“EVERYBODY BELIEVES IN DEMOCRACY UNTIL
HE GETS TO THE WHITE HOUSE . . . ”:
AN EXAMINATION OF WHITE HOUSE-
DEPARTMENTAL RELATIONS

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I

ON DIRECTING THE FEDERAL ESTABLISHMENT FROM THE WHITE HOUSE

A President is expected to perform three overriding functions: to recast the nation's policy agenda in line with contemporary needs, to provide symbolic affirmation of the nation's basic values, and to galvanize the vast machinery of government to carry out his programs and those he has inherited. The slippage and gap between the first and third functions is the primary concern of this discussion. The annual unveiling of a President's legislative program now has much in common with Madison Avenue's broadsides advertising each year's "spectacular new line" of Detroit-made combustion engine automobiles: the perceptive citizenry is increasingly sensitive to performance standards of both.

And so it is that the recently arrived President, aspiring to "unite the nation" and "get the country moving again," expecting that he and his lieutenants will succeed where previous administrations faltered, customarily feels he must order first his own executive branch "household." Recent Presidents often have gone out of their way to solicit the loyalty and support of senior civil servants. President Nixon, for example, immediately after his inauguration, personally traveled to each executive department and met with and addressed thousands of these senior officials. Presidents and their inner circle of aides continuously strive to secure greater internal managerial control over the executive departments. They even learn (after awhile) that one way to do this is to forge a unity on policy priorities among the general American public *outside* of the executive branch.

But, as Bailey has pointed out, the executive branch of the federal government is a many-splintered thing.¹ The President is soon acquainted with the considerable difficulty of promoting unity in the face of the basic pluralism of the American political system.² Presidents Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon have each complained bitterly about the recalcitrance of the federal bureaucracy, and seemingly turned

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¹ Bailey, *The President and His Political Executives*, *ANNALS*, Sept. 1956, at 24.

² See R. FENNO, *THE PRESIDENT'S CABINET* 271 (1959).

more and more to their personal White House staffs for help in gaining control of their own executive establishment. And the collective record of Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon as chief executive, especially with respect to the achievement of their domestic policy goals, has raised considerable questioning and criticism. As Rexford Tugwell concluded:

The truth is that Kennedy did not function as an executive. He had only the most meager contacts with the secretaries of the domestic departments, largely because he had no interest in their operations.³ This inability of a president—who must be political leader and chief legislator and who is sole custodian of the national security—to direct the domestic establishment has become almost total.⁴

Kennedy, after being in office two years, publicly complained that the nation's problems "are more difficult than I had imagined" and "there are greater limitations upon our ability to bring about a favorable result than I had imagined."⁵

One Kennedy White House aide put the frustration more bluntly: "Everybody believes in democracy until he gets to the White House and then you begin to believe in dictatorship, because it's so hard to get things done. Everytime you turn around, people just resist you, and even resist their own job." Again, the same John Kennedy who in many ways inspired the country, was moved to quip about a relatively low priority project, the architectural remodeling of Lafayette Square across from the White House, "let's stay with it. Hell, this may be the only thing I'll ever really get done."⁶ President Johnson also expressed disappointment over seemingly slow and uncooperative departmental responses. He attempted to "ride herd" on a multitude of programs by insisting on getting up-to-date figures on varied federal and international grant programs and routinely required departmental written reports. But he eventually resorted to vesting more and more authority for departmental coordination in the White House domestic policy aides and his Budget Bureau director. It was a no doubt disillusioned President Johnson, tired with continually battling the bureaucracy, who solemnly warned the incoming Nixon Administration that they should spare no effort in selecting thoroughly loyal people to man key departmental positions. It is as though Johnson believed that a significant portion of the Great Society programs, for which he had fought so hard, had been sabotaged by indifferent federal officials. And, in the wake of the Great Society legislative victories, both Presidents Johnson and Nixon held that the scaffolding of the federal government and the federal system needed extensive re-vamping, if not major surgery. Said Nixon: "... I have concluded that a sweeping reorganization of the Executive Branch is needed if the government is to keep up with the times and with the needs of the people."⁷

³ Tugwell, *The President and His Helpers: A Review Article*, 82 POL. SCI. Q. 253, 262 (1967).

⁴ *Id.* at 265.

⁵ Interview with President John F. Kennedy televised December 16, 1962.

⁶ Quoted in Rovere, *Letter from Washington*, THE NEW YORKER, Nov. 30, 1963.

⁷ Nixon, State of the Union address, Jan. 22, 1971, in 117 CONG. REC. H92, H94 (daily ed. Jan. 22, 1971).

The thesis running implicitly if not explicitly through this paper is that White House staffs and executive department officials, upon whom contemporary Presidents are exceptionally dependent, are more specialized, professionalized, and differentiated than has been generally acknowledged. Presidents find themselves continuously surrounded—some would say afflicted—by problems of complexity, diversity, and a seemingly endless series of jurisdictional and territorial disputes. Presidential staffs, cabinet members, and advisors are invariably associated with, if not captured by, professionally, politically, or personally skewed sets of policy preferences. No cabinet officer or White House advisor consistently and singularly acts for “Everyman” or “the public interest.” Priority setting, budget cutting, and preferred procedural strategies necessarily promote selective interests at the expense of others. Hence, Presidents are constantly, and rightfully, faced with conflicting claims; calibration and management of conflict is the core of presidential leadership. Those who would somehow reorganize the federal government so as to remove or elevate the American presidency away from bureaucratic or societal conflicts should be fully aware that they may at the same time be stripping the presidency of the strategic occasions for exercising essential leadership skills.

To the extent that White House staff and senior department officials maintain close communications and negotiations—or exchanges—we can speak of the existence of an executive branch exchange system.⁸ Both sides are needed to perform the functions of the executive branch; each wants certain types of help from the other, and each seeks to avoid overt antagonism toward the other. White House staff members can be viewed as performing important linkage roles in this exchange system, connecting a President with a vast network of administrative officials. Presidents and most of their staff grow well aware that cooperation from the permanent federal departments is earned rather than taken for granted. Loyalty and support as well as crucially needed expertise are eagerly sought, for a basic premise in the exchange system is that departmental officials, especially civil servants, play, or can play, a strategic role in administering federal government activities.

Some of the relationships within this exchange system can be briefly suggested here. Richard Neustadt has commented:

Agencies need decisions, delegations, and support, along with bargaining arenas and a court of last resort, so organized as to assure that their advice is always heard and often taken. A President needs timely information, early warning, close surveillance, organized to yield him the controlling judgment, with his options open, his intent enforced. In practice these two sets of needs have proved quite incompatible; presidential organizations rarely serve one well without disservice to the other.⁹

⁸ For more theoretical treatments of the exchange system notion, see G. HOMANS, *SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR* (1961); P. BLAU, *EXCHANGE AND POWER IN SOCIAL LIFE* (1964). Cf. Heath, *Review Article: Exchange Theory*, 1 B. J. POL. SCI. 91 (1971).

⁹ Neustadt, *Politicians and Bureaucrats*, in *THE CONGRESS AND AMERICA'S FUTURE* 102, 113 (D. Truman ed. 1965).

And Bill Moyers adds:

The job of the White House assistant is to help the President impress his priorities on the Administration. This may throw him into a sharp adversary role between two Cabinet members who are also competing with the President for their views of what the priorities should be. . . . Their [White House assistants] job is to make sure that decisions get implemented; it is not to manage the implementations. The follow-through aspect of it is very, very important. In recent years, the White House staff may have tended to become far too much of a managerial operation and less an overseer.¹⁰

The general White House view reflects a concern for teamwork, cohesiveness, interdepartmental coordination, follow-through on the President's program, and protection of the President's reputation. White House aides generally spend a sizeable portion of their time engaged in intra-executive branch alliance building. How best to communicate what the President wants done? How to give the departmental leaders a sense of involvement in presidential decisions? How politely but firmly to tell "them" of the President's dissatisfaction with department performance? How to motivate them to give added energy to get "our" programs moving? Should we promote an inside man into that new vacancy or bring in someone from the outside? How can we extricate this program operation from that nearly impossible group of people over there? A standard joke during the 1960's had White House staff members trying to figure out how to contract out to private enterprise or foundations the work that the State Department was assigned to perform. A standard exercise during the late 1960's, especially within the Nixon Administration, was the design of programs that might shortcircuit the federal bureaucracy with the hope of getting federal monies and programs more swiftly into the hands of state and local officials. In short, the problem becomes how to employ the resources and sanctions of the presidency to make the machinery of government act in accord with the administration's overriding goals?

Senior departmental officials are no less involved in exchanges with the presidential staff. Some of them are temporary political appointees, most are career civil servants with a long legacy of dealing with the presidency, especially with the budget officials attached to the Executive Office of the President. Their concern is often a blend of wishing to satisfy and cooperate with the objectives of the current presidential team, but at the same time attending to departmental priorities and the always present need for maintaining departmental integrity. White House requests for the most part are honored; pressure and arrogant communications are resented. But the day-to-day concerns are reflected in the following types of questions: How can we get White House endorsement and increased budget approvals for this new department initiative? How can we get the White House to side with us in this jurisdictional matter? How can we make an end run around that unsympathetic and

¹⁰ Quoted in an interview by Sidey, *The White House Staff vs. the Cabinet*, THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY, Feb. 1969, at 4.

amateur White House aide and make sure the President hears about this new idea? When should we supply a potentially great news announcement to the White House and risk not being able to use it here to gain publicity for "our" cabinet officer and departmental programs? In short, how do we deal with the White House when necessary, or when it can help us, but otherwise preserve our autonomy?

There are a variety of "rules of the game" governing White House departmental exchanges. Some are easy to define, most are elusive and variable.

The focus of analysis in the following discussions is on the exchange relationships between White House staff and departmental executives, especially on the "middle-man" role of the White House staff. These alliances, often uneasy and almost always fragile, are difficult to comprehend without examining the observations and perceptions of centrally involved participants. With this in mind, I interviewed forty-three members of the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon presidential staffs. Of these, twenty-four served under Kennedy, thirty-four under Johnson, and six under Nixon (many staff members served under more than one administration).¹¹ Additionally, more than twenty-five cabinet and sub-cabinet members from these administrations were interviewed or consulted.

The 1960's and the presidential administrations of John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson present a fascinating laboratory for examining White House-departmental relations. It seems fair to assume that cooperative and responsive relationships are particularly tested during and immediately after periods of sustained presidential activism, that is, when major new programs are being launched and old ones being discarded or revitalized. That the sixties were a major period for such change is well-documented and need not be retold here.¹²

Simple but previously neglected questions such as the following need to be asked: How much tension and strain exist between White House staff and departmental executives? Why do some White House staffers see considerable conflict whereas others view departmental relations as essentially harmonious? What variance exists over time or among the departments? What are the major sources of perceived conflicts? To what extent should and can conflict be resolved?

II

WHITE HOUSE-DEPARTMENTAL CONFLICT: PRESIDENTIAL AND DEPARTMENTAL PERSPECTIVES

The focus on conflict here deserves a note of explanation. In the strictest sense, conflict occurs when different people "seek to possess the same object, occupy the

¹¹ Since the period under study here is 1961 through 1970, the bulk of these interviews were with Kennedy and Johnson staff aides. These interview/informants serve as substitutes for direct participant observation by the author. From the various "informants," through a careful process of filling in parts of the complex mosaic, we can construct a richer descriptive-analytical account of the exchange relationships.

¹² See, e.g., A. SCHLESINGER, *A THOUSAND DAYS* (1965); J. SUNDQUIST, *POLITICS AND POLICY: THE EISENHOWER, KENNEDY, AND JOHNSON YEARS* (1968).

same space or the same exclusive position, play incompatible roles, maintain incompatible goals, or undertake mutually incompatible means for achieving their purposes."¹³ Conflict, as well as its closely interrelated opposite, integration or harmony, is always more or less present in any large organization, and indeed in all human relations. If one looks for it, one will surely find it. One of the ironies of our government is that, although it exists to resolve conflict, *i.e.*, to pull together diverse class, regional and ethnic interests and accentuate the common goals of prosperity, liberty, etc., it strives at the same time to make this nation safe for and supportive of certain types of conflict, *e.g.*, business competition in the marketplace, diversity in religion, and the clash of contending ideas and values. Within the federal executive branch there is more contention about the priorities and tempo of federal activity than there is about the basic ends or legitimacy of the government. In this sense, the executive branch exchange system operates much like a trading arena in which different participants hope that their preferences might prevail. Some recent examples of conflict in the executive branch revolved around the following types of concerns—would vocational education programs be better managed and coordinated by the Office of Education or the Labor Department, what types of guidelines should exist for "Model Cities" applications, should we raise or lower tariffs on shoes and textiles, should United States surplus food programs principally serve the interests of agricultural price stability or short term foreign policy aims, to what extent and in what manner should federal agencies enforce the Civil Rights Act of 1964¹⁴ and the Supreme Court ruling in the *Brown v. Board of Education*¹⁵ decision, and how rapidly and to what extent should domestic departments decentralize administrative and evaluation authority to the ten federal regional offices around the country.

Conflict is not always an indicator of weakness or ill health of an organization. Critical adversary relationships may provide a much needed jolt toward system adaptation and renewal, and hence be a notable asset. Coser's suggestions are relevant:

Conflict prevents the ossification of social systems by exerting pressures for innovation and creativity; it prevents habitual accommodations from freezing into rigid molds and hence progressively impoverishing the ability to react creatively to novel circumstances.¹⁶

Several former members of the executive branch have made a case that certain federal policies and practices have suffered not from too much conflict, but from too little.¹⁷

¹³ North, *Conflict—Political Aspects*, in 3 INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES 226 (D. Sills ed. 1968).

¹⁴ Pub. L. No. 88-352, 78 Stat. 241.

¹⁵ 347 U.S. 483 (1954).

¹⁶ Coser, *Conflict—Social Aspects*, in 3 INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, *supra* note 13, at 232, 235.

¹⁷ See, *e.g.*, C. FRANKEL, *HIGH ON FOGGY BOTTOM* (1969); R. HILSMAN, *TO MOVE A NATION* (1967); T. HOOPES, *THE LIMITS OF INTERVENTION* (1969); D. MOYNIHAN, *MAXIMUM FEASIBLE MISUNDERSTANDING* (1969); G. REEDY, *THE TWILIGHT OF THE PRESIDENCY* (1970). See also A. ENTHOVEN & K. SMITH, *HOW MUCH IS ENOUGH?* (1971).

But assessing the utility or disutility of conflict requires an extremely sensitive appraisal of a large number of variables. The analysis here is limited to an exploration of participant perspectives on the existence and presumed sources of conflict in the White House-departmental exchange system.

It is hoped that studying the existence and nature of conflicts in the executive branch exchange system may add to our understanding about what makes the presidency work—or not work. Though contemporary Presidents have been able to provide some semblance of integrating unity via their legislative messages and budgetary controls, Presidents seem otherwise increasingly buried beneath their own institutional machinery. Conservatives and liberals alike join in faulting the executive branch as a bulwark against change, and as largely unresponsive to contemporary needs. The phenomenal growth and differentiation of the executive establishment and the attributed independence of the permanent government (civil servants, foreign service and military officials, and so forth) from the presidential government (the President, his inner circle of White House counselors, and those politically appointed cabinet officials who can be thoroughly relied upon) make assessing the strength of the presidency quite complicated.

