THE ROLE OF THE LEGISLATIVE BRANCH IN NATIONAL AFFAIRS

27 August 1959

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Roger Hilsman, currently Research Associate, Washington Center of Foreign Policy Research, the Johns Hopkins University, on leave from his position as Deputy Director for Research of the Legislative Reference Service, Library of Congress, was born in Waco, Texas, 23 November 1919. He graduated from the United States Military Academy, West Point in 1943, and received his M. A. and Ph. D. degrees in international relations at Yale University. During World War II he served in Marrill's Marauders; OSS; CIA; NATO planning in the Joint American Military Advisory Group, London; and in the United States Headquarters, EUCOM. Formerly a member of the Center of International Studies at Princeton, he is the author of "Strategic Intelligence and National Decisions" and co-author of "Military Policy and National Security" and "Alliance Policy in the Cold War." Among the numerous magazines to which he has contributed are "World Politics" and "The American Political Science Review." He is presently working under a special grant from the Rockefeller Foundation on a book about the making of U. S. foreign policy. This is his first lecture at the Industrial College.

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DR. KRESS: General Houseman, Gentlemen: Today we have a lecture on "The Role of the Legislative Branch in National Affairs." Not only is this topic a necessary part of our review of the makeup and functions of our own Government but each one of you as a military man has a special interest in our relations with the Congress. We share the interest of the legislative branch in the makeup and size of the military service, in the providing of funds for national security, in the administrative processes of budgetary procedures, and in the periodic review of expenditures by congressional committees.

Our speaker this morning, Dr. Roger Hilsman, has spent his adult life in taking part in or studying national and international affairs. Results of these studies are made available to all of us through his numerous publications, a list of which you have in his biography. He is currently enjoying a Rockefeller Foundation grant which permits him to work on a book on United States foreign policy.

Dr. Hilsman, it is a pleasure to welcome you to this platform for your first lecture to the Industrial College and to present you to the Class of 1960.

DR. HILSMAN: Thank you very much, Dr. Kress. General Houseman, Students: This topic is "The Role of the Legislative Branch in National Affairs," but with the limitations of time I am going to concentrate on the role of Congress in foreign policy and in military policy, which I think is of central concern to you here. I also am going to try to put this in its complete context. I am not going to just talk about Congress but try to talk about the relations of Congressmen with the executive, with the press, with lobbies, with pressure groups, and so on. In other words, this is really, let's say, the political decision-making process in America.

My procedure will be, first, to look at Congress, at what Congressmen are like, what they do, their internal organization. Second, I would like to advance a theory about how policy is made in this town. And, finally, I will try to spell out some of the implications flowing from the nature of Congress and from the way that policy seems to be made in Washington.

Let's suppose that you are a newcomer to Capitol Hill. What would you notice? Well, I think the first thing you would notice--at least it happened to me--would be how well informed some members of Congress are. Among the more sensitive and active Members of Congress there seem to be one or two, at least, for almost every field you can name--agricultural policy, defense policy, foreign policy--who are just as knowledgeable as any of the specialists--Mike Mansfield, on some aspects of foreign policy; Senator Symington on missiles, for example, and air power; Senator Douglas on economic problems. The point is that there are specialists in Congress.

A House Member once said to me, "Look. I come from a district in California where water is just terribly important. I am a specialist in water. When a foreign policy question comes up I go over to see Mike Mansfield." He had gotten to know Mike Mansfield when he was a House Member, and he still went over to see Mansfield after he went to the Senate. This accounts, you see, for why some Members of Congress achieve positions of very real power even though they don't have a chairmanship of a committee or something like that.

But notice that even the less active Members of Congress can get to know an awful lot about a subject. Most of these people have long tenure. They are in Congress 10, 15, 20, 25, even 40 years. Day after day, week after week, session after session they listen to expert briefings given by people like yourselves. They can learn an awful lot about a subject--a lot more, if the truth is known, than some Secretary or Assistant Secretary who rarely stays on the job more than three or four years.

Well, in this same connection, the newcomer to Capitol Hill might also be startled at how quickly new ideas arrive there on Capitol Hill. You see the Congress, like the Presidency or any locus of power, is the focal point for the activity of groups who have axes to grind. These groups use every bit of information and every argument they can get their hands on, and deliver it to Congressmen. As a consequence Congressmen have in effect a very far-flung intelligence network numbering at least in the thousands.

Another characteristic that might impress the newcomer is the seriousness of most Congressmen, how seriously they take their job, and their somewhat unusual sense of responsibility. Much of what appears to be irresponsibility, including nepotism and windbag characteristics, really is political in origin and not true irresponsibility.

By the way, what I am trying to do is break down the stereotype that we all have of the political windbag. But let me say one thing as a qualification. If anything, Congress is representative of the whole United States. There are some awfully able men up there, and there are some hacks. I once heard a man who spent some years in Congress and then went to the State Department in a very high position say that it had been his experience that in most organizations there were about 15 percent who were really able, really energetic, who were really carrying much of the load, and he said that after viewing both the State Department and the Congress he wasn't sure but that the 15 percent in Congress was a little more able than the 15 percent in the State Department. So I don't want to say that they are all wonderful, but I do want to say that the stereotype just isn't true.

