

Putting It Together for Science at the State Department

Like a gauche guest at a diplomatic dinner, science at the State Department has just never seemed to fit in. Despite a recognition that science and technology are increasingly important ingredients in foreign relations, administrators at State have found it difficult to integrate science into the normal workings of the department at home and abroad. Finally, last year, the State Department was given a reorganization plan designed to provide science and technology with a stronger base in the department. Changes have been slow in coming, however, apparently because of diversions caused by the decline and fall of President Nixon and, perhaps, by the old problem of a low priority for science.

The reorganization measure was attached to a State Department authorization bill and provides for the creation of a new Bureau of Oceans and International Environmental and Scientific Affairs. The new bureau will have responsibility for a variety of functions which have been scattered rather haphazardly. It is to be headed by an assistant secretary of State, which for the first time gives science and technology a chief holding formal sub-cabinet rank.

Reportedly, a major cause of the delay in implementing the new plan is the failure so far of efforts to fill the assistant secretary spot. The lag is attributed to the unwillingness of prime candidates to serve in the Nixon Administration and, by some, to the fact that Secretary of State Henry Kissinger's preoccupations at home and overseas have resulted in such a full in basket that departmental affairs such as the appointment to the new post are overlooked.

As the name implies, the new bureau will exercise responsibility in the areas of oceans and fisheries and environmental, wildlife, and conservation matters and will administer the growing number of scientific programs in which the department is involved. In addition, the bureau will have a lead role in dealing with population and energy issues.

To a large degree, the new bureau is an expanded form of the decade-old Office of International Scientific and Technological Affairs (SCI). That office, which had its origins in the 1950's, is home base for the State Department's corps of science attachés and deals with problems in the areas of technology policy and space and atmospheric affairs, as well as administering scientific and technological programs under the portfolio of bilateral and multilateral agreements in which the United States is a participant.

The other major components of the new bureau will be the separate staffs which have dealt with environment, with fisheries and wildlife, and with population matters. Organizationally, all three offices started out as free-floating units with their heads holding titles as special assistants to the Secretary. However, the head of the environment staff, Christian A. Herter, Jr., has been operating under a bureaucratically complicated arrangement under which he chairs the U.S.-Canadian International Joint Commission but at the same time is also detailed to the SCI as chief of the environmental unit.

Impetus for the new bureau came from Congress,

rather than from within the State Department, and, to a marked degree, the reorganization reflects the predilections of its principal sponsors, Senators Warren G. Magnuson (D-Wash.) and Claiborne Pell (D-R.I.). The new bureau, however, represents a merger of a kind that has been frequently discussed within the State Department in recent years but somehow was never carried out.

Because the push for creation of the new bureau came mainly from Magnuson and Pell, there was speculation that the traditional scientific programs administered by SCI might be given a priority in the new bureau to match the place of Scientific Affairs in its name—that is, last.

Both Magnuson and Pell represent coastal states, and both are concerned with issues ranging from fisheries to recovery of mineral resources from the seabed. Pell, however, went to some pains during discussion of the reorganization to put on record that oceans, environment, and science should be coequal in the new bureau and that the point was to give all three more prominence.

Fair shares for all three elements is implied in the new organizational structure, which calls for three deputy assistant secretaries in the bureau, one each for oceans, environment, and science. Out of a total of about 78 posts in the new bureau, nearly 60 are being filled by people from SCI, so it is difficult to foresee science being swamped.

The reorganization is regarded as a new start at State for science, and the fortunes of the bureau would seem to depend heavily on the abilities of the new assistant secretary. Kissinger is said to feel strongly that the top post should be filled by someone with a first-class reputation in science and technology, and this seems to have complicated the recruiting process.

Kissinger is said to have a keen appreciation for the importance of science and technology in dealing with energy, food, and environmental problems; in his first speech at the United Nations after becoming Secretary of State he emphasized the importance of collaborative efforts in science and technology. There is a rather dispiriting record, however, of previous Secretaries having good words for science but a feeble follow-up.

SCI's director for a decade, Herman Pollack, a veteran State Department administrator who is not a scientist, had been a candidate for the assistant secretary's post but retired from the department in August, presumably when it was affirmed that the job would go only to a "scientist." During Pollack's tenure, the number of science attachés was increased to about a score from half that when he took over in 1965, and real progress was made in the difficult task of integrating the attachés into the machinery of the embassies abroad. At the same time, the SCI office in Washington was built up to handle the increasing load of negotiating and fence-tending now required in science diplomacy. This mainly required the exercise of administrative skills and caniness, and the new assistant secretary may well learn that a premium remains on these skills, which are less easily acquired in a laboratory than in the labyrinth of the State Department.—JOHN WALSH