Let us examine the major competing schools of thought about functions and responsibilities belonging at the White House and those belonging within the departments. Just as there are those who want to strengthen Congress in all executive-legislative relations and thereby make Congress the “first branch of government,” so also there are heated arguments about whether the cabinet and the departments need to be strengthened vis-à-vis the White House staff and the Executive Office of the President. While not doing justice to the richness of varied arguments, it is helpful to sum up the contending polar perspectives characterizing much of recent practice and prescription: the presidential perspective and the departmental. These are presented here as ideal type constructs and as such are not necessarily held by any one person or group. It is likely that admixtures of these perspectives will be found in instances of conflict and in proposals for reducing conflict. Indeed, much of the ambiguity and inconsistency of contemporary reforms stems from an alternation back and forth between these two perspectives. Reform documents are surfeited with a seemingly contradictory, but intentionally conciliatory exercise of saying “on the one hand,” we need stronger departments, or a stronger cabinet, but “on the other hand,” we must have a strengthened presidency. Illustrative are the Nixon reorganizations of 1970 which call for closer domestic cabinet ties with the presidency under the umbrella of a “Domestic Council,” but insist on locating the fairly sizeable Council staff in the President’s office (staffed at least initially with highly trusted White House aides recruited from the national and regional presidential campaign entourage).¹⁸

¹⁸ See *Reorganization Plan No. 2 of 1970*, Mar. 12, 1970, in 1970 U.S. CODE CONG. & AD. NEWS 449.

A. The Presidential Perspective

This perspective, popular among most presidential advisors, university liberals (at least during the 1950's and 1960's), and probably a majority of the Washington press corps, holds that the presidency should be a strong and visible force in making sure that presidential policy objectives get effectively translated into desired policy performance. "This is the great office, the only truly national office in the whole system." The basic premise corresponds with Alexander Hamilton's point of view—that the requisite unity and drive for our political system would only come from a strong executive.¹⁹ Only the presidency should retain discretion over budget choices and over the way federal policies are administered. And only the presidency can provide the needed direction and orchestration of complex, functionally interdependent federal programs. Presidents and their staffs, if properly organized, can assure that the laws of the land not only will be administered faithfully, but also imaginatively. There is an explicit assumption that a strong presidency can make a major difference in the way government works and that this difference will be in the direction of a more constructive (desirable) set of policy outcomes.

Presidentialists invariably also argue that the presidency is not properly organized, staffed, or funded. The presidency needs not just "more help" but a major infusion of skills, talent, tools, and loyalty if it is to gain control over the permanent federal departments. Implicitly, if not explicitly, "More Power To The White House!" is the slogan. Partly because so many previous Presidents have bypassed existing departments and set up their own new independent agencies, and partly because of the sheer size and diversity of the executive establishment, the White House too often serves at the pleasure of the bureaucracy, rather than vice versa. McGeorge Bundy speaks for many believers of the presidential persuasion when he observes that the executive branch in many areas "more nearly resembles a collection of badly separated principalities than a single instrument of executive action."²⁰

The presidential camp never completely trusts civil servants, and frequently mistrusts political appointees as well. Whatever of importance needs doing either ought to be done directly from the White House, or should be done with the expectation that the departmental people will temper or undermine the desired policy intentions. As former Kennedy staffer, Arthur Schlesinger, explains:

At the start we all felt free to "meddle" when we thought we had a good idea or someone else a poor one. But, as the ice began to form again over the government, freewheeling became increasingly difficult and dangerous . . . [and] our real trouble was that we had capitulated too much to the existing bureaucracy. Wherever we have gone wrong . . . has been because we have not had sufficient confidence in the New Frontier approach to impose it on the government. Every important mistake has been the consequence of excessive deference to the permanent government. . . . The problem of moving forward seemed in great part the problem

¹⁹ See THE FEDERALIST No. 70 (Hamilton).

²⁰ M. BUNDY, THE STRENGTH OF GOVERNMENT 37 (1968). See also *id.* ch. 2.

of making the permanent government responsive to the policies of the presidential government.²¹

The goal of the presidentialists in its crudest form is "to presidentialize" the executive branch. Toward that end there are catalogues of reform proposals, a few of which can be mentioned as examples:

The strong Presidency will depend upon the Chief Executive's capacity to control and direct the vast bureaucracy of national administration. Ideally, the President should possess administrative powers comparable to those of business executives What the President needs most can be simply formulated: a power over personnel policy, planning, accounting, and the administration of the executive branch that approaches his power over the executive budget.²²

Other variations on this theme call for better policy evaluation and program management staffs within the Executive Office. Presidentialists with narrow policy interests are always asking that the formulation and administration of their particular policy concerns be brought closer within the presidential orbit "much along the lines of the Council of Economic Advisers." Another suggestion would give the presidency some field agents or "expeditors" (federal domestic program "czars") located in federal regional offices or large metropolitan areas to insure that presidential priorities are being properly effected at the grass roots level.

B. Departmental Perspective

This perspective holds that the success or failure of the federal government's efforts to manage federal programs rests almost entirely on the quality and competence of the executive departments. An assumption here is that all programs at the federal level possess considerable discretionary aspects. Those holding a departmental perspective say that for programs to be effectively administered, discretion and authority must (at least to a large extent) be vested in departmental and bureau leaders. The sentiment here is that the role of the White House, particularly in regard to the administration of domestic programs, should be a highly selective one, and one that is tremendously and rightfully dependent on career civil servants and professional departmental expertise. Certain department officials, for example, deplored the amount of White House involvement in AID grant clearances, HUD model city selections, and HEW desegregation proceedings. To be sure, even the most extreme departmentalist would agree that crisis situations and various types of national security matters necessarily should be subject to substantial presidential discretion.

The departmentalist view has varying support among professional civil servants, among some former cabinet officers, and even among some former White House staff assistants. Moreover, there are increasing numbers of skeptics who are persuaded

²¹ SCHLESINGER, *supra* note 12, at 683.

²² L. KOENIG, *THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE* 417 (rev. ed. 1968).

that a larger and more "resourceful" presidency (or more "institutionalization" of the presidency) is not a realistic answer to the problem of managing a responsive federal government. There are even those who argue that it probably does not make much difference which of the various presidential candidates gets elected. "You can elect your favorite presidential hopeful at the next election but the basic problems of government non-responsiveness will still be with us!"²³

Some advocates of the departmental perspective come to their position because of a recognition that the political facts of life just do not permit intensive or extensive presidential involvement in most matters of federal policy administration. The limits of the presidency are cited, such as in David Truman's appropriate cautions:

[the president] cannot take a position on every major controversy over administrative policy, not merely because his time and energies are limited, but equally because of the positive requirements of his position. He cannot take sides in any dispute without giving offense in some quarters. He may intervene where the unity of his supporters will be threatened by inaction; he may even, by full use of the resources of his office, so dramatize his action as to augment the influence he commands. But he cannot "go to the country" too often, lest the tactic become familiar and his public jaded. Rather than force an administrative issue, he may choose to have his resources for a legislative effort . . . [For effectiveness he] must preserve some of the detachment of a constitutional monarch.²⁴

And while the President remains detached or "above" the day-to-day operations of the federal government, cabinet members and their staffs want both a relative independence and a vote of confidence with which to carry on their work. As one prerequisite, they insist that White House staff members should not have authority independent from the President to issue directives to cabinet and agency leaders. And when they need it cabinet members and agency heads should have the right to direct access to the President. It follows too that Presidents should get involved only in broad policy questions, not in the nuts and bolts concerns of program execution and application. White House people are viewed as "amateurs and terribly ill-informed nuisances" who are seen as "breathing down our necks."

The more the White House usurps functional responsibilities from their "proper" home in the departments, the more the White House may undermine the goal of competent departmental management of presidentially sponsored programs. A cabinet member who is made to look weak within his department will be treated with less respect by his subordinates as well as by relevant congressional and client support groups. Department officials who must fight strenuously to maintain access and rapport with the White House have correspondingly less energy left over for their internal department management concerns. When the White House staff or other presidential advisors step in and temporarily take over certain departmental functions, the action may further diminish the capacity of the department to streamline

²³ This view was expressed by one former cabinet member interviewed for this study.

²⁴ D. TRUMAN, *THE GOVERNMENTAL PROCESS* 407-08 (1951).

or revitalize its capability for managing these functions in the future. Too frequent intervention from the White House creates morale problems within the departments. Resentment and hostility are likely to impede subsequent cooperation. Imaginative professional people will not long remain in their departmental posts if they are frequently underused or misused.

Departmentalists, charging that White House aides get rewarded for "meddling" in department affairs, note that on closer inspection it is frequently a disadvantageous strategy for everyone involved, excepting perhaps the White House aide who has to look "busy." George Reedy, a former Johnson aide, notes that "there is, on the part of the White House assistants, a tendency to bring to the White House problems which should not properly be there, frequently to the disadvantage of the president."²⁵

If these arguments appear overdrawn and unrealistic, listen to President Johnson's former Housing and Urban Development Secretary, Robert Wood, as he decidedly posits the departmentalist over the presidentialist persuasion:

The longer one examines the awesome burdens and limited resources of those who help the president from within his immediate circle, the more skeptical one becomes of a strategy for overseeing government by "running" it from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. The semiheroic, semihopeless picture has been captured many times in several administrations: dedicated men, of great intelligence and energy, working selflessly through weekends and holidays to master an endlessly increasing array of detail on complex subjects beyond their understanding on which decisions must be made "*here*" because a resolution elsewhere is not to be trusted. They persevere, taking their stand against "the bureaucrats," pushing programs through against sullen, hidden resistance from the departments. Committees are abolished, agencies rejuggled, staff reviews simplified, new reporting forms introduced, all in the effort to assure that more and more decisions are, or can be, presidential. Yet, in the end, after thirty years, the effort to help the president in making government work has not succeeded.²⁶

III

A. Amount of Conflict Perceived by White House Staffers

Conflicts in the executive branch exchange system are widely acknowledged by most recent White House staff members. The forty-three aides interviewed for this study were asked whether they experienced major difficulties in working with the federal executive departments: "can you give your view of this; is this really a problem?" As shown in Table 1, approximately two-thirds answered that there were extensive and considerable troubles in dealing with the departments. Some talked of this as the single greatest problem in contemporary government. One man who had worked for both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson said that "it was an absolutely

²⁵ REEDY, *supra* note 17, at 94.

²⁶ Wood, *When Government Works*, THE PUBLIC INTEREST, Winter, 1970, at 39, 45.

terrible problem. . . . There are major problems with cabinet members and civil servants alike. Even the great cabinet members like McNamara and Freeman were terrible in evading their share of many of our efforts." A senior Johnson Administration counselor observed that the "separation of governments is not so great between Congress and the president as between a president and those people like sub-cabinet and bureau officials, who become locked into their own special sub-systems of self-interested policy concerns." Others talked about the increasing defiance of department people toward the White House:

It's a terrible problem and it's getting worse, particularly with the State Department. The major problem is the lack of any identification [on their part] with the president's program priorities. At State they try to humor the president but hope he will not interfere in their complex matters and responsibilities. It is equally a problem with civil servants and cabinet types. It is amazing how soon the cabinet people get captured by the permanent staffs. Secretary [David] Kennedy [of Treasury] under Nixon, for example, was captured within days . . . and Nixon's staff didn't even try to improve things. They just assumed there was a great problem. Personally, I think you can't expect too much from the bureaucracy. It is too much to expect that they will see things the president's way.

TABLE 1

WHITE HOUSE STAFF PERCEPTION OF CONFLICT WITH DEPARTMENTS

Problem of tensions and conflict in these exchanges was:	Percentages N = 43
Considerable	65%
Moderate	25
Insignificant	10
Total	100

Source: Personal interviews with forty-three White House staff members serving between 1961 and 1970.

Some aides were more inclined to note that conflicts varied with different departments and with different cabinet members. For example: "yes there are certainly many problems, but it differs from area to area and from president to president. I think the amount of friction is related to the role of the White House staff and what they undertake and what presidents let them do." Another example of a more tempered assessment of the existence of conflict comes from a Congressional relations aide to the Kennedy-Johnson White House:

Oh, yes—there are problems to an extent. There is deep suspicion around the whole government toward the new president when he comes into power. . . . But the fights you get in are different all around town. . . . We had some excellent men around town, and some bombs. The important thing for a president to do is to get good men and then decentralize the responsibility. Let the department people do their job and don't let your [White House] staff interfere too much

Some White House staff who had less involvement with departments were the most likely to acknowledge little if any serious conflict.

On balance, a substantial majority of recent presidential staffers complain of considerable difficulty and conflict in their work with the federal executive departments. To a man, all of these aides were proud of having worked for recent Presidents and quite obviously enjoyed the ambiance of White House political life (said one: "It is the ice cream parlor of American politics!"). Most of them, however, left frustrated with the task of making the permanent government responsive to the White House. The modal if not the consensus view was "the greatest difficulty we had was getting things out of the executive agencies. The magnitude of change and effort that is needed to get things back into shape . . . and how futile it all seems to be . . . [as] requests get lost among the bureaucracy and it is so tough to penetrate all their crap."

B. What White House Staffers See as Sources of Conflict

Conflicts in the executive branch exchange system can be attributed to both subjective and objective factors. The difference in allegiance to the presidential or departmental perspectives illustrate a major subjective factor. Some other subjective factors include differing definitions of priorities and roles, personality clashes, and personal ambitions. Objective factors would include such things as sheer size of the federal effort (and the time and communications restrictions that stem from that size), restrictive budget limitations (Presidents and cabinet heads find they have little control over ninety per cent or more of "their" budgets²⁷), centrifugal pulls inherent in federalism and in the functionally independent departments, and various knowledge gaps (for example, "we don't have all the answers!"). Presidential staff members seem to be well aware of most of these sources, but seem to stress the subjective differences and the ill effects of the divorce between presidential and departmental perspectives.

Extended interviews with White House staff yield the persuasive impression that no one set of difficulties lies at the root of executive branch conflict. Their discussions often moved back and forth from noting causes to complaining about symptoms. But their multiple citations here (see Table 2) are instructive both for their diversity and for unexpectedly candid criticism of the way the White House itself contributed to these difficulties.²⁸

²⁷ See C. SCHULTZE, ET AL., *SETTING NATIONAL PRIORITIES* (1970); Weidenbaum, *Budget "Uncontrollability" as an Obstacle to Improving the Allocation of Government Resources*, in 1 *THE ANALYSIS AND EVALUATION OF PUBLIC EXPENDITURES: THE PPB SYSTEM* 353-68 (Compendium of papers presented to the Joint Economic Committee of the United States Congress, 1969).

²⁸ The staff perceptions of the sources of conflict shown in Table 2 do not adequately reflect the intensity of the respondents' views. Although they blamed White House staff operations approximately as often as they faulted the departments, the author feels their criticisms of department officials and civil servants were more intense than their criticisms of their White House colleagues.