One reason that you get this illusion of irresponsibility is the busyness of Congress. The individual Congressman carries a formidable burden. Really, when you think about this, the irritation that you feel at behavior that seems to fit the stereotype sometimes gives way to what really is a little awe.

First of all, a Congressman must handle a multitude of matters for his constituents; and indeed he must do this; and it is probably a good thing for democracy that he does. You know, the Congressman frequently votes against what the public-opinion polls say. The reason he does this is because he has discovered early in his career that a small minority that feels very intensely about a certain subject is politically more potent than a very diffuse majority that really is a little pro this but not very. The way he learns about this intensity, which the polls can't measure, is by talking to people, talking to his constituents. So it's probably a good thing.

Also there is his formal calendar. He's got to attend the floor for voting and for some debates, and he has endless committee work, listening to people hour after hour, with mountains of material for reading. As a result the Congressman jerks from subject to subject. Remember, he's got the whole gamut of our national life to think about. He can't just specialize on defense policy or foreign policy completely. He does have to vote. Now, he may consult the Mike Mansfields, but he's got to have some sort of opinion on these things. As a consequence, his day begins early and his week lasts long. Nothing can be given sustained attention. Everything is half-done. The congressional scene, in a single word, is untidy. But notice that this is the face of irresponsibility but not actually the fact. What causes the trouble is the very extent of a Congressman's responsibilities.

Another aspect that might strike the newcomer is the freedom that Congress seems to have in the field of foreign policy. Now, for one thing, there seem to be relatively few pressure groups at work in foreign policy, nothing like what happens in the field of domestic policy. The interests of pressure groups have certainly created high tariff barriers. This is true--very high tariff barriers. But, no matter how important a liberal trade policy might be in the long run for a more stable world, it is doubtful to me whether any country, in the short run, has altered its foreign policy significantly as a result of these tariff barriers.

Take Japan for example. Japan suffers probably more than most countries from our tariffs, but power and political considerations have kept it on our side in spite of this.

Beyond tariff demands, producer groups don't seem to be very much concerned. They made a half-hearted attempt in the Marshall plan days to help shipping interests and a few others, but as a practical matter it came down that half of the goods had to be shipped in U. S. bottoms. Apart from producers groups, the lobby and pressure groups that have the most effect are the national minorities--the Ancient Order of Hibernians, and so on. These minority groups are really very active--there's no question about that--though they are not always in sympathy with the policy of the homeland, notice--not always. With the notable exception of the Zionist organizations, there is really not very much foreign policy that these pressure groups have to work on, except opposition to communism, which the whole Nation is committed to. Polish Americans, and so on and so forth, have no foreign policy other than all are in opposition to communism, so they don't have too much effect. It's only in our Middle East policy, in sum, that pressure groups have much effect--the Zionist organizations and some of the oil companies. But here it is a lot less stark and a lot less dramatic than a lot of people feel it is.

You see, I am arguing that there are very few influential lobbies in the field of foreign affairs. Let me go a little bit further. I think that particular foreign policy issues--things like Quemoy, Matsu, and so on--rarely, if ever, have a direct effect on elections. Only two or three percent of the mail that Congressmen receive concerns foreign policy. The mass of the people is indifferent to it, or, if not indifferent, they have the feeling that it is too complex and they think, "Let's let the people who are interested in it and are specialists decide these matters."

This is not completely irrational. I am terribly interested in foreign policy and in military policy, but I don't know a thing about agricultural policy, and I am quite content to let the consumers groups and the farmers hassle this one out by themselves without any help from me. But a result of this, which is the point I am getting to, is that a Congressman is free to vote pretty much his own preferences. For example, I once heard a very powerful opponent of foreign aid in the Congress really complain--he was terribly frustrated--that his constituents didn't appreciate his efforts to stop the great giveaway, as he called it. His image of himself was Horatio at the bridge, you see, single-handedly holding off the enemy and not being appreciated for his efforts.

So Congress seems to be somewhat freer from lobbies or from constituent pressure in foreign policy than it is in domestic policy. I am not saying that the lobbies are not powerful in domestic policy. I am saying that they are not powerful in foreign policy or in military policy, and I would include all the defense contractors on this, too. They have a very mild influence, it seems to me, on the Congressmen.

Notice also that Congress is free from party control and party discipline. The President can't force Republican Senators and Congressmen to vote the way he wants them to very effectively. He has to rely on persuasion, but he can't really bring very much pressure to bear on them. Back in the thirties, when there was a depression, patronage might have had pretty much importance, but it doesn't have much importance today. The national party dispenses very little patronage that is significant, and rarely through Congressmen, and the congressional party on Capitol Hill has a few police jobs and elevator jobs on Capitol Hill, but they are largely taken by constituents who are students at the local universities and law schools. It is not an important thing.

So one would think that the congressional party could exercise this pressure largely through the assignment of chairmanships, or something like this, but party regularity--voting the way the party wants--has never been a consideration in assigning chairmanships or in making committee assignments. If this country, like Britain, had a National Party that could prevent rebels from running under the label of the Democrats or the Republicans, you might have some effective pressure. The British certainly do have pressure. The Labor Party has pressure on its members and the Conservative Party has this kind of pressure on its members, but in the United States this isn't true, and until it is true, which I don't think is likely, party regularity is not going to be a consideration. Seniority is the way that these things are done on Capitol Hill--years of service--and there are a lot of objections

to this, I suppose. It means that the most competent man doesn't get the job until he is also the most senior man. But, until you get this kind of firm party structure, seniority is a pretty good way of doing it. It prevents favoritism; it prevents this kind of fragmenting, vicious, bitter fight that would result if there was any other method.

