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ORGANIZATION FOR NATIONAL POLICY
PLANNING IN THE UNITED STATES

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Policy can be roughly defined as agreement on the objectives of action and on the means of achieving those objectives -- on where you want to go and how you propose to get there. The making of American national policy involves immensely complex and often messy procedures. Different American administrations have approached the task with quite different concepts of the nature of the policy process and of the techniques to be preferred.

In recent years, we have witnessed an increasing reliance by the Eisenhower Administration on a series of "distinguished citizens committees," composed mainly of prominent private citizens and established to review past policies and to make recommendations as to the objectives and courses of future American action. Two years ago, the Gaither Committee made its report to the President on certain parts of our defense program. This year, there have been several groups engaged in reviewing other important aspects of our foreign policy. The Draper Committee, for example, examined the objectives and programs of military assistance in relation to economic assistance. Another committee, selected from the Business Advisory Council and under the chairmanship of President Harold Boeschstein of Owens Corning Fiberglas, looked into the problem of the Soviet economic offensive and the policies appropriate to meeting it. Again, the Straus group reported on the assistance that private groups, business or other, can give to our policies in the underdeveloped countries.

The growing emphasis on the "distinguished citizens committee" technique raises a number of questions about the policy process that are worth examining. How have past administrations attempted to mobilize fresh ideas on American national policy, to evaluate these ideas, and to translate them into action? What are the most effective methods of drawing on the experience and resources of individuals and groups outside the Executive Branch of the government? What are the relative advantages or disadvantages of relying heavily on

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non-governmental committees for policy recommendations?
What are the requirements of the policy process that affect its procedures of operation?

If we start with the last -- and more general -- question, we first need to clarify and give more specific content to what we mean by policy. I have already offered one definition: agreement on the objectives of action and the means of achieving those objectives. To this, I would add the further qualification that a policy can hardly be taken seriously unless the courses of action chosen are actually executed and reasonably achieve their intended effects.

For the sake of analysis, three different phases of the policy process can be distinguished from one another, although, of course, in practice the demarcation lines between them will be fuzzy and the phases will overlap. Roughly, these may be described as the formulation phase, the decision phase, and the execution phase. The first is an intellectually creative process in which a policy is suggested and a program of action proposed that is calculated most effectively to achieve the specific objectives of that policy. The second phase involves not only that of arriving at a coordinated and authoritative decision but also the politically essential and often arduous task of marshaling a consensus behind the proposed policy and program. During the course of this phase, the policy may be subjected to greater or lesser modifications, but necessary if the policy finally decided upon is to command wide enough support to ensure its eventual execution. The final and perhaps most difficult phase is putting the chosen policy and program into action which includes the problems of meeting unforeseen obstacles and of capitalizing on unforeseen possibilities. This final phase of execution often takes on continuing elements of the first and second phases. Objectives and methods of procedure are modified in the light of actual practice. Action builds a measure of consensus among those who are acting together. A periodic check and audit of the action process by those who made the original decision is often necessary sometimes to assure that necessary action is promptly gotten under way, sometimes to restrain the built-in momentum of an action program and to keep the program in proper relationship to the broader aspects of overall policy. On the other hand, too detailed back-seat driving of an action program can stultify it.

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In the field of national policy, the last phase -- the execution of chosen courses of action -- is clearly the responsibility of the Executive Branch of the government. Furthermore, the job of formulating policies and programs -- the first phase, in which new policies are thought through and proposed for decision -- has also become largely an Executive Branch function, particularly as to those aspects of national policy which involve foreign policy and defense. The Legislative Branch plays an important role mainly in the second phase. Only if the Congress becomes part of the consensus behind a given line of policy is there any prospect that the tools necessary to its execution will be forthcoming. And Congress must participate in the periodic check and audit of the action program.

How does the Executive Branch go about developing national policy and programs? The process involves a most varied, complex, ill-defined, and often ad hoc collection of procedures. The role of the Secretary of State, is, of course, crucial. Within our working constitution, he is not only the Minister for Foreign Affairs, but he is also in part the Prime Minister as well -- unless, as did Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt, the President choose to be his own Prime Minister, Presidents rarely overrule the recommendations of their Secretaries of State, and, conversely, a policy is usually dead if it does not receive the approval of the Secretary of State.