1. *On White House "Sources" of Conflict*

White House staffers suggest that their own definition of their roles, and the pressures they had to work under frequently exacerbate relations with cabinet and department officials. Presidents and their staffs arrive at the White House charged up to get things done, to produce results, to make good on the pledges of their campaign. The frenzy and simplification of problems and issues generated in the campaign, coupled with the post election victory euphoria result in strategies of over-extension and insensitivity:

Well, a Kennedy staff hallmark was to seize power from around town. In retrospect I think they often were insensitive to the channels of the existing government. They came in after the campaign with a pretentious "know it all" attitude and they hurt their case by this stance. For example, I think the White House staffers often called people low in the departments and deliberately undercut cabinet people too much in the early years. . . . In retrospect I don't think you can coordinate much from the White House. You just don't have the people and the numbers . . . [and] you can't evaluate all that much [not to mention managing it]

No Emily Post manual is available for White House aides to learn about the numerous nuances and diverse expectations that come with their staff roles. At best, it is a learning by doing, and a learning from your mistakes type of experience. The goldfish bowl and pressure cooker atmosphere is an invitation to problems, and the opportunities for mishaps and mistakes abound. Hatchet men for the opposition party and aggressive columnists in search of scandal and conflicts of interest are ever-present with their predatory instincts. These frequently arise situations in which White House aides try desperately to get faster results for "their President" from securely tenured officials in the various governmental departments. But White House aides are damned if they become overly arrogant with department people on the one hand, and on the other hand become superfluous or irrelevant men if they grow afraid to use the available resources of their positions. Eager for fast results, there were many staffers who, according to a former White House aide, "if they had the option between (1) giving an order to the bureaucracy, or (2) trying to win their cooperation, would always settle quickly for issuing orders."

Staff insensitivity to cabinet and department executives occurs for a variety of reasons. Presidents often want to "put the heat on" some cabinet member or bureau chief, but prefer not to take the blame for being tough. Presidents understandably eschew the "bad guy" role, hence the bearing of unpleasant news befalls various staff assistants.

Discussions about the problem of staff insensitivity were often ambiguous. On the one hand, aides somewhat contemptuously talked of the need for more "care and feeding" of cabinet members (as though some of the cabinet were kept symbols for window dressing alone). But they would also insist that one just has to be aggressive and "hard-nosed" in order to get anything accomplished. For example:

TABLE 2

PRESIDENCY STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON THE SOURCES OF CONFLICT AND STRAIN IN
WHITE HOUSE-EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT RELATIONSHIPS

Types and Sources of Conflict	Percentages N = 41
<i>White House "Sources":</i>	
WH staff insensitivity toward department officials	51%
WH staff and President communications failures	44
WH staff usurpation of department roles and/or excessive interference in department affairs	37
WH "tried to do too much too quickly"	29
<i>Departmental "Sources":</i>	
Civil servant and bureaucratic parochialism	49
Cabinet "leadership" too weak or unimaginative	46
Departmental leaders captured by narrow special interests	46
Red tape, and inept staff work	37
Departments unable to work together	24
<i>Complexity/Diversity Factors:</i>	
Sheer size and complexity of federal efforts	37
Lack of time for the needed follow-through/ coordination/implementation	27
Substantive and ideological differences about policy choices within the federal system	27

Source: Personal interviews conducted by the author with forty-one presidential staff members who served at the White House during 1961-70. Respondents could give more than one reply. See n.28 *supra*.

I think most of the problem lies in the disregard of some White House aides of the rank, and age, and positional dignity or status of cabinet members and agency heads. Three little words can give a White House aide a lot of power, "the President wants . . ." You need to combine a proper sense of firmness with deference . . . but you have to know the danger traps and the mine fields and always have to keep in mind the question: "How can I serve the president?" I'll tell you exactly how to deal with this problem: you use two plans. Plan A: get in touch with the cabinet or department head and say "the President is anxious to have your judgment on X matter." If they squirm or delay or fail to comply then you use Plan B: "Damn it Mr. Secretary, the President wants it by 3:00 this afternoon!" You have to be tough in this business.

Some aides stressed that the always delicate distinction between *staff* or advisory roles at the White House, and operational administrative *line* responsibilities in the cabinet departments became overly blurred during the Kennedy and Johnson years. Too many of the staff tried to do more than they were supposed to be doing and gradually came "to give orders" rather than transmit requests. But as mentioned earlier, Presidents frequently encouraged this development and some cabinet members

respect decisive and competent White House aides, brusque though they may be. Impatient or disillusioned with some of their cabinet, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon turned more and more to their White House staff for advice, coordination, and particularly for help in resolving jurisdictional disputes between executive agencies. One result, in the words of one top Johnson aide, was that "after awhile he [Johnson] never even bothered to sit down with most of the cabinet members (domestic cabinet) even to discuss their major problems and program possibilities." Partly because of the war, and partly because he had grown used to leaning on his own staff so heavily, "Johnson became lazy and wound up using some of the staff as both line managers as well as staff and, I think in retrospect, *it frequently* didn't work out!"

Some of the most instructive commentary was devoted to the problem of intra-executive branch communications. Numerous aides mentioned that a "basic reason for conflict is the lack of communications." Fault in this regard is generally placed upon White House staff and sometimes on the President. Often it is not that cabinet and departmental officials fail to respond to White House policy directives, but rather that those directives are too hazy or inadequately communicated. Sometimes it is because Presidents and their aides just have not made up their minds.²⁹ Occasionally, different White House aides send out contradictory messages to the departments. For example, the domestic program and legislative development staff might be pressing a department for new program ideas while the budget director and his staff are warning department officials of the need to reduce their activities, especially their more costly programs. Often the President has not made his view known forcefully enough to overcome uncertainty and confusion. Presidents are handicapped in this sense because they often have multiple audiences in mind when preparing their remarks. The capacity of the departments to understand what the President means and to believe that he really means it should never be taken for granted. In his farewell pep talk to the Nixon cabinet, Daniel Moynihan posed the problem as follows:

[I]t is necessary for members of the administration . . . to be far more attentive to what it is the President has said, and proposed. Time and again, the President has said things of startling insight, taken positions of great political courage and intellectual daring, only to be greeted with silence or incomprehension.

. . . But his [Nixon's] initial thrusts were rarely followed up with a sustained, reasoned, reliable second and third order of advocacy.

Deliberately or no, the impression was allowed to arise with respect to the widest range of Presidential initiatives that the President wasn't really behind them.³⁰

²⁹ For a discussion of indecisiveness and ambiguity during the Eisenhower years, see N. POLSBY, *CONGRESS AND THE PRESIDENCY 19-22* (1964).

³⁰ Farewell comments to the Nixon cabinet and subcabinet delivered by Daniel P. Moynihan in the East Room of the White House, Washington, D.C., Dec. 21, 1970, reprinted in 6 *WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC.* 1729, 1731 (1970).

Another aspect of the communications problem is rooted in the sheer size of the federal enterprise. One story was mentioned by a former Johnson aide as a lesson relevant to understanding the communications responsibilities of the presidency. He suggested that the dinosaur probably became extinct not because it was too big or too clumsy, but rather because it suffered a failure of communication. Signals were not transmitted from brain to foot, or from foot to brain rapidly or accurately enough to create a picture of reality on which the dinosaur could act. A few weeks after hearing this story, I was intrigued by the seemingly quite analogous but more specific account of another former Johnson aide, who trenchantly summed up many of Lyndon Johnson's troubles in directing the war in Vietnam as follows:

Even if the Vietnam problem could have been managed by the President of the United States acting as the Vietnam Desk Officer, the system would soon have broken down from sheer lack of communication. It is one thing for Great Men to make policy, it is another to implement it, monitor it, coordinate it with existing policies and programs, and undertake the advance planning to meet foreseeable problems and possible contingencies.³¹

One other problem discussed by close to a third of the White House aides (again, see Table 2) was that their Administration tried to do too much too fast. Even President Johnson was quoted to this effect in the last days of his presidential term.³² It was not that Great Society programs were ill-intentioned or mis-placed, but rather that not enough planning had preceded implementation. One veteran budget counselor to Presidents explained his view of the conflict this way:

Too much was attempted under LBJ. We didn't ask ourselves enough questions about whether we could do these things. Expectations outran the capability to work things out. There were too many other demands or problems in the mid and late 60's. Vietnam, inadequately trained manpower at all levels of government, and the structure of intergovernmental relations was inadequate. The space and missile programs had the backing of the people, but public support was terribly splintered over the War on Poverty, etc. . . . It was like a Tower of Babel with no one interested in the other people's programs.

If the departments are, in fact, occasionally "parochial" in their behavior, Presidents and presidential staff can often be overly "political" in their behavior. For example, Nixon's vetoes of various health and education bills—for balancing his political budget—incurred the hostility of several HEW officials. Likewise President Kennedy's highly political decision to support federal subsidies for the construction of the Cross-Florida Barge Canal angered many budget and conservation counselors within his own administration. Likewise the typical Executive office attitude toward the Agricultural Department—"keep prices down and the farmers off our back!"—annoyed many department officials who held expansionary hopes for turn-

³¹ C. COOPER, *THE LOST CRUSADE* 414 (1970).

³² See H. GRAFF, *THE TUESDAY CABINET* 172 (1970).

ing their department into a rural development and a major conservation agency. The point to be appreciated in several of these illustrations is that the political perspectives and substantive preferences of Presidents and their staffs produce their share of executive branch conflicts.

2. *On Departmental "Sources" of Conflict*

There is an increasingly popular view that much of the conflict in the federal executive branch can be explained by the fact that the departments are "specialized, parochial, self-interested," while the President and his advisors have "a government-wide point of view."³³ The extent to which this is the overriding explanation is easily overestimated. While House staff members (whom we would expect to be prime enthusiasts for this interpretation) fault the White House and its operations about as often as they fault the cabinet and the departments. The battlefield depiction of the departments as rapacious challengers of the presidential prerogative, as illustrated by the Schlesinger quote below, is, at least in the context of my series of interviews, an overdrawn or embellished position:

Kennedy . . . was determined to restore the personal character of the office and recover presidential control over the sprawling feudalism of government. This became the central theme of his administration and, in some respects, a central frustration. The presidential government, coming to Washington aglow with new ideas and a euphoric sense that it could do no wrong, promptly collided with the feudal barons of the permanent government, entrenched in their domains and fortified by their sense of proprietorship; and the permanent government, confronted by this invasion, began almost to function (with, of course, many notable individual exceptions) as a resistance movement . . .³⁴

Approximately half of the White House aides mentioned a seeming inability of many government workers to adopt "the presidential perspective." This latter commodity, always ill-defined, seems capaciously to include "the public interest," responsiveness to the electorate, maturity of judgment, virtue, and wisdom.³⁵ Whatever all this is, quite a number of the White House policy staff assistants are convinced that department people either do not understand it or just stubbornly resist it. "Mostly the bureaucrats are unresponsive, they view themselves as the professionals and see your [White House] impact as purely political. They don't fight you openly, but they don't cooperate if they can help it!"

Another way for White House aides to explain departmental sources of conflict is to question the competence or loyalty of the cabinet member. Cabinet members get faulted for being "too much of an individualist," "too aloof," "too stubborn" and sometimes for not being "a take charge type." In any event, the traditional complaint

³³ See, e.g., J. DAVIS, *THE NATIONAL EXECUTIVE BRANCH* 146 (1970).

³⁴ SCHLESINGER, *supra* note 12, at 681.

³⁵ An attempt to explicate the "presidential perspective" is made in T. SORENSON, *DECISION-MAKING IN THE WHITE HOUSE* 78-86 (1963).

that cabinet members get captured by narrow special interests was a frequent response; to some it was the number one problem:

—Often times we appointed weak cabinet people to start with. Luther Hodges at Commerce was very weak. And Ribicoff [HEW] chickened out after he came aboard and saw the mess which he was supposed to administer—so he merely presided over it temporarily while he began making plans to leave and run for a Connecticut U.S. Senate seat.

—It all comes down to people, some people do a great job like McNamara. They really run their show and get great people to help them and don't need White House interference. Rusk and McNamara were talented and loyal, but Weaver [HUD] was very weak and had loyalties mainly to his department's interests. Even John Gardner [HEW] became seduced [by special interests] much faster than anyone predicted. And Willard Wirtz [Labor] was terrible . . . He saw himself as Labor's representative to the president rather than as part of the president's cabinet. He even out-Meanyed George Meany a few times!

One of the most significant factors promoting conflict between the departments and the White House staffs is their different time perspectives. This same variable is also at play in White House-congressional relations.³⁶ A president and his staff think in terms of two and four year time frames—at the most. They strive to fulfill campaign pledges, convention platforms, and earlier announced priorities as soon as possible, seeking always to build a respectable record for forthcoming election campaigns. The haste with which the White House rushed the announcements of the Model Cities and the Teacher Corps programs may well have damaged the chances for effective design and launching of these programs.³⁷ Career civil servants, on the other hand, will be around after the elections regardless of outcomes, and more importantly, they are held accountable to the General Accounting Office, the Office of Management and Budget, or to congressional investigation committees for the way federal programs are administered (and for any mistakes that might be made). The work incentives for most careerists are stacked in the direction of doing a thorough, consistent, and even cautious job, rather than any hurried dancing to the current tunes of the White House staff.

C. Conflict as a Result of Complexity

Nearly all of the White House aide commentary on executive branch conflict can be traced back to problems of government size and problem complexity. White House aides become arrogant and insensitive because they are often asked to do too much in too short a time. White House aides "breathe down the necks" of cabinet and department leaders because Presidents become impatient and restless for results.

³⁶ See POLSBY, *supra* note 29, at 102-03, for a discussion of this same variable in executive-legislative relations.

³⁷ See H. SEIDMAN, *POLITICS, POSITION, AND POWER* 76 (1970); Kempton, *Proclaim and Abandon: The Life and Hard Times of the Teacher Corps*, *THE WASHINGTON MONTHLY*, Feb. 1969, 10-19.

Departments appear inert or unresponsive because they are having difficulty in pulling together diverse specialists to work on complex questions. Cabinet members give the impression of being "weak" (and sometimes are) because they must preside over huge holding companies of diverse, functionally specialized enterprises. White House aides are continuously disillusioned and disappointed by the lack of coordination both within and among departments; but the White House vision of coordination unrealistically presupposes that department people share an understanding of complex problems, and a sophisticated appreciation of the relatedness of one problem to another, of one agency to another. Communications problems exist because large numbers of people are involved in administering programs all over the country and are confronted by constantly changing and shifting circumstances. Legislative or executive intent, or the GAO and Civil Service Commission "rulebooks and regulations," even if they could be memorized, do not have all the answers for all seasons. Uncertainties, changing environment, and shifting priorities all make policy implementation harder (and pleasing the White House near impossible). One White House counselor to President Eisenhower summed up what he refers to as the pervasive fact of political life that continually affected the Eisenhower Administration:

the sheer size and intricacy of government conspire to taunt and to thwart all brisk pretensions to set sensationally new directions. The vast machinery of national leadership—the tens of thousands of levers and switches and gears—simply do not respond to the impatient jab of a finger or the angry pounding of a fist.³⁸

There is, finally, the constantly faced dilemma of choosing between competing values. Ideological preferences enter here. That not many White House aides mention ideological factors as a source of conflict may imply that a relatively common political culture unites executive department officialdom with recent members of the presidential government. But there are differences of view, sometimes reflecting political party points of view, but more often reflecting differences about the role of the federal government in solving local or international problems. There is always the problem of making the critical distinction between what the federal government can do and what it cannot do. The occasional quest to push the governmental system to great levels of commitment and compassion gets generated in presidential elections and later by major presidential policy addresses (*e.g.*, the quest *to end poverty, to achieve equality of opportunity, to renew our cities, to help develop Latin America, to return power to the people*, and so forth). However, even the "best laid plans" of Presidents or Congress often get rescinded because of the "bottlenecks" of problem complexity and jurisdictional interdependency. As White House aides well know, however, "you have to start somewhere"—despite manifest

³⁸ E. HUGHES, *THE ORDEAL OF POWER* 59 (1963).

opposition and complexity. One aide explained the fate of many Great Society programs as follows:

. . . complexity of problems and complexity of the executive establishment [those were the chief problems]. . . . A program today often needs three or four departments and an equal number of Congressional committees and sub-committees to even get things started. It is the interdependency of policy and responsibilities that slows things down. There are just more and more people and more institutional drags involved. It takes a lot of time and testing to get things to work. For example, in the fields of job training and civil rights—LBJ knew he had to start things even though he couldn't be sure everything would work out well. He was terribly aware that there were so many bottlenecks. . . .

