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NSAM 341

Speech by General Maxwell D. Taylor
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President Johnson and ladies and gentlemen of the Association. Alex's very kind introduction to me, unnecessarily considerate, was most appreciated. I am so glad to read in the paper that he is going to be around Washington for a long time; perhaps he will introduce me at some other occasion. With regard to my address today, his suggestion was that I take this opportunity to give a sort of autobiographical account of NSAM-341 and its background. I am very happy to do it if you will excuse the occasional use of the first person pronoun, because what I propose to do is simply to tell you how this project developed as I saw it.

I am sorry to sound an inauspicious note when I say that insofar as I am concerned NSAM-341 really had its origin in the "Bay of Pigs" experience. You may recall that following the collapse of the beachhead, April 17, 1961, several of us were asked by President Kennedy to appraise the operation and tell him what had gone wrong. This group included his brother, Bob Kennedy, Allen Dulles, Arleigh Burke and myself. In our final report to President Kennedy, we pointed to a number of shortcomings, among them, the organizational deficiencies in Washington which made it difficult for the President to control a complex, interdepartmental operation such as the "Bay of Pigs". We indicated the kind of organization which would be necessary if we were ever tempted to engage again in so involved an operation.

The organizational concept which we suggested called for a permanent committee with the title Strategic Resources Group, reporting to the President, capable of directing the use overseas of the resources of several departments. Whatever its intrinsic merits, the suggestion was not received with any great enthusiasm, primarily because it seemed to suggest the United States might want

to undertake another Bay of Pigs type of operation, and that was not an appealing thought in 1961. However, the concept of having a permanent steering group of very senior officials who controlled all the resources of the principal departments engaged in overseas activities remained alive and reappeared in January, 1962, when President Kennedy approved the constitution of the so-called Special Group for Counter-Insurgency. This was really the Strategic Resources Group under a different name, with a slightly different membership and with a more restricted objective.

Now for those of you who are not familiar with the Special Group, I will review its mission and composition. It was established to assure the unity of effort and use of all resources required to prevent and resist subversive insurgency. That was the overall purpose. More specifically, it was to assure recognition throughout the entire Federal Government that subversive insurgency or the "War of Liberation" is a major form of political-military conflict equal in importance to conventional warfare; and to verify that all Departments give appropriate attention to counter-insurgency in their training programs in order to form the leadership necessary to carry forward in this field. A third objective of the Group was to verify the adequacy of departmental resources to cope with "Wars of Liberation" in the future. Finally, the Group was directed to keep an eye on certain selected countries--countries designated by the President and to verify the adequacy of the interdepartmental programs in these countries which were given this special attention because they were either under subversive attack or seemed exposed to that threat.

The original membership of the Special Group consisted of the Military Representative of the President as Chairman, the Attorney General, the Deputy

Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of CIA, the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and the Administrator of AID.

This Group has been meeting regularly since early 1962 with only slightly changed membership. I would say that its record has been a very honorable one. Many things were started under its direction. The impact on the education programs which it initiated throughout the government has been very great. It created a new realization of the problem of coordinating overseas efforts in the U.S. Missions. It has been responsible for the development of Internal Defense Plans in certain sensitive countries. But as time went on, I think that most of the members of the Group found that it was much harder to follow up on these programs than it had been to initiate them. Hence, the general feeling grew that the mission of the Special Group should be reviewed and perhaps revised.

I returned from Saigon in August of this last year, at which time the President asked me to review all of the activities of our Government in the Counter-Insurgency field, both at home and abroad, and to make appropriate recommendations. I received authority from the White House to ask for the constitution of four interdepartmental committees: One, to examine matters of organization, doctrine and programming headed by Ambassador Bonsal; a second committee to examine training; a third committee to evaluate resources, their availability and use; and the fourth to look into the broad questions of intelligence bearing upon Counter-Insurgency. These committees worked very hard and very effectively for two months and gave me their reports on the first of December, after which I prepared my recommendations to the President.