Now this general freedom, both in terms of party and in terms of lobbies, pressure groups, and constituents, that Congress enjoys inevitably has its effect on relations with the executive branch. For one thing, the individual Congressman just isn't reluctant to disagree. Given his need for publicity--after all, he has to run for office--not only is he not reluctant; he is sometimes a little eager to disagree. Because, after all, in conflict lies news. So he is tempted to disagree for disagreement's sake, or, rather, for publicity's sake.

It is also this freedom from party control, combined with one other thing, that gives committee chairmen their great power. I think this is one of the first observations that anybody in Washington makes. It is that committee chairmen are very powerful people. Vinson's power, for example, in the military field, or Rooney's over the State Department, or Passman's power over foreign aid are familiar to everyone here, I think.

But notice: A chairman's power is really at the margin, when you think about it. Most of these chairmen are really rather frustrated by the fact that the most they can accomplish is to limit, to delay, or to modify. They can rarely, if ever, kill a whole program, for example, like foreign aid. As a practical matter of politics, I don't think they could. An appropriations chairman, say, who has immense power over foreign aid, who went too far and tried to kill the program entirely, would find that the other Congressmen would find ways of bypassing him. He knows this, and consequently he has to exercise some self-restraint, which is frustrating to him. My point is only that chairmen are powerful, but their power is not absolute by any manner of means.

Relations between Congress and the executive are also affected by other considerations, in terms of foreign policy, at least, and also in terms of military policy--by the way, by military policy I mean the general structure of our defense posture. But the Congress is in a sense, in these fields, the captive of the executive. It is the executive that controls the flow of information from overseas, the flow of information about new technology, and so on. And there need not be any conscious suppression of one kind of information and emphasis on

another to accomplish the same result as suppression and emphasis. There's just so much information that merely selecting it has the same effect.

In addition, there is the question of technical expertise and advice. It is the executive that sets the framework in which policies are debated. It spells out the alternatives and Congress is pretty much stuck with this framework and with these alternatives. The executive defines the problem which Congress has to decide. This monopoly over information and this plethora of expertise gives the executive what might be called the intellectual initiative in foreign policy and in defense policy. The Congress as a whole can criticize, it can add, it can amend, it can delay, or, in an extremity, it can block an action; but it can rarely, if ever, put forward a new policy of its own, a different alternative, and force the executive to follow it.

Notice, by the way, some examples of this--for example, the loss of China, back in the Truman administration. There were Members of Congress, as there were people in all parts of American life, who saw that China was being lost to the West and who felt that a radically new and different policy was necessary. But the executive assumed that effective measures would require such great sacrifices that the Congress and the people wouldn't be prepared to accept, and the fact that the executive made that decision meant that there was never any possibility of really considering these bold alternatives--as, for example, in Wedemeyer's recommendations.

Let me give you a couple other examples. One is the destroyers-for-bases deal in the Roosevelt administration. You see, here the executive could find a way around Congress. Most of Congress at that time was really opposed to this measure, and would have voted it down, but the executive found a route to accomplish the same thing. There are two recent examples. As you recall Congress voted more funds for the Air Force because they wanted to raise the number of Air Force groups, and Truman simply impounded the funds. In the Eisenhower administration, Congress again did the same thing, put in more money than the executive asked for, and Eisenhower just took the money and then scaled down his next year's request. My point is that Congress in these instances tried to initiate a different policy and failed completely.

Now, this power of the executive to get around Congress is inevitably the cause of suspicion and distrust. The Congress in consequence

is always studious to bind the executive to its wishes, always trying to put riders on, and so on, to try to guard its prerogatives and to try to limit the executive. Though it knows it can't ever succeed in exercising detailed supervision over the executive's actions in foreign policy and in defense policy, though it knows that it can be circumvented, the Congress will nevertheless attempt to provide for the detailed operation of programs. And you see it's here that you get the traditional, the classic struggle between the Congress and the executive, the classic struggle of the separation of powers that every observer of the American political scene has commented on since the time of de Tocqueville.

We now come to the theory I would like to advance about how policy is made in Washington. It seems obvious that these classic interpretations of the effects of the separation of powers are not completely satisfying for decisions on major policies. By this I mean policies requiring sacrifices by the whole Nation or requiring us to concentrate on one goal at the expense of neglecting another. In these major decisions the process seems to be much more complex--it involves more interaction between the various participants--than the formal powers and procedures of the Constitution would lead us to believe. Anyone who has observed the process by which policy is made on major issues can't avoid noticing such things as interagency rivalry. I am sure that in this joint school, here, I don't need to press this point. Not only is there interagency rivalry but there are fierce battles within one agency. Different parts of the State Department, for example, are fighting each other all the time. The struggle is not only between Congress and the executive but it is also between an informal alliance of people who think alike--partly composed of Congressmen and partly composed of people in the State Department--against another group cutting across both the State Department and the Congressional lines. These informal alliances cut across institutions here in Washington. It is this kind of activity that we probably ought to pay more attention to when we talk about how policy is made. The suspicion arises, in other words, that politics is not confined to elections but that it has a role in policymaking as well.