Listening to White House aides' views of these conflicts heightens one's appreciation for the responsibilities of the chief executive. The President has to act, even in the face of uncertainties, complexity, and opposition; eventually the consequences of inaction may outweigh the results of an ill-fated action. The President can ask the right questions, can act as educator, can preside over appropriate compromises, and can do much to shape and sharpen new policy directions, but the constraints on directing an effective application of those policies to problems are enormous. As the general public expects more and more of the presidency, and as its responsibilities for performance become greater and greater, the President is often thrust in the middle of a disillusioning squeeze play.

IV

A DIFFERENTIATED WHITE HOUSE STAFF

Much has been written about the continuous growth and increasing importance of the White House staff. The popular verdict is that the White House staff is the "center of the action" within the executive branch, and that it, more than any other body of counselors, is now the prime mechanism for helping Presidents shape and execute decisions. We are told that recent White House staffs have included favored assistants who have overshadowed the cabinet executives and challenged the importance of the "Distinguished Outsiders" to whom previous Presidents may have turned.³⁹ Senior presidential assistants often deny any superordinate status over the cabinet and claim they are there merely to help the President communicate with the departments.⁴⁰

To be sure, White House staff have been quite strategically important in policy formulation stages of federal policy. But their apparent "effectiveness" in this one sphere too often obscures an unimpressive record in policy direction or "follow-through." While White House staff may contribute to the distillation of a vast amount

³⁹ See, e.g., S. ALSOP, *THE CENTER* (1968); P. ANDERSON, *THE PRESIDENTS' MEN* (1968); C. ROBERTS, *L.B.J.'s INNER CIRCLE* (1965).

⁴⁰ See Murphy, *Eisenhower's White House*, *FORTUNE*, July 1953, at 75, 76 (quoting Sherman Adams).

of incubating legislative proposals, congressional subcommittees along with departmental officials are often able to go about the work of steering and administering federal domestic programs with seeming immunity from White House influence.

Presidents, of course, use their staff differently from term to term, and from one season to the next. But several generalizations about the White House staff in the 1960's can be suggested. It is my estimate that the patterns of continuity and similarity of the way recent Presidents (1960-1971) have organized and used their White House staffs far outweighed the differences. First, while the role of the White House staff has grown generally, its greatest increase in responsibility has been in information gathering and "policy distillation" activities: the culling of new ideas from task force and advisory group reports, the drafting of legislative messages, and the subsequent design of legislative strategies.⁴¹ As mentioned above, the execution or direction of far-flung federal enterprises have been less easily assumed by the White House (although there have been attempts). Second, the increased importance of the White House staff in policy making comes not so much at the expense of cabinet and departmental influence, as in proportion to the measurably expanding commitments of the federal government. Furthermore, just as current White House staff are significantly more important as a collectivity than most previous presidential staff, contemporary department leaders (excepting perhaps one or two) have vastly increased mandates, more administrative responsibilities, and larger staffs of their own, than did their predecessors of some twenty or forty years ago. Finally, relatively few White House aides enjoy anything near the prominence of the more important members of the cabinet. Under recent Presidents, only a small number of White House aides (ranging from six to a dozen) have had close and frequent access to the President. In practice, the large majority of White House aides deal much more frequently with sub-cabinet and cabinet secretariat staffs than directly with cabinet members. And White House aides have their largest influence on matters of small importance or in matters with which the President is indifferent. Theodore Sorensen's view of the staff role is relevant:

In those areas where his [President Kennedy's] interest and knowledge were limited, the scope of our discretion was often large. But even in those instances we did not make major decisions for him. Our role was to enable him to have more time, facts and judgements with which to make them himself—to increase *his* influence, not ours; to preserve his options, not his ego; to make certain that questions were not foreclosed or answers required before he had an opportunity to place his imprint upon them.⁴²

And White House staff should not be judged as distinctly superior to the cabinet or departmental personnel, for the quality of White House staff contributions is very often only as good as the cooperation and counsel White House staff can elicit from departmental officials.

⁴¹ See *THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY SYSTEM* (T. Cronin & S. Greenberg eds. 1969).

⁴² T. SORESEN, *KENNEDY* 259 (1965).

The day of the "general purpose aide" with an entirely undefined portfolio seems a thing of the past for White House staff. To be sure, many of the White House jurisdictions are not rigidly prescribed, but those claiming to be generalists thrive not "at large," but in particular functional or substantive assignment areas, within, for example, public relations, foreign policy, or domestic program areas. It is easier than one might suspect to divide recent White House staff into five relatively distinct functional operations. (More could be defined, but a typology of five is sufficient for our purposes.) Overlapping assignments do exist and not a few White House aides claim they serve (or served) as bridges between factions within the staff. But with rare exceptions, presidential aides can be identified as members of one of the following staff units: (1) domestic policy and legislative program, (2) budget and economic policy, (3) national security and foreign policy, (4) congressional relations, and (5) administrative and public relations.⁴³

As seen in Table 3, perceptions of executive branch conflict vary quite measurably with the type of White House task assignment. The White House aides with more programmatic or policy oriented responsibilities are far more likely to observe "considerable conflict" with the departments than are the more political or public relations staff assistants to Presidents. Is this just because they have more contact with the departments? Or is the nature of the work assignment responsible? Or is the type of man who is likely to be cast in one job at the White House basically different from the type of man he must deal with in the departments? A closer examination of this differentiated White House staff (at least as it existed from 1961-1970) may

TABLE 3

VARYING STAFF PERCEPTIONS OF CONFLICT IN PRESIDENCY—EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENT RELATIONS, WITH STAFF FUNCTIONS HELD CONSTANT

Levels Of Conflict	Presidency Staff Functional Groupings				
	Domestic Policy & Legis. Prog. N = (12)	Budget/ Economic (6)	National Security/ Foreign (8)	Congress Relations (5) (Total N = 43)	Administrative Public Relations Staffs (12)
Considerable	100%	83%	75%	20%	25%
Moderate	0	17	12.5	80	50
Insignificant	0	0	12.5	0	25
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

Source: Personal Interviews of White House Staff Members serving between 1961 and 1970.

⁴³ One of the more distinguishing characteristics of the expanding Nixon White House has been its newly-created Office of Communications for the Executive Branch—a public relations and image-making functional group that will no doubt continue to exist in the same or somewhat similar format under future Presidents. See Bonafede, *Men Behind Nixon—Herbert G. Klein: Spokesman for the Administration*, NAT'L J. 258-62 (Dec. 6, 1969).

suggest some of the features about White House work and staff "operational codes" which both make life difficult within the White House and shape varying performances.

A. Domestic Policy and Legislative Program Staff

Recent developments have had the effect of enhancing the need for a larger and more professional domestic policy and legislative program staff: the sheer growth of federal domestic programs, the fact that the initiative for setting the budget and formulating legislation has swung over to the President, and the vast increase in jurisdictional questions which are raised by multi-departmental programs such as Model Cities, mass transit, manpower training, early childhood education, and environmental protection. Another new dimension of White House staff domestic policy work has been the increased use and major reliance on presidential advisory networks outside of existing channels (*i.e.*, besides those within or connected with the executive departments).⁴⁴

Most of the Kennedy and Johnson domestic policy staff members were trained as

TABLE 4
BACKGROUND CHARACTERISTICS OF VARIOUS WHITE HOUSE STAFF GROUPINGS
DURING THE 1960's

<i>Background Factors</i>	<i>STAFF GROUPINGS</i>				
	Domestic Policy & Legis. Prog. N = (12)	Budget/Economic (6)	Nat. Security, For. Affairs (8)	Congress Relations (5) (Total N = 43)	Administrative Personal Staff (12)
Lawyer	75%*	0%	0%	40%	17%
Economist	0	50	50	0	0
University Professor	8	50	38	0	0
Public Relations Journalist	0	0	0	0	58
Former Congressional Staffer	42	0	12	20	33
Former Executive Branch Employment	75	100	75	40	17
Political Activist	50	0	25	100	67

Source: Personal interviews. * Percentages to be read down the column.

⁴⁴ See generally THE PRESIDENTIAL ADVISORY SYSTEM, *supra* note 41. See also H. WOLMAN, POLITICS OF FEDERAL HOUSING ch. 4 (1971).

lawyers (see Table 4). Most also had previous and sometimes extensive Washington experience; the Kennedy aides came directly from the campaign and from Capitol Hill staff positions, the Johnson aides mainly came from within the executive departments. Many had both legislative and executive branch work experience. Presidents Kennedy and Johnson used their domestic policy staff to summarize and analyze departmental proposals, refine conflicting views (insofar as possible), and generally define issues or proposals that deserved presidential attention. The domestic policy staff have been particularly sensitive to the fact that they should help the President "make his decisions [based] on the full range of *his* considerations and constituencies, which no Cabinet member shared."⁴⁵ These staff usually see their work in terms of "getting things started," "getting bills to Capitol Hill," and later, once programs start getting enacted, "making things work."

The domestic aides, more frequently than any other group within the White House, usually fashion a distinctively adversary relationship with their counterparts in the domestic executive departments. Patrick Anderson captures some of the disquietude toward Johnson aide, Califano:

Serving as the chief expeditor for an impatient and demanding President, Califano has made many enemies. Cabinet members seeking to carry an issue to the President are often told to "talk to Joe" and this breeds resentment. Part of Califano's job is to knock heads together, and this wins him no friends among those whose heads are knocked. Some Cabinet members call him "Little Joe" behind his back, and they say it without smiling. Others who have crossed his path have called him a "hatchet man," and worse.⁴⁶

These White House staff tend to be younger than the cabinet and senior civil servants with whom they conduct most of their business. Invariably, the White House lawyers explicitly view themselves as counsels to the President (who, of course, is "their" client). Often these lawyers interrogate or prod "their" departmental adversaries much in the spirit of the prosecuting attorney, and with the same tutored and dispassionate disregard for niceties, they soon earn the disapprobation of many a departmental official. Priding themselves on possessing a superior capacity to think analytically, and the insight and foresight of that mysterious element called the "presidential perspective," White House domestic policy lawyers often view themselves as the necessary and indispensable catalysts who must stimulate and prod the departments into compliance with presidential intentions. Insensitive and arrogant as this appears, these aides are encouraged in this behavior by their perceptions of the constant need for speed, and by an often disillusioned and disbelieving President hardened by his inability to bend departmental bureaucracies in the direction of his policy priorities.

⁴⁵ SORESENSEN, *supra* note 42, at 258.

⁴⁶ P. ANDERSON, *supra* note 39, at 367.

B. Budget and Economic Counselors

During the 1960's several members of the Council of Economic Advisers and of the Budget Bureau directorate functioned as full-fledged members of the White House staff. The previous distinctions between "Executive Office of the President" and "White House staff" became increasingly blurred as the White House domestic policy lawyers needed more sophisticated counsel on unemployment, tax policy, inflation control and numerous related questions involved in "managing" the national economy. Concomitantly, budget directors and economists—assigned to the Executive Office—assumed a presidential perspective largely indistinguishable from that of senior White House policy aides.⁴⁷

Budget Bureau leadership in the past decade was recruited from among the economics profession or from respected "old hands" who successfully worked themselves up the career ladder within the Bureau. In theory at least, the President's domestic aides and political counselors serve the short term, immediate policy interests of *a President*, whereas the Budget Bureau serves the longer term perspective of *the presidency*, with particular responsibilities for program evaluation and budgeting analysis. By the mid-1960's both the Bureau of the Budget and the Council of Economic Advisers were involved in White House program formulation tasks as well as in quasi-operational activities such as inflation control or anti-poverty program activities. As these so-called Executive Office "staff" became increasingly involved in White House and cabinet-level operations, the distinctions between White House and "Executive Office of the President" *and* the distinctions between presidential *staff* and executive branch *management* became at best hazy, and often confusing.

The Bureau of the Budget—now the Office of Management and Budget—has long played a central role (although with differing success⁴⁸) as an intermediary between White House and the departments. The Bureau has been expected to raise tough questions about program promise and performance: "What will this program really do?"; "Why has this program taken so long to get off the ground?"; "Why does this cost so much?"; "Why haven't you been in closer collaboration with other departments on this part of that program?"; and so forth. Not surprisingly, and in no small part intentionally, these investigative questions and the budgetary examination processes themselves beget a more or less adversary relationship with the departments.⁴⁹ Moreover, Presidents and their senior White House staff assistants expect their budget and economic advisors to identify and bring to their attention department inconsistencies and specific program activities that run counter to the President's intentions. That conflict and heated argument result is not something that necessarily upset Presidents. One recalls John Kennedy's comment to two aides

⁴⁷ See Gordon, *Reflections on Spending*, in 15 PUBLIC POLICY 13 (J. Montgomery & A. Smithies eds. 1966).

⁴⁸ Schick, *The Budget Bureau That Was: Thoughts on the Rise, Decline, and Future of a Presidential Agency*, in this symposium, p. .

⁴⁹ See A. WILDAVSKY, *THE POLITICS OF THE BUDGETARY PROCESS* (1964); Davis & Ripley, *The Bureau of the Budget and Executive Branch Agencies: Notes on Their Interaction*, 29 J. POL. 749 (1967).

in the midst of one such heated debate: "The last thing I want around here is a mutual admiration society. . . . When you people stop arguing, I'll start worrying."⁵⁰

Budget officials, even more than White House staff domestic policy aides, are now well accustomed to their often unfashionable role as the "abominable no-men" of the executive branch. Presidents frequently transmit some of their most unpleasant decisions for cabinet leaders *via* Budget Bureau leadership. One former director points out that conflict between the departments and the Budget Bureau is not only inevitable but, on balance, healthy. How else can you ferret out all the problems and possibilities? Said another Budget Bureau leader: "there is actually an inverse relationship between a cabinet member's effectiveness for the administration and his popularity with the Budget Bureau." That is to say, malleable and agreeable department people probably lack the capability for inventing and incubating needed new policy proposals and/or managerial strategies.

C. National Security and Foreign Policy Staff

It might seem that the President's national security staff would enjoy more harmonious relationships with "their" executive departments than is the case between the domestic policy staff and the domestic departments. Presumably the national security staff deals primarily with only two departments, State and Defense, in contrast to domestic policy aides who must deal with about ten departments plus numerous independent agencies. Moreover, it is generally held that the President is granted much greater leeway in determination of foreign policy than is the case in the various domestic policy spheres. But such a view is somewhat deceptive, for the Defense Department alone is really several departments rolled into one huge umbrella, employing at least three times as many *civilians* (not to mention military personnel) as the entire list of domestic departments (with the Post Office now excluded). In practice, the White House national security staff has responsibilities for at least seven or eight major departments and agencies, including Defense, State, Central Intelligence Agency, The Military (Joint Chiefs of Staff), the United States Information Agency, Agency for International Development, and frequently, when appropriate, for Treasury, Agriculture, and Commerce as well.

