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Harnessing Conflict in Foreign Policy Making: From Devil's to Multiple Advocacy

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When making (foreign) policy, presidents must navigate between twin dangers: excessive conformity and destructive conflict among the policy advocates. The notions of devil's and multiple advocacy are reexamined in light of three decades of research in political science and psychology as coping strategies for dealing with these dangers. Devil's advocacy is of some help in promoting diversity and mitigating tendencies toward conformity, despite serious implementation difficulties. A substantial body of conceptual and empirical work bearing on the assessment of the more comprehensive multiple advocacy framework has accumulated since its formulation in 1972. The main findings are (1) that practices associated with multiple advocacy have indeed contributed to improving presidential policy-making processes and uncovering avoidable errors, (2) that the implementation of multiple advocacy has been uneven (which makes evaluation difficult), and (3) a number of suggestions for fine-tuning the prescriptive model and specifying conditions conducive to its effective application.

A large and alarming body of historical and laboratory evidence suggests that presidential decision making in foreign (and for that matter domestic) policy is plagued by a number

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of chronic impediments that may undermine the policy-making process and detract from its "quality" (e.g., De Rivera 1968; George 1980; Burke and Greenstein 1989; Vertzberger 1990; Haney 1997; Hess 2001; Parker and Stern 2002). Among these are insufficient diversity of expressed opinions and excessive conformity in advisory groups (Janis 1982; 't Hart 1994; Stern and Sundelius 1997, 124-28; Schaefer and Crichlow 2002). Groups suffering from these problems deprive themselves of the kind of constructive debate that can "arouse discussion and stimulate creative thinking" (Amason and Thompson 1995, 2) in ways that "improve both decision making and acceptance of the decisions made" (Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois, 1999, 171-72).

As an insightful student of the presidency has recently reminded us, a key challenge for presidents is "is to forge a team and get the most out of it, minimizing the tendency of subordinates to tell their boss what they sense he wants to hear" (Greenstein 2000, 195). In this article, we will examine two institutional compensations intended to make it more likely that adequate degrees of diversity and critical interaction will inform and energize the policy-making process. The first is the so-called *devil's advocate*—a relatively modest measure designed to counteract pressures toward homogeneity and conformity in small groups and thus enhance deliberations. The second is the much more comprehensive and ambitious system of *multiple advocacy*, which is designed not only to cope with the problem of conformity but to moderate tendencies toward pathological conflict/competition among advisers such as those associated with more vicious forms of cabinet and bureaucratic politics (George 1972; Allison and Zelikow 1999; Stern and Verbeek 1998, 205-55; Garrison 1999).

Before examining each of these measures in turn, let us make an observation regarding the composition of the advisory network (Hult 1993, 114-20). As Irving Janis pointed out several decades ago, the knowledge and experience of individual group members are valuable resources for executives. *Ceteris paribus*, groups that are more diverse will be able to draw on a wider base of knowledge and experience in formulating and coping with policy problems. Longtime Washington hand and commentator David Gergen (2000) argues convincingly in his book *Eyewitness to Power: The Essence of Leadership from Nixon to Clinton* that a strong team should include "people who have known the president a long time to keep the flame alive; veterans of Washington to make sure the flame burns effectively. Youngsters to give the team energy; gray hairs to give it wisdom" (p. 184; see also Abshire 2001, viii-ix). Advisory groups that are overly homogeneous will thus be deprived of cognitive and social resources that might otherwise have informed their decisions. For example, Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois (1999) argue strongly for diversity. Their advice to executives is "Assemble a heterogeneous team, including diverse ages, genders, functional backgrounds, and . . . experience. If everyone in the executive meeting looks alike and sounds alike, then the odds are excellent that they think alike too" (p. 191). Therefore, choosing a team that is sufficiently diverse and composed of individuals with integrity is, of course, the first defense against excessive homogeneity and conformity of perspective (Janis 1982, 305; Russo and Schoemaker 1989, 156-57). Let us also note that diversity is potentially associated with costs as well as benefits ('t Hart 1997, 324-26; Kowert 2002), an issue to which we will devote more attention below. Thus, while diversity is clearly a good start in coping with the risk of excessive conformity in policy making, executives may find that additional measures are required and may thus wish to consider making use of devil's advocacy.

