

Intelligence as Foundation for Policy

The role intelligence actually plays in the Executive Branch's forging of national security policy is described and appraised by an indubitable authority.

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An integral and in fact basic element in the formation of national security policy is the latest and best intelligence bearing on the substance of the policy to be determined. That statement is not a theoretical truism, but a description of what has by and large actually been practiced in the Executive Branch under the administration of President Eisenhower. It is based on first-hand observation: for periods totaling almost four years I was in continuous touch with the procedures for formulating, adopting, and coordinating the execution of national security policies within the Executive Branch. I assisted the President at 179 meetings of the National Security Council - almost half of all the meetings it held in the first dozen years of its existence. I presided at 504 meetings of the Council's Planning Board (earlier called its Senior Staff). I was a member and for a while Vice Chairman of its Operations Coordinating Board; I participated in meetings of the Council on Foreign Economic Policy; I represented the President on a small group which considered special operations. It is from this experience that the conclusions of this article are drawn.¹

NSC Operating Procedures

The function of the National Security Council, as defined by National Security Act, is "to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security, so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of Government to cooperate more effectively in matters affecting the national security." The Act also gives to the Council the duty of "assessing and appraising the objectives, commitments, and

risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power." The Council advises the President both on policy and on plans for its execution, but its primary statutory function thus lies in the *formation* of policy. The role of the Council as a planning body is subordinate to its policy function.

The Council and its subsidiary Planning Board² and Operations Coordinating Board³ constitute an apparatus available to the President to help him reach policy decisions on national security. The National Security Act is sufficiently flexible to allow each President to use this personal aid as best suits his convenience. One President may use the Council mechanism in one way, another in another. The best use is made of it when a President uses it in a way that satisfies his personal requirements. It has never been felt necessary to test whether the Congress can constitutionally require by statute that a President consult with specified persons or follow specified procedures in coming to a policy decision in this field.

Under President Eisenhower, the normal procedure for operating the policy-making aspects of the NSC mechanism has involved three main steps. First, the NSC Planning Board formulates recommendations as to national security policy and circulates them to Council members and advisers well in advance of the Council meeting at which they are scheduled to be considered. Then the Council considers and approves or modifies or rejects these recommendations, and submits to the President such as it approves or modifies. Finally, the President approves, modifies, or rejects the Council's recommendations, transmits those policies which he approves to the departments and agencies responsible for planning their execution, and - as a rule where international affairs are concerned - requests the NSC Operations Coordinating Board to assist these departments and agencies in coordinating their respective planning for action under the approved policies.

Thus a policy is first determined by the President, and then the departments and agencies plan how to carry out their responsibilities to the President under it, being assisted in the coordination of this planning by the OCB. It is, of course, fundamental that the planning to execute policy responsibilities be carried out by the respective departments and agencies which are directly charged by the President with such responsibilities. No person or body should intervene, at a lower level, between the President and the department head directly

responsible to him.

During the period 1953-1958, with which I am familiar, the great bulk of national security policy determinations were made by the President through the operations of the NSC mechanism just described. Because this method of policy formulation was the usual one, such policies were commonly but erroneously referred to as "NSC policies." Since it is the function of the President to determine policy in all areas under his executive control and responsibility, and national security policy may be formed in any way which he finds convenient and appropriate, the policies so formed, whatever body or individual may submit the recommendations therefor, are the *President's* policies.

There were occasions during this period when national security policy was determined by the President as a result of Cabinet deliberations (though this was a rare occurrence) or by his executive decision based on conferences with one or more of his principal department or agency heads, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, or others within whose special competence some particular subject would naturally fall. There should always be complete flexibility for every President to determine however he elects the matters of high policy which it is his responsibility to decide. Because of the utility and convenience of the NSC mechanism, however, and because the present Chief Executive values the advantages of integrated recommendations and joint deliberations based on them, it has been the more or less standard operating procedure during his tenure to seek to form national security policies through the procedures outlined above.

Factual Intelligence and Estimates

In this article the term "intelligence" is used to embrace both factual intelligence and estimates based thereon. In forming national security policy both are of prime importance.

