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Diplomacy On The Wing

When Dr. Henry M. Wriston, president emeritus of Brown University, spoke out in clear and sharp words against the habit of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles of rushing around the world trying to conduct diplomacy in person and leaving the State Department to fend for itself, it was no ordinary attack.

Dr. Wriston has been a valued adviser to Secretary Dulles. He has done as much as anyone to help Dulles reorganize the U. S. foreign service.

He has a long and distinguished career behind him in education and public affairs. The article entitled "The Secretary of State Abroad" appeared in the well-known American quarterly review "Foreign Affairs" of which Allen W. Dulles, head of the Central Intelligence Agency and brother to Secretary Dulles, is a member of the editorial advisory board.

Dr. Wriston takes cognizance of the fact that American Secretaries of State have been traveling more in recent years since the United States became the greatest of the world powers and since the use of the fast airplane.

But he thinks the very frequent absence of the Secretary of State from his office is a serious handicap to the formulation and conduct of foreign policy.

With that position, we have long agreed.

Mr. Dulles is so frequently on the wing that he does not have time to do much basic and balanced planning of foreign policy.

He is usually thinking in terms of some specific visit he is going to make and nobody seems to have given thorough attention to general, world-wide policy.

Perhaps this is why Mr. Dulles so often changes his position in his public statements on policy.

When Dulles is gone, there is nobody of top rank to brief the President on foreign policy and nobody in the State Department to make top decisions.

As the result the Department frequently has appeared ridiculous by its inability to make a necessary decision or by doing quick reversals from one position to another.

Dr. Wriston, in his article in "Foreign Affairs", says:

"After his status as adviser to the President, the second principal function of the Secretary is to keep under continuous over-all review every phase of our world-wide responsibilities and opportunities. In the present state of world affairs this alone is a back-breaking task. Over concentration upon one area seriously impairs the balance . . . So swift is the movement of events that even brief absences can seriously dislocate policy formation."

The author of the article declares at one point that so far as competent diplomacy is concerned, "The airplane has become more than a convenience; it is a temptation."

To all this, Secretary Dulles replies that "today we all have to travel," and that Khrushchev and Bulganin have traveled more than he has in the past six months. He says it is old-fashioned to sit at home and that he can accomplish so much more with a personal talk.

There are a lot of people who do not believe Secretary Dulles is accomplishing very much in any way.

Whether the very pointed remarks of Dr. Wriston will tend to cause Mr. Dulles to be more sparing with the use of his "magic carpet" we cannot tell. Certainly the former has been closer than most people to the situation which he discusses. He may be able to see with more perspective than the flying Secretary.

Most Americans will agree with Dr. Wriston when he says: "The vital requisites for the effective discharge of the duties of Secretary of State are perspective and wisdom. Those qualities find their most effective employment when there is at least a modicum of leisure for quiet reflection."