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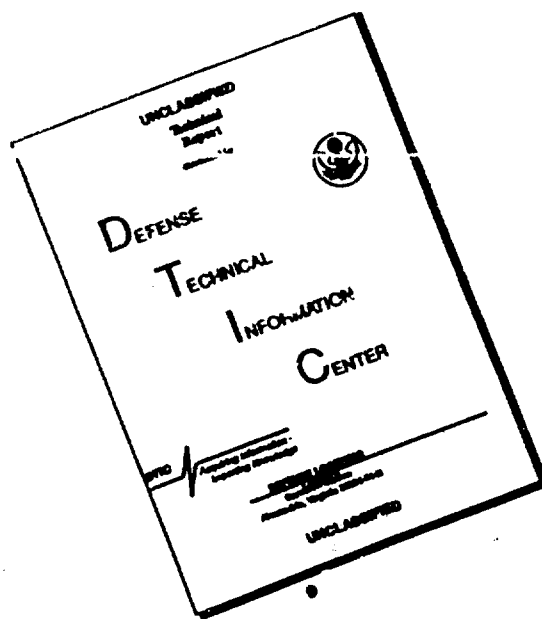
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FUTURES IN GOVERNMENT

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Public decisionmakers have necessarily been interested in the future since the early beginnings of organized society, relying on a variety of religious, mystic, intuitive and random devices for making hard decisions in the face of uncertainty.¹ Therefore, interest in the future as such constitutes no innovation in government. What is new, are three converging and interrelated developments concerning the future dimensions of governmental activities, namely: (1) increasing necessity to take the future better into account; (b) increasing possibility to take the future better into account; and (c) increasing demand to meet needs of the future.

The creation and accelerating aggravation of very difficult public problems as a result of contemporary social and scientific developments makes it essential to foresee the main problems and try to deal with them well in advance when more alternatives are available and leadtime permits careful search for preferable solutions. Developments in knowledge on how to foresee probable futures and how better to absorb unavoidable and extensive uncertainty by making our present

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actions less sensitive to unpredictable futures, do improve possibilities (relative to the rate of change) to take the future better into account. And contemporary ideologies on the "active great society,"² which combines a revolution in expectations with belief in organized public activity, do generate widespread demands to meet the needs of the future (though, often, only of the near future) by and through governmental action.

Needs, possibilities and demands are essential requisites for better consideration of the future in governmental activities. But they are not sufficient to assure it. Given the present structures, staffing and modes of operation of contemporary governments - Democratic and Communist, modern and developing alike - there is little probability that needs, possibilities and demands can result in more than lip service to futures and, perhaps, some marginal improvements in their consideration. The outputs of governmental activities are necessarily shaped by the characteristics of governmental systems. Therefore, the more fargoing a change we desire in the outputs of government, the more fargoing changes are required in the characteristics of the governmental system. Better consideration of the future - this is a fargoing change in the specifications of governmental outputs which, despite much talk on "planning," tend to follow the percepts of "muddling through" and incremental innovations. Indeed, under more stable conditions and with less knowledge available, incremental change was often an optimal strategy, which still has much to recommend itself.³ But even if we adopt, as I think we should, a nonpresumptuous stance and limit our present ambition to achieving, let us say, ten

percent weight to futures in contemporary governmental policies - this constitutes a demand for fargoing change in present governmental outputs, requiring significant changes in some critical variables of the governmental system.

The main required change can be easily defined as need for a new public policymaking culture, in which futures are an integral part of the appreciative framework of governmental decisions and activities. Increasing public awareness of the importance of futures for contemporary activities may help to strengthen the role of futures in the political culture, and hence the applied political significance of public associations in futuristics, of treatment of the future in mass media of communication and various efforts to build bridges between the work of professional futurists and public awareness. But changes in appreciative framework⁴ are difficult to achieve in such ways and diffuse cultural influences can't be relied upon to transform deep-rooted habits of Establishments fast enough.

