17 January 1956

Hon. Robert Cutler, Chairman
Old Colony Trust Company
One Federal Street
Boston 6, Massachusetts

Dear Bobby:

I read with both interest and enlightment your January 4 talk at the MIT dinner. Let me know when you are here. There are many things to talk over.

Sincerely,

Allen W. Dulles
Director

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Dear Allen —
This may divert
you from your
serious reading
Bob

ROBERT CUTLER
CHAIRMAN
OLD COLONY TRUST COMPANY
allied with
THE FIRST NATIONAL BANK OF BOSTON

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 A. W. Dulles

COMPTON MEMORIAL DINNER
MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
WALDORF-ASTORIA, JANUARY 4, 1956

ADDRESS BY ROBERT CUTLER
The Membership of the National Security Council

President Killian, I am particularly happy that you have asked me to speak at this Commemoration. Karl Compton was one of my heroes.

My definition of a hero is someone who has qualities that you admire and dearly wish that you might possess.

It was my good fortune in 1947 and 1948 to work with Karl Compton in making more available to the American people the Compton Commission's "Program for National Security." The Compton Report was a great state paper, the sound common sense of which was not grasped by our then political leaders.

One June night the Citizens' Committee for the Compton Report held a civic rally in Faneuil Hall in Boston. It was, I think, the first time that movietone cameras were permitted in that historic shrine. I remember Karl's figure standing out on the dark stage in the bright focus of the Kleig lights: broad of brow, his blue eyes shining, his manner serene and frank, unassuming yet fully confident of the subject he had mastered. In introducing him, I said this: "Here is one whom all of us, everywhere, are proud to hail as an American."

How suitable it is that the Karl Taylor Compton Laboratories, and the associated nuclear reactor, will be keyed to President Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace Program and to the education of a new breed of engineers needed for such peaceful exploitation.

Karl Compton worked for peace, and for the true way of living that belongs to a people at peace.

I am going to talk to you tonight about the National Security Council, about one aspect of the Council operation that has had some relation to your illustrious Institution.

Some of you will remember a character in DAVID COPPERFIELD named Mr. Dick. Mr. Dick lived in cloudy happiness with Miss Betsey Trotwood and spent his life in preparing a Memorial Address to the Lord Chancellor. But he never finished the job

because he could not keep the head of King Charles the First out of the Memorial. My personal "King Charles' head" is the National Security Council. For 115 consecutive weeks the Council monopolized and swallowed up my days and nights, while I was serving President Eisenhower as his Special Assistant for National Security Affairs.

Just as the Council's effective functioning became a part of me, so also I carry the stigmata of my association with this great man.

But if you find my fervor evangelistic, I hope you will also find it tempered by a scientific rationalism becoming to your great Institute.

Once there was a Southern boy who, going North, made a great success in business. But he always looked forward to his visits back to his folks in the dreamy calm of the Deep South village of his birth. On one of these visits, he was being driven by Rastus in the only taxicab in town from the dusty Depot to his family's white-pillared home on the hill. As they progressed slowly along Main Street, he noticed a new Church structure being built.

"What's that new Church, Rastus?" he asked. "When I was a boy, we had just the First Baptist Church down on Willow Street."

"Well, Boss," Rastus replied, "it seems like dey had a schism at de First Baptist Church, and dese folks, dey set to build a new Baptist Church down here near de Depot."

"What was the nature of their theological difference, Rastus?"

"Well, Boss," Rastus replied, " I don't rightly understand it a-tall. But it seems dat de folks down at de old Church on Willow Street, dey say dat Pharoah's daughter done found Moses in de bulrushes. And de folks here in de new Church on Main Street, dey say dat's what Pharoah's daughter say."

This story illustrates the Scylla of Fundamentalism and the Charybdis of Rationalism, which I shall hope to steer between tonight in discussing my question.

My question is this: what persons should participate in formulating recommendations concerning national security policy which are to be submitted to the President of the United States for his executive decision?

This question has current significance to the American people, because under the administration of President Eisenhower the National Security Council has emerged as a mechanism of the Executive Branch of the Federal Government for advising the President on matters of high policy, equal in importance to the Cabinet. The solid establishment and effective functioning of this relatively new organ at the apex of Government is a current phenomenon of America's political economy.

