming rate of staff departures, which threatens to undermine the future of the Foreign Relations series. For those remaining behind, however, we will miss the quality as much as the quantity of the people who have left: the devotion to detail of Rita Baker and Vicki Futscher; the personal decency of Jim Siekmeier and David Patterson; the moral courage of Craig Daigle and Erin Mahan; the outspokenness of Monica Belmonte and Steve Galpern; the sharp intellect of Doug Selvage and Jamie Van Hook; the congeniality of Keri Lewis and Ted Keefer; and the qualities of others too numerous to mention. We will also miss how the work that they did—the compiling, editing, and managing—ensured the quality of the series. All were committed to the excellence of this collaborative effort. Rita Baker, Vicki Futscher, and Ted Keefer, in particular, knew how to turn water into wine, transforming the work of inexperienced compilers into manuscript of the highest quality. In the end, none could tolerate any longer the pettiness and petulance, the malevolence and vindictiveness that have become synonymous with the current management. And, as a result, all reluctantly felt compelled to abandon their commitment both to the work and to their coworkers. Marc Susser and David Herschler have recently argued that “no one is irreplaceable”—an argument, of course, that could just as easily be applied to them. Perhaps there is an element of truth in what they say. No one person is irreplaceable. But, as a group, the people who have left over the last eight years, their essential contribution to the office and to the series, can and will never be replaced.

Susser has often compared his management of the office favorably with that of his predecessor, Slany. It was the “bad old days” then, he has implied, so it must be the “good new days” now. A quantitative analysis comparing the last eight years under Slany to the first eight years under Susser, however, reveals that, if anything, the opposite is true. Susser has repeatedly claimed that recent staff departures are “normal attrition,” that is, most left to follow personal goals rather than to flee his management of the office. The comparison between Susser and Slany belies this claim. During the last eight years under Slany, three out of four employees who left the office did so by what could reasonably be considered “normal attrition,” e.g. retirement or employment elsewhere. Under Susser, the story is quite different. Over the last eight years under Susser, two out of three employees who left the office did so due, at least in part, to differences with his management. All seven departures this year—and 14 of the last 17—were primarily

for this reason. This is not “normal attrition.” It is not normal under any standard. It is rather “abnormal migration.” It represents a collapse of staff morale and a vote of no-confidence in Susser’s leadership, threatening the office as a whole, the individual careers of its staff, and the future of the series itself.

During the last eight years under Slany, the Office of the Historian suffered from a series of setbacks, including a lack of staffing, production, and vision for the series. These factors contributed heavily to his downfall in May 2000. Susser was appointed specifically to address these problems, in particular, the steady decline in FRUS staff, which had dwindled to 21 members at the time. With the support of the front office, Susser initially succeeded in doing what Slany could not: to hire the historians, declassification coordinators, and editors necessary to produce volumes. Susser, however, also surpassed Slany in another sense. He eventually succeeded in driving away many of those he had hired. The office, for instance, has added 31 compilers to the staff since 2000. Not counting those hired in the last two years, who could not yet be considered sufficiently experienced, more than half of those have already left. As a result, the office has lost about half the experience it gained by hiring and training new compilers in the first place. By any standard, the people who left would and should have been an important part of the future of the office and the series. And at the current rate, most of those who remain will be gone by the end of next year.

Both the quantity and the experience of the staff are essential for producing volumes. But, as statistical analysis clearly demonstrates, experience is much more important. This year alone the office has lost 20% of its FRUS staff (7 of 35 members) and 30% of its FRUS staff experience (64 of 212 years). The remaining staff of 28—lower than any year under Susser since 2001—is still higher than any of the last eight years under Slany. The remaining staff experience (148 years), however, is considerably lower than at any other time in the last 16 years, lower, in all likelihood, than at any other time in decades. There is also another historic milestone to consider. The experience of those who left under Susser is now greater than the experience of those who remain. One could reasonably argue that, given the chance, the émigrés would do a better job than the employees in producing the series. Of course, under this scenario, most of the employees would probably jump at the opportunity to join the “émigré team.”

For any office, the bottom line is production, and for the Office of the Historian, the bottom line is publication of Foreign Relations volumes. Susser and Herschler have regularly asserted that it doesn’t matter who does the work, as long as there is sufficient staff to follow their leadership. The numbers, however, contradict this assertion. Under Slany, a FRUS staff of 24, with an average of 11 years of experience per member, published 63 volumes. Under Susser, a FRUS staff of 35, with an average of 6 years experience per member, has published 42 volumes. In other words, Slany’s staff—two thirds the size of Susser’s but with twice the experience—produced 50% more. The conclusion here is unavoidable: experience

matters. The comparison is also instructive on meeting the congressional-mandated 30-year line. During the last eight years of Slany, 18 of the 63, or 29%, of the volumes were published on-time, that is, within 30 years. The corresponding figures for Susser are 6 of 42 volumes or 14%. Although neither was particularly successful in this regard, Slany, at least, was twice as effective as Susser in meeting the goal. This inability to produce is similarly reflected not only in the failure to meet the 30-year line but also in the number of years elapsed after the deadline has been passed. The cumulative delay in the series (i.e. past the 30-year line) has been about twice as long under Susser as it was under Slany (209 to 111 years). To make matters worse, the clock is still ticking for a growing number of overdue volumes on Susser's watch. In fact, compared to the last year of the Slany era, twice as many volumes are currently in arrears this year (30 to 16), many of them delayed for reasons of management rather than declassification.