Devil's Advocacy: Uses and Limitations

Since the early sixties, much attention has been given to ways of ensuring that unpopular views are encouraged and given a proper hearing in small decision-making groups in which pressures for conformity often discourage expression of dissenting opinions. Among the organizational devices often recommended for this purpose is the time-honored institution of the "devil's advocate." Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in which President Kennedy's policy meetings had been marked by a seeming unanimity of opinion, his brother suggested that thereafter there always be a devil's advocate to give an opposite opinion if none was pressed (Kennedy 1969, 90; De Rivera 1968, 61-64, 209-11; Janis 1972, 215-16). Indeed, JFK appears to have encouraged both his brother and Theodore Sorensen to take a more active "watch-dog" role in foreign-policy matters. Later, President Johnson is said to have referred to Undersecretary of State George Ball as his "devil's advocate," thereby acknowledging Ball's continued expression of his dissent over Vietnam policy. While something like a devil's advocate role was perhaps played by these officials and no doubt by other advisers on other occasions, relatively little historical material describing activities of this kind is available to serve as a basis for evaluating the efficacy of this organizational device. Similarly, the experimental laboratory research on small groups that has been consulted in preparing this article remains inconclusive regarding the feasibility and utility of devil's advocacy in real-world settings (Katzenstein 1996, 317-18, 329-30). However, many studies do strongly suggest that a group's performance can be enhanced under certain conditions by leadership practices and the cultivation of a group culture that "protects" members who express minority views (see, e.g., Moscovici 1985; Nemeth and Staw 1989; Turner 1991; Schultz and Ketrow 1995; Kaarbo and Gruenfeld 1998).

However, the case for introducing a devil's advocate into policy-making groups still rests in good measure on a priori grounds. While the case is a strong one in principle, the introduction and effective utilization of a devil's advocate in real-world settings is by no means a simple matter (Katzenstein 1996, 329-30). Indeed, those who favor the idea of a devil's advocate often have very different notions of what this would mean in practice. Some are content to suggest that the leader of a group should appoint one person on an ad hoc basis to serve as devil's advocate if no one in the group will challenge the dominant view in a given situation. Others have identified a much more complex set of requirements and procedures for institutionalizing the devil's advocate function, even going so far as to suggest that a subgroup rather than just one individual be assigned a continuing responsibility to make the opposition case even after a decision has been taken (De Rivera 1968).

Strictly speaking, the devil's advocate performs a *role*; it is understood that the person performing this role will argue an unpopular position that should be considered but that no one else will speak up for and that the devil's advocate does not really favor. The fact that he or she is performing an accepted role and is not a genuine dissenter is designed, of course, to protect that person from incurring sanctions for challenging the group's opinion or its leader's view. Thus defined, however, the limits as well as the potential utility of the role become manifest: for while the devil's advocate introduces some diversity into the group's deliberations or challenges some of the premises that enter into the leader's judgment, he or

she cannot persist in the challenge or, even more important, seek to develop a coalition within the group to oppose and, if possible, overcome the majority. Unlike a genuine policy dissident, the true devil's advocate is not a political actor with policy commitments and organizational resources but is merely playing a role that, at best, facilitates a dialectical, multisided examination of the problem at hand. Nor should the role of devil's advocate be confused with the much more comprehensive role of the "custodian-manager" of the policy-making process, which will be discussed below.¹

Those who have observed with distress the repeated failure of policy makers to consider diverse views sometimes turn in desperation to the idea that installing a devil's advocate would help. But the mere provision of a devil's advocate in small decision-making groups is hardly a guarantee that the person will be able to perform the role well enough to contribute to improved policy making. However, the psychological literature does suggest that the perceived sincerity of a dissenter—as demonstrated through consistency, autonomy, and commitment—is an important factor in determining minority influence (Moscovici 1985, 355