What I am saying is that policymaking in the United States is a political process even when it takes place entirely inside the executive branch. What do I mean by "political process"? Well, first of all, I mean that deciding on a policy requires a reconciliation of a whole range, a diversity, of values. In a free society, especially one which is large and complex, a mass society, there are just all sorts of different goals that people want. National policy has to serve more than one simple goal, and there is this process by which competing values

are reconciled in the framework of a particular policy. I mean by a "political process" second, that there are groups of people, informal groups of people and sometimes formal groups of people, who are identified with these alternative values and are identified with alternative policies. In the military field, I could just say two small phrases--massive retaliation and limited war. Groups of people are identified with these different ideas. Now, third, by "a political process" I mean that the relative political power of these different groups is as relevant to what the final decision is as the wisdom and cogency of the arguments they advance in favor of it.

Because these groups pursue different and competing values, and because power is part of the process, one aspect of the relationship here in this town between these groups is that of conflict. They are in conflict; they are in competition. We may therefore expect that the policy-making process has some of the phenomena associated with conflict; not only a concern for power position--that is, the position you take on something is not only in terms of what that policy is going to achieve--but how it will affect your power to influence other policies later. That's one aspect of it. Another one is the manipulation of threat. Now, I don't mean a threat of physical violence but a different kind of retaliation. Some Congressmen, for example, cultivate a reputation for being hard men. They do this for a perfectly good purpose, because this is the way they exercise power. If they get the idea across to the other Congressmen and to people in the executive that they are hard men who would never forget a grudge, they tend to get their way more often. There is a book out, by the way, called "Advise and Consent," which is a novel about Washington politics, by Allen Drury, and he has a prototype of this kind of Senator. The Senator is called Seabright Cooley. He deliberately cultivates an image of himself as being a hard man, who will retaliate if cornered.

This is at the margin. Not all Congressmen do this--only a very few. But it illustrates that there is conflict involved in the policy-making process.

We would also expect that there would be alliances formed and that the composition of these alliances would shift over time. If you want a very classic example, look at the way Roosevelt began to think in terms of foreign policy as opposed to just fighting the depression, when he had to shift his position to gather a new alliance in Congress and in the country, and he deliberately started making concessions to the Southerners, who were traditionally internationalists, on domestic policy in order to gather their support on foreign policy.

Now, conflict is only one aspect of this. After all, we are all Americans. We all have a nation at stake. So we share a lot of values. As a consequence, another characteristic of this process is that of accommodation--self-sacrifice in order to achieve a higher goal, mutual concessions in bargaining. So it is a process of conflict and of accommodation. The accommodation is a pretty complex process, and I like to call it the building of a consensus. That is, you try to persuade a large enough number of people so that you essentially have a consensus on a policy. By the consensus-building process, I don't mean that foreign policy has to have a consensus before it can be acted on. What I mean is that anybody in the executive, in Congress, in the press, in academia, men of affairs like Gaither or Draper--people like these--any time they want to influence policy, they behave as if they were trying to build a consensus. They go around and try to persuade.

The utility of this theory of policymaking is that it focuses attention on the diversity and the inconsistency of the values that policy must serve. We are a big society with a wide range of people with different desires, and it focuses on the importance of the bargaining and the power in this process. It assigns a central place, in other words, to politics.

Viewed as part of a consensus-building process, certain aspects of Congressional behavior become understandable, aspects that really seemed perverse when you considered them as rational steps in a logical process. You see, a Congressman, given his limitations of power in terms of making the executive do something, when he tries to influence policy he has to do it by trying to persuade a lot of people that it ought to be done.

Take for example a Congressman confronted with the defense budget. The Congressman usually ignores the great strategic questions. Frequently the questions are: Why does the Air Force overcoat cost more than the Army overcoat? The point is, this is not really stupid. He can't influence the basic strategy behind this unless it is very stark and very dramatic. Take for example the Symington air power hearings. A lot of people said that this was an oversimplified question, and maybe even the wrong question. But notice that, if you have to build a consensus, if you have to have something dramatic in order to have an influence, then about the only question you can ask is: Who has got the most airplanes, the Russians or the United States? If the answer is the Russians, then the executive is under a burden to justify its

position. Notice also that this might be the only way that a Congressman could get into defense policy when you have a President who is also a five-star general, with the prestige that he has in military affairs.

Notice also that certain aspects of the behavior of the executive become a little clearer if you think in terms of conflict and consensus-building. A lot of people have an impression of the executive as a bunch of blabbermouths. There are endless leaks of information, you know, so people feel they are irresponsible blabbermouths. Obviously this isn't it. What's happening here is that there are some leaks which are used to try to influence the general public; information is leaked in order to prepare public opinion for a move the executive is going to make. Other leaks are made because one group of officials are trying to outflank another group, or trying to take the wind out of their sails.

