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## PSAC: Reestablish It Now

The President's Science Advisory Committee (PSAC) was organized to ensure competent, independent, and responsible scientific and technical awareness at the presidential level of policy-making. It was approved by President Truman in 1951 after the outbreak of the Korean war, reinforced by President Eisenhower in 1957 after Sputnik, and liquidated by President Nixon. The PSAC served an essential function and should promptly be reestablished to supplement the role of the science adviser. The dilution of our post-World War II military, political, economic, and cultural primacy increases the need for such action; rising international tensions, growing domestic problems, and the approaching election make it timely. This is the message conveyed by seven science advisers (DuBridge, Rabi, Killian, Wiesner, Hornig, David, and Stever) and some 15 other scientists, engineers, and administrators who have served under all Presidents since Truman.\*

The Truman-Eisenhower apparatus comprised a science adviser to the President, with staff, and the PSAC, which was appointed by and reported to the President and worked with but was independent of the adviser. In 1976, legislation encouraged by President Ford restored the office of science adviser (and gave Congress access to him) but did not recreate the PSAC. Resourceful enlistment of ad hoc panels by Frank Press, the present adviser, has palliated but cannot cure the statutory deficiency.

Science and technology ingredients are essential to policy-making on domestic and foreign issues involved in improving our living standards, promoting domestic tranquility, defending our borders, and seeking arms limitation agreements. Such issues, as Comptroller General Elmer B. Staats pointed out, transcend individual federal agencies and programs and require "improved measures and criteria to support federal decision-making." The President should not rely for guidance solely on his science adviser, who is limited by statute in staff and scope, and cannot rely unquestioningly on his cabinet members or the National Science Foundation director, who must advocate the special and sometimes competing interests of their departments. Nor should high-level scientific expertise be expected to flourish in the White House staff, the National Security Council, or the Office of Management and Budget, where this year's hostages, next year's budget, and the approaching elections constitute long-term issues.

The PSAC, well chosen and actively used, would meet the need. To ensure the requisite stature and visibility, the members of PSAC must be presidential appointees. They should be generalists characterized by prominence, wisdom, courage, discretion, independence, and patriotic dedication; experienced in government; and sensitive to the practicalities of politics. The physical, biological, medical, and social sciences should be broadly represented. There is no room for narrow specialists, however distinguished. Not every member should be a practicing scientist. The PSAC must have the judgment and loyalty to gain the confidence of its President. But this does not mean subservience. Expression of divergent views within the group should be encouraged, but the remedy for irreconcilable differences should be resignation, restoring freedom for public expression. The committee should be small; 9 to 12 members would permit diversity, focus responsibility, and encourage collegiality. The Federal Advisory Committee Act of 1972 and the Freedom of Information Act present serious but not insurmountable impediments. Should a crisis arise or the climate change, Congress may modify them, under the provision of Public Law 94-282 for "periodic revision and adaptation."

Reestablishment of the PSAC would benefit the nation, strengthen the presidency, gratify Congress, and encourage the scientific and technological communities.—WILLIAM T. GOLDEN

\**Science Advice to the President*, William T. Golden, Ed., Pergamon, Elmsford, N.Y., 1980. ix + 256 pp. Cloth, \$50; paper, \$9.95.