The hope that a strong Secretary of State and a well organized State Department could act as the central coordinator for United States foreign policy has grown increasingly unrealistic. Contemporary Presidents have generally held that United States national security policy is and must be presidential policy, and concomitantly, there has been a major shift in policy formulation and direction to the White House and away from the various departments.

All recent Presidents have relied heavily on their national security staffs for keeping in close communication with the executive agencies making up the national security establishment. John Kennedy was warned against having a large layering

⁵⁰ Quoted in P. SALINGER, *WITH KENNEDY* 64 (1966).

of staff imposed between himself and his national security departments. He was successful in cutting down the size of the complex formal staff inherited from Eisenhower, but he did not lessen the responsibility of his own team of White House aides in this area. Indeed, after the Bay of Pigs embarrassment, Kennedy enlarged the mandate and the functions of this staff. Kennedy and his aides generally viewed the Systems Analysis and International Security Agency groups as well as the Office of the Secretary in the Defense Department as unusually close allies and sometimes even as adjunct staff.

Kennedy's staff had several economists and foreign affairs specialists recruited from university communities. Gradually, both the McGeorge Bundy and Walter Rostow NSC staffs during the 1960's added experienced "regional area" specialists from State Department or the CIA. But relatively few specialists in military or defense policy served on their staffs, though the Nixon-Kissinger staff has been more inclined to add staff in this sphere. Most of the national security aides interviewed for this study saw considerable conflict in departmental White House relations; the exceptions to this generalization were former department aides who felt that their colleagues exaggerated their estimates of conflict. It is possible that men who have spent most of their career working within government find it easier to work with the departments and are generally more patient than those White House aides new to government. That the National Security Council's framework for coordination has existed for twenty years longer than the newly created Domestic Council offers apparently only slight advantage to NSC aides in trying to get the departments to act in responsive compliance with the President's policy agenda.

Recent national security aides at the White House also paint a picture of their work as decidedly located within an adversary process in which they act as presidential agents trying to bring about a more consistent and responsive national security policy performance by the respective areas of the United States government. One aide suggested that his job was much like "an espionage operation, digging out information from whatever source was available in anticipation of problems, and on the outlook for new ideas and problems." Another NSC aide rather bluntly said that the White House had to know how to "stir up the animals in the bureaucracy, know when to rap 'their' knuckles, fire them, create new agencies to make end runs around them, etc. . . ." A somewhat more reflective view of their role was put as follows:

One of the distressing truths of Washington is that government needs a sense of leadership, a sense of coherence and a sense of purpose and often needs to be told which way to go. Hence, the president and the White House often can do the job of prodding and probing, asking the right questions at the right time. Often there are great ideas or proposals around lower down in the government, but they never get the proper attention because in their words "nobody asked us." So shaping

the issues, shaping them in such a way as it can be resolved or treated is critically important and a job that presidents and the national security council staff can fulfill.

D. White House Congressional Relations Staff

White House congressional relations aides differ from their fellow staff having substantive policy responsibilities in several ways. Their concern is less with policy formulation than it is with policy promotion. While the program and policy staff are busy trying to win support and cooperation for White House policy interests within the departments, congressional relations aides spend their time seeking political support from within congressional committees and among diverse factions on Capitol Hill. Not surprisingly, program and congressional liaison aides sometimes differ over the relative merits and feasibility of newly suggested program ideas. And at least under the recent Democratic administrations, the congressional relations aides have frequently mirrored the more conservative views of congressional chairmen in internal White House staff deliberations. Congressional relations aides only infrequently pay attention to policy implementation activities and on those occasions, more often than not, they argue the case as viewed on Capitol Hill to their White House colleagues.

Several factors help explain the congressional relations staff's more moderate estimates of contention between White House and departments. First, the White House congressional relations staff by vocation are far more geared to political accommodation and compromise than others on the White House staff. Consensus-building rather than policy incubation and program generation is their life style and preoccupation. They define their task as helping the President get his program passed by Congress. They consciously work for the reelections of the President (or his party) and the President's supporters within the Congress. To these ends they necessarily seek to minimize conflict and maximize cohesion. A reasonably unified executive branch is an added advantage for successful enactment of major legislation. Division and dissension within or among these departments will usually hurt a bill's chances for passage. Because they, more than any other staff at the White House, are conscious of the ingredients (*i.e.*, new proposals) that go into the making of the box scores of wins and losses that (albeit simplistically) characterize presidential-congressional relations, the legislative liaison aides favor "practical" proposals. While domestic and budget White House staff often remain disappointed by the dearth of new ideas or the hesitancy of the President to back a controversial proposal, the congressional relations officers are more easily satisfied by modest accomplishments and are also less inclined to encourage new or complicated legislative initiatives that might be difficult to pass—"we obviously don't want to be put in the position of having to sell programs that don't have a reasonable chance of passing."

Second, at least during the 1960's, the congressional relations officials had explicitly designated lieutenants in all major departments.⁵¹ For the most part these

⁵¹ See A. HOLTZMAN, *LEGISLATIVE LIAISON: EXECUTIVE LEADERSHIP IN CONGRESS* 263 & ch. 9 (1970).

department officers were loyal partisans who owe allegiance almost equally to their cabinet members *and* to the White House congressional relations office, for the White House legislative liaison team had authority to remove or fire departmental legislative relations aides. These department contacts frequently had "graduated" to their posts from campaign or Capital Hill staff work. In general, the White House staff enjoyed cordial and close (often with weekly meetings) relations with these "compatible" counterparts in the departments. In marked contrast with the White House domestic and budget aides it was quite rare for the White House congressional relations aides to have much if any contact with non-partisan civil servants or "bureaucrats." To some extent, their departmental lieutenants took the brunt of and absorbed department conflicts, thereby leaving the White House congressional relations aides relatively free to deal with senior congressional officials and preside over White House-congressional relations strategies.

Finally, the primary preoccupation of White House congressional relations aides is dealing with the leadership and committee chairmen in Congress. Since congressional aides are employed first and foremost to help forge viable coalitions of congressional support from bill to bill and from one legislative season to the next, their chief opposition consists of dissident members of their own party or influential opponents on the other side of the congressional aisle. Departmental concerns, especially departmental debates about alternative programs, are less appreciated and probably less well understood by congressional relations White House aides; these latter concerns necessarily take a back seat to their principal attention which is devoted to congressional and partisan strategy and tactics. In sum, then, both the fact that congressional relations aides have less actual contact with cabinet members and civil servants and the fact that they have distinctively different functional responsibilities account for less perceived conflict with departments.

E. Administrative and Public Relations Staff

As can be seen in Table 3, the non-policy administrative and personal staff assistants to the President were the least disposed to see serious conflict between the White House and the departments. Strictly speaking, no one on the White House staff is far removed from policy matters, but in a relative sense, there is measurable variation in staff involvement in detailed substantive policy deliberations. We now have White House organizations with large staffs of communication specialists, campaign counselors, ceremony coordinators, and dozens of others who handle speechwriting, mail, T.V. and radio arrangements, travel arrangements, and so forth. One reason for their "happier" evaluation of departmental relations is that they are measurably less involved with the vast executive establishment. Their contact with the departments is either with the usually responsive Office of the Secretary or with their own carefully planted network of political aides.⁵²

⁵² See E. CORNWELL, *PRESIDENTIAL LEADERSHIP OF PUBLIC OPINION* ch. 9 (1965). See also Bonafede,

It is not so much that many of these aides do not have some problems in their relations with department officials, as it is that they have grown accustomed to accentuating the positive. That is, they are hired to secure maximum press and TV coverage for presidential accomplishments and, not surprisingly, to insure that the appealing rather than the appalling stories, the harmonious rather than the contentious character of a presidential administration are communicated to the American general public.⁵³ Just as congressional relations aides experienced their conflicts more with certain members of Congress rather than departmental officials, so also many, if not most, of the administrative and public relations aides to Presidents have their occupational difficulties with columnists, editors, and TV commentators outside the government rather than with department officials inside the government.

The backgrounds of the non-policy aides are also quite different from those of the substantive policy staffers. (See Table 4.) Non-policy aides have had more extensive political and party involvement, less training in economics or law, and few have had experience working in the executive branch. Their backgrounds are no doubt related to the incentives or reward systems that affect their job performance. Non-policy aides are less concerned with the instrumental tasks of government effectiveness and, naturally, more concerned with maintaining or enlarging the President's coalition of political supporters. These differing perspectives which reflect distinctive staff divisions of labor influence the way these various White House staff work with executive department officials and how they assess White House-department relationships.

V

A DIFFERENTIATED CABINET

In the previous section it is suggested that the differentiated White House staff organization may be one of the contributing factors to the variance in staff perceptions of conflict with the departments. So also it is likely that diversity and dissimilarity of the executive departments may also contribute to a variance in White House staff perceptions of conflict. An essential premise here is that an understanding of White House-departmental relations must take into account the differences in the way cabinet and department roles are viewed from the White House.

Though the cabinet is not mentioned in the United States Constitution, Presidents have appointed and consulted with their department heads ever since George Washington began the practice. President Washington actively solicited advice and counsel from his three department heads—State, Treasury, and War. In time he called these three together with his part-time Attorney General (who continued a private practice on the side). Subsequently, cabinet meetings became tradition

supra note 43; Bonafede, *Harry S. Dent Digs in as Key White House Political Legman*, NAT'L J., Sept. 19, 1970.

⁵³ Bonafede, *supra* note 43, at 258, 262.

and almost all Presidents used their cabinets as a political sounding board and as a convenient communications network. Over time, the cabinet changed greatly, especially affected by its growth from three to a dozen departmental members by 1967. While the notion of a cohesive presidential cabinet of collegial and interchangeable advisors persists with remarkable staying power, the cabinet as a collectivity has rarely been a policy making or program coordinating body.⁵⁴ Indeed, the cabinet as a meaningful "collectivity" appears to be passing into oblivion (though not out of existence). And as Rossiter predicted more than twenty years ago, in its place there has grown up "a congeries of functional cabinets with reduced and appropriate membership."⁵⁵ The following discussion sketches several variables that undoubtedly affected White House assessments of and working relations with the cabinet departments under recent presidential administrations.

Any discussion of the cabinet, of course, should note that personality and individual levels of competence often affect the degree to which cordiality exists between White House and departments. Each cabinet usually has one or two cabinet members who excel in one way or another and become the dominant personalities in their cabinet. Herbert Hoover's aggressive performance as Secretary of Commerce under Harding and Coolidge was of this type. George Marshall's performance in both the State and Defense Departments under Harry Truman earned similar accolades. Treasury Secretary George Humphrey clearly towered over most of the Eisenhower cabinet.⁵⁶ More recently, the case of Robert McNamara is particularly illustrative. McNamara enjoyed especially close ties with both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson.⁵⁷ His previous reputation and his subsequent performance as a talented manager of large, complex organizations practically mesmerized both of these Presidents and most of the White House staff (almost none of whom had ever managed any organization other than temporary campaign staffs). Both Kennedy and Johnson repeatedly pointed to McNamara and the Defense Department as models for other departments to imitate, conspicuously congratulating their PPBS, cost reduction, and cost-effectiveness operations. McNamara's quite effective capacity to present his own case before the Presidents made it seemingly unnecessary for White House aides to serve as "go-betweens" or intermediate channels; indeed McNamara put such staff functionaries out of business even before they attempted any efforts along these lines. McNamara, for example, personally carried his annual budgetary requests directly

⁵⁴ See FENNO, *supra* note 2. Fenno's study should have a wider reading audience than it has had in the past, as many new Cabinet members—and Washington journalists who should know better—continue to talk about an idealized "textbook Cabinet" in which all members are treated as equals and in which each serves as a counselor to Presidents on matters beyond those within their departments' jurisdictions.

⁵⁵ Rossiter, *The Constitutional Significance of the Executive Office of the President*, 43 AM. POL. SCI. REV. 1206, 1216 (1949).

⁵⁶ HUGHES, *supra* note 38, at 61-68; A. LARSON, EISENHOWER: THE PRESIDENT NOBODY KNEW 25-26 (1968).

⁵⁷ Compare the sympathetic perspective on McNamara in W. KAUFMAN, *THE McNAMARA STRATEGY* (1964), with the more critical account in Halberstam, *The Programming of Robert McNamara*, HARPER'S, Feb. 1971, at 37.

to the President, with the President granting the Budget Director the opportunity for selective appeals or disagreements; this was a substantially different if not an exact opposite procedure of the usual for all other cabinet members (and for Defense Secretaries both before and after the Kennedy-Johnson administrations).

Occasionally, too, there are times when the politics of the period and the functions of a department thrust particular cabinet members into prominence, and simultaneously, into close collaborative relations with the White House. Dean Acheson's unusually close and cordial ties with the Truman White House and Lyndon Johnson's highly respectful appreciation of Dean Rusk illustrate the cases of internationally tense periods in which diplomatic political strategy looms large. Secretary John Gardner (HEW 1965-68) enjoyed great prominence and relatively good relations with the Johnson White House during the middle 1960's around the time in which major educational and health legislation were being ratified and placed into operation. Soon thereafter, however, when the Vietnam war began overshadowing all else and consuming more and more of the President's time and potential budget increases, White House communications with HEW's Gardner began to resemble those of most other domestic cabinet members—less frequent and less supportive.

The rise in prominence or fashion of an issue relevant to a department's activities can occasionally also work to the detriment of White House-department relations. The "law and order" issue in the late 1960's occasioned cutting partisan attacks to be mounted against President Johnson's Attorney General. Ramsey Clark resisted most temptations to act in any retaliatory or repressive manner. But, evidently, Clark's response was viewed as overly dispassionate and tolerant by his President.⁵⁸ And the more recent case of former Secretary Walter Hickel and his varied efforts apparently illustrates the case of a cabinet member who decides to champion popular issues (environmental protection and youth) measurably further than the Administration of which he is a part.

There are, of course, numerous other reasons why Presidents and their staff may deliberately choose to have "cool" relations with a cabinet member. Sometimes this may be due to presidential lack of interest in a department's domain. Sometimes there is ill will existing between a strong President and a strong and quite stubborn cabinet member. Part of the problem undoubtedly arises because Presidents just don't have time to spend with cabinet officers, not to mention the leaders of independent agencies and major bureau chiefs. The blunt fact of the contemporary period is that approximately two-thirds of presidential time has been spent on national security and foreign policy considerations.

An apparent pattern characterizes White House-cabinet relations over time. Just as there is a distinctive presidential "honeymoon" with the press and with partisan critics, so also White House-department ties usually are the closest and

⁵⁸ See GRAFF, *supra* note 32, at 172.

most cooperative during the first year of an administration. The first six months of the relationship is usually cordial, "healthy," and often bordering on the euphoric. The election victory is still being celebrated. A new team of "leaders" has arrived in Washington. New faces provide for extensive news copy. A new federal policy agenda is being recast. The newly staffed executive branch gives everyone an impression of bubbling over with new ideas, new possibilities, and imminent breakthroughs. In contrast to the much publicized arrival of the cabinet members, White House staff receive less publicity at this time. White House ceremonies feature the announcement, installation, and self-congratulatory rituals of welcoming in the recently anointed cabinet chieftains who, at least in the Nixon version, are men possessed of special "extra dimensions." The Washington political community, the executive branch in particular, is a veritable merry-go-round of good will and cheerful open doors. One Kennedy cabinet member, remembering those early days, noted that Kennedy told his cabinet that there would be frequent cabinet meetings and that individual cabinet officers should telephone him or Vice President Lyndon Johnson on anything of importance; when in doubt they should "err on the side of referring too much" on policy matters.⁵⁹ Even the egregiously silly or blandest of proposals coming from cabinet members at this time are tolerated and entertained by a deferential White House staff and a happily-elected President.