To reformulate an earlier statement, as sufficient transformations of public policymaking culture are too difficult to achieve directly, we must try to increase the weight of futures in the output of government through suitable changes in a number of variables of the governmental system. In particular, we must make a number of changes in (a) the structure of government; (b) the staffing of government; and (c) the patterns of governmental decisionmaking.⁵

Futures and Government Structure:

The basic idea of government structure is division of labor. The division of labor in government is generally constructed along the

dimensions of substance, types of activities and bases of interest, with different units looking after various goals and sub-goals, interests and sub-interests, functions and sub-functions, and a few and often weak units trying to achieve some coordination, integration and comprehensive view. This common structural principle ignores another main dimension of activities and goals, namely the time dimension. It is not enough to distinguish between the goals of public security and increasing G.N.P., the interests of farmers and universities, and the services of telecommunication and health, and at best somewhat to coordinate these goals, interests and services. These goals, interests and services must be considered and synchronized within the stream of time, with due allocation of the missions of taking care of the future within the overall division of labor in the governmental structure.

A standard reaction to this problem is to claim that every unit in charge of any goal or activity is also in charge of the time dimension of that goal or activity: considering the future is regarded as an integral part of the job of every unit.

The trouble with this easy answer is that it does not work. One main reason why it is ineffective to combine responsibility for the present and the future in one and the same unit is the well-documented tendency for the pressure of present problems to drive the future out of consideration, in the sense that limited resources of time and energy tend to be first allocated to the more immediate needs. Another main reason for the incompetability of dealing with the present and the future in unitary units are the differences in temperament, knowledge, methods, strategy and orientations which are required

for successfully looking after the present on one hand and trying to consider and take into account the future on the other hand.

The conclusion that due consideration of futures in government requires special units who have, so to speak, a vested interest in the future seems to me inescapable. Only by giving to futures an organizational expression in government can the pressures of the present be somewhat contained and can the special qualifications needed for dealing with the future be assured.

But setting up special "Institutes for the Future" as sometimes proposed, however useful, in no way solves our problem.⁶ In order for units looking after the future to serve as a countervailing force against governmental myopic fixations on the present (and, often, on the past), these units must be closely involved in current government activities.

We meet here a basic organizational dilemma: In order to achieve their purpose to increase the impacts of futures on present policies and operations, special future organizations must be in close contact with current activities and feed-in their specific contributions into the ongoing governmental processes. But being closely involved with the present may subject the futures organizations to temptations to build up their power by becoming involved in present problems and adjusting their views of the future to present expediency.

There is no short and easy solution to this dilemma. Much depends on the professional qualities and character of the personnel staffing both the new units "representing" the future and regular governmental organizations. Much also depends on changes in the

patterns of governmental decision making. To these two subjects we will turn soon. On the structural level, our main emerging recommendation is to try to achieve a balance between very pure study of futures without influence on government and compromised study of futures with some influence on government, through positive redundancy: We need a whole set of units working on futures dispersed throughout government, and indeed throughout the central guidance cluster.⁷ This set of units will cover a range from special independent look-out institutes to single futures experts in departmental planning and policy-analysis units.

I would like in particular to stress the need for small units dealing with futures within regular governmental organizations. Only by becoming part of the "insiders" and participating in the internal processes of the various governmental organizations, can futures achieve the desired pervasive influence on current decision making.⁸ Similarly, because of the multiple and differentiated structure of government, dispersal throughout the governmental set-up (including, of course, the legislature) and throughout the central guidance cluster (including, for instance, parties, trade unions and interest organizations) is necessary.⁹ Such a network of units working on futures will also be very helpful in strengthening coordination and integration within government by serving as an additional interunit connective tissue and by providing similar views of futures as common framework for contemporary action by different units.

Futures and Government Personnel:

Efforts to set up futures units in government and to integrate them with regular governmental operations at once demonstrate the

validity of my own substitution for Malthus's law, namely that while the difficulties of problems increase at a geometric rate, manpower qualified to deal with these problems develops at an arithmetic rate. Having a few persons interested in futuristics and doing sometimes brilliant work in it is one thing; establishing a formalized role of "futurist" in government is a completely different thing, requiring types of professional training not available at present.