What I am going to comment on today is only that part of my recommendations which bear upon NSAM-341--the direction, supervision and coordination of interdepartmental affairs overseas.

Having been asked to look into governmental effectiveness in the field of counter-insurgency, those of us involved soon felt that our directive was too narrow since counter-insurgency literally means resistance to an insurgent movement, and obviously the last thing that we should want is to find ourselves in that kind of defensive situation. It seemed to us that we should give priority to the prevention of subversive insurgency and emphasize what should be done to improve preventive measures including the early detection of symptoms.

The next question is, where do you look for the symptoms of subversive insurgency? The answer is that they are found in virtually every emerging country of the world. Subversive insurgency is encouraged and fomented by conditions of poverty, of backwardness, of poor government, of lack of education, all of which are conditions one finds in most of the 90 odd emerging countries. Hence, one concludes that any organization adequate to meet the requirements of anticipating subversive insurgency must observe and evaluate continuously the conditions in some 90 countries of the world. At this point, one begins to question the wisdom of setting up a special organization study of two-thirds of the population of the world and of ignoring the remainder. Should we not recognize that the basic organizational requirement is really crisis anticipation and crisis management wherever found? This was the line of reasoning which I felt impelled to follow and it was in that spirit that I made the recommendation which later resulted in Presidential approval of NSAM-341. In case you do not identify the document by that

designation, its text was published in the Foreign Affairs Manual as Circular No. 385, dated March 4, 1966.

I was surprised when I started inquiring into the overseas authority of the Secretary of State to find how little specific authority he had for the management of interdepartmental business. In contrast, an Ambassador with authority derived from the letters of three successive Presidents (the last being President Kennedy's of 1961) is very clearly the number one man in his country. He has overall coordination and supervisory responsibility for all U.S. programs. However, I have found no assignment of directive responsibility to him. That word, "directive", apparently was deliberately omitted from the Presidential letters. Nonetheless, I think as a practical matter as you experienced Foreign Service Officers know better than I, that a strong Ambassador with his present authority clearly runs his Country Team and directs the overall U.S. program.

But here in Washington, we have never had a single focal point of authority comparable to the Ambassador and his Country Team. The National Security Council was organized with the intention of doing something like this in supporting the President in his discharge of responsibilities in the field of security. But the record shows, I believe, that the National Security Council has not adequately fulfilled the original intent.

In deciding how best to fill this void, I talked to many senior officials about refurbishing the National Security Council. I found virtually no enthusiasm for such a face-lifting effort. The general feeling was that the National Security Council had the inherent weakness of being too big and that no President was likely to sit down in such a large group and use it as a forum

for deciding major overseas matters. So, in the absence of any desire on the part of our senior officials to overhaul the organization of the National Security Council, it appeared necessary to look elsewhere for organizational support for the President in the discharge of his responsibilities for overseas affairs.

Reviewing the record, I found that the only special authority that the Secretary of State had in this field had been given by President Kennedy rather casually in the public relations release made at the time of the abolition of the OCB and the Planning Board in January, 1961. The language I can not quote exactly, but it said in effect that the President would look to the Department of State to assume the coordination function which presumably had been done by the OCB. That being the case, it was logical to consider whether we should not give more specific authority to the Secretary of State and the means to carry out this authority or alternatively whether we should set up some new organization, stemming from the President himself, for the conduct of interdepartmental affairs overseas. Personally, I had no difficulty in choosing between these two alternatives. The creation of some new organization under the White House reaching out into all the countries where we have missions abroad did not appeal as being either desirable or practical. The simple way, hence the preferred way, would be to use the structure of the Department of State for the discharge of this additional Presidential function. Thus, it came out in the end, expressed in the following language: "To assist the President in carrying out his responsibility in the

conduct of Foreign Affairs, he has assigned to the Secretary of State authority and responsibility to the full extent permitted by law for the overall direction, coordination and supervision of interdepartmental activities of the United States Government overseas." That is the first time the words "overall direction" have ever appeared in defining the responsibility of the Secretary of State overseas and, indeed, goes somewhat beyond the present language of the authority of our Ambassadors.