The role of the Secretary of State in the national policy process has, of course, its limits: he cannot himself generate and check for feasibility and consistency all the recommendations for policies and programs bearing on the position of the nation in the world as a whole. In the Truman Administration, the usual procedure on national security matters -- matters involving a mixture of political, military, economic and psychological considerations -- was to put together a small ad hoc group of the best informed, imaginative, and practical people to be found at the working levels of the principally concerned departments and agencies of the government, relieve them of their regular duties, and ask them to work out the best policy proposal they could devise. The original stimulating idea might come from almost any source -- from our people overseas, from a newspaper commentator, from the President, from the Secretary of State, from someone in the Policy Planning Staff or in the Pentagon. I remember one occasion, when I was with the Policy Planning Staff, on which Colonel

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George Lincoln, now of West Point, called me on the phone and raised considerable cain with me personally and the State Department in general because we hadn't come up with something for Asia comparable to the Marshall Plan for Europe. His call was one of the several events which led to a process that, in the end, produced Point Four.

After a proposal for a new policy or for a policy shift, with related programs, was mapped out, at least in general outline form, it was subjected to the long and laborious procedure of the decision-making phase. Before a proposal could be gotten through the National Security Council, and, if necessary, Congress, an enormous task of consensus building was necessary at many different levels within and outside the Executive Branch. This procedure was often elaborate and time-consuming, although it could be speeded up by a firm expression of support from the Secretary of State or from the President. But in most cases a shift of policy was subjected to a lengthy process of tugging and hauling before it was given authoritative approval and put into execution.

Under the Eisenhower Administration, new approaches have been made to the process of policy formulation and decision. Initially this Administration decided that greater reliance should be placed on the National Security Council, that the machinery of the N.S.C. should be strengthened, and that its policy role should be broadened to include the first as well as second phase. It can be argued that this move was wrong in theory and abortive in practice. The essential function of the National Security Council is to assist the President in resolving the Executive will. It is a decision-making body. It is involved in the second phase of the policy process and so heavily involved that it does not perform well when asked to take over the functions of the first phase -- the development of proposals for new policies and programs. Imagination becomes stifled by jockeying and compromising for departmental advantages in the final decision.

To develop a policy proposal adequate to meet a new and important problem requires a high degree of objectivity and ruthless intolerance for one-sided or prejudiced views. It requires a concentrated and extended effort of the imagination to fit the myriad pieces of the problem together into a new pattern of policy which will fit the real situation and which can, in practice, be executed with a fair prospect of achieving its objectives. Most men are able to do such work only

under favorable conditions. When they are subjected to the full pressures of inter-service and inter-departmental rivalries -- in the very arena of decision-making where the President is to make the final and authoritative decision -- the conditions for objectivity and for extended creative and imaginative work are usually not present. Jockeying for departmental advantage in such a forum begins at the first moment that a new policy problem comes up for discussion. Compromises begin even at the information-gathering stage. Imagination is stifled.

Even more important are the effects on the rest of the Executive Branch of the decision to concentrate in the N.S.C. machinery the responsibility for the formulation of new national policy ideas. One result is to relieve others of a full sense of their responsibility. It becomes unnecessary for those in the State Department or Defense Department who are not part of the N.S.C. machinery to worry much about new national policy ideas.

Furthermore, giving the N.S.C. the job of policy formulation tends to cut off cross-fertilization of ideas between the departments and the services. Each department is fighting a battle in the N.S.C. for what it considers its point of view. It therefore mobilizes the information in its possession for presentation to the N.S.C. in a manner that will support and show off the departmental viewpoint to best advantage. This approach tends to restrict the practice of extensive cross-contact between the personnel of different departments since such contacts may give another department the information with which one's own departmental viewpoint can be rebutted. In sum, very unhealthy processes can be put in chain. In any case, the decision "to strengthen the N.S.C." does not seem to have produced results wholly satisfactory even to those who had instituted the change.

Not satisfied with the N.S.C. technique, the Eisenhower Administration has turned more and more to rely on outside groups or committees of private citizens, appointed to assist in the tasks of policy review and formulation -- the committees I mentioned earlier. But I am concerned that this technique, too, will be found inadequate.

The advantage of the non-governmental committee is its freedom from the inter-departmental squabbles, pulling and hauling, and compromise that have characteristically inhibited

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such bodies as the National Security Council. But there are disadvantages to the "distinguished citizen committee" technique that may outweigh the value of the relatively free atmosphere in which it is able to operate. The most serious of these is the possibility that the committee may be too far removed from Executive Branch responsibility to be fully effective. Those members of the Executive Branch who are actually responsible for carrying out policy -- the third aspect of the policy process -- feel, perhaps rightly, that such groups are out of touch with the real problems with which the officials, in the end, must always deal. In any case, it is obvious that the committee, once its report has been presented, is in a poor position to help fight its recommendation through the decision stage. Both of these difficulties characterized the reception of the Gaither Report two years ago and may well similarly affect the reception of the Draper Committee's report now.