Before tackling my question, I should sketch for you a little background.

The National Security Council was created by the Congress; and first began to function in September, 1947. Thus, differing from the Cabinet, the Council from its birth had the legislative sanction of an Act of Congress.

Under its statutory charter, the Council is concerned only in policy matters affecting the security of the nation. The Cabinet, by reasonable accommodation, handles other vast policy areas such as Agriculture, Labor, Post Office, Interior, Health Education & Welfare, Civil Service, much of Justice and Commerce, and so forth.

The statutory purpose of the Council is to integrate the manifold aspects of national security policy (such as foreign, military, economic, fiscal, internal-security, psychological) to the end that security policies finally recommended to the President shall be both representative and fused, rather than compartmentalized and several.

The Council's role is advisory only. It recommends; it does not decide. Whatever security policy may be finally approved by the President, after such modifications or rejections of the Council's views as he may determine, is the policy, not of the Council, but of the Chief Executive of the Republic.

President Eisenhower, who is Chairman of the Council, regards the Council

as a "corporate body," consisting of officials who are advising the President in their own right, and not simply as the heads of their respective departments. And he expects the Council members (quoting his words) to "seek, with their background and experience, the most statesmanlike answer to the problems of national security, rather than to attempt solutions which represent a mere compromise of agency positions."

I will give you a statistic: - not as a criterion of value, of course, but as a useful quantitative measure. The Council has now been in operation eight and one quarter years (99 months). Considerably less than half of its meetings were held and actions taken in the final 64 months of the Truman Administration; while a good deal more than half of them occurred in the 35 months to date of the Eisenhower Administration. This statistic evidences the swelling volume of the Council's work under Eisenhower's use of this new mechanism. It also illustrates graphically the flexibility of the National Security Act. Under the Act's broad provisions, each President is free to use the Council vehicle as he finds most suitable to his needs at a given time.

In considering what persons should take part in Council deliberations, we face at the outset a Constitutional question.

The National Security Act of 1947 defines not only the purpose and functions of the Council, but also designates certain persons who will be members of the Council:-- the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization. There is serious doubt in some minds, - and most certainly in mine (once a lawyer, you know, always a lawyer), - whether the Congress has the Constitutional power to direct or require the Chief Executive to counsel with particular advisers in resolving his will on particular subjects. But this Constitutional question has never been pressed. Both Presidents to whom the Council vehicle has been available have found it useful and convenient. Although Mr. Truman and General Eisenhower availed themselves of its manifest convenience in very different ways, each found in the statutory core of its membership

the very persons whom - had there been no statute at all - he himself would have included in a body to advise him upon national security policy.

In addition to these five statutory members, who else should participate at the Council Table, - and participate through their representatives in all the lower echelons of the Council mechanism through which pass, in an acid bath of long and painstaking scrutiny and review, the proposed policy recommendations that ultimately reach the President?

First, let us look at current procedure as to Council attendance under General Eisenhower.

The President, in recognition of the essential part which a strong U.S. economy plays in the survival of our free world, has added to the five statutory members, as regular Council attendants: the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Budget. Also, there come to all Council Meetings, in an advisory capacity, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of Central Intelligence. There are also normally present three Special Assistants (for Disarmament, for Foreign Economic Policy, for National Security Affairs); the Director of the U.S. Information Agency as an observer; and the Council's Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary. In addition to the fifteen persons whom I have enumerated, there are invited to the Council table, whenever one or more has valuable knowledge or experience to offer in respect to a particular Agenda item, the head or heads of other Departments and Agencies. Thus, most frequent additional ad hoc participants in Council deliberations are Admiral Strauss with respect to atomic energy, the Attorney General on matters of internal security, the Federal Civil Defense Administrator, the Secretaries and Chiefs of Staff of the Military Services, the Ambassador to the United Nations, and the Secretary of Commerce on matters involving foreign trade.

The mere recapitulation of these numbers illustrates what was perhaps my most difficult and constant problem while in Washington. There is a universal desire to attend Council Meetings. I do not ever recall an invitation being refused. To the contrary, there are many who strongly feel a need, if not a right, to attend.