I would like to repeat again that I view this decision as the act of the President in making the Secretary of State his agent in directing interdepartmental matters overseas. This is not inherently or organically a State Department function. It is something additional. By the same token those other officials of the State Department under the Secretary who are involved, the Assistant Secretaries of State whose role I will mention later, and the Ambassadors overseas all are really wearing a second hat--a Presidential hat--in fulfilling this function.

The only activities excluded from this allocation of responsibility were those which are military and which the President as Commander-in-Chief directs through the channel of command reaching from the President through the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff to our overseas commanders.

There has been considerable debate as to what should be understood by the term "interdepartmental activities". The following language was put into the NSAM which I believe expresses quite clearly what is intended: "Those activities which are internal to the execution and administration of approved programs of a single department or agency, and which are not of such a nature

as to effect significantly the overall U.S. overseas programs in a country or region, are not considered to be interdepartmental matters." The question arises as to who is going to make the determination of whether an activity is "interdepartmental." The answer is that it will be made by the so-called "executive chairman" about whom I am going to talk in a moment.

In order to assist the Secretary of State in discharging his new responsibility, he has been given certain organisms to support him. The thought was to create in Washington at both the Assistant Secretary and at the Under Secretary level something analogous to the Ambassador and his Country Team so that each regional Assistant Secretary of State would have an interdepartmental committee called the Interdepartmental Regional Group (IRG) and the Under Secretary of State would have the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) as interdepartmental agencies to assist these officials in discharging their interdepartmental responsibilities.

Now I shall talk only about the Senior Interdepartmental Group because the Interdepartmental Regional Groups are merely duplicates of the senior group. The language in setting up the so-called SIG, if we may use abbreviations, reads as follows: "To assist the Secretary of State in discharging his authority and responsibilities for the interdepartmental matters which can not be dealt with adequately at lower levels or by presently established procedures, including those of the Intelligence Community, the Senior Interdepartmental Group is established." The membership of the SIG is identical with that of the old Standing Group which I have described above, with the exception that the "executive chairman" is the Under Secretary of State. Otherwise, we have as

permanent members the same representation from State, Defense, JCS, AID, CIA, USIA. There was considerable debate during the circulation of the draft as to whether this permanent membership was adequate. Obviously other departments have very important overseas business which is often interdepartmental in nature. Take Treasury, for example, or Agriculture. But it was agreed after discussion that these departments do not have regular business and the assignment of a senior official as a permanent member of the SIG is hardly justified. However, the understanding was reached, and it is clear in the NSAM, that the Chairman of the SIG must look after the potential interests of other departments and invite them to provide membership when business affecting them is on the agenda. Furthermore, the head of any agency or department can ask for an item to be put on the agenda and, when that is the case, send a representative who has full rights of membership. Furthermore, the Senior Interdepartmental Group was made the successor to the Special Group for Counter-Insurgency which is now abolished and all the responsibilities established by NSAM-124 now pass to the jurisdiction of the SIG.

Now let me talk about the "Executive Chairman" role at the SIG and IRG levels. I would certainly not be particularly happy if the end product of the work I have been describing had simply been the creation of six additional Washington committees. Nothing could be more unpromising. But I harbor the hope that the curse of the committee system has been somewhat attenuated by several features which have been built into this new structure. First, as to the membership of the Groups, you can see by the composition of the SIG we have the top man or the number 2 man of all the major agencies of government regularly involved in overseas business. They must come to the conference table