Let us now examine a few of the other proposals which have been made recently for improving the organization of the United States government for national policy planning.

There is one school of thought that believes that our difficulty is that we have too much organization, too much staff work, too many committees, too little delegation and concentration of power and responsibility in specific individuals. I tend to agree with much that these critics of governmental over-organization have to say. Government by committee can result in lack of decision, fuzzy decisions, delays, frustration and such a defusion of power that it is impossible to hold anyone responsible for non-action, delayed action or wrong action. But it is impossible to run an organization as complex as the U.S. government without some resort to the committee technique. Policy and action have to be coordinated. The views of interested departments and agencies have to be heard. In other words some form of committee technique must be resorted to.

How can these dilemmas be resolved or at least mitigated? One line of approach is to cut down, as far as possible, the number of issues which rise to the Presidential, or N.S.C. level, for resolution. Perhaps a distinction can be made between national strategy and national policies and programs. Obviously national policies and programs must be consistent with, must support, and must be adequate to carry out, the

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national strategy. But is it essential that the great bulk of these policies and programs go to the Presidential level for resolution? Must the President be asked to decide on the policy papers with respect to each country or with respect to every functional program? If the President isn't to decide them, who is to do so? In most instances more than one department or agency is involved.

If the President is prepared to look upon his Secretary of State as being more than a Secretary for Foreign Affairs if he is prepared to look upon him as having some of the attributes of a Prime Minister in the British system, then it is possible to delegate to the Secretary of State some of the decisions which otherwise must of necessity clog the N.S.C. machinery. The Secretary of State may be able in turn to delegate a portion of these decisions to subordinates in whom he has confidence.

Under such a system the President and the N.S.C. would be continuously concerned with the broad lines of national strategy, with particular issues which arise on the moving front of developing strategy, and with issues raised on appeal from the Secretary of State's decision by other departments and agencies. The number of such appeals to the President could be held to reasonable proportions if practice had demonstrated that the President could normally be expected to back up his Secretary of State's decisions.

But is the staff work available to the Secretary of State adequate to enable him competently to carry these responsibilities in addition to those which his functions as Secretary for Foreign Affairs place upon him? A strong case can be made that it is not. Where can properly equipped and properly trained staff for this function be found? The Wristonization of the State Department may have improved the prospects for developing an effective Foreign Service. But the Wriston program was not designed specifically to develop the qualities required for the type of staff work involved in working on national policy issues.

Perhaps consideration should be given to the selection and training of a special corps of national policy staff assistants. Those selected from the Foreign Service might be given tours of duty with the Joint Staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with the Bureau of the Budget, or with the Treasury before being assigned to national policy staff positions.

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Those selected from the military services might be given tours of duty with the State Department, with the C.I.A. or with the office of the President's Scientific Advisor. Once such a corps of specialists in national policy -- but generalists with respect to the various parts of the national policy problem -- was developed, members thereof could be assigned to strengthen the staff of the N.S.C., to assist the Secretary of State, perhaps as members of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff, to work on the staff of Secretary of Defense or that of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.

Another school of thought favors the creation of additional machinery to improve the coordination of staff work between the State Department and the Pentagon. It is their thesis that most of the shortcomings of national policy planning have arisen in the area which is neither purely political or purely military and which falls between the clear responsibilities of the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. Part of the difficulty has arisen from periodic prohibitions by Secretary of Defense or by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on exchange of information and views at lower levels between the Pentagon and the State Department without specific prior authorization from the top. Another part of the difficulty is that the State Department is not well equipped with people who have an adequate understanding of current military matters to enable them effectively to deal with problems having both political and military aspects.

Increased coordination, contact and exchange of information between the State Department and the Pentagon is hardly a question of organization. If such contact is at any time inadequate, a word from the President, at the request of either of the Secretaries should be adequate to correct the situation. The more difficult question is that of making the contact and exchange of information useful in improving the quality of national policy planning.

It has been suggested that just as each of the service departments and the Department of Defense is assisted by specialized outside technical assistance, the State Department -- or the N.S.C. -- should be similarly assisted. The Air Force has the assistance of the RAND Corporation, the Army of the Operations Research Office of Johns Hopkins University, the Navy of the Applied Physics Laboratory and the Department of Defense of I.D.A., the Institute of Defense

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Analyses. These institutions dispose over large numbers of highly qualified men not only in the physical sciences, but in the social sciences as well. Everyone who deals seriously with military-political problems avails himself as best he can of their expertise. Their primary responsibility, however, is to the department or service which employs them. Shouldn't those who are dealing with national policy problems at the highest level have available to them expert talent of at least the same quality? One possibility is that an organization similar to I.D.A. but more heavily oriented toward political, economic, and psychological expertise be attached organizationally to the State Department but housed with I.D.A. so that there could be continuous cross-fertilization of ideas between the weapons-systems experts and the political experts.

