

# Insight and Outlook . . . By Joseph Kraft

## Devil's Advocate

THE COMING departure of George Ball as Under Secretary of State will leave open more than a high-level job. It will leave open a vital role—the role of devil's advocate within the foreign policy community of the Executive Branch.



While Ball will be staying on for months, the time to think about filling the void is now. For the role of devil's advocate is too important to be left to the chancy accidents of individual replacement. A Doubting Thomas needs to be built into the system, given an institutional base.

It happens that the right institutional base is now open. It is the post of Chairman of the Policy Planning Council which Walt Rostow has just vacated to become a White House aide.

TO GRASP what this is all about, it is useful to review Ball's role. As everybody knows, he has been a persistent critic, doubter, nay-sayer and no-man on Vietnam.

What might have been a headlong rush toward direct confrontation with Communist China has been slowed up. Great care has been taken to limit bombing operations. Flexibility, in the form of repeated offers to negotiate with the other side, has been a consistent feature of the American posture.

But if Ball has undoubtedly played a useful role, it has been largely a matter of luck. The Under Secretary arrived at his position on Vietnam mainly because the flow of resources to Asia conflicted with his belief that American energies would be more wisely concentrated in Western Eu-

the hunt for Rostow's successor has not been directed along these lines. On the contrary, the search has been for a well-known figure from the academic world, preferably connected with a liberal Democratic

organization, but a supporter of the President on Vietnam. In other words, a show-piece, an apologist for past mistakes, not a challenger of mindless orthodoxies.

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rope.

THAT ACCIDENT, given the penchant of the Secretary of State for organization men, is unlikely to be repeated. While it is true that no one can match the influence of a dissenter at the highest level, with ready access to daily operational decisions, as a second best it, at least, makes sense to try to establish an institutional nay-sayer.

Many reasons fit the Chairman of the Policy Planning Council for that role. The job is a prestigious one, with regular access to the leading officials in the foreign policy community.

But the Planning Council can assume the role of institutional heretic only if it has the right kind of Chairman. That means a powerful and resourceful arguer, specially trained in the disciplines of modern analysis, confident in his convictions, and enough at home in the bureaucratic ways to know the moment and mode for bringing influence to bear. The ideal Chairman would pose cogent doubts, not spit against the wind.

SO FAR, unfortunately,