Here, the close dependence of introducing new types of knowledge into government on the structure of academic teaching and professional training becomes paramount. Having just failed, after extensive search, to locate a university equipped to accept an assistant of mine for advanced study and writing a Ph.D. in prediction methods and treatment of the future, I may be somewhat oversensitive to the issue. But recognition of these areas as a distinct field of specialization and professional training on the graduate and post-graduate level looks to me as an essential requisit for advancing the taking into account of the future in government (as well as in industry and indeed in all types of social activities).

This does not imply that futuristics can or should be a discipline of its own; neither available knowledge nor its eclectic nature justify such a proposal at present or in the foreseeable future. The best place for training professional staff for work on futures would be in conjunction with the new policy interdisciplines, such as operational research, systems analysis and policy analysis - with special care being taken to develop also the more imaginative and creative capacities essential for work on futures.¹⁰ The tendency at some

United States universities to set up special schools on public policy and special programs in analytical knowledge and skills point in the needed direction. It will be a pity if Europe lags also in this area behind the United States, especially as much of the pioneering work on futures was initiated by European scholars and thinkers.

To repeat, preparation of adequately trained professional manpower to staff the proposed special units dealing with futures is an essential preliminary condition for successful operation of such units. Defining new positions without good personnel to fill them is an empty gesture which may well have a negative boomerang effect, bringing the idea of futures in government into bad repute. One can and should proceed by stages, setting up one or two central units for future research with available self-trained personnel as soon as possible. But a concerted effort to develop relevant professional training is necessary for the setting up of the required set of special units to become feasible. Training of such professional manpower will also press in the direction of institutionalization of looking after the future as recognized roles in government (and industry) because of the demand of such manpower for suitable positions. Thus, training of professional manpower is in all respects the most important step in advancing the cause of futures in governments, and in society in general.

Preparation of specialized staff for working on futures is essential but not sufficient. In order to permit communication between present governmental staff and the new professionals and to enable utilization of new knowledge and novel orientations in actual

governmental processes, the present staff must understand the basics of the new knowledge and have some feeling for the new orientations. Attention to futures studies in the training of senior civil servants, both pre-entry and post-entry, is therefore essential. The emphasis in such training should be on the importance of consideration of futures for present policymaking and decision making, on the ability to face and absorb the increased subjective uncertainty associated with efforts to take the future more and better into account, and on basic knowledge on the main tools of future studies so as to evaluate correctly potential contributions and their limitations.

Quite taboo a subject is the advanced training of politicians. Certain'y, establishing an educational or training qualification as a condition for political office would be anti-democratic. But it is difficult to justify why providing defined groups of politicians (such as Members of Parliament) with opportunities for study and contemplation to be paid for by the public is widely regarded as absurd. Until such conventionally fixed opinions adjust themselves to new needs, the best that can be done is to try and influence politicians through mass media of communication and to get individual politicians interested in futures through personal contacts, informal meetings, etc.

Getting politicians aware of futures and realize the importance of futures for present policies is critical for the problems of futures in government. It is part and parcel of the broader problem of achieving a new symbiosis between knowledge and power within a rapidly changing environment. Hopefully, the other proposed measures in respect to structure, personnel and decision pattern will also - together with

more interest in futures by the public - influence politicians, perhaps even opening a way for more systematic exposure of politicians to new knowledge and orientations.

Patterns of Governmental Decision Making:

Changes in structure and personnel are not aims by themselves; they are but tools to increase the impact of futures on present governmental action - which again is an instrumental specification designed to increase achievement of longer-range human and social objectives. When we reach patterns of governmental decision making we are approaching the crux of the problem of futures and government, as the main aim of the proposed changes in structure and personnel is to influence governmental decision making.

In addition to shaping the decision making process by varying its structural and personal determinants, we must also try to improve the consideration of futures in government by direct shaping of decision making. This we can try to do by fixing a number of patterns for decision making, calculated to reinforce taking into account of futures. Here we have a number of possibilities, such as:

- establishing a planning - programming - budgeting system, (PPBS in short), whereby current divisions are tied in to longer-range problems and issues.
- providing all government units with shared assumptions of basic alternative states of the future (population, technology, economy, international relations, etc.) and requiring them to take these assumptions explicitly into account when analysing present policy alternatives.
- requiring all main departments to prepare alternative scenarios of the future implications of their present activities up to a given date.