The gathering of intelligence facts is today a matter of enormous scope and hardly conceivable complexity, bearing no resemblance to the simple if hazardous personal mission of a Mata Hari. There are, indeed, many individuals working in the field of intelligence, in and out of formal government service, who must exhibit personal bravery and rare

ingenuity, taking risks beyond the ordinary call of duty. Because all is grist that comes to the intelligence mill, one need not seek to measure the results of these individual efforts against the results of the world-wide scientific and technological operations employed in modern intelligence gathering.

In our continuing confrontation by a power openly dedicated to swallowing all mankind in the maw of Communism, the rapid gathering of germane intelligence on the activities of other nations in every field of endeavor has put the United States into an electronic business that is world-wide, highly scientific, incredibly complicated, and extremely expensive. It is staggering to realize the limitless ramifications of current technological procedures, the almost overwhelming amount of raw material that comes flooding in every hour of the day and night to be sifted, analyzed, codified, and-most urgent of all-communicated clearly to the decision-makers. For in the last analysis the valid use of intelligence is to build intellectual platforms upon which decisions can be made. It is not gathered to be stored away like a harvest. It must be delivered, succinct and unequivocal, within the shortest time feasible to focal points for use.

This prompt delivery is essential both to those who conduct our foreign affairs or direct our defensive military mechanisms and to those who frame our decisions of high policy. The sound concept that the national intelligence effort should be centralized is not inconsistent with a demonstrable need that each of the several departments have its own intelligence arm. The man who may have to dispatch a SAC bomber, an ICBM, a Polaris submarine, or a Pentomic task force has a dual function with regard to intelligence: he has a part in acquiring the latest intelligence for use at central headquarters, all the way up to the President; he also must himself have and use the latest intelligence in carrying out his crucial responsibilities.

It is for these reasons that the National Security Act in 1947 created a Central Intelligence Agency and a Director of Central Intelligence, who at one and the same time is chief officer of the Central Intelligence Agency, Chairman of the United States Intelligence Board, and Foreign Intelligence Adviser to the President and National Security Council. Through the series of NSC Intelligence Directives the President has sought to make the gathering and dissemination of intelligence more rapid and efficient. These Directives put emphasis on the centralization of authority and responsibility in the intelligence field, on making the

separate intelligence organizations of the armed services and other departments and agencies contributory to, and not independent of, such central authority, while still allowing them to meet their specialized needs.

The President has shown a constant awareness of the urgency of perfecting the national intelligence effort. He gave close attention to the reports on this effort made by the committee under General James A. Doolittle (October 1954) and by the Hoover Commission's Task Force on Intelligence Activities under General Mark Clark (May 1955). In February 1956 he formally established a President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities, first chaired by Dr. James R. Killian and now by General John E. Hull. He gave this Board the continuing mission of reviewing the conduct of our foreign intelligence activities and reporting thereon periodically to the Chief Executive.

The operation of the many intelligence arms in the critical field of intelligence gathering and dissemination at all levels involves a truly vast annual expenditure. But in terms of national survival, the prompt delivery of correct intelligence to the President, the ultimate decision-maker, is an undebatable necessity.

Beyond this requirement for current factual intelligence there is an additional requirement for intelligence estimates. These estimates may be addressed to a particular country, area, situation, armament, or function and set forth both the pertinent facts and the likely future actions predicable thereon, or they may seek to arrange logically and with precision the broadest spectrum of intelligence materials into a considered appraisal of what over-all developments may be in future time.

Both types of intelligence estimates can be of the greatest possible help to policy-makers and planners. Their preparation requires expert competence and their coordination calls for objective thinking by those who have the authority to agree or differ on behalf of their organizations. Because of the prophetic nature of any estimate, it is of great consequence that the final text should seek not compromise but clarity. Many of the coordinated national intelligence estimates with which I worked during these four years clearly and fully set forth dissenting views held by competent members of the U.S. Intelligence Board.

