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January 9, 1969

MEMORANDUM

TO: HENRY A. KISSINGER
ASSISTANT TO THE PRESIDENT-ELECT FOR
NATIONAL SECURITY AFFAIRS

FROM: MELVIN R. LAIRD

SUBJECT: Your Memorandum dated January 3, 1969 concerning
a New NSC System.

I have read and re-read your proposal many times and have tried to relate it to the discussions we had in Key Biscayne on proposed changes in the National Security Council System. After much study and considerable reflection on the draft proposal, I am forced reluctantly to conclude that as Secretary of Defense-designate, I cannot fully approve the proposal in its present form.

This decision was reached for several major reasons, among which I would list the following:

First, it would institute as presently drafted, a "closed loop" in which all intelligence inputs would be channeled through a single source, the Assistant and his NSC staff. Such an arrangement in effect would or could isolate not only the President from direct access to intelligence community outputs but also the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, and other top-level members of the President's team.

I have found in my past dealings with the intelligence community and DOD officials, for example, that it is not a good practice to interpose a third party, no matter how capable and objective, between the man responsible for intelligence information and those who must take responsibility for acting upon it. A method must be provided to correct this deficiency.

Second, it would place in the hands of the Assistant and his NSC staff the primary right of initiating studies and directing where they will be performed as well as determining which policy issues should be placed on the agenda for NSC meetings. There should be some consultation provided for with the principals in establishing the priorities of these studies. It would also give the Assistant both

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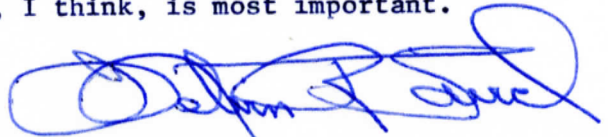
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the power and the responsibility for implementing NSC policy as well as the right of determination of issues arising from the implementation of those policies without requiring consultation or even notification of NSC principals. This could very well result in principals going around the NSC and directly to the President as a regular practice. This would negate what I believe the President-elect is trying to accomplish. The principals who make up the National Security Council, including the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, should be able to place policy issues on the agenda subject only to the veto of the President.

Third, it is my desire, as I know it is yours, to strengthen and revitalize the National Security Council as a major Presidential tool in determining National Security policy. But in my view, this cannot be accomplished by aggregating to the NSC and through it to the Assistant to the President the major tools that have always been intended to be utilized equally by all of the President's top-level board of advisers in the National Security field.

These three points constitute several of the major reasons why I find it necessary to raise these serious questions about the proposed New NSC System, as outlined in your draft of January 3rd. In our conversation today and in my conversation yesterday with General Goodpaster it was made clear that the above comments were in line with your understanding of how the NSC would operate. I do feel, however, that the memo creating the new system should formally spell out these important points.

Needless to say, I look forward to a period of sustained mutual cooperation between the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and the principal advisers to the President in this vital area. I am sure that in further consultations among all of the principal advisers, we will arrive at a mutually satisfactory New NSC System. This, I think, is most important.



Melvin R. Laird

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