6-1956

Science Attaches in the State Department

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
June 8, 1956

Science Attachés in the State Department

A barrier has developed between the State Department and United States science. It must be broken down in this age of great technological and scientific advancement which play such a major role in world affairs. Science needs to be placed appropriately as a facet in official policy making.

By 1952 there was a science advisor in the Department of State. Ten science attachés were on duty in five European capitals. However in the time that has passed since the present Administration took over, all science attachés have come home, none have been replaced and the office of Science Advisor is now occupied by an able economist.

This is a great contrast to present activities in other nations; Soviet Union is assigning scientific attachés to its embassies for the first time in its history. Britain, Canada, Australia, India, France and Germany, as well as a number of other nations, large and small have stationed official science attachés in this country. The United States has no science attaché anywhere.

The philosophy that a diplomat is wise enough to handle any human situation himself is outmoded. Our Embassies need scientists who can read reports in manuscript of foreign scientific experiments which are unpublished for general consumption. The National Academy of Sciences contributed to the defense of the United States in two world wars, acting in this advisory capacity.

It was rumored that the State Dept. was going to put into effect a sweeping plan to integrate science in foreign policy but couldn’t because the scientists themselves couldn’t decide what they wanted. However at the same time Academy officials believed that the science-attaché appointments were being held up until the scientists would agree to serve as spies for the CIA. This the scientists will not accept.

The National Academy recommends "a more positive and active" role in foreign policy:

1. Closer contact between the Department of State and the Academy in an advisory capacity.
2. Creation of a Science Office at the policy level in the Department of State, designation of a scientist as Special Assistant to the Undersecretary.
3. Appointment of recognized scientists as science attaches on a regional and individual country basis.

The U. S. Navy keeps a science staff of its own in London and the Atomic Energy Commission plants its agents in U. S. Embassies under disguised titles. Why cannot the Department
of State appoint science attaches concerned with day-to-day
effects of new discovery on our power for peace in the world?

The State Department is the logical one to take the lead
- in the collection and dissemination of scientific information.