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May 29, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. JOHN EHRLICHMAN

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger *HAK*

SUBJECT: Information Needs of Executives

In response to your request I had a member of my staff prepare the memorandum on "The Information Needs of Executives" at Tab A. While I endorse the thought expressed therein, I want to particularly emphasize the following points:

1. Executives should only be given the information they need.
2. Executives should refuse to be burdened with decisions that subordinates can make for them.
3. Staff must recognize what information is essential to the executive (the busy executive frequently does not know).
4. The staff must know "their man" well enough that they can pace their input to his own habits and time requirements. Simultaneously, they must be continually conscious of the fact that information which arrives too late to influence decisions is worthless no matter how thoughtful and well prepared.

If you have the time, I recommend you read sections I and II of my article on "Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy" (Tab B), for my more detailed thoughts on the subject.

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INSTRUCTIONS APPLY

WASHINGTON

May 16, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR MR. EHRLICHMAN

FROM: Henry A. Kissinger

SUBJECT: Information Needs of Executives

You asked for my views on the information needs of executives with particular attention to the President's requirements.

Information needs fall into three general categories:

- general background information;
- regular reports on current developments;
- information relating specifically to decisions to be made or actions to be taken.

The basic premise in meeting these needs can be stated very simply - to get the right information to the man responsible for making the decision in time to be of use to him. There are four factors involved: volume, accuracy, timeliness and relevance.

Volume

While individuals vary greatly in their ability and willingness to accept and absorb information, a President or any executive probably needs more information than he may wish to use or even to see. Volume in itself, however, is probably not a major problem if the executive gets what he really needs and in time. This need can be met through careful selection and timing and method of presentation. General background information can be collected in a reading file for an executive to review during a desk luncheon, an evening at home or a weekend reading session. Information on current developments can be presented in one or more daily summaries with special periodic situation reports on key issues. Information directly related to policy or operational decisions can be presented in writing or through oral briefings as part of the decision-making process. The objective should be to provide him with maximum

information with minimum reading time. His staff should give him an option as to the depth he wishes to go in a given instance by covering a lengthy document with a concise summary of its major points or by identifying the major issues which require his attention or decision.

Accuracy

The serious consequences of conveying inaccurate information to an executive are so obvious that such cases are at a minimum. Even so, an executive can be misled by a reluctance on the part of his subordinates to convey bad news or by slanted reporting or a lack of objectivity with a view to influencing his decision. Staff officers must see to it that a President receives objective, factual information. They must recognize and question a report which appears less than candid. Bad news must be reported completely and honestly, but it might well be accompanied by an analysis of what went wrong and what steps have been or should be taken to make it right.

Timeliness

Timeliness of information implies both speed of transmission and availability and presentation at the proper moment and in the proper way. Modern equipment is available in all methods of communication which has reduced the technical lag to near zero. Any executive and his staff should be aware of the existence of such equipment, should understand its uses and should decide whether his information needs are such that they require or could benefit from such equipment. As you know, we have begun a program of modernization and improvement of the information and communication facilities serving the President with a view to computerization.

The human element is by far the more uncertain in information transmission. A slow courier or a staff officer's failure to recognize the significance of a piece of information can consume many times the time required for a message to travel thousands of miles. Although these delays cannot be entirely eliminated, proper staff training and discipline can keep them to a minimum.

The time requirements for getting information to the President are such that no formal communication system by itself is completely adequate. There are and should be faster, less formal means for acquiring and conveying information where necessary. Many large organizations

because of their very size cannot respond quickly enough to meet the real time needs of the President. A small professional staff with a keen awareness of the President's concerns and a knowledge of the Washington bureaucracy can often anticipate the President's needs and tap a source for information before or at the instant the information is needed.

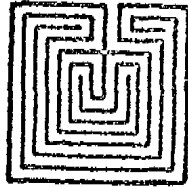
Relevance

The key to real satisfaction of the information needs of any executive is relevance. He will accept and absorb almost any amount of information if he can relate it in his own mind to the matters occupying his attention or in which he is interested.

There are many ways in which information can be made more relevant. An executive's staff can:

- cover an information item with a brief analytical comment which makes the item more meaningful and anticipates and answers his questions concerning it;
- combine a series of related items into a single item requiring a single focussing of attention, e. g. prepare a brief situation report based on a dozen individual press ticker items;
- summarize a long item which contains much irrelevant information, highlighting aspects likely to be of interest to the executive;
- select an appropriate time to bring a piece of information to an executive's attention, related to the time of his most immediate concern with the problem.
- decide whether to convey an isolated bit of information or to incorporate it into a more comprehensive study.

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HENRY A. KISSINGER

Domestic Structure and Foreign Policy

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I. *The Role of Domestic Structure*

IN THE traditional conception, international relations are conducted by political units treated almost as personalities. The domestic structure is taken as given; foreign policy begins where domestic policy ends.

But this approach is appropriate only to stable periods because then the various components of the international system generally have similar conceptions of the "rules of the game." If the domestic structures are based on commensurable notions of what is just, a consensus about permissible aims and methods of foreign policy develops. If domestic structures are reasonably stable, temptations to use an adventurous foreign policy to achieve domestic cohesion are at a minimum. In these conditions, leaders will generally apply the same criteria and hold similar views about what constitutes a "reasonable" demand. This does not guarantee agreement, but it provides the condition for a meaningful dialogue, that is, it sets the stage for traditional diplomacy.

When the domestic structures are based on fundamentally different conceptions of what is just, the conduct of international affairs grows more complex. Then it becomes difficult even to define the nature of disagreement because what seems most obvious to one side appears most problematic to the other. A policy dilemma arises because the pros and cons of a given course seem evenly balanced. The definition of what constitutes a problem and what criteria are relevant in "solving" it reflects to a considerable extent the domestic notions of what is just, the pressures produced by the decision-making process, and the experience which forms the leaders in their rise to eminence. When domestic structures—and the concept of legitimacy on which they are based—differ widely, statesmen can

May 16, 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR DR. KISSINGER

FROM: Jeanne W. Davis

SUBJECT: The Information Needs of Executives

John Erlichman has asked for your views on the information needs of executives, with particular attention to the President's needs, to assist him in preparing for a presentation to a group of administrative officials in major independent agencies (Tab B).

I have prepared a memorandum for your signature (Tab A) which contains some thoughts on the subject.

Recommendation

That you sign the memorandum at Tab A.

Attachments