- requiring all staff papers, position papers, White Papers, etc. to deal explicitly with the future implications of their recommendations.

This is a more technical area further exploration of which requires detailed examination of organizational decision processes and of modern decision theories, which would carry us beyond the scope of this paper. Particularly important are modern developments in PPBS¹¹ which provides a very useful tool for reshaping some focal governmental decision making patterns so as to take the future somewhat more into account, especially when integrated with a comprehensive planning framework. Sufficient for our present purposes to note these possibilities and their importance.

Conclusion:

Tackling the problem of futures and government requires a variety of changes in government, academic institutions, and public interests. Considerable leeway is provided by the variety of required changes for adjusting their order of priority and mode of realization to actual conditions, availability of resources and political feasibility. Different combinations of specific changes can be quite useful under distinct conditions. But there is a critical mass, below which single improvements will be corroded by the inertia of day-to-day governmental routine.

The various proposed changes which we have discussed are largely interdependent and mutually supportive. Only when an aggregative effect can be achieved, is there a good enough probability that together they may move governmental activities towards more taking into account of futures, and even then only if external conditions are

favorable. In particular, public interest in futures and advances of knowledge in futuristics are essential, as is the successful management of current problems - which otherwise become acute crises and necessarily push futures into the background.

FOOTNOTES

1. See Richard Lewinsohn, Science, Prophecy and Prediction (New York: Harper, 1961) and F. N. David, Games, Goods and Gambling (New York: Hafner, 1962).
2. See Bertram Gross, The Great Society (New York: Basic Books, 1968) and Amitai Etzioni, The Active Society: A Theory of Societal and Political Processes (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1968).
3. Compare David Braybrooke and Charles E. Lindblum, A Strategy of Decision (New York: Free Press of Glencoe, 1963) and Yehezkel Dror, "Muddling Through - Science or Inertia," Public Administration Review, Vol. XXIV, No. 3 (September 1964), pp. 153-157.
4. This very important concept is developed in Sir Geoffrey Vickers, The Art of Judgment: A Study of Policy Making (London: Chapman & Hall, 1965) especially chapter 4, pp. 67-74.
5. See Yehezkel Dror, Public Policymaking Reexamined (San Francisco: Chandler, 1968) where this approach to the evaluation and reform of government is systematically developed.
6. See Bertrand de Jouvenel, The Art of Conjecture (New York: Basic Books, 1967). Examples of specific proposals are the Prospectus for an Institute for the Future prepared by Olaf Helmer in the U.S.A. (November 1966) and the Outline of a European Look-Out Institution prepared by Robert Jungk for the Council of Europe (June 1967).
7. For this important concept see Bertram M. Gross, The State of the Nation: Social Systems Accounting (London: Associated Book Pub., Social Science Paperbacks, 1966) pp. 72-74.
8. For details see Yehezkel Dror, "Some Requisites of Organizations' Better Taking into Account the Future," in Robert Jungk and Yohan Galtung, ed., Mankind 2000 (Oslo: Norwegian Universities Press, 1968, in print).
9. Our analysis applies mutatis mutandis to one quite widespread type of future-dealing organizations, namely planning units. A main reason for the failure of many national planning units lies in the basic weaknesses of the dichotomy between a single central planning unit and regular Ministries. Diffusion of planning throughout the governmental structure and the central guidance cluster is an essential part of any viable solution.
10. Compare a parallel proposal in Yehezkel Dror, "Policy Analysts: A New Professional Role in Government," Public Administration Review, Vol. XXVII, No. 3 (September 1967) pp. 197-203.

11. See for instance Fremont J. Lyden and Ernest G. Miller, eds., Planning - Programming - Budgeting: A Systems Approach to Management (Chicago: Markham, 1967).