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Proposals to Cope with Multipolarity

In the course of our previous discussions, I believe that we have established the need for better organization and improved procedures both in Washington and in our missions abroad to cope with the increasingly complex problems arising from the multipolar distribution of political power. In this changing situation, our leaders will be obliged to attend to many problems simultaneously and to be watchful in many directions without becoming unduly or exclusively immersed in any one particular problem. In an international world of multiplying crises, we should agree, I believe, that it will be dangerous to allow ourselves to become involved too quickly or too often in opposing the trouble-makers--certainly not without a cold-blooded analysis of the stake and the possible consequences. In reflecting the lessons of our Viet-Nam experience, I am impressed with the need to recognize early the symptoms of subversive aggression, and try to eliminate them before they can germinate into the kind of large scale guerrilla warfare which we are combatting in Southeast Asia. All our decisions and actions in future situations will need to be guided by an accurate evaluation of our true national interests and controlled by a prudent reluctance to assume new commitments without strong cause.

These requirements of closer attention, clearer discernment and more accurate evaluation can be met only if our leaders have accurate information about the countries of the world which may be the targets of the trouble-makers. Only with such information can we expect our government to prepare wisely, decide rightly and act effectively in the multiplicity of troubles which may arise.

In discussing the need for selectivity in accepting further involvements abroad, we have commented upon the danger of the piecemeal attrition of our resources in undertaking to do too much in too many places. Perhaps we did not dwell sufficiently upon the consequent need to maintain adequate resources in being to support those decisions which eventually we may feel obliged to take. The resources which we will need will be of many sorts-- political, military, economic, psychological, moral. And we must know how to combine them best for an effective, flexible response to challenges which may assume many forms. It was the realization of the difficulty of integrating all these components of our strength for effective use in meeting complex problems abroad that led to my conclusion that our present way of doing business, if adequate to get by without major loss in the past, was likely to be inadequate for the changing requirements of the future.

One may question this conclusion and ask why these complex international matters can not be handled as intended within the framework of the National Security Council. The National Security Council, you will recall, was set up in 1947 for the purpose of providing advice to the President with regard to matters of the kind we are discussing. Although I personally believe that the concept of the National Security Council and of its supporting committees (the Planning Board and Operations Coordinating Board) was sound, nevertheless the record indicates pretty clearly that it has not been an effective body for the integration of overseas programs and activities. So as you know, President Kennedy in February, 1961 dissolved the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board, reduced the meetings of the

National Security Council to the vanishing point, and decided to rely on the informal staff procedures of Mr. McGeorge Bundy and his White House assistants. These informal procedures had their failures and successes. They failed conspicuously in giving direction to the Bay of Pigs operation, but we should remember that at that time all the key officials involved were virtually strangers to each other. A new squad of players who had just reported to the stadium had been required to take on a major opponent without preliminary practice or even knowledge of the signals. So the failure constituted by the Bay of Pigs affair should not, I believe, be held against the organization and procedures which followed the abandonment of the procedures of the National Security Council and its committees. The informal method succeeded brilliantly in coping with the Cuba missile crisis. But here again, it is dangerous to generalize. The Cuban missile crisis did not involve the coordination and direction of complex, interdepartmental programs. It was more a matter for the President to take very tough decisions based upon advice from a limited group of his senior advisers. The execution of the Presidential decision was a relatively simple military matter for which the military chain of command was thoroughly adequate.

The informal approach has attained very creditable results in the management of the highly complex situation in South Viet-Nam--although by the time of his departure from government in 1966 Mr. Bundy's informal staff was hardly small, and State had a highly developed interdepartmental organization for dealing with Viet-Nam problems. In general, I feel that our success over recent years in conducting our interdepartment business

in Viet-Nam and elsewhere has been due largely to the performance of able individuals and not to the organizational merits of the system or lack of system employed. Furthermore, we have been lucky in not having a multiplicity of crises breaking out at the same time to overload the "informal approach." Hence, I conclude that the methods employed up to now, while able to pass reasonably well the tests to date, would not be satisfactory for the long pull in this evolving multipolar world.

