Reasoning together with the Commander in Chief

THE PRESIDENT AND THE MANAGEMENT OF NATIONAL SECURITY: A Report by the Institute for Defense Analyses. By Keith C. Clark and Laurence J. Legere. Praeger. 274 pp. $6.95.

By Hubert H. Humphrey

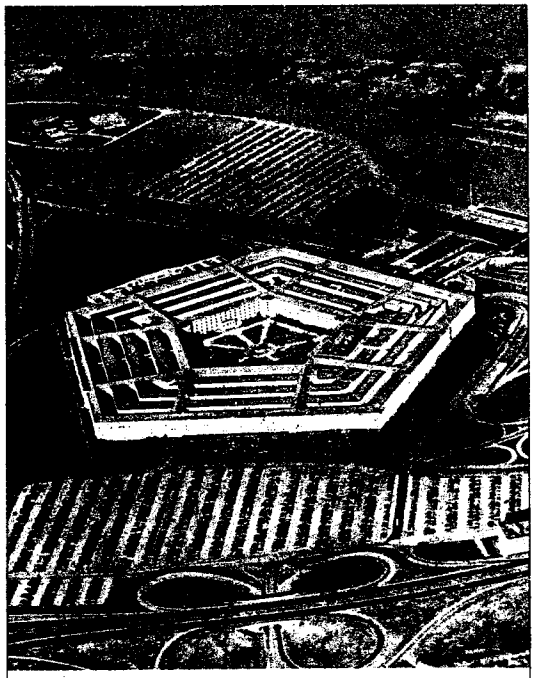
The report by the Institute for Defense Analyses (I.D.A.) entitled *The President and the Management of National Security* could properly be subtitled "the first authorized biography of the national security community."

General Maxwell D. Taylor (Ret.), president of the I.D.A., knew from personal experience that a green light from the top was necessary before the executive branch alumni assembled by the Institute could gain the active cooperation of key officials at the White House, State, Defense and the C.I.A. He got it from President Johnson early in 1968.

The result is an authoritative and valuable guide to the national security process under Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy and Johnson, with well-conceived suggestions for changes.

President Eisenhower, as we all know, used established bureaucratic channels to produce the annual Basic National Security Policy paper — a national strategy to achieve broadly defined U.S. objectives in light of major trends in world affairs. His emphasis was heavily on the side of comprehensiveness and codification through a tightly structured and predictable policy process.

John Kennedy, and subsequently Lyndon Johnson, deliberately moved toward a more pragmatic and unstructured approach, one designed to produce more relevant staff work by centralizing direction of national security in the President's hands. Decisions were made and tested in concrete circumstances and the bureaucratic structure was frequently adjusted to meet changing conditions — witness the birth of ExComm (an ad hoc group of Kennedy advisers, in and out of government) in the Cuban missile crisis and the evolution of President Johnson's intimate Tuesday luncheon group.



The Pentagon

From his first day in office President Nixon has made clear his preference for a more formal, centralized system than that employed by his two predecessors. On January 20, Mr. Nixon signed a memorandum declaring that the National Security Council would be "the principal forum for consideration of policy issues requiring presidential determination." The same order took away from the Secretary of State and his Department the responsibility, under the President's overall direction, for coordinating interdepartmental policies and placed it in the National Security Council.

Clearly every President should structure the national security agencies of the federal government in the way best suited to his own method of receiving information and of making decisions. I would have done so myself. And we all know that organization is secondary to results. But there are several dangers in the present system, which ignores the lessons of the past so clearly set forth in this book. The slow pace of unfolding events in the Administration's first five months in office tends to confirm the reality of these dangers.

We now have government by the National Security Council. The Council met no less than five times in the first two-and-a-half weeks of Mr. Nixon's term. It has met more often since then than in any comparable period in its twenty-two-year history.

But government by the National Security Council is government by committee. There are rarely fewer than a dozen present at Council meetings and usually many more. The tendencies of government by committee are well known to all of us who have had committee experience — to procrastinate; to require ever increasing amounts of paper work; to spend more and more time on the wording of papers. Defining policy on paper is worthwhile if no one comes to believe that such statements will provide answers to real and changing issues.

The conclusion that government by committee has missed opportunities in recent months seems increasingly evident. How else explain the four months that elapsed before the President articulated at length the Vietnam policies that have been accepted doctrine for the better part of a year? How else explain the long delay in the start of the all-important U.S.-Soviet negotiations to limit and reverse the strategic arms race, when new construction starts make the problem more difficult to solve with every passing month? How else explain the deferral of needed actions on Okinawa? On the Alliance for Progress? On our approaches to Communist China?

Hubert H. Humphrey was a U.S. Senator from Minnesota for sixteen years and Vice President of the U.S., 1965-69.