My time is getting a little short. I am going to skip a couple things. Just very briefly--if you look at the National Security Council, a lot of people have criticized this because it is not a true decision-making body, and so on and so forth--it is a committee. But, if you think about this process as being a political one, it becomes quite clear why the National Security Council can't be what a lot of these people want it to be. It is not the kind of body that is suitable for this bilateral bargaining or for the weighing and balancing of power that a political process entails.

I come now to the final task of speculating on the implications of all this. I think most of the general implications follow rather naturally. A policy-making system that tends to depend on developing a consensus among a wide range of people--whether they are in this town or in the general public--puts a very high premium on effective communication, and an even higher penalty on a failure of communication. You see, achieving sophisticated policies in defense or foreign policy is not just a problem of policy-planning by a general staff or by an elite of policy-planners in the State Department. It is a process of bargaining, of persuading, and of educating. One of the reasons that we have difficulty getting rational policies is because the process is a lot more than just thinking of the idea.

Notice also there doesn't seem to be any one place where these tasks of educating and persuading can be concentrated, since there are just too many participants, too widely separated, to be reached by any one communications network, and this is probably even true of the President, although he certainly has more facilities than anyone else.

Another thing is that an enormous effort must go into selling the policy, not only to Congress and the public but to other people in the

executive. The very size and complexity of the President's task means that the bureaucratic machinery isn't going to be very effective in coping with departures from routine. Before a new issue or a new idea can reach the level at which a decision is made, a national decision, it has got to jostle out a lot of other ideas, a lot of other issues, and a lot of other problems; and to jostle these out a lot of people up the hierarchy have to give their consent to it. This is why a problem under study, by the way, may never reach the level of decision.

Well, all of these things put obstacles in the way of systematic policymaking in the United States. Some issues--one example, the Marshall plan--are the subject of massive concentration and massive effort and get decisions, and others are neglected almost entirely. We seem to bounce from the crest of one crisis to the crest of another. There is a bias toward postponing decisions. You know; you've got the Thor and the Jupiter, and you end up making the Thupiter. You don't make clear decisions. You have the Bomarc and the Nike--you have compromise all the way through. There is a bias to delay decisions in the process. There is also, by the way, a tendency to do as little as possible. Take the Eisenhower doctrine on the Middle East. It dealt only with direct Communist aggression rather than with the host of other threats that were maybe more immediate--subversion, for example--the reason being that it is just too hard to get a wide consent on a whole range of policies at one time. You tend to pick out a dramatic one and get that, and hope for the best later.

It is here, you see, in what we might call the discontinuity of policy development in the United States, rather than in intelligence failures, that we are most likely to find the explanation for the fact that the United States is rather frequently surprised by the turn of international events. Most of our troubles in anticipating events derive not so much from a failure to foresee the consequences of something we did do or have decided upon, or from a failure to consider the effectiveness of an alternative we rejected, but rather from problems we have never really faced as a Nation, even though individual citizens may have raised them.

I am going to skip the next section because of time. The point I wanted to make here, with some illustrations, was that it isn't really as bad as it sounds. This process, where a wide number of people have to agree to policy, really is a very effective way of testing a policy provided you do face the problem and provided the people know what you are talking about. For example, this is really the explanation of the great wisdom and effectiveness of our policy toward Europe in

the postwar period. Most of the people in the United States were familiar with Europe and its problems--we had fought a couple of wars there--consequently we were able to develop the Marshall plan and NATO and arms aid, and all the rest rather effectively. You see, what I am driving at is that dictatorships frequently make mistakes of commission--like Hitler's attack on Russia--mistakes democracies never make. One reason they don't make them is this thorough exploration of policies. But notice also that this same thing probably accounts for some of our mistakes of omission--our failure, for example, to face up to the problem of China because it was just too complex to sell that many people on as much sacrifice as was necessary.

Another implication to this for congressional-executive relations is that really sales gimmicks are not the final solution. There is a place for briefing Congressmen; there is a place for the Secretary of State to have breakfast with the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee; and a place for all the varied arts of the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Relations; but there are very sharp and rather narrow limits as to how far the executive can go in bringing Congress into what Senator Vandenburg used to call the takeoff of policy as well as the crash landing. The kind of powers bestowed on Congress, their political independence, their responsibility to their own constituency means to me that you couldn't really bring a Congressman into something like, say, an enlarged National Security Council and expect him to behave consistently according to the President's view of things. It just isn't in the cards.

Notice also that this puts a terrible premium on the President's being active in building a consensus himself. He's got to get out and persuade and sell. He's got to engage in politics in the good sense of helping people to identify what our true interests are and getting people to agree on a policy to meet them. If he is inactive, policy and the Nation flounder.

Notice that the danger of drift, though, is not always on the executive's shoulders. It derives from the massive power of Congress to bloc an action as well as from inactivity on the part of the executive. As a consequence of this, the massive power of Congress, it might be that a succession of very strong Presidents might succeed in finding new ways for evading Congress or for manipulating Congress. But I would think that a completely nominal role for Congress that would result at the end of this process really is not desirable. It is the essence of democracy, I think, that the values of a maximum number

of people be served by national policy. The President can accomplish a lot in this, but he can't personally weigh the intensity and the extent of opinion in a whole nation. It's too big a job. Some other device is needed, and traditionally, in democracies, the Parliament or the Congress has been this device for representation and for weighing the wide range of opinions throughout society. And it seems to me that it still has its uses today. I would say that diminishing the role that Congress plays in foreign affairs would be more likely to set us back in trying to adapt democracy to a mass age rather than to further us.