When I returned from Saigon in August of last year, the President gave me the task of reviewing our governmental procedures in the field of foreign affairs and of making recommendations of possible improvements. After several months of work in which many competent officials took part, I filed a report in January which resulted in the Presidential decisions announced in Washington last week. Although I am sure that at Lehigh University you ladies and gentlemen attend closely to the news bearing upon foreign affairs, and hence that you are all probably aware of the substance and significance of these changes because of their pertinence to our discussion of the problems arising from multipolarity, I am going to take time this evening to go over them with you and give you some of their background. First in capsule form, let me indicate the substance of the President's decision.

"In order to assist him in discharging his responsibility in the conduct of foreign affairs, the President has directed the Secretary of State, as his agent, to assume responsibility to the full extent permitted by law for the overall direction, coordination and supervision of interdepartmental activities of the United States Government overseas (less exempted military activities). Up to now, the Secretary of State,

assisted by the regional Assistant Secretaries, has performed a coordinating function in interdepartment matters abroad. Now he has received formal and specific overall directive authority from the President. While the term 'interdepartmental matter' has not been specifically defined, in the present context it covers those activities abroad involving more than a single department or agency, or which is of such a nature as to affect significantly the overall United States overseas program in a country or region.

"To assist the Secretary of State in this new role, there will be a permanent interdepartmental committee, called the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) with the Under Secretary of State as its 'Executive Chairman'. The latter term is used to describe a chairman who has the authority and responsibility to decide all matters coming before his committee, subject to the right of any member to appeal from his decision to higher authority. This is an important provision which makes the difference between the normal committee and an incisive, decision-making body.

"The other regular members of the Senior Interdepartmental Group are: The Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Director of the United States Information Agency and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs. The Chairman will invite representatives of other departments and agencies when they have an interest in the matters under consideration. The Senior Interdepartmental Group will function as a focal point for decisions and actions on overseas departmental matters which are referred to it by the Secretary of State or by an Assistant Secretary of State, or raised by the action of an individual member.

Any department or agency not a member may also raise matters for action by the Group.

"Beneath the Secretary of State and the Senior Interdepartmental Group, the regional Assistant Secretaries of State will occupy important focal positions in the channel of responsibility for overall direction, coordination and supervision of interdepartmental matters in the regions of their responsibility. Supported by Interdepartmental Regional Groups (IRG) analogous in membership and responsibilities to the Senior Interdepartmental Group (of which the Assistant Secretaries are Executive Chairmen), they will work closely with United States Ambassadors and the Country Teams abroad and assure the adequacy in their regions of United States policy, plans, programs, resources and performance. It is at this level that the volume of work will be done, leaving for the Senior Interdepartmental Group only the major problems. As in the case of the Senior Interdepartmental Group, the new arrangements are for the purpose of expediting decision and action.

"Thus, the overall purpose of the changes directed by the President is to formalize relationships and clarify responsibilities in the conduct of our overseas business, operating within the framework of existing law. It does not affect in any way the statutory responsibilities of any of the key Government officials involved or their relations with the Congress. In establishing the Senior Interdepartmental Group and the Interdepartmental Regional Groups, it creates a regular meeting place for the key officials involved in overseas activities and assures decisive action by giving unusual authority to the 'Executive Chairman'. These meetings also assure

the departments and agencies primarily involved in overseas affairs a forum in which all views can be expressed in advance of decisions. The departments and agencies with an occasional interest will be invited to attend these meetings when there are matters affecting them on the agenda, or they may propose matters for the agenda. In any case, their representative will have the same rights as the regular members when their business is being considered.

"Such then are the highlights of this new organization. Once put in effect, it should bring greater method into the conduct of foreign affairs, permit a sharper and more rapid focus of the efforts of several departments on complex overseas problems and assure that no sector of the foreign front is neglected at a time of preoccupation with some overriding problem. Thus, in a sense, it is a response to many of the requirements of multipolarity which we have been discussing."

Now, having set forth in broad outline the nature and purpose of the President's decision, I would now like to go back over it and comment upon certain important points contained within it. The most important one, I believe, is the action of the President in clearly fixing responsibility on the Secretary of State for the overall direction, coordination and supervision of interdepartmental matters overseas. In the past, the role of the Secretary of State overseas has been far from clear. The only written authority which he has had up to now for the coordination of overseas programs is contained in a press release made by President Kennedy on February 19, 1961 at the time of the abolition of the Operations Coordinating

Board. The statement read: "First, we will center responsibility for much of the Board's work (that is of the Operations Coordinating Board) in the Secretary of State. He expects to rely particularly on the Assistant Secretaries in charge of regional bureaus and they in turn will consult closely with other departments and agencies. This will be our ordinary rule for continuing coordination of our work in relation to a country or area." This is a pretty limited grant of authority and hardly makes the Secretary of State take charge of government overseas programs. Now the Secretary is assuming responsibility for overall direction, coordination and supervision which in combination amounts to something considerably different from his previous limited authority.