But there is a nice balance to be preserved. That is the balance between an attendance which will permit intimate, frank, fruitful discussion and an attendance which turns the group into a "town meeting." You remember Queen Victoria's objection to Mr. Gladstone: "he speaks to me as if he were addressing a 'town meeting.'"

President Eisenhower is insistent that Council Meetings shall be, in fact, a forum for vigorous, searching discussion as precursor to clear, incisive policy recommendations to him. Professor Edward Warren of the Harvard Law School used to teach us students that the "pow-wow element" of a meeting was invaluable. That element disappears when over a certain number of persons sit about the Council Table. Once this invisible line is passed, people do not discuss and debate; they remain silent or talk for the record. A restriction in the numbers who attend is less for reasons of security than to make the Council into the valuable device which President Eisenhower intends that it shall be.

Should there, then, be more than 15 to 20 persons participating at the Council Table?

A recommendation has frequently been advanced that the Council would be strengthened by adding to its membership some qualified civilians, who would be free of departmental responsibilities.

(Let me pause here to explain that when I use the term "civilians," I do not do so in contrast to military personnel. I use the term as a short-cut expression for "persons not holding Federal governmental office" - too mouthfilling a phrase often to repeat. I make no apology for the term "civilian" - it needs none, for it is a proud term. I am a civilian, - at least I still was when I began speaking to you tonight.)

Now the argument in favor of "civilian" Council members runs as follows. A few wise men, of broad gauge, divorced from the enormous burdens carried by Cabinet ministers, would have time to think and to contribute a quality of guidance now believed by some to be lacking at the Council Table.

This recommendation has been pressed by far wiser men than I, and it certainly merits - and has received - very serious consideration.

Now I have consistently opposed the concept that the Council would be benefited by including in its regular membership a small number of highly qualified civilians who are divorced from the responsibility of operating a department or agency. My opposition runs deeper than the increased number of persons at the Council Table. By hypothesis, these men would be elder statesmen; they would be "Nestors." I am fearful that the views of these "Nestors" would tend to be theoretical. Why? Because their views would not be tested by the responsible daily contact which a Department Head has with the marching events of our tense world and with the practicability of actions to cope with such events. Furthermore, such views, because of the intellectual brilliance and "free time to think" of their sponsors, might tend to dominate the Council discussions.

Think of a Compton, a Killian, a Robert Wilson, a James B. Conant (please let me get in one plug for Harvard), sitting every week at the Council Table, with nothing to do but to think and to expound. This concept is truly in the megaton range.

Let me pinpoint for you what I think to be the essential virtue of the Security Council. It is this: the Council procedure brings to the President the views of the very officials upon whom he will later rely to carry out his national security policy decisions. And it brings these principal and responsible ministers together, in a give-and-take argument, stating their views before each other and before the President, upon whom rests the burden of decision; questioning and being questioned; each having his free, full opportunity to speak before the die is cast. This kind of thing seems to me the quintessence of democracy in action, admirably suited to the genius of our free institutions.

I conceive that a democracy draws greatest strength from the participation in the making of policies by those who will be charged with responsibility for executing the policies to be made. Therefore, I believe it to be fundamentally sound that the responsible Departments and Agencies of the Executive Branch should be the ones to carry the burden of preparing policy recommendations. Those who are indoctrinated by the hard realities of actual daily operations can make - or so I think - the soundest contribution to policy formulation.

While I reject the idea of non-governmental members of the Council in regular weekly attendance, I have always favored seeking "outside" advice and counsel through the appointment of civilians, on an ad hoc Consultant basis, as advisors to the Council. While I was Special Assistant, we used such Consultants on a good number of occasions, either with reference to basic policy or with reference to some special policy issue.

These men were in no sense representing special interests. They were carefully selected because of broad diverse backgrounds of experience and as representative of segments of our country, both in terms of geographic location and individual occupations.