But as policy formulation is accentuated in the early years of a presidential term, program management and implementation receive increasing attention in the later period (especially if a President has been successful in passing a fair amount of new legislation by then). Critical domestic developments and international crises begin to monopolize the presidential schedule. Presidents gradually find that they have much less time for personally dealing with cabinet members as they had in the administration's early months. Cabinet members become less inclined to refer "too much" to the President, knowing full well that they may prematurely exhaust their personal political credit with him. Additionally, the President's program becomes somewhat fixed; priorities get set and budget ceilings produce some new rules of the game. Ambitious, expansionist cabinet officers become painfully familiar with various Executive Office staff refrains, usually to the effect that "there just isn't any more money available for programs of that magnitude," "budget projections for the next two or three years just can't absorb that type of increment," and perhaps harshest of all—"yes, I agree that this is an excellent proposal, but excellent though it may be, it will just have to wait until the next term."

When, in the course of an administration, cabinet members grow bitter about the way they are treated and increasingly left out of White House affairs, they seldom make their opinions public. There are, of course, some exceptions and privately a good number of cabinet officers will talk about the problem. The case of Interior Secretary Walter Hickel is perhaps an extreme case; the fact that he had only two

⁵⁹ J. DAY, *MY APPOINTED ROUND: 929 DAYS AS POSTMASTER GENERAL* 97 (1965).

or three private meetings with his President during a two year period seems an unusually restrictive arrangement. Most recent cabinet officers have had more frequent relations with their White House superiors, but few of the domestic cabinet members have been wholly pleased by the quantity or quality of these meetings. Said one Johnson cabinetman, "I just don't know what you can do—you just have to realize that his day is the same length as yours and become resigned to the reality that he just can't afford to spend much time with most of us—especially with that war going on."

A cabinet member who served both Presidents Kennedy and Johnson stated that there should unquestionably have been more cabinet meetings:

there are two important things that should be done through the use of the cabinet meetings. First, meetings should be held to inform the cabinet members about major developments or new priorities. Secondly, the president should occasionally bring some major policy issue before the cabinet and open it up for detailed discussion. He should take advantage of the broad gauged abilities of these very able men. For example, never once was there any discussion of whether we should send more troops to Vietnam. This type of policy matter was always confined to the national security council group—but they could have benefitted from our views and ideas on this type of matter, for we had less personal involvement in the earlier decisions and might have been able to give valuable added perspective or fresh appraisals.

An insightful commentary is provided by John Kennedy's Postmaster General in his witty but somewhat bitter memoir-recollections. J. Edward Day suggests that Kennedy had neither the time nor the inclination to utilize the collective judgment of his cabinet; Day also hints that Kennedy hardly made use of several of the cabinet members even in their individualized departmental leadership roles. It is worth citing three of his observations at length, not so much because he is one of the few cabinet members to express his views openly, as because his views are similar to the private complaints of several other cabinet officers:

. . . President Kennedy had never had the experience of being an executive among lesser but by no means subservient executives; he had been served by a fanatically devoted band of men of his own creation. His Cabinet was a different run of shad. Each member was independent and quick to express his views, perhaps too much so for the President's taste. . . .

. . . .

The impression was created . . . that the President preferred smaller meetings with those Cabinet members concerned with a specific problem. *But his absorption with politics, publicity, and foreign policy allowed him little time to be concerned about the domestic departments*, unless they had an immediate political aspect. For the domestic Cabinet, *personal meetings with the President became fewer and farther between*, and more than one member grew increasingly unhappy because it was so difficult to see the President.

The atmosphere at Cabinet meetings should have been right for free-and-easy, frank discussion. At the outset it had been only natural to assume that such discussion would be encouraged. . . .

The setting may have been right, but after the first two or three meetings one had the distinct impression that the President felt that decisions on major matters were not made—or even influenced—at Cabinet sessions, and what discussion there was a waste of time. . . . When members spoke up to suggest or to discuss major Administration policy, the President would listen with thinly disguised impatience and then postpone or otherwise bypass the question. . . .⁶⁰

A senior Kennedy staff member tells of the occasion when one cabinet officer had repeatedly requested him to make an appointment with the President. "He kept calling and calling, and so finally about the forty-third time—after I had told him over and over again that this wasn't the type of problem the President wanted to discuss with cabinet members—I finally relented and scheduled an appointment. Immediately after Secretary X completed his appointment and had left, Kennedy stormed into my office and [in emphatically strong language] chewed me out for letting the cabinet member in!"

Cabinet members who went to President Johnson with requests were often faced with a *quid pro quo* situation, and at least for some cabinet members, presidential requests were an added factor in keeping them at a distance. One cabinet officer noted that most of the domestic department heads tried as much as possible to leave the President alone because of the enormous Vietnam war burdens the President was carrying. "But even at that, it was known that the President would welcome visits by domestic cabinet members on Saturday mornings. In retrospect, several of us regret that we did not make greater and better use of those opportunities. But part of the reason we didn't was because Johnson had an uncanny way of asking favors of you or giving you a number of political chores to do that you knew you didn't want and often couldn't carry out."

By mid-term election time, the White House also expects cabinet members to campaign for the administration and to celebrate the administrative and legislative record of the past two years. Like it or not, cabinet members become judged on their capacity to generate favorable publicity, and to proclaim the virtues of the recent "White House" achievements and, above all, to exclaim the performance of the sitting President.

Conventional rankings of the departments are based on their longevity, annual expenditure outlays, or their personnel totals. Rankings according to these indicators can be seen in the first three columns of Table 5. A preliminary appreciation of department diversity can be gained by even a casual comparison of these columns. For example, while the State Department is more than 175 years older than some of the newest departments, its expenditures rank as the lowest of any department.

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 96-98.

On the other hand, the Department of Health, Education and Welfare although formally less than twenty years old ranks second only to Defense in having more personnel and higher annual expenditures.

Some other ways of classifying the departments deserve note. One is suggested by Stewart Alsop's journalistic appraisal of real political "power and impact."⁶¹

TABLE 5
VARIOUS WAYS OF VIEWING THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS

SENIORITY	EXPENDITURES ^a	PERSONNEL ^b	A JOURNALIST'S ASSESSMENT OF "REAL POLITICAL POWER & IMPACT" ^c
1 State	1 Defense	1 Defense	1 Defense
2 Treasury	2 HEW	2 HEW	2 State
3 War/Defense	3 Treasury	3 Agriculture	3 Treasury
4 Justice	4 Agriculture	4 Treasury	4 Justice
5 Interior	5 Labor	5 Interior	5 Interior
6 Agriculture	6 Transportation	6 Transportation	6 HEW
7 Commerce	7 HUD	7 State	7 Labor
8 Labor	8 Commerce	8 Justice	8 Agriculture
9 HEW	9 Justice	9 Commerce	9 Commerce
10 HUD	10 Interior	10 HUD	10 HUD
11 Transportation	11 State	11 Labor	11 Transportation
INNER & OUTER CLUSTERINGS ^d	SUPER-CABINET PLAN A ^e	SUPER-CABINET PLAN B ^f	PRESIDENT NIXON'S 1971 PROPOSAL ^g
{ State Defense Treasury Justice	National Security Economic Stability and Growth Domestic Policy	Foreign Affairs Economic Affairs Natural Resources Science and Technology Social Services and Justice	{ State Defense Treasury Justice
{ Agriculture Interior Transportation HEW HUD Labor Commerce			{ Human Resources Natural Resources Economic Development Community Development

^a Estimated budget outlays of the executive departments in 1971.

^b *Statistical Abstract*, data for 1970.

^c See S. ALSOP, *THE CENTER* 254 (1968).

^d Generic clustering according to counseling/advocacy dimensions—see text discussion.

^e The way some White House aides view aggregate departmental concerns, and the apparent priority of these concerns as viewed by recent Presidents.

^f An example of cabinet consolidation that is one of many plausible but politically unlikely reforms.

^g Richard M. Nixon, State of the Union message to Congress, January 22, 1971.

⁶¹ See ALSOP, *supra* note 39, ch. 9.

Alsop's 1967 ranking takes into account not only the conventional data mentioned above, but also the Washington, D.C., status considerations toward contemporary cabinet members and departmental activities. Upon closer inspection the Alsop listing varies only slightly from longevity or seniority rankings with minor adjustments added to acknowledge the higher budget allocations of Defense and HEW as well as the personal Washington "celebrity" status of Robert S. McNamara and John W. Gardner (HEW).

The contemporary cabinet can also be differentiated into "inner" and "outer" departmental clusterings as illustrated in the fifth column of Table 5. The inner cabinet, at least throughout the 1960's, was generally recognized as the primary presidential counseling as well as strategic information gathering departments. (A cabinet counselor is a source of information and advice, someone to whom a President can turn for appraisals and consultation on highly sensitive or critical problems.) The outer cabinet are the explicitly domestic policy departments (Justice excepted). By custom, if not by designation these cabinet officers assume a relatively straight-forward advocate orientation that overshadows their counseling role. (An advocate is someone who argues for a cause, who supports, defends and on occasion pleads in behalf of some special concern.)

State, Defense, Treasury, and Justice, each for different reasons (discussed below), are the cabinet posts most consistently considered as part of the inner cabinet. The pattern in the past few presidential administrations suggests somewhat strongly that these counseling cabinet positions are vested with high priority responsibilities that almost naturally bring Presidents and their top staff into close and continually collaborative relations with the occupants of these inner cabinet leadership posts. Sorensen wrote that it was the "nature of their responsibilities and the competence with which they did their jobs" that brought certain department executives particularly close to President Kennedy in this counseling manner.⁶² Speaking of the Eisenhower period, Emmet J. Hughes sees a convergence of raw strength of personality and leadership with the Defense, Treasury, and State cabinet posts.⁶³ Sorensen cites six cabinet members as enjoying particularly close ties to John Kennedy, and one gathers that the general order of their importance and closeness to Kennedy amounted to this: Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon, and in varying ways Labor Secretary Arthur Goldberg and Vice President Lyndon Johnson.⁶⁴ And it is abundantly clear that Rusk and McNamara continued to hold superordinate status in the Lyndon Johnson cabinet vis-à-vis their cabinet colleagues. On balance, the period between 1961 and 1971 can be characterized by having had an "inner cabinet" group made up of the Defense, State, and Treasury secretaries along with the Attorney General. Then, too, as will be discussed a little later, certain White

⁶² SORENSEN, *supra* note 42, at 265.

⁶³ HUGHES, *supra* note 38, at 61.

⁶⁴ See generally SORENSEN, *supra* note 42, ch. 10.

House staff counselors were also included in an inner circle if not in the inner cabinet.

The inner cabinet grouping of this inner/outer breakdown suggested here corresponds identically to George Washington's original foursome, to Stewart Alsop's journalistic appraisal, and also to Sorensen's account of the Kennedy Administration. Moreover, the inner cabinet departments were the only ones immune to President Nixon's proposed overhaul of the executive branch; all others were nominated for abolition. My own classification of inner/outer derives from the examination of how White House aides viewed the departments. The status accorded these cabinet roles is, of course, subject to ebb and flow, for the status is rooted in performance and the fashions of the day as well as reputation. But, in general, White House staff during the 1960's acted far more deferentially toward these inner cabinet positions and the men who occupied them than toward outer cabinet officials.

With the exception of the State *Department*, as distinguished from the *Office of the Secretary* of State, the inner cabinet and the inner cabinet departments were almost always viewed as executive branch allies of the White House staff. An implicit operational code to this effect seemingly guided the manner in which most White House staff aides participated in executive branch activities during the 1960's. For this reason, these ties deserve further attention.

The State and Defense Departments have long been considered counseling and inner-cabinet departments. And the special closeness of Secretaries Rusk and McNamara with both Kennedy and Johnson is illustrative. One Johnson aide said it was his belief that President Johnson personally trusted only two of his cabinet—Rusk and McNamara (though it appears that the trust relationship between Johnson and McNamara diminished somewhat in 1967). Contemporary Presidents view national security and foreign policy matters as life and death considerations; President Kennedy, for example, noted that while mistakes in domestic policy “can only defeat us [at the next election, mistakes in] foreign policy can kill us.” The seemingly endless series of crises (Berlin, Cuba, Congo, Dominican Republic, Vietnam, and the Middle East to name just a few) during the 1960's make it mandatory for recent Presidents to maintain close relations with these two national security cabinet heads. Just as George Washington had met almost every day with his four “cabinet” members during the national security concern over the French crisis of 1793, so also John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson were likely to meet at least weekly and be in daily telephone communication with their inner cabinet of national security advisors.⁶⁵

It needs to be added, however, that throughout the past decade there has been more than a little White House discontent with the operational lethargy of the State Department.⁶⁶ We see here an anomaly in which the Secretary of State clearly

⁶⁵ See GRAFF, *supra* note 32; G. CHRISTIAN, *THE PRESIDENT STEPS DOWN* (1970).

⁶⁶ See SCHLESINGER, *supra* note 12; HILSMAN, *supra* note 17; J. LEACOS, *FIRES IN THE IN-BASKET* (1968); Campbell, “*What is to be Done?*”—*Gigantism in Washington*, 49 *FOREIGN AFFAIRS* 81 (1970).

was regarded as a member of the President's inner cabinet, but the Department of State was regarded as one of the most deficient and inadequate cabinet departments. More than twenty-five per cent of the White House staff interviewed for this study cited the State Department as an excellent illustration of the problem of White House-department conflicts. White House staff scorned the narrowness and timidity of the encrusted and elitist foreign service officers and complained also of the cutodial conservatism reflected in State Department working papers. Part of this problem may stem from the threats and philosophy of the Joseph McCarthy era which intimidated State Department careerists into holding only the puristic interpretations of the accepted policies of the day, thereby inhibiting their imaginative and inventive policy faculties. No doubt though, part of the problem stems from the way recent Secretaries, especially Secretary Rusk, defined their job. The demands on the Secretary were such that the State Department and its management were not Rusk's personal top priority. John Leacacos has surmised that the priorities appeared to have been:

. . . first, the President and his immediate desires; second, the top operations of the current crisis; third, public opinion as reflected in the press, radio and TV and in the vast inflow of letters from the public; fourth, Congressional opinion; fifth, Rusk's need to be aware, at least, of every thing that was going on in the world; and only sixth and last, the routine of the State Department itself.⁶⁷

The fact that the Secretary of State so frequently serves as the President's representative abroad or his number one witness on foreign policy matters before the Congress undoubtedly is another reason so few Secretaries of State have had the time or energy available for managing the State Department's widely scattered staff. It needs to be added that more than sixty federal departments, agencies, and committees are involved some way in the administration of our foreign policy. Recent Presidents increasingly have vested authority in their own White House-based NSC staff partly to compensate for State's uneven performance as a coordination arm for foreign policy matters and partly because Presidents need instant analysis during international crisis periods. In this regard, McGeorge Bundy's White House national security staff was dubbed by the press as "Bundy's little State Department." In another step to centralize and coordinate basic foreign policy activities, Richard Nixon has instituted a White House-level Council of International Economic Policy with broad authorities. Nonetheless, the Secretary of State still enjoys a relative closeness to the incumbent President and even with the rise in importance of White House national security counselors the Secretary of State is likely to continue as a full-fledged member of future presidential inner cabinets.