I would really like to see certain ways of strengthening Congress' participation in foreign policy. What worries me is the difficulty in forcing the executive to consider a problem that it has so far ignored. Take for example civil defense. A lot of us who worked in the field of strategy--and this may be an anathema to some of you--believe that a civil defense program is terribly important to a deterrent posture. You have to be able to absorb a blow. It makes it a lot more believable that you will fight if you can say, "Look. Our population is protected; we are prepared to fight." But it is very difficult to get the executive to face a problem that it has chosen to ignore. Congress has been trying this one for a number of years with very little success.

On the other hand, if the executive weds itself to a wrong-headed policy, Congress is very limited in how it can chivvy it around. As a practical matter, about all it can do is lay the groundwork for the next administration. I will stick my neck out at this point and say, "You all have watched the defense debate now for a number of years. I would be willing to make you a slight wager that, whether the next President is a Republican or a Democrat, whether it is Rockefeller or Nixon or any of the host of Democrats that seem to be running so hard, you will see some fundamental changes in our defense policy." The point I am making is that all of this debate has not influenced the present Administration but it has laid the groundwork for the next. I don't think this is good, you see. I am worried that there is really no effective way of getting the executive to face a problem that it chooses to ignore or to get it to shift its policy.

One might think that you could strengthen Congress by giving it more staff and more expertise, but I am doubtful about this. I think formal machinery to make Congress into some sort of a second executive is foolish. It would lead more to paralysis than to anything else. And if you look at the nature of Congress I don't think it is a very promising approach. The problem is how to meet these evolutionary

changes in our environment. In the 19th century, when we were isolated and largely an agrarian society, our political institutions were quite perfect for our situation but when we are a world leader and must make quick decisions and sometimes very fundamental and radical ones, our machinery creaks a bit, I would think we need an evolutionary change in our institutions, not a radical one. I don't think a radical one will get us anywhere.

In other words, the most promising course, it seems to me, may not be either in tinkering with the structure and organization or in developing an elite of philosopher politicians to run for Congress. I think the most promising course may lie at this entirely different level of attempting to understand the subtleties of the system in which national policy is really made and of accommodating ourselves to the opportunities it presents.

I am not urging the armed services to be politicians, necessarily, but I am certainly urging you to understand that policymaking is a political process in the sense in which I have defined "political," and that if you want to influence it you ought to behave that way.

DR. KRESS: Dr. Hilsman is ready for your questions, gentlemen.

QUESTION: Sir, you mentioned the Congressmen at times trying to force the executive to do certain things. We notice every year in the appropriations business that they spend a lot of time in committees and so forth, and usually the appropriation is never passed until after the fiscal year has started. Do you think there will ever be a possibility that Congress will get all these investigations and so forth over and get the appropriation out before the fiscal year starts?

DR. HILSMAN: No. This, you know, is a political process. No. Nothing further can be said on this.

QUESTION: In reference to your remarks about the seniority system as being suitable for the organization of Congress, the laymen would get the impression that most of the Congressional committees are headed by longtime representatives from less populated ares. Is there not such an imbalance now?

DR. HILSMAN: Yes. The seniority system of course has its faults, and it rewards the South or upper New England that are deeply committed to one party for historical and traditional reasons. It gives

them power out of proportion to the population involved and so on, and it doesn't necessarily promote the more competent men. The more competent men arrive in chairmanships by accident. What I said was that, given the structure of American society, given the structure of its political parties, and so on and so forth, I don't think you would get anywhere by changing this. If you changed it so that you did give it to more competent or deserving people, you would end up with favoritism and with splitting the parties even greater. You don't want to end up like France, you know, with a lot of small parties, where you're paralyzed.

Actually, there is some philosophical support for this, and that is that, if you take the parliamentary system that the British have, this really presupposes a very cohesive, unified society, all of one nationality, with long traditions, and so on. It really presupposes this. You see, with the parliamentary system, a bare majority can decide almost any question. The English have a hard time understanding our political system. I remember talking to a British political scientist once who said that he never could understand any merit in the American system until the British parliamentary system was tried in South Africa, which is multiracial. There are not only negroes and whites, but there is the British element and the old Boer element. In the American system you could never have happen what happened there; that is, a bare majority took the voting rights away from a whole segment of the population. In our system we may slow the process down by which one segment of the population gets the vote, but we could never take it away from one segment. In South Africa they took the vote away from the Cape coloreds who had the vote. You know, these were people of mixed ancestry. The had had the vote. We could never do this.

The philosophical point is: We have a diverse society, national in scope, where we have different regions with different agricultural interests, with different economic interests. We have the industrial North and the agricultural South and Midwest, with different kinds of agriculture, the mining States, and so on. We've got such a large and diverse society that consent of a wide segment of that society becomes really very important if we are not going to have a succession of civil wars. After all, we had one. So a governmental process that requires wide consent, much more than a simple majority, a much higher percent, really helps a diverse society maintain itself as a nation, rather than fragmenting and busting up into little pieces.

It is a delicate balance. One of the reasons we maintain what cohesiveness we have is that almost every substantial minority feels that it has the power at least to delay things that it doesn't want and to circumvent them. On the other hand, other minorities have the feeling that at least they can make some sort of progress within the system.

