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NEW YORK TIMES

The Presidency—II

A Study of the Council Exercising Some Eisenhower Powers During His Illness

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Special to The New York Times.

WASHINGTON, Dec. 2—During the present illness of President Eisenhower—and for much of the time before it—many of the powers and duties of the Presidency have been exercised by a kind of Presidential council.

The membership of this council differs from time to time in accordance with the subject under discussion, but in general it is composed of the President, the Vice President, the Cabinet, some heads of the independent agencies (such as the Office of Defense Mobilization and Atomic Energy Commission) and some members of the White House staff, notably Sherman Adams, the Assistant to the President.

This system has some advantages under a President in frail health. It provides continuity when President Eisenhower is out of Washington, and he has been out of Washington or convalescing in Washington 723 of the 1,777 days he has been President. Of these 723 days, 140 have been spent away on official or political business, 101 recovering from his three illnesses in Denver, Gettysburg or the White House, and 482 resting or vacationing at resorts or at his farm.

The formalizing and strengthening of the Cabinet and the National Security Council have also brought to these institutions an order and authority they did not have under President Harry S. Truman. But this institutionalizing of the Presidency has also weakened the personal impact of the President himself and uncovered some weakness that now harrass the Administration.

Weaknesses Analyzed

The weaknesses of the system, in the opinion of well qualified observers here, are as follows:

¶It transfers some of the vital powers of the Presidency from General Eisenhower, the most influential official on the American scene today, to lesser officials who cannot command anything like the same authority either in the executive or legislative branches of the Government, or in speaking to the nation and the world.

¶It leaves the articulation of United States policy, particularly foreign policy, to officials notably John Foster Dulles, Secretary of State, who often define policy more harshly, or even more belligerently, than the President.

¶It encourages a kind of "departmental mentality" among Cabinet officers who tend to refrain from criticizing one another, and discourages long-range Government-wide planning.

¶It conceals responsibilities for mistakes by spreading authority among a vast number of officials in the departments and the White House office.

¶It shields the President from unpleasant information in the early stages of a crisis when Presidential action might be effective in deterring the crisis.

Examples of this last point are manifold. In the spring of 1956, when reports were coming in from all over the world of a decline in United States influence, the President asserted that prestige was never higher.

Before the Suez war broke out, the British and French almost broke all diplomatic contact with the United States, but the President did not get into the line of communication with London and Paris until it was too late.

On Feb. 8, 1956, when the President was asked about reports that the United States was lagging behind the Soviet Union in the development of guided missiles, he replied that "you can be sure that in every single one of these fields, we are ahead of anybody else."

Often, department heads are not only conscious but anxious over national and world developments but have no power to take remedial action and do not seem able to get action on them.

For example, over two years ago, on Nov. 21, 1955, Lewis L. Strauss, the head of the Atomic Energy Commission, went to the Thomas Alva Edison Institute and made what still stands as the best summary of the crisis in United States scientific education yet made in this country.

He gave all the facts on the production of Soviet scientists and the lag in our production of qualified scientists and engineers. But after the Soviet sputniks went up, the President said he was "surprised" to be told by a group of scientists who visited the White House that the most serious problem we faced in the field of missiles and rocketry lay in the education of American youth.

Both the strength and weakness of the Eisenhower system have been summarized in these terms by Edward S. Corwin of Princeton University, the noted scholar of the Presidency:

"A marked characteristic of the Eisenhower Administration," he wrote in "The President—Office and Powers" before the President's current illness, "is the frequent detachment of the President from the conduct of his subordinates. On several occasions, he appears to have accomplished what President Truman said was impossible, 'passing the buck' to the Secretary of Agriculture, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of the Army, the Attorney General.

"Each of these gentlemen, according to the President, is an independent office holder with his own views of appropriate policy, with which the President has no warrant to interfere.

"The same detachment, the same attitude of reigning rather than ruling, when coupled with efficient staff work, had already been carried so far by the time of the President's critical illness (in September of 1955) that the Administration went on notwithstanding the disaster with scarcely a tremor."

Some Proposals Rejected

Since then, however, there have been quite a few "tremors" in the world, but the President has not always delegated essential powers or followed the recommendations of the department heads.

For example, he was confronted with influential advice from both Mr. Dulles and Admiral Arthur W. Radford to intervene in the last stages of the Indochina war. This he flatly refused to do and the testimony of the best-informed officials here is that whenever there is any question of United States involvement in war he is attentive to dangerous gambles.

On other questions, however, his tendency is to go along with the recommendations that come up to him from the departments. For example, when he was asked after the sputniks whether he proposed to give new instructions to William M. Holaday, the missiles director at the Pentagon, he replied:

"Well, Mr. Holaday couldn't receive new instructions from me, for the simple reason that if he doesn't know more about it than I do, I am very foolish to have him around. Now, I have provided to the limit of my ability the money that they asked me for [to procure missiles] and that is all I can do."

Jefferson: One Vote

This degree of reliance on Cabinet and staff is not new in American history. Thomas Jefferson went even further, describing his system as follows:

"All matters of importance or difficulty are submitted to all the heads of the departments composing the Cabinets: sometimes by the President consulting them separately and successfully, as they happen to call on him; but in the gravest cases by calling them together, discussing the subject maturely, and finally taking the vote, in which the President counts himself as one.

"So that is all important the Executive is, in fact, a directory which certainly the President might control."

This system was abandoned early in the Nineteenth Century, however, and the history of the Presidency is one of uneven but generally rising authority in the hands of one man.

When President Lincoln called his Cabinet together to present the Emancipation Proclamation, he said:

"I have got you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself."

President Eisenhower has never gone so far as to take a vote in Cabinet or the National Security Council and count himself but one. He has insisted that all questions come to him in the form of "recommendations," and he alone decides. But the operation of the Eisenhower system is much nearer to Jefferson's Presidential directory than to Lincoln's blunt reminder that the Constitution knows only one execu-

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