The Justice Department, also a counseling department, is frequently identified with the "inner circle" of cabinet agencies and its chieftains usually associated with the inner cabinet. That both Kennedy and Nixon appointed their most trusted campaign

⁶⁷ LEACACOS, *supra* note 66, at 110.

managers to the Attorney Generalship is an indicator of the importance of this position as a presidential counseling location. The Justice Department traditionally serves as the President's attorney and lawyer.⁶⁸ This special obligation results in continually close professional relations between White House domestic policy lawyers and Justice Department lawyers. Few people realize that the White House is constantly dependent on Justice Department lawyers for counsel on civil rights developments, presidential veto procedures, tax prosecutions, anti-trust controversies, presidential pardons recommendations, regulatory agency oversight, and a continual overview of the congressional judiciary committees. That this particular exchange sees lawyer working with lawyer may well account for some of the generally higher levels of satisfaction characterizing White House-Justice Department transactions. (The anomaly of J. Edgar Hoover as chief of the FBI which is, of course, within the Justice Department, defies most generalizations, for Hoover has often remained immune from both White House and Attorney General sanction, much to the concern of many of his "superordinates.")

The Treasury Department continues to play an all important role as an interpreter of the nation's leading financial interests and as key presidential advisor on both domestic and international fiscal and monetary policy considerations. At one time, of course, the Bureau of the Budget existed within Treasury. Now the budget staff and numerous economists, particularly within the Council of Economic Advisers, are attached to the White House itself, thereby somewhat diminishing the monopoly of economic counsel once available only from the Treasury. But, Treasury is a department with major institutional authority, having considerable responsibility for income and corporate tax administration, currency control, public borrowing and counseling the President with respect to questions of balance of gold, the federal debt and international trade, development, and monetary matters. By custom, if not by law, the Secretary of the Treasury sits in on deliberations of important national security controversies. Indeed, Treasury Secretary Douglas Dillon played a significant role in Kennedy's Cuban Missile Crisis policy determinations. There is here, as in the case of the Justice Department lawyers, a common professional linkage among economists and financial specialists at Treasury and their professional counterparts on the White House staff.

The inner circle of cabinet members are noticeably more interchangeable than the outer circle cabinet. Henry Stimson, for example, alternated from Taft's Secretary of War, to Hoover's Secretary of State, and then back once more as FDR's Secretary of the War Department. Dean Acheson was an FDR Under Secretary of the Treasury but later a Truman Secretary of State. C. Douglas Dillon reversed this pattern by being an Eisenhower Under Secretary of State and later a Kennedy Secretary of the Treasury. When Kennedy was trying to lure Robert McNamara to his new cabinet he offered McNamara his choice between Defense and Treasury.

⁶⁸ See L. HUSTON *et al.*, *ROLES OF THE ATTORNEY GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES* chs. 1 & 2 (1968).

More recently, former Attorney General Nicholas Katzenbach went from Justice to an Under Secretaryship of State, and former Attorney General William Rogers is now the thirteenth Justice Department head to have served in another inner cabinet position. John Connally, once a Secretary of the Navy, became a Nixon Secretary of the Treasury. There have been occasional shifts between inner and outer cabinet (*e.g.*, Harriman—Commerce to State, and Richardson—State to HEW), but such examples are an exception to the general pattern. What this interchangeability means is hard to discern, but it suggests perhaps that Presidents find it easier as well as more necessary to work with inner cabinet members and that inner cabinet members find it easier for their part to adopt a counseling style that allows them to identify more closely with the presidential "perspective" than is the case for outer cabinet members.

Quite related to the interchangeability of inner cabinet roles is the little-appreciated fact that, at least in recent years, White House staff aides recruited from within the executive branch have come mainly from among the inner-cabinet departments, often directly from service as assistants to cabinet members. And many of the recent White House staff who did not come from the executive branch had served (at one time or another) as departmental consultants to inner cabinet officials.

In recent years several members of the White House staff have performed cabinet-level counselor roles. Eisenhower, for example, explicitly designated Sherman Adams as a protocol member of his cabinet. Kennedy clearly looked upon Theodore Sorensen, McGeorge Bundy, and some of his economic advisors as co-equals if not more vital to his work than most of his cabinet members. Johnson and Nixon have likewise assigned many of their "staff" men to cabinet-type counseling responsibilities. Indeed, President Nixon, quite reasonably, has appropriated this term—cabinet counselor—for several of his personal staff, including Messrs. Burns, Moynihan, Harlow, and Finch. These counselors, whether in department posts or on the White House staff, are expected to rise above the narrowing frame of reference of the conventional advocate and, in Moynihan's view "It is not enough [that they] know one subject, one department. The President's men must know them all, must understand how one thing relates to another, must find in the words the spirit that animates them . . ."⁸⁹ The people to whom Presidents turn for White House overview presentations to congressmen and cabinet gatherings provide another indicator of inner "cabinet" status. When Kennedy wanted to have his cabinet briefed on his major priorities, he would typically ask Secretary of State Dean Rusk to review foreign affairs considerations, Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers Walter Heller would review major questions about the economy, and Ted Sorensen might sum up and give a status report on the domestic legislative program. In like manner, when Lyndon Johnson would hold special "seminars" for large gatherings of congressmen and their staffs, he would invariably call upon the Secretaries of State and Defense

⁸⁹ Moynihan comments, *supra* note 30, at 1731.

to explain national security matters, and then ask his Budget Director and his Chairman of The Council of Economic Advisers to comment upon economic, budgetary, and domestic program considerations. More recently, President Nixon would typically call upon his Secretary of State, his director of the Office of Management and Budget, and one of his chief White House domestic policy counselors to inform and instruct members of his assembled cabinet and sub-cabinet. These illustrations indicate that recent Presidents often believe that members of their own Executive Office are better equipped to talk about and counsel "significant others" regarding the "President's" program rather than let most cabinet members attempt to do the same. Kallenbach's reasoning in this regard seems appropriate:

[A]s the departments have grown and supervision of their operations has become more burdensome, the heads have less opportunity to concern themselves with questions of general policy outside their own spheres of interest. Another factor is the steady enlargement of the Cabinet group itself. . . . This creates a condition which tends to induce the President to rely more heavily upon one or more individuals in the group for general advice, rather than upon all equally.⁷⁰

What has generally happened in recent years is that the Secretaries of State and Defense still remain as prominent national security advisors though the National Security Assistant to the President has joined them as an inner-circle counselor. In domestic and economic matters Treasury Secretaries and most Attorney Generals still play a major role in rendering advice and broad-ranging policy counsel, but they have been joined in the inner "cabinet" by the Budget Director, and variously prominent White House and staff economists and domestic policy coordinators. President Nixon's 1971 cabinet reform proposal is an apparent recognition of the problem of the outer cabinet's "distance" from the presidency. His proposals would abolish some of the outer cabinet departments and attempt to bring four newly packaged or consolidated "outer" departments into closer proximity if not full-fledged status with his inner cabinet. It is impossible to tell whether his recommendations will make any significant difference in this regard, although his motives for proposing this change are no doubt related to the seemingly estranged relationships between the outer departments and the White House.

The outer cabinet is the collection of cabinet posts and departments most often nominated as candidates for reform or abolition. These are the cabinet posts that experience the great cross pressures from clientele groups and congressional interests that often run counter to presidential interests or priorities. It is the outer cabinet departments that have the most intensive and competitive exchange with White House and Budget Bureau staff, and many an outer cabinet member has complained bitterly about the political pressures on and unmanageability of their departments. Robert Finch, a recent outer cabinet member who escaped from the outer into a quasi-inner cabinet status as a White House "cabinet-level" political counselor put

⁷⁰ J. KALLENBACH, *THE AMERICAN CHIEF EXECUTIVE* 439-40 (1966).

it this way: "It's great, just great, to be a Cabinet member without having to run a big department. I'm in [here at the White House] on everything."⁷¹ It was as though he was relieved from the advocate role and graduated to a more congenial and satisfying assignment as presidential counselor.

Most of the White House domestic and budget policy aides interviewed for this study cited five departments as the ones with which they had the most difficult or truculent working relations—HEW, HUD, Labor, Commerce, and Interior. Invariably, the White House staff suspects that outer cabinet departmental executives often accentuate the concerns of their department and their department's more obvious clientele over the concerns that might be broadly ascribed to the President or the President's party. One of Franklin Roosevelt's Commerce Secretaries quite frankly acknowledged his representational and advocate obligations when he said, "If the Department of Commerce means anything, it means as I understand it, the representation of business in the councils of the administration, at the Cabinet table, and so forth."⁷² President Nixon says he expects his Secretary of Agriculture will be an advocate-spokesman in behalf of the farmers:

I want to say . . . that when I did appoint him, I wanted a man who would speak for the farmers and for American agriculture to the White House rather than the other way around. He has done that. Beneath that very pleasant and disarming exterior of his is a very strong and persuasive and determined mind. And in these matters that come before us and the high decisions that have to be made at the White House with the legislative leaders, with the Cabinet, on the budget and other matters, I can assure you that agriculture has a very strong advocate.

I have appreciated that fact, because I do not want those who simply are there to parrot the views that we may have developed in advance. I want somebody there that will represent this community and represent it well.⁷³

Most of the reform proposals espoused by White House aides (two of which are noted as columns 6 and 7 in Table 5), would reduce the number of cabinet posts in the hope of strengthening the President's ties with the outer cabinet and increasing the stature of the outer cabinet vis-à-vis the inner cabinet. The implicit (but by no means clear) assumption behind most of these reforms is that the fundamental conflict in the executive branch is not between the President and various cabinet members, but it is rather between special and general (or presidential) interests. Some of the outer cabinet departments could and perhaps will eventually be collapsed into a few broader purpose departments. Alternatives depicted in Table 5 indicate that department reduction could conceivably be pushed to five or even three basic core

⁷¹ Quoted in *THE NEW REPUBLIC*, Oct. 3, 1970, at 14.

⁷² Fenno, *President-Cabinet Relations: A Pattern and a Case Study*, 52 *AM. POL. SCI. REV.* 388, 394 (1958) (quoting Jesse Jones' statement before a House Subcomm. on Appropriations in 1941).

⁷³ Address by President Richard M. Nixon delivered at the Department of Agriculture Conference on Corn Blight, Beltsville, Md., Dec. 17, 1970, reprinted in 6 *WEEKLY COMP. PRES. DOC.* 1699, 1700 (1970).

departments (even more "revolutionary" than the Nixon proposals). As is usually the case, talk about the need to reform and the move in this direction (however gradual) has been preceded by an implicit or unconscious set of practices that have already recognized a distinctively differentiated cabinet. The way White House aides define their work and how Presidents allocate their time and energy indicate that there currently exist three specialized "cabinet" concentrations—national security, aggregate economics, and domestic policy affairs. And at least during the 1960's it happened that these three areas were attended to in approximately this same order of importance or deference.

In the future it is likely that regardless of how organization charts are drawn, presidential use of the cabinet and White House staff will take into greater consideration the realities of the differentiated roles and activities of the federal departments. It is likely, too, that Presidents will move in the direction of utilizing specialized "cabinets" for concentrated purposes of the federal government. This is to say, the generalized cabinet will more or less pass into oblivion as a national security "cabinet," an economics directorate and a domestic policy "cabinet" continue to emerge, each of which will be presided over by some combination of presidential counselors, some based in redesigned executive departments and others located on the President's personal staff.⁷⁴ Cabinet advocates will surely still exist, but it may be possible to have them operate from posts within rather than on top of the executive departments. (It may well turn out, of course, that these concentrated and realigned cabinets will find that their internal rivalries become so intense and so often tumultuous that new reform movements will then champion the goal of breaking up the super cabinet framework.) On balance, the White House staff for the foreseeable future is not likely to become much smaller or see its importance measurably diminished by these reorganizational developments, but a redesigned and consolidated outer cabinet might enable White House staff to abstain more often from the temptation of pulling administrative responsibilities into itself than has been the case in the last ten years.

VI

STRENGTHENING WHITE HOUSE-DEPARTMENT RELATIONS?

There is little difficulty in establishing the existence of considerable White House frustration with department "unresponsiveness" or parochialism and the existence of cabinet and department distress at the sometimes unnecessary political and abrasive behavior of the White House staff. But it is much less easy to evaluate the varied prescriptions that are put forth as a means toward improving White House-department relations. This last section discusses some proposals suggested by former White

⁷⁴This is not to suggest that President Nixon's particular set of reforms will be passed. In fact I doubt they have much chance of being passed as he would want, although there will no doubt be some consolidation and alteration of the current outer-department organizations.

House staff and concludes with some general observations about strengthening White House relations with the cabinet departments.

We have seen in preceding sections that there is no one single cause of White House-department conflicts; moreover there is no one simple solution. Indeed, it would seem reasonable that the appropriate reforms will vary not only with the type of problem but also according to staff functions at the White House and the differentiated departments involved. Most of the White House aides at least implicitly acknowledge that numerous remedial or regenerating efforts are needed within the White House as well as between the White House and departments.

Many former presidential aides began their discussion of reforms by pointing out the obvious: no two Presidents are exactly alike; styles differ as well as policy preferences. Hence, "each president should organize his office more or less as he sees fit." And not a few aides recalled instances of intentions for remedying bad habits at the White House which quickly evaporated:

Johnson would occasionally try to organize us into some better relationship to the cabinet and agencies. He would get memos on a certain day from two different White House people with two differing views or competing thoughts. He must have told me several times [after such occasions] and I know he told some of the others on the White House staff to "ORGANIZE THIS PLACE!!—organize it along more coherent lines so there won't be so much overlap." But this, [when tried], wouldn't last for more than a few days, because the President himself wouldn't stick to it or honor it. In practice the White House just does not lend itself very easily to that type of straight line or box-like organization.

As seen in Table 6, rather than uniformly calling for the presidential or "more power to the White House" perspective, these aides support what might be called an integration model just as much, and many of them support a department/cabinet approach as well. Almost eighty per cent of the domestic and budget policy aides offered suggestions that would strengthen White House policy planning and management capabilities. Even those who complained about White House staff arrogance often concluded that Presidents must have tough and aggressive staff help. The following responses provide some flavor of the strong presidentialist beliefs of many of these aides. (One could conclude about the first response that it is less a solution than a source of conflict itself.)

The presidency has to be the activist within the very conservative federal bureaucracy.

The bureaucracy is the conservative agent or the custodian of old laws and old policies. They fight against anything new suggested by the White House, hence a president has to be the destabilizing factor in the system. The inability of department institutions to be creative or to take on new responsibilities is fantastic! In my view, the most important thing for a president is to know how to *shake* up the bureaucracy! My own law is that for every new major priority you need to create a new agency—never give it to the existing department. You need a new agency

to get the resources and the leadership to pull off anything that is a major departure—like getting a man to the moon.

I think it is impossible to run the White House staff without having tough men to do the work of the president. Sorensen, Feldman and Dungan (Kennedy aides) were of this type. They could be very tough, abrasive, and uncompromising. But they had to be tough because if they were not the people in the agencies and departments just wouldn't respect the communications that came from the White House. I think it is a fundamental dilemma that people working for a president have to be arrogant, and almost be bastards in order to get White House work done with the departments.