Now, there is some merit to this. My point on the seniority system is that you are going to have to change the whole nature of the society if you change that.

QUESTION: Doctor, you mentioned, or you suggest, an evolutionary change rather than a revolutionary change in our legislative and foreign policy process. Don't you believe that maybe a more dynamic and aggressive change is necessary in today's conflict with communism? In other words, should we perhaps take the risk of committing an act--get into an act of commission rather than of ommission?

DR. HILSMAN: You are talking about policy rather than about the structure of our Government?

STUDENT: Yes.

DR. HILSMAN: My point about the evolutionary change was that I was saying that I don't think we ought to try to remake our political institutions into something like, say, the British system. I think we ought to modify them slowly, very slowly. And I would submit that we have been doing this rather steadily. Look at what has happened in the last 30 years. Thirty years ago the United States Government didn't exercise nearly the powers it does now. It didn't get into a lot of fields as it does now--in health, for example, or in manipulating the economy, for example. I think our capacity to meet world crises has surprised not only the world but ourselves as well.

So there has been an evolution going on. If you read books written about our political system in the late 19th century, such as Woodrow Wilson's "Congressional Government," he called it Congressional Government because Congress was running the whole show. He had the foresight to see that, as foreign affairs became more important, we had to play a bigger role in it, and that foreign affairs was something that could not be run by a Congress, as almost all Congressmen would be the first to say--too much so, I think; they lean a little too far in this direction.

So I was talking about revolutionary changes in our governmental structure and in our institutions. This I am not in favor of. In terms

of policy I am quite in favor of it, but I would submit that the way this is done, you see, in this system, is by leadership. It just has to be very active and very foresighted and very energetic leadership, or we just flounder; we just react to events. I would think, myself, that, if all the people who are involved--you people, people in the State Department, the press, Congress, and the executive--got a little clearer about the nature of the system, it would work better. I mean, if we get it just very clear in everybody's mind that the President has got to be heavily engaged in politics--politics in my good sense, you see, of getting out and reconciling value conflicts and trying to garner support for bold policies--if we all recognize this--if our textbooks in high schools and on up recognize this, then future Presidents will be imbued with this idea before they ever get to be Presidents, you see.

I would say that this is the kind of thing by which we can better ourselves. For example, I think the armed services are really doing a magnificent and perceptive job in this. I have lectured at other of the War Colleges, and they are all interested in these matters that we have been talking about today. They are all working toward educating their people for them. I'd like to see more of this done in other parts of the Government.

QUESTION: Doctor, I got the impression that there was something radically wrong with defense policy and that it would have to wait for the next administration for correction. Would you care to comment on what that is?

DR. HILSMAN: Yes, I will be happy to; I'll stick my neck out any time. I think there are three things wrong with our defense policy. This is a personal opinion. Starting with something that you might favor, I think that sometime in the past there has been a tendency to say, "Look. If we can destroy the Soviet Union once, that's all we need. We don't need to care about how many missiles they've got or how many airplanes they've got, and so on. All we need to do is to look at the problem of getting in." I am a little distrustful of this tendency. I would like to see more SAC. I would like to see SAC hardened. You are all familiar with this term. I would like to see more missiles. I would like to see better warning systems. That's the first thing.

The second thing is that I think that we have had a tendency to overemphasize nuclear air power as the solution to all problems. Where you are going to drop an H-bomb in Laos beats me, in order to cope with this very ambiguous threat. I think we need more limited war forces,

by which I mean not just ground divisions--and let me take a cut at the Army as I am passing. I think there is a tendency in the Army today to go for modernization, which is, again, a little inappropriate to some of the kinds of threats we are going to have. I am a little worried and not convinced that a highly modernized ground force will retain all the conventional war capacities that I would like to see it have. So I have now distributed my cuts.

Finally, I mention civil defense. I think if you look carefully at the whole strategy of deterrence, it becomes pretty clear that the capacity to absorb a blow is an effective deterrent. I don't only mean that we might have to fight a war; and it might be very important to say we will give our population fallout shelters. But our posture of deterrence is a lot more believeable when we say: "Look. You hit Europe and we'll hit you," and they say, "Yes, but you haven't got any civil defense program and that means 170 million dead Americans." Maybe that isn't the situation today, but in a very few years it may very well be the situation, when the missiles get widely distributed.

So there are three levels about which I am a little unhappy. When you come down to it, I suppose that it could be summed up by saying I think that economy is important, but survival is more important. In other words, I'd be happy if all three services got more money.

QUESTION: You mentioned that the Congressman has freedom from his party, yet each political party has a party line. Does not the maverick jeopardize his chances for reelection in identifying himself as a rebel?

DR. HILSMAN: Well, you really can't talk about this without saying, "Which Congressman and what is the nature of his constituency?" A Democrat from the South, as long as he pursues the general values of his own constituency--fights against civil rights, fights for cotton and certain other agriculture, and things like that--can pretty much thumb his nose at what the national policy--you know, the President--says. Just look at the votes on any of the major issues and you will find that the votes always run, say, 150, for--50 Republicans and 100 Democrats; 89, against--25 Democrats and 64 Republicans. It always splits this way. You really just can't talk about this except in terms of the individual Congressman.

