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NSC
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[Redacted]

Dear Bobby:

The address indicates why you'll have to put up with my hunt-and-peck typing.

Dinner last Thursday was extremely pleasant. It was kind of you to arrange it. I trust your energy has returned with a rush and you can dispense with both those remarkable horse pills and with the ginger ale.

Fred Dearborn and I had an extra forty minutes or so together which I found profitable as well as pleasant; for what we did was to march down an array of possible devices for initiating new ideas in the Executive Branch noting their strengths and weaknesses as we went. He suggested that I put them on paper and send them along.

More or less, they went like this.

1. An Inside Staff. This is the conventional proposal many have made, including myself, for a group within the White House having the right to produce substantive papers on issues overlapping the jurisdiction of any one department and to get them on the NSC agenda. The boss should either be the same chap who chairs the Planning Board or a subordinate of his. The advantages of this direct approach are obvious; the major disadvantages are three -- first, in a town where careers are built in departments or services it would be extremely difficult to get and to hold the absolutely topnotch men necessary to make the staff perform properly; second, the town might well unite to do the buggers in; third, the staff might become as rigidly fixed and committed to special positions as any departmental staff.
2. An Inside Board. This would be an extension to the NSC of Allen Dulles' technique with the NIE's; that is, a group of independent critics, within the government part-time at least, to serve as a collective super-ego, without however doing independent or competitive staff work. The advantage is that such a Board might keep the minds of the NSC and its committees open to a wide range or possibilities and help prevent major issues from getting fudged in negotiated language. And they might do these things as critics,

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without raising the competitive difficulties of Solution 1. The disadvantage is that a group of this kind, cut off from day-to-day work in the government, might find it difficult to make thoroughly relevant observations in a professional context; and there might, as in the case of Solution 1, be difficulties in maintaining quality.

3. An Outside Board. The notion here is that a group of chaps of the Lovett-McCloy-Killian-Gaither variety meet regularly and, when they feel so moved, have the right to place on the NSC agenda an item they feel deserves governmental attention or action. As compared with Solution 2, this one has the advantage of guaranteeing first rate men and complete independence of the bureaucracy, the disadvantage of even greater remoteness from the government's day-to-day business. The relative virtue of this device might well depend on an issue Fred and I did not discuss; that is, whether the Outside Board had a staff of high quality. It might then function like an exalted committee of the New York Council on Foreign Relations or the top committee of Nelson Rockefeller's current wingding. Like an activist secretariat in an international organization, this Board would require extraordinary tact, competence, and selectivity of issues to work well.
4. An Ad Hoc Outsider. The notion here is that when a major issue requiring innovation arises the NSC call in a top-level outsider (of major cabinet post stature) for (say) 3-6 months; but that his staff be drafted from inside the government. Operating under direct Presidential mandate, this remarkable fellow would pick a first rate staff from all relevant departments of the government - they would not be assigned to him, nominated at most. The outside chap and his staff would be instructed from on high to free its mind of departmental vested interests for the duration. The advantage would be that the great creative potential within the bureaucracies would be tapped by freeing men from routine and putting them under a free soul; and that the hard-working insider would have a crack at the glamorous issues, to the advantage of long run morale. Moreover the staff would require no elaborate briefing and it would not easily be fooled. The difficulties center on the problem of getting co-operation between the Outsider and the Great Chieftains; and on the problem of getting the Indians to behave like truly free men for the duration of the project, since they would be doomed to return to the old departmental ruts.

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5. An Ad Hoc Outside Board and Staff. This one Fred and I did not discuss since it is the current favored technique; e. g., the two Quantico reports (although they reported to a single insider rather than the NSC), Gaither, Fairless, etc. Its major weaknesses - aside from the problem of advocacy and acceptance within the government-are-first, the government itself must decide it's in pretty bad trouble before initiating some fresh thought; second, the government must spend a lot of high class time briefing the outside characters.

As I said to Fred on the way to the station, I would venture only one firm piece of advice: whatever device or devices you choose to experiment with, set the first experiment up with special care; for the result is going to depend more on the quality of the men involved, the issues first chosen for consideration, and the soundness of the preparations within the bureaucracy than on the theoretical correctness of the administrative method. Administration, as you well know, is merely the organized projection of human personalities; and since blessedly we are all different there is no single correct way to do business.

A final word, Bobby. Reflecting on our dinner conversation I concluded that we may well have been arguing at cross-purposes. I believe you are impressed (as am I) with the extent to which the steady grinding of the NSC machinery, under a President who uses it, has brought men in town to understand the legitimacy of each other's problems and bureaucratic perspectives. On any issue coming up for decision it is easier to balance and to mesh the various professional perspectives than it was at any earlier time (except to the extent that the three services or the Treasury keep their sensitive issues off the agenda and simply kibitz on the State Department). But I'm worried about a somewhat different question: who in the government is free to do the sustained staff work on issues that are not yet hot, where departmental positions may not yet have been formed up, and which may require a lot of hard creative work (not merely committee discussion) before the shape of an appropriate national policy can be discerned. These are the ones we often let slide until mild or severe crisis is upon us; and then, no matter how bright the Planning Board - and it's plenty bright - the range of action open to the nation is radically narrowed - as in Algeria, or at Suez, or at Dienbienphu; or as it will be if the Indian Second Five Year Plan falls or the Polish Army marches to Berlin or the Baltic Coast.

Again many thanks. I hope this report of Fred's further discussion with me - which he can easily correct and supplement - is of some use to you both.

Yours,

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W. W. Rostow