A third school of thought advocates the creation of additional national policy machinery outside of the Executive Branch of government. Various proposals have been made for a National Policy Academy or for a continuing high level commission of ex-Presidents, representative distinguished citizens, etc., to work on problems of national policy.

In my view, there is a general presumption against the creation of additional national policy machinery outside of the Executive Branch. Such an institution will not always see eye to eye with the Executive Branch. It may constitute one more hurdle which those responsible for action have to overcome before action becomes possible. The net result may be one more step toward assuring, through excessive division of power and responsibility, a national policy of massive passivity.

In considering this class of proposal, it is important to be clear as to the functions which it is proposed that the new institution is to fill. Some have proposed that its primary functions be basic research on issues fundamental to national policy and the formulation of new proposals for policy. It is not clear to me why these functions cannot be better performed by institutions part of, or more closely affiliated with, the Executive Branch. Others have proposed that the new institution should stimulate and bring continuous pressure upon the Executive Branch so that it will develop more dynamic, more far-sighted, in any case "better", national policies. But the question of what are "better" national policies is exactly what is at issue.

If the proposal is to create an institution whose major function is to contribute to the building of a firmer and

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deeper public consensus behind those policies that are finally decided upon and are to be executed by the responsible agencies of government, then perhaps there is more to be said in favor of making the attempt. It is hard, however, to see how the previously mentioned pitfalls are to be wholly avoided even if the institution's prime function is thus limited.

A fourth school of thought sees the major bottleneck to improved national policy planning as residing in what they allege to be the current dominance of the fiscal controllers over the effective policy making process. They see current N.S.C. policy papers as being of importance only as they give a peg to the Bureau of Budget and its minions to assert approved policy in support of their control over expenditures. Again there is much to be said in favor of this viewpoint. But what is to be done to improve the situation. At any level of fiscal expenditures there are bound to be competing demands for resources. Allocations have to be made and in peace time those allocations can generally be most conveniently controlled through the allocation of money. The largest expenditures are in the sphere of defense. Perhaps improvements can be made in defense organization to bring the subsidiary parts of that organization more into line with a logical division of the functions which the national strategy calls upon the defense organization to fulfill and thus to facilitate some decentralization of responsibilities and powers, including within limits, those of planning and fiscal control. But this is no easy or simple matter.

In my view it is erroneous to cut the Gordian Knot of the high cost of defense by a simple N.S.C. decision fixing an arbitrary five year ceiling on the aggregate of Defense Department requests for appropriations. But no matter what aggregate is finally decided upon, problems of fiscal allocation and fiscal control will remain.

A fifth school of thought sees the bottleneck to improved national policy planning in the failure of those in the highest positions of responsibility to resolve, or to resolve correctly, certain basic issues of policy which only they can resolve. Three crucial issues are usually sighted. 1. Is the scale of the effort we are making in support of our foreign policy and defense objectives adequate in the light of the threats which we face? Can we afford to put 10 or 12% of our national effort into support of our national objectives viz a viz the outside world when the Soviet Union

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is putting two or three times as great a percentage of its resources into support of opposing objectives? 2. Are we justified in putting such heavy reliance for the military support of our foreign policy objectives upon nuclear armaments, the use of which would seem to controvert the very political purposes they are supposed to support? A crucial component of this question is the degree to which we should rely upon a capacity to initiate the use of nuclear weapons in limited wars to shore up our inadequate conventional military capabilities to support our objectives in such wars. 3. Are we devoting sufficient effort and resources to the non-military components of our national policy?

It is asserted that these questions are so basic that they do not lend themselves to staff work of the type usually implied when one speaks of policy planning. It is asserted that the President and his principal cabinet advisors have to express their judgment on these basic issues before policy planning in the usual sense can proceed. I would suggest that the principal task of national policy planning at the N.S.C. level, the level of the State Department Policy Planning Staff and of the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff is to provide the President and his principal cabinet officers with the data on which they can more intelligently come to a decision on just such basic questions of national strategy.

In sum, I see no easy and simple road to improving the quality of national policy planning. I believe much can and should be done. But that much involves doing a host of sensible but relatively minor things at a large number of significant and relevant points in a most complex process.