prepared to take a position on all items on the agenda and to commit their department or agency. Moreover, the membership is permanent and each one of these officials is expected to be present for meetings unless he is sick or out of town. Additionally, the Chairman is an "executive chairman". That title is defined as a chairman who has not only the authority but also the responsibility for settling any issue on the agenda of his committee. It means that, in the extreme case, he can have every member of his committee against him but he can say "Boys, this is the way it is going to be unless you utilize your right of appeal." In the latter case, any member can appeal the issue to the next higher authority. In the case of an appeal from the SIG, it would presumably be to the Secretary of State with the right to go beyond him to the President. In a case of an appeal from the Assistant Secretary level, it would be to the SIG. So we have an echelonnement of tribunals to which an appeal can be carried. I sincerely believe that with chairmen with that kind of authority many of the delays and compromises which frequently creep into committee business can be avoided.

Let me sum up now what the advantages appear to be in this new arrangement. I feel that, for the first time, we have fixed responsibility for overall managerial guidance and direction of our business overseas. The Secretary of State is responsible, acting for the President. Next I feel that there has been a clarification of relationships. There is no doubt now who is in charge, whence the direction comes and who must be consulted. A very important advantage, I would think, is that we now have several recognized forums in Washington where we should be able to get interdepartmental decisions rapidly. Virtually any senior official can utilize the mechanism either at the

Assistant Secretary level or at the Under Secretary level to get his business considered and decided. One of my problems as a military official used to be, and I am sure the problem is common in every other department in Washington, to get the military voice heard in conference early enough to be effective. Now we have these forums in regular session where it should be easy to inject the views of each of the interested agencies in the early phases of discussion before decisions have been reached. I would think that this would be a great advantage to all participants in interdepartmental business overseas.

I might say, at this time, that in clearing this proposal about town I had anticipated considerable difficulty in obtaining concurrences. To my surprise, I found almost no difficulty. I found that almost every senior official in Washington was most happy to have the Secretary of State given this clear authority. Hence, I am convinced that, at the top level, State will get nothing but cooperation in discharging this added responsibility. As I made my rounds, there was, of course, a very close examination of the fine print in the language of the NSAM. But insofar as the principle was concerned, no opposition whatsoever was raised.

I think this is good news because as we all know organizational changes in themselves have minimal value. I have often said that good organization simply allows good men to do their work better. If, indeed, this is a sound organization, it still will not contribute significantly unless it is accepted ~~xxx~~ happily by the participating agencies--which I believe is the case at this moment. Next, it is essential that all agencies put in first class players to fill the key slots. This organization will never be any better than the quality of the men who are given the key assignments.

A final advantage which I think I see in this arrangement is the possibility to cope better with the problems of what has been called the growing multipolarity of power. In recent years many of us would say, I believe, that our bi-polar confrontation with the Sino-Soviet Bloc has ceased to be our sole important preoccupation in international affairs. Instead, we have a diversity of problems in many quarters. There are many trouble-makers creating for us many trouble spots around the world. We need built into our executive organization a system which will assure us of watchful eyes looking constantly in all directions and giving warning before we are surprised. Uncle Sam can no longer afford to be a one-eyed Cyclops able to focus attention in only one direction but must have an Argus-eyed capacity to survey the entire international scene. I believe that this organization we have discussed will contribute to that capability for vigilance.

Before I sit down, ~~ladies~~ ladies and gentlemen, I would like to record my feeling this decision of the President recorded in NSAM-341 is a tremendous challenge to the Foreign Service and to the Department of State. As a complete outsider, I obviously had personal bias in this matter but felt that it was the obvious solution which should be given a thorough trial. But it means that State has to perform up to the challenge. You will have to put your best players into the key slots for, in due course, I am sure there will be a review made of what has been accomplished under this system. If, as I hope, performance justifies the concentration of responsibility and authority in State, we are on the right track and a long-standing deficiency in our Federal system has been

corrected. If not, the only answer will be to review the decision and find another solution. I have all confidence in my mind that I have before me here many of the men and women who are going to make this system work.

Thank you very much.