In giving the Secretary this new authority, however, the President requires him to exercise it by means of certain interdepartmental committees or Groups, one at the level of the Under Secretary of State, the others at the level of the Assistant Secretaries of State. If these were just ordinary committees added to the proliferation already existing throughout government, I would derive little cheer from this new proposal. Fortunately, a determined effort has been made to make these groups something quite different from normal committees. One important feature has been to make the Chairman an "Executive Chairman" which means that he will have the authority and responsibility to decide all matters which come before his Group. If any member does not like his decision, that member has the right of appeal to higher authority. This device should prevent the Group from bogging down in time-consuming debate and from compromising issues to

get unanimity at the cost of incisiveness.

The committee curse is also mitigated by the character of the membership. All members will have permanent assignments on the Groups which will have first call on their services. All members must come to meetings prepared to commit their department or agency with respect to the matters on the agenda. With this kind of membership and with an energetic Executive Chairman at the helm, these Groups should contribute importantly to expediting the conduct of overseas business in Washington. Abroad, I would expect the current arrangement of the Ambassador and Country Team to remain about as at present. There would be some value in my opinion of a new Presidential letter to Ambassadors to reaffirm their authority and to expand it in consistence with the new authority given the Executive Chairmen of the Groups at home.

In summary, I would express the hope that this new procedure would go far in meeting the organizational and procedural requirements for coping with multipolarity. However, I am thoroughly aware that no mere organizational device will satisfy the many needs of this problem. The best sound organization can do is to facilitate the work of able officials. It can not replace the requirement for qualified people.

Under this new procedure, the State Department is challenged to rise to the possibilities of the new authority conferred upon it. The position of the Regional Assistant Secretary of State will gain enormously in importance as will the requirements placed upon the incumbents of these positions. They will have to be executive types, capable of giving direction to complex interdepartmental matters and doing so in an

atmosphere of harmony and team play. The Executive Chairmen must remember that they are not representing the State Department in their new role. They are representing the President of the United States and will need to approach the problems of the Groups with his point of view.

But even if the new system functions perfectly, it will not be a complete answer in itself. The outcome will depend upon the decisions and actions taken as the result of the plans, evaluations and recommendations which will emerge from the channel of responsibility leading from the overseas missions to the Secretary of State and to the President. In the last analysis, it will still be the President who will have to take the critical decisions and bear the enormously heavy responsibility for the consequences.

In executing his responsibilities, he will be helped or hindered by our national attitude. In some of the expressions of concern over the situation in Viet-Nam, we are seeing curious aspects of our national character. In the country-wide reaction as well as in the Congressional debates, there is often a note of reluctance to use the vast power represented by the resources of the United States at home and abroad. There seems to be a certain feeling of guilt arising from our possession and our use of this strength. An uneasiness about the morality of our conduct keeps cropping up in the public discussions which encourages those who deplore the use of power for any purpose.

One consequence of this attitude is that our government, in defending its own actions to the people, is obliged to disclose its plans and hopes to a degree which must be vastly helpful to our opponents. Inevitably in a situation where we are using limited means to gain limited ends, there is a

strong element of bluff involved in our actions and those of our adversaries. The game of escalation which is being played by both sides in Southeast Asia--to the distress of some United States onlookers--is not far removed from a game of poker. In both cases, the outcome will depend upon the resources available to the opponents and their willingness to risk those resources. Since our side obviously has resources far superior to those of any adversary, our success in the game will in the long run be determined by our nerve and will to carry through. None of the organizational and procedural devices which we have been talking about will solve this problem one iota. The resolution of problems of multipolarity which have been the theme of these discussions will in the long run depend upon the quality of our leadership and the toughness of our national character. Ours will be the task to use the giant strength of America not tyrannously like a giant but generously and forthrightly as becomes a great power with a sense of responsibility for the discharge of its historic mission.