There are some, who come from marginal districts, especially, who have to be pretty careful. By marginal districts I mean those

that are sometimes Democrat and sometimes Republican. I'd say a person from New Jersey, for example, say a Republican who was elected in 1952 when Eisenhower came in, would probably be pretty well convinced that he would have to stick pretty close to supporting Eisenhower. On the other hand, another kind of Republican, say from up in Maine, could be completely indifferent. You have this phenomenon just all the time.

By the way, I didn't really mean that there wasn't some pressure on them. Indeed there is. I meant that there is nothing like the pressure that there is in Britain where, if a man votes against a three-line whip, he's out. They weed him out of the party, and he just can't get reelected. I don't think such a man has been reelected more than once or twice in British history.

QUESTION: You mentioned an adequate civil defense. I would like to ask what you visualize as an adequate or even a feasible civil defense?

DR. HILSMAN: I was afraid this was going to come up. The reason I was afraid is not that I am not prepared to talk about it but that it takes too long for the time we have. Let me refer you to the Rand Corporation studies. The Rand Corporation, as you know, is a research organization for the Air Force. When most people think of civil defense they think of deep shelters--"Let's protect our cities."

By the way, in all of these comments about strategy I am really thinking a little ahead. I am not talking about the present situation, right now, I think we are reasonably strong for the moment. What worries me is that I tend to feel that some decision ought to be taken now to make sure we are that way in 1965. One worries about 1965, but not so much about today.

A civil defense program for the cities is just so expensive that one doubts that it could be effective, and it is backbreaking. If you just look at a map of the United States in a simulated attack, one hour after attack there are these little dots all over the United States. If you look at the map of the United States 24 hours after the attack and see the fallout patterns, you see that there is very little of the United States that isn't covered by fallout, very, very little.

The answer to this is, you see, fallout shelters. They are cheap. You know, a root cellar is an adequate fallout shelter. If you go into your basement, if it is a real basement, it cuts radioactivity by a factor of 100. If you take $150 and build a little cinder block room off

in one corner, you cut your factor of fallout so low that you are really within safety limits, you see.

STUDENT: We've got adequate places for people to go inside out of the weather right now.

DR. HILSMAN: I am not talking about getting out of the weather. I am talking about fallout shelters, you see. We've got to have fallout shelters, which I say are cheap--not deep shelters--fallout shelters which are in effect, say, 12 inches of dirt. If you dig a slit trench and put logs over it and 2-1/2 feet of dirt, you've got a fallout shelter. Whether you can stay in there two weeks is another matter. You've got to stay in there two weeks. But you need fallout shelters; you need a distribution of food; you need stockpiling of the things you will need to recover.

As I say, this is a terribly complicated subject and one which is still debatable. I would refer you to the Rand studies. I'll give you three references: There is a Rand study out on it. I think the title is "Non-Military Defense." There is an article in the January issue of the Bulletin of Atomic Scientists, by Herman Kahn, called, "How Many Can Be Saved?" It offers a cheap program, you see, as cheap as a half-billion dollars over a three-year period. Then I also refer you to a novel called: Alas, Babylon," by a man named Pat Frank. This is a very interesting novel for two reasons. One is the way the thermonuclear war starts, the political climate in which a thermonuclear war can start. It is possible. We can have one of these things. The second reason it is interesting is that it is a story of some people in a small Florida town, where the wind happens to be blowing the right way. They didn't get any fallout. Where it is relevant to civil defense is that it brings out the things that can become important at a time like this. For example, there is no gasoline, no transportation, no electricity. Candles become terribly important. You start looking all over for coal-oil lamps and things like that. All your insulin needs refrigerating--it's gone. People who have diabetes will die.

It's interesting. If you think of it in terms of civil defense it highlights very clearly the kinds of things we ought to stockpile and disperse now, you see. Notice that this civil defense program that I am suggesting is not a too happy one. If it is a surprise attack, it means that 60 percent of our population lives. We lose the 40 percent in the cities. What I am concerned with is, if we don't have something like this and they get the jump on us, if they come in on us and we are not

able to stop them--and if it is a surprise attack this is likely to be true, in a missile age--because of fallout we are going to lose almost everybody--90-some percent. A cheap program will at least save 60 percent of the people who aren't in the cities. If you've got strategic warning and if war comes up in terms of a real international crisis, and if you can evacuate your cities, you might save 80 or 90 percent.

Notice also that when you talk about deterrence, it is really for strategic reasons that I want a civil defense program. Just let your mind wander around a little bit on a situation where the Soviets, for some reason which we can't foresee right now, go a little crazy and start being really provocative in Europe. We say, "Our population is evacuated as of 24 hours. Now, back down." I say that that will have a lot more meaning than if we say, "We are going to launch SAC. Now back down," and they say, "But your population is vulnerable."

DR. KRESS: Gentlemen, when you are committee chairman next spring you will want to remember those references for the Final Problem. We are all very grateful to Dr. Hilsman this morning for this very spirited discourse on a subject which could, in a textbook style, have been a little bit dull, but was a very bright and sparkling presentation. Thank you very much, Dr. Hilsman.

DR. HILSMAN: Thank you. I enjoyed it.

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