TABLE 6

PRESIDENCY STAFF PERSPECTIVES ON THE QUESTION OF IMPROVING COOPERATION AND REDUCING CONFLICT BETWEEN WHITE HOUSE AND THE EXECUTIVE DEPARTMENTS

STRATEGY PERSPECTIVES ^b	PERCENTAGES ^a N = 43
<i>I. Presidential Perspective:</i>	
—Stronger WH Management-Monitoring System	45%
—More Aggressive WH Sanctions and Controls over Executive Departments	41
—Stronger WH Policy Determinating Capability	33
<i>II. Integrative Perspective:</i>	
—Make It More of a "Two-Way Street"	45
—More Collaboration and Departmental Involvement in Policy Setting	40
—More WH Staff Sensitivity and Homework Re: Intra-Departmental Concern	36
<i>III. Departmental—Cabinet Perspective:</i>	
—Strengthen Cabinet Secretaries and Cabinet-President Linkage	26
—Delegate More to Departments—Less WH Interference and Primacy; More Trust and Better Communications	24

Source: Personal Interviews of White House Staff Members Who Served During 1961-1970 period.

^a Percentages here reflect multiple responses.

^b Aggregate responses to the three perspectives were as follows: 69% of the respondents recommended the presidential perspective, 69% recommended the integrative perspective, and 40% recommended the departmental/cabinet perspective.

Although there is a good deal of overlap between those supporting the presidential and integrative perspectives, the integration approach was relatively more supported among the administrative and public relations assistants and among the national security policy aides than among the domestic and budget policy advisers. Integrative recommendations are seemingly based on the assumption that the White House is not likely to have much of an effect on federal program implementation

unless it can win supportive cooperation from among the middle and higher echelons of the executive branch departments. For example:

I think the basic solution to the problem of dealing with the departments is to get one or two top staff people in the office of a cabinet member or department head and have these people work closely with the White House team. This helps a lot. It has to be a two-way street between the White House and the Cabinet members. It is very important for White House aides to do favors for Cabinet members when they really want to get a promotion for somebody, or get some projects done. If you don't go along with them occasionally, and do this type of thing for them, they in turn are going to be difficult to deal with for yourself. It should be a bargaining, give and take, two-way relationship.

Some forty per cent of the former White House staff aides noted that a strong presidency could only succeed in an executive branch which also was characterized by the existence of strong cabinet and departmental leadership. Many of these aides felt that Kennedy, and Johnson, and their senior staff had neglected the cabinet members and underestimated their importance in making the government work. One aide insisted that it was a major mistake to let the domestic cabinet departments become so divorced from the White House:

One way to improve things is to have the president and the cabinet members, particularly in domestic areas, meet at least six or seven times a year and talk in great detail, and in highly substantive terms, about the major priorities of the administration. You have to have better communication. Basically you have to make the cabinet less insecure.

Other aides criticized certain of their colleagues for having taken over operational responsibilities of the regular agencies, adding that too often these aides neither expedited program implementation nor accomplished anything else except possibly enlarging their own importance. Other aides aren't so sure of remedies as they are convinced that past behavior by the White House is no longer adequate:

I think one major problem is the care and feeding of cabinet members. Most of these guys are people too, and the White House staff must be sensitive to that. Luther Hodges spent four most miserable years there [as Secretary of Commerce] and Ed Day [Postmaster General] was also very discontented. They got the feeling that they were left out. As the White House gets more of the action and much larger—the cabinet people will resent it even more. Even if and when you are able to recruit good people to the cabinet, they are likely to let their jobs go and be less excited about the challenges of their work if they are continually kept at a distance from the White House. . . .

Those aides who held sub-cabinet positions in one of the departments or agencies (either before or immediately after they worked on the White House staff) were significantly more sympathetic to the departmental/cabinet perspective than most of their White House colleagues who had not served "in the other fellow's shoes."

VII

CONCLUSION

A democracy must serve as a forum or arena for the practical and just mediation of conflicts. If our elected chief executive and his lieutenants were not constantly surrounded, or "afflicted," by a wide diversity of conflicts, they would probably be avoiding their legitimate public responsibilities. The conflicts discussed in this paper are those that exist within the executive branch, but it seems fair to assume that executive branch conflicts in large part mirror the existing and potential conflicts of society at large and as such they deserve far more detailed scrutiny. In general, however, we can conclude with Lewis Coser that such conflicts as exist are multi-lateral rather than unilateral, multidimensional rather than unidimensional, and occasioned by mixed rather than single motives. This paper suggests, if anything, that the conflicts which abound in the executive branch admit no single source, nor are they generated by any one set of political actors or agents. Size, complexity, specialization, and differing policy preferences are but a few of the factors contributing to that richness of contention that often exists within the American executive establishment.

The intent of this paper has been to answer only the most simple and elementary of questions pertaining to conflict and cooperation within the executive branch. It is tempting to pontificate about "solutions" and "remedies" that might ameliorate these conflicts and "strengthen" White House-department relations. But such an exercise would be premature and diversionary from the much needed analysis that must precede sophisticated political engineering. For example, we know little about the impact of conflict on the way public policies are selected and applied, or the conditions under which conflict in the executive branch is useful or necessary or valuable rather than a liability. It might be feasible to devise some indicators or scales on which to measure the amount and intensity of conflict, and the degree to which it helps or hinders certain sets of actors or certain sets of preferences within given decisional arenas. The very definition of conflict deserves more attention: how to distinguish between *routine* and *critical* conflicts; is there a point at which creative or constructive conflict becomes debilitating to the institutions within which they have been fostered? What are the effects of varied types of conflicts on system stability, system renewal, and system innovation?

But having duly displayed the appropriately detached professional caution, let me at least stick a toe into the water, and indulge just a little in a few suggestions that emerge from this analysis. Some readers may find these suggestions to be mere common sense or unnecessarily overbearing. And to some extent so they are. I would only add that these suggestions are offered in the spirit of experimentation and tentativeness and urge that these too be tested.

Ted Sorensen has written that President John Kennedy was always more in-

terested in policy than in the administration of policies.⁷⁵ We can extend that observation to President Johnson and the White House staffs of both Presidents as well. The way in which our elections and campaign systems are run makes it easy to accentuate discussions about policy issues rather than policy strategies, and this emphasis seemed overextended during the 1960's.⁷⁶ At the beginning of a presidential term White House staffs are initially comprised of policy-generating and policy-distillating activists who attempt to make good on the sweeping proposals that were vaguely articulated in previous campaigns. The emphasis is on policy change and the development of brand new sets of policies rather than the adaptation or improvement of existing policy. It may well be that the initial investment in a staff gathered for the purpose of developing and selling new policies skews the White House counseling resources in such a way that the White House is less effective in managerial and implementation aspects of policy leadership. Since it appears that White House work emphases are somewhat subject to cycles of accentuated policy formulation or accentuated policy implementation, it may be that staffing patterns should similarly be subject to shifting composition. During the Kennedy-Johnson presidencies, however, the internal composition of the staff did not noticeably change. The domestic policy staff, for example, continued to be comprised of youthful Washington lawyers who were geared to putting together new programs for the next State of the Union. But during periods when program implementation and interdepartmental jurisdictional disputes become the overriding concerns of a presidential administration it may not be enough to rely solely upon this type of staff. And to overcome some of the operational deficiencies of major new programs such as those making up the core of the War on Poverty, Alliance for Progress, and Great Society it may not be enough to have White House lawyers and economists occasionally seek the advice of management consultants or appoint managerial project directors to secondary departmental posts.

Even if Presidents reshuffle their executive branch departments, even if Presidents could redesign the congressional committee structure to their own preference and banish lobbyists from the metropolitan Washington community—conflicts would still exist and flourish within the executive establishment. Therefore, no matter what other reforms are attempted, Presidents and their senior-most advisors ought to give far more consideration to the need for skilled management mediators, who will not be afraid occasionally to widen the scope of conflict, who can selectively step in and divide up controversial pieces of the action. By custom if not by preparation, White House aides have increasingly been forced to serve as arbitrators among competing agencies, competing policies, and competing priorities. Indeed, the increasing prominence and importance of domestic, budget, and national

⁷⁵ SORENSEN, *supra* note 42, at 281.

⁷⁶ T. Cronin, "The Textbook Presidency and Political Science," a paper delivered at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Los Angeles, Sept. 10, 1970, reprinted in 116 CONG. REC. S17,102-15 (daily ed. 1970).

security policy aides at the White House derive from their sitting as judges on the high court of executive branch jurisdictional claims. But ironically many of these people were recruited to the White House not because of their special talents in this area, but because of their help on the campaign trail or as an academic advisor to a presidential candidate or a President-elect in search of a legislative program. It is an understatement to suggest that the White House is in great need of decisive executive branch mediators who can, with the full confidence of the President, preside over the thorniest of complicated claims and counter-claims by competing cabinet members and know when worthy and important elements of a debate are being seriously neglected or misrepresented within these cabinet level negotiations. In the recent past Presidents have used people who were already "on-board" to perform tasks for which they were ill-suited or unprepared. In this regard, one might want to test out a suggestion put forth by Stephen Bailey (although perhaps first at the state or local government level):

[Presidents] should create a team of two or three or four presidential "administrators" or "expeditors," removed from the day-to-day preoccupations of existing White House aides, who could be assigned on an ad hoc and short-term basis as troubleshooters to straighten out jurisdictional conflicts among agencies, both in Washington and (on an itinerant basis) in the field. "Ad hoc" and "short-term" must be underlined, for permanent and long-term portfolios for such assistants could only produce impossible tensions with cabinet secretaries, agency heads, and key legislators. Furthermore, they might easily create centers of power in the executive branch competitive with, rather than derivative of, presidential authority. Such administrators or expeditors must be men of considerable personal stature. As surrogates for the chief executive in a system inherently unfriendly to surrogates, they must be skilled in mediation, soft of voice, wise in the ways of politics, and utterly devoted to the President—institutionally and personally. The President must be prepared to support their judgements in the overwhelming majority of cases while being willing on occasion to overrule them on appeal.⁷⁷

Presidents and their White House staff should never assume that departmental executives will intuitively divine presidential intentions. White House staff themselves have sometimes not clearly understood their own and their own President's policy positions and often do not adequately communicate their policy positions when they do know their position. While it is true that department officials sometimes do not want to hear or understand what the White House is saying, just as often White House aides have misunderstood the degree to which their job is that of a communications agent. Ironically, those White House staffs who have had most experience in the field of communications are those assigned to deal with external groups and publics, such as the Congress, the press, and the general public, rather than the various components of the executive branch itself.

We have suggested in this paper the distinction between an inner and outer

⁷⁷ Bailey, *Managing the Federal Government*, in *AGENDA FOR THE NATION* 315 (K. Gordon ed. 1968). See also, Brown, *The President and the Bureaus* . . . , 26 *PUB. AD. REV.* 174 (1966).

clustering of the cabinet. Inner cabinet members seem to enjoy closer and more collaborative ties with the White House; outer departments are more characterized by centrifugal pulls that dissipate close counseling relationships with the White House. But there are some implications of this dichotomy which are not entirely clear at first glance; the problem for the White House may not be to try to make the outer cabinet precisely like the inner cabinet, but to consider whether the inner cabinet might not benefit from some aspects of the way in which the White House relates to the outer cabinet. That is, the cordial and frequent contact between White House and Defense, Justice, Treasury, and the Secretary of State may actually camouflage substantive problems that should be contended, and issues that should be subject to the clashing of adversary viewpoints. United States policy in Vietnam, the Bay of Pigs episode, inadequate tax reform, and too casual a concern for civil liberties are general illustrations that come most readily to mind as by-products of the inner cabinet in the 1960's. It may be that because White House relationships with the counseling departments seem so close, comfortable, and professional in comparison with White House relationships with the overt advocate departments, that the White House too readily accepts the judgments of these departments, overlooks potentially divisive issues, and neglects the creation of an effective system of multiple and critical advocacy for the substantive and operational aspects of these departments. Too often in the 1960's the debates and adversary proceedings came too late or were procedurally foreclosed with reference to inner cabinet policy choices. If this be so, then many of the more conventional structural reforms (including some of those which President Nixon proposed in his 1971 State of the Union address) misunderstand an important aspect of White House-department relationships. Efforts must be made to increase certain types of conflicts and advocacy proceedings to ferret out differences of views, to generate alternative policy choices (and their rationale), and to estimate the likely consequences of diverse policies.

Many of the White House staff with executive branch experience previously served within inner cabinet departments, and this may explain both their greater difficulties with the outer cabinet and their preference for reforms which would place presidential counselors, as opposed to advocates, in charge of realigned and consolidated outer cabinet departments. But an assumption by which these aides are guided is that the policies or products of the inner cabinet have somehow been more acceptable or wise than those of the outer departments. There may be a tendency here, mistakenly to interpret closeness and loyalty to the presidency as equivalents of intelligent policy and competent administrative performance. In any event, Presidents should be wary of receiving their counsel exclusively from inner cabinet and staff who maintain only a presidential perspective. I am among those who feel that people who protest that a President is drastically isolated are, more often than not, merely signifying that a President has rejected or ignored their pet preferences, but there is nonetheless often a tendency for Presidents to indulge in only those views and

opinions that sound like music to the ear, a situation that can of course lead to a state of alarming deficiency.

No one should dispute that our modern presidency is charged with enormous new obligations to act as an overseer of executive branch *responsiveness* and *integrity*. Who else can recruit talented department leadership? Who else can better motivate, educate, and inspire federal officials to higher levels of public commitment? And who else can both authoritatively mediate interdepartmental squabbles and wage vigilant pressure campaigns against those within the federal government who see themselves as the chief constituency of their own federal departments? All this and more is expected of the modern presidency and the expanded super staffs at the White House. But notions of government integrity and responsiveness are always slippery and should necessarily be subject to continuous definitional disputes. Responsiveness to whom? Is the presidentialists' perspective really free of special interests, or does this depend almost entirely on whether one happens to like the sitting President?

We come back, invariably, to a realization that Presidents are limited in the degree to which they can eliminate executive branch conflicts, and alternatively try to strengthen White House-department ties. Presidents have been and will continue to be frustrated by the sluggishness of the federal executive branch's response to new priorities. And increasingly, Presidents are disillusioned by the seeming incapacity to inspire and recharge the batteries of the sprawling federal government. But there are occasions, I think, when Presidents and their staff are justifiably thwarted from any easy resolution of substantive and procedural conflicts. We must be careful to maintain a political climate in which uncomfortable questions can be asked of a President from within—or without—the White House. Sometimes an issue is of sufficient divisiveness that it is not then amenable to any majoritarian point of view, and displacement or avoidance of conflict may be the best approach. Moreover, certain types of conflict-resolution or coordination are essentially forms of coercion that might threaten the rightfully independent bases of influence and opposing viewpoints in Congress or society.⁷⁸

We might measurably contribute to the health of our presidency by examining and ultimately appreciating those conflicts that are avoidable or unavoidable, appropriate or inappropriate, and by trying to understand how these conflicts can limit as well as strengthen the presidency. Properly conceived and carried through, such analyses will undoubtedly help to limit and refine our expectations and assessments of democratic presidential leadership.

⁷⁸ This point is made in Wildavsky, *Salvation by Staff: Reform of the Presidential Office*, in *THE PRESIDENCY* 700 (1969).