Intelligence Orientation for the Makers of High Policy

The prompt circulation of daily bulletins and special and national estimates as basic orientation for those who make the recommendations and decisions on high policy is an obvious necessity. The Planning Board, responsible for doing the spade-work in forming policy, needs to review the special and national estimates in detail, dissecting them and arguing over them until they become familiar material. And Security Council members need to get them in time to study and weigh them before the subjects to which they relate are taken up at the Council level. Both Planning Board and Council members should be *inseminated* with their contents, as I once told one of the chiefs of British Intelligence. In the Planning Board this insemination has been a feature of its standard operating procedure since 1953, as I will illustrate in a moment. At the Council level the education of the members is carried on in several ways.

In the NSC. The Council members receive daily, weekly, special, and general intelligence publications, and their function requires that they be familiar with this material. In 1953, moreover, in order to insure that Council members are kept fully acquainted with current intelligence, an innovation was introduced at their meetings. Until then, the oral briefing on current intelligence was given each day in the President's office to him alone. Now it became a part of the Council's established procedure to make the first agenda item at each meeting a briefing by the Director of Central Intelligence.

This oral briefing, assisted by the visual presentation of maps and charts on easels behind the Director's seat, reviews the latest important intelligence throughout the world but focuses on the areas which are to be taken up later in the meeting. It normally consumes from fifteen to twenty-five per cent of the meeting time, being frequently interrupted by specific questions from the President and other Council members. These questions often give rise to colloquies and extemporaneous expressions of views which are of consequence to the policy recommendations that are to be discussed. I have always believed this direct confrontation of the Council each week with current and special intelligence to be an important aid to policy consideration and formulation. Yet the British Cabinet and the War Cabinet under Sir Winston Churchill, to the best of my knowledge, carried on their policy

deliberations without the benefit of this stimulating and thought-focusing device.

There are other ways in which the Council, as the supervisory body to which the Director of Central Intelligence reports, is kept informed about intelligence problems. The Director submits annually to the Council a summation of the problems that have faced the intelligence community in the preceding period and the measures and means adopted for dealing with them. The President and Council must also from time to time review and revise the National Security Council Intelligence Directives, which constitute the charter for the operations of the intelligence community.

The revision of one of these detailed and often complicated NSCID's, especially in relation to the functional gathering and rapid dissemination of intelligence, may require months of prior study by a panel of specialists—perhaps scientists, technologists, or communications experts, persons of the highest intellectual and scientific standing—brought together to advise on methods and procedures. Many of the panel studies necessary for the purposes of the experts involve most carefully guarded secrets. Yet it is important that the Council understand, in general terms, how the vast intelligence community of modern days is organized, administered, and operated. The principles which emerge from the findings and recommendations of these highly classified studies are matters for action by the Council, and especially by the President.

In times of particular crisis the function of intelligence is conspicuous in its importance. In such historical crises as Indo-China in 1954, the Chinese off-shore islands in 1954 - 1955, and Lebanon in 1958 - to cite a few at random - the intelligence appraisal of the Director of Central Intelligence, the foreign policy appraisal by the Secretary of State, and the military appraisal by the Joint Chiefs of Staff were indispensable ingredients in the deliberations held before the die was cast and the policy set by the President.

In the Planning Board. The Planning Board necessarily probes deeply into the latest intelligence on each subject that comes before it. A CIA Deputy Director is in regular attendance at the Board table, bringing to its deliberations an informed knowledge of the contents of special and general intelligence estimates. He participates from his point of view in the debate on current matters, and it would be as unthinkable to

overlook his views as to overlook those of the representative of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, who is seated at the table as adviser on military issues.

The CIA Deputy Director and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs seek to coordinate the preparation of intelligence estimates with the forward agenda of the Planning Board. To that end the agenda is tentatively scheduled for a period of two months or more ahead so that the flow of intelligence materials can be arranged to meet the policy-makers' demands. Of course, history sometimes takes a hand, and the scheduled forward agenda has to be suspended for the immediate consideration of a special estimate that has been urgently called for. There can be nothing static or cut-and-dried in scheduling ahead the Planning Board's work-load (and consequently the Council's forward agenda) ; it is entirely unpredictable how long a time may be consumed in the preparation of particular policy recommendations or what interruptions may be forced by extrinsic happenings. Whatever the order of business, however, one factor is essential: a foundation of the latest and best intelligence to build upon and a constant rechecking of intelligence material as time marches on to the Council deliberation and the Presidential decision.