Included in these Consultant groups were at least two members of your Technology Faculty. Max Millikan, Director of Technology's Center for International Studies, headed a group that turned in a reasoned, deeply penetrating study, the concepts of which much influenced the shaping of our basic policy. Later, President Killian chaired a task force of brilliant scientists that put in months of hard thinking in sensitive areas of the greatest consequence to the survival of our American homeland. Never will your President's tact and perseverance shine to a finer advantage than they did in putting together this task force's report. To the President of the United States, as I do here to you tonight, I have paid tribute to Professor Millikan and President Killian for their wise advice in highly troubled times.

Not everything civilian Consultants recommend is promptly adopted or acted upon by the Executive Branch. The mills of the Federal Government grind mighty slow. But the civilian Consultant may well recall the ancient story of the Princess who could not sleep because someone had put a small pea under the mattresses. A great service may be rendered to the United States by providing in the oyster shell the irritation which later comes to build the pearl.

There are, as you will certainly realize, considerations to be carefully weighed in deciding whether or not to use civilian Consultants to the Council at a given moment and on a given subject.

1st. consideration. Is the time which will be consumed in educating the civilian Consultants for their task and in obtaining for them the necessary top security clearances, worth what may be the product of their labors? 2nd. consideration. The briefing and backgrounding of such topflight people - who are to advise the President and Council - cannot be left to underlings. The cramped time - schedule of the Top Brass itself must be invaded for their education. How much damage to morale results from the employment, at the apex level, of expert "outsiders" who look over the shoulders and breathe down the necks of able, extremely busy officials charged with direct responsibility to the President for performance? 3rd. consideration. Will the views of a person, not informed by operating, departmental responsibilities, be sufficiently realistic to carry weight?

It is my opinion, on balance, that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages, where the Consultant's task is either a specific matter as to which he is particularly qualified or a general subject as to which his civilian knowledge, his geographic location, and his occupational experience may well enable a useful contribution. This result may flow either from Consultants acting as a group or committee or acting in certain cases as individuals.

Perhaps it might be wise for each Administration to develop a panel of civilian Consultants. Under such a procedure, all members of the panel could be simultaneously cleared for security; and thereafter all would be available, as needed, for ad hoc limited service. Because service limited in time would be called for, persons holding responsible civilian positions would feel able to serve on the panel. It should be possible to keep such a panel reasonably up-to-date on the secret and sensitive information and intelligence which is necessary for the effective performance of service when called to duty. But an obvious disadvantage to such a procedure is the difficulty of selecting members for such a panel, capable of handling the special and wholly unpredictable problems that may arise in future time.

Now, a few words in conclusion.

It is well that we have in our America today this useful mechanism, the National Security Council, to help the Chief Executive in coming to the decisions which he, alone, can make. The nation will always owe to James Forrestal, who in 1946 and 1947 foresaw the need for integrating national security policy, true thanks

for so early understanding the shape of things to come.

When you and I are occupied with our daily work, business or industrial or professional, we have neither the time nor the capability to grasp the terrible nature of the problems that lie ahead of America. It is when we plunge into the vast, shifting sea of sensitive intelligence that comes flooding in upon Washington that we acutely realize how great is the need of affording to the Chief Executive a mechanism to provide rounded, representative, and painstakingly-wrought advice. It is difficult today to conceive how our Government could effectively carry on without some device for integrating security policy recommendations to the President.

Forgive my enthusiasm for these procedures which have been so much a part of me for so long a time. I know that tragedians who have stepped off the boards recall only their finest Hamlets. But I do not wish to leave with you an impression that the National Security Council mechanism cannot be further strengthened and fortified. Indeed, to the contrary.

I march under the banner of Heraclitus. Nothing is permanent except change. The Council operation which I have described will no doubt change: it can and will be improved. We have discussed here tonight some possible changes.

But it is axiomatic that only the President can decide what change will best suit his requirements. Let neither customary use nor the Congress freeze a President's choices into a bed of Procrustes.

Abraham Lincoln called America "the last best hope of earth." I should like to conclude onthat great phrase.

The last best hope to keep our world at peace, free from the engulfment and the obliteration of a thermonuclear conflict, lies in the calm balance, the rock-bottom common sense, and the inner resources of Dwight David Eisenhower, advised and counselled, as best may be, by his responsible Ministers.

Almighty Providence, strengthen this man in the times of his decisions in order best to accomplish Thy great purposes for all the peoples on the Earth.