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THE USE OF AD HOC GROUPS IN DOD

Formal ad hoc groups ~~separately~~ organized to deal with a specific issue have been used fairly extensively in DOD, and particularly in ISA. They are a valuable management tool, but their effectiveness heavily depends on the character of the problem involved, how they are organized, and the responsibilities assigned to them.

Purposes

Special issues and problems at times arise that cannot be most efficiently managed within the existing organizational framework because they:

- Are urgent matters which deserve and will receive much attention by the Secretary.
- Heavily involve the major responsibilities and expertise of several DOD offices.
- Are particularly complex, fast-moving, and time-consuming.
- Involve more than one DOD office in constant interaction with several extra DOD agencies.

Certain
In ~~these~~ cases (MBFR, Vietnam, and the Foster Panel are examples discussed below), the existing bureaucratic structure does not provide for adequate concentration of resources, speed, and central direction.

Ad hoc groups typically are designed to improve performance in such situations by:

- Devoting specialist personnel to a single issue, relieving them of other responsibilities.
- Reducing the time and resources required for coordination under existing bureaucratic procedures.
- Eliminating duplication and fragmentation of effort among the DOD offices concerned with the problem.
- Insuring the development of coherent and unified DOD initiative and positions.
- Insuring a coordinated and influential DOD role in interagency deliberations.

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An immediate caveat is in order: ad hoc groups can be worse than useless -- they can diminish rather than enhance DOD performance -- if they are used excessively. At best they can add another unit that serves little purpose other than as another point of coordination. At worst they can sap the effectiveness and morale of the bureaucracy and waste the Secretary's time.

Organization

Ad hoc groups may be organized in different ways, but they are ~~at their~~ most effective when their organization follows a few basic rules that experience has shown to be particularly important.

1. Although the issue involved typically will bear on the major responsibilities of different DOD offices, one of them (e.g., a specific Assistant Secretary) must be directly assigned primary responsibility within DOD on the issue; the ad hoc group should be organized under that office's aegis. Unless one office is clearly in charge, the centralizing function of the group cannot be performed, and it can lead to a further dispersion of effort. The group is most effective when it is supporting an individual in whose judgment on the issue the Secretary has confidence and whom he authorizes to speak and act for him within DOD and within the bureaucracy. At the same time, the responsible individual must not only insure participation of other DOD offices through the ad hoc group mechanism; he must also maintain a direct dialogue with the other interested principal advisors to the Secretary, and with the Secretary himself.

2. It is essential that the ad hoc group be clearly tasked with the central role and responsibility for developing and coordinating DOD plans, analyses, and positions on the assigned issue. At the same time, the ad hoc group cannot supplant the responsibilities and work of other interested DOD offices, and its effectiveness will depend in part on their contributions and challenges from their specialized points of view. The ad hoc group's role can be facilitated if interested DOD offices establish special elements within their own organizations to insure timely, responsible, and productive participation in the ad hoc group and its work.

The basic problem is, of course, the familiar one of squaring direction with diversity. Too much of the one diminishes the contribution of other DOD elements, and spurs them to see the ad hoc group as an unnecessary trespasser on their terrain. Too much of the other simply fragments the DOD effort and does not permit the ad hoc group to meet its purpose.

3. The ad hoc group must be given the authority to act as the central point of contact and coordinator for exchanges between DOD and other

agencies. Its ability to manage DOD internally will depend in part on this. And it cannot help develop and advance coherent and influential DOD positions in the Washington community without this authority.

4. The ad hoc group is typically composed of specialist personnel who have either been seconded to it from concerned DOD offices, or separately hired for the group. Seconded personnel should maintain contact with their offices and colleagues to insure communication and support between them and the ad hoc group. But they should be primarily responsible to the ad hoc group, and their role in other offices clearly subordinated to this.

5. Apart from these institutional factors, the group's performance will, of course, depend on the ability and energy of the DOD office that leads it and the personnel that make it up.

6. Finally, the duration of the ad hoc group should be specifically tied to the task assigned to it. It should be terminated and the work absorbed into the existing structure as soon as that task no longer requires special treatment.

Communication

While ad hoc groups can provide a number of major advantages, it is essential that they not be permitted to denigrate from the Secretary's control over communications with other agencies. Policy documents -- whether outgoing from DOD or incoming from other agencies (including NSSM requests) -- must be channeled through the Secretary's office. On the other hand, ad hoc groups can perform a useful function as the inter-agency point of contact and communication at less than the policy level. Properly managed, they can facilitate the process of educating other agencies to DOD concerns, and focus requests for DOD inputs to inter-agency studies (e.g., MBFR) so as to avoid unnecessary or redundant work.

The SALT Experience

While DOD organization to cope with SALT went through an ad hoc group phase, the long-term character of the issue has led the Department, over time, to develop an institutional framework of a more permanent nature. Should MBFR develop along the same lines, it may be necessary to take similar steps with the MBFR Task Force.

A description of the MBFR, Vietnam and Foster Panel organizations is at Tab A. A brief history of the SALT organization is at Tab B.

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Foster Panel

On 19 January 1972 the Secretary of Defense appointed a panel to initiate a review of the policy pertaining to employment of strategic nuclear weapons, to identify and illuminate national policy or other issues requiring resolution, and to prepare for his consideration proposed Guidance for the Employment of Nuclear Weapons. The Director, DDR&E was appointed panel chairman with the ASD(ISA), ASD(SA), ASD(I) and the Chairman JCS appointed panel members. The Chairman and each panel member drew upon their staffs for support in the conduct of panel affairs.

The panel charter was carefully set forth in the SecDef memorandum appointing the panel:

"What national policy issues should be considered in planning for the employment of nuclear weapons? What is current national policy on these issues? Do these policies provide sufficient guidance for planning nuclear weapons employment and do they adequately define the ways in which nuclear weapons employment plans should support overall U.S. objectives? What policies are implicit in the current NSTAP, Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP), and other nuclear weapons employment plans? What national policies affecting nuclear weapons employment are not reflected? Are the implied policies consistent with other national policies? For example, to what extent do existing nuclear weapons employment plans and the organization and procedures for planning nuclear strikes provide the flexibility to adapt to crisis situations called for in the Defense Policy and Planning Guidance? What, if any, new policies or revisions to existing policies are needed?"

To carry out its task the panel was to have access to whatever information it deemed pertinent to its task. The date for task completion of the first phase was established as 1 May 1972.

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2

As can be seen from the above, the Foster Panel, also referred to as the NNTAP Panel, was clearly an ad hoc group with a specified limited charter and a well defined suspense date for task accomplishment. All personnel involved were on loan from their permanent organizations and continued to carry out their responsibilities in those organizations. Through this administrative device the SecDef was permitted to bring together a very senior group of advisors to concentrate on a very narrow, very sensitive security problem. The result was a unique capability to focus directly on the problem at hand, obtain very sensitive data, investigate and evaluate highly classified war planning instruments and arrangements and enter into discussion with very senior military and civilian authorities responsible for these matters.

Subsequent to submission of the panel report in May the SecDef requested certain follow-on efforts which extend the life of the panel into early 1973. However, as a practical matter it appears that the Foster Panel has met its objectives and will be permitted to disband.

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