In the OCB. Turning for a moment from policy formulation to the coordination of plans for carrying out approved policy, we find that in this work of the Operations Coordinating Board current intelligence is again a necessary ingredient. At the weekly meetings of the OCB over which the Under Secretary of State presides, there are in regular attendance senior representatives of Defense, Treasury, Budget, USIA, AEC, and ICA, and the two cognizant Special Assistants to the President. At the informal Wednesday luncheon which always precedes the OCB meeting the Director of Central Intelligence has an opportunity to thrash out problems of a sensitive nature. At the more formal Board meetings which follow he is a full participant. The coordination of planning in the responsible departments and agencies for the execution of a policy which the President has approved requires the same up-to-the-minute intelligence that the making of the policy did.

The Annual Policy Review. The annual Estimate of the World Situation produced by USIB member agencies is awaited each year with the greatest interest--and anxiety--by those in the policy-making apparatus. It is an invaluable production, presenting as it does a distillation of the painstaking efforts of the entire intelligence community to state as of the year-end the dimensions of the foreign threat to our national

security. It is written with scrupulous care, it is well documented, and it sets forth with clear distinction, where differences of opinion occur, the opposing views of the experts who cannot agree with the majority estimate. I conceive this annual basic estimate to be of great consequence—as a stimulant, as a guide, as a frank expression of differing views on matters which may be of highest significance. It is this estimate which constitutes each spring the point of departure for the recurring review of our basic national security policy.

The first step in this review is to schedule the Estimate of the World Situation for discussion at two or three meetings of the NSC Planning Board. At these meetings it is subjected to 7 to 10 hours of controversial discussion in a search for better understanding. Its contents are analyzed and dissected so that attention can be focussed upon its most important conclusions. In some years distinguished consultants from "outside of government," such men as General Gruenther, John J. McCloy, Arthur W. Burns, Karl R. Bendetsen, and Robert R. Bowie, have been invited to these Planning Board meetings. They have been asked, after study and review of the high points in the Estimate, to discuss them with the Planning Board at a meeting of several hours' duration. Then these points, together with the consultants' and the Planning Board's reaction to them, have been brought before the National Security Council at several meetings wholly devoted to their consideration. Short papers presenting the policy issues and their implications are prepared by the Planning Board as a basis for Council discussion at these meetings.

The purpose of the procedure just described is not, of course, to try at the Planning Board or Council level to change or modify any part of the annual Estimate. The purpose is to sharpen understanding of the important aspects of the Estimate and to study and discuss in open meeting the policy implications thereof. Through this procedure the Council members become sharply aware of the high points in the Estimate and the differences in view regarding them, and can join in a give-and-take discussion without feeling bound by the more formal presentation of carefully prepared policy recommendations. Almost as important as the ultimate policy decision itself is the intellectual controversy which precedes it, the educative and consolidating effect of full and frank discussion, the exposure of views which have not become fully formed in departmental exercise, the emergence of novel and interesting ideas at the highest level.

The way in which this product of the intelligence community serves as a regular precursor to the Planning Board's annual review of basic policy is a cogent illustration of the community's essential role in the shaping of national security decisions.

A Model Case

It may be appropriate, at the close, to describe what in my view is the ideal procedure for formulating a national security policy. Let us take as an example not the annual broad policy review which may consume several months, but a national policy on the State of Ruritania.

First, the Ruritania item is scheduled far ahead on the Planning Board agenda, with three to five or more sessions devoted to it. At the first of these sessions the Board will have before it a national intelligence estimate on Ruritania. It will also have before it a factual and analytical statement, prepared by the responsible department or departments or by an interdepartmental committee, on the military, economic, political, and other germane aspects of the Ruritania policy problem. To this compilation of factual data and analysis, whether supplied in separate memoranda or as a staff study, have contributed the vast resources of the informed departments and agencies of government, the brains and experience of the operating personnel who work day after day in the particular area of Ruritania and have learned at first hand the strengths and limitations involved, the very persons who staff the departments and agencies that will be called upon to implement this policy they are working on when and if it receives Presidential approval.

The intelligence estimate and the departmental material are explained, discussed, and chewed over in one or more meetings of the Planning Board. A senior representative of a responsible department is likely asked to attend at the Board table and be questioned and cross-questioned about the factual information and tentative policy recommendations submitted by his department. The Board seeks to squeeze out of the material all the juice that it contains.

After these proceedings, a draft policy statement is prepared by the responsible department or by an interdepartmental or special committee. This draft will consist of a set of "general considerations"

(drawn from the intelligence estimate and the factual and analytical material as a basis for policy recommendations), a statement of the "general objectives" of the proposed U.S. policy toward Ruritania, a more detailed proposal for "policy guidance" in the several areas of U.S. - Ruritania relations, and appendices covering anticipated financial costs of the proposed policy and comparison of military and economic expenditures and other data for past and future years.

At as many Planning Board meetings as required this draft statement is discussed, torn apart, revised. In the intervals between the meetings revised texts are drafted by the Planning Board assistants for consideration at the next meeting. Finally, from this arduous intellectual process emerges either full agreement on the correctness of the facts, the validity of the recommendations, and the clarity and accuracy of the text, or-as is often the case-sharp differences of opinion on certain major statements or recommendations. In the latter case, the draft policy statement will clearly and succinctly set forth, perhaps in parallel columns, these opposing views.

When the draft policy has been thus shaped, reshaped, corrected, revised, and finally stated, it is circulated to the Council at least ten days before the meeting which is to take up policy on Ruritania. Council members will thus have sufficient time to be briefed on the subject and familiarize themselves with the contents of the draft, and the Joint Chiefs of Staff will have time to express in writing and circulate to Council members their formal military views on the exact text which the Council is to consider.

That is my concept of how the integrating procedure of the NSC mechanism should work when it is working at its best. Some such procedure is the desired goal, a goal often approximated in actual performance. The views of all who have a legitimate interest in the subject are heard, digested, and combined, or in the case of disagreement stated separately.

In a good many instances the views of experts or knowledgeable people from "outside of government" are sought and worked into the fabric at the Planning Board level. The intelligence estimates, the military views, the political views, the economic views, the fiscal views, views on the psychological impact - all are canvassed and integrated before the President is asked to hear the case argued and comes to his decision.<

It is certainly true that human beings are fallible and that the instruments which they create are always susceptible of improvement. The mechanism which I have described, and its operation, can and will be improved as time goes on. But the main course of this integrative process seems to me mechanically and operatively sound. And it must be grounded on the firm base of the best and latest intelligence.

1 In 1951, in the early organizational stages of the Psychological Strategy Board, the author served as its Deputy Director and representative at meetings of the NBC Senior Staff, later to become the Planning Board. In early 1953 President Eisenhower asked him to study the organization and functioning of the NBC mechanism and make recommendations to strengthen and vitalize its structure and operating procedures. He then became the President's principal assistant with reference to the operations of the Council. He was moved from the position of Administrative Assistant (January-March 1953) to that of Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, where he served from March 1953 to April 1955 and from January 1957 to July 1958.

2 The NSC Planning Board, chaired by the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, is composed of officials of the departments and agencies which are represented at the Council table with reference to a policy matter there under consideration. These officials have a rank equivalent to Assistant Secretary or higher. Each is supported by a departmental or agency staff. Each has direct access to his department or agency chief and commands all the resources of his department or agency for the performance of his duties.

3 The NSC Operations Coordinating Board, of which the President's Special Assistant for Security Operations Coordination is Vice Chairman, is composed of officials of the departments and agencies concerned with the policies referred to the Board by the President for assistance in the coordination of planning. These officials have a rank equivalent to Under Secretary or higher. Each is supported by a small departmental or agency staff. Each has direct access to his department or agency chief and commands all the resources of his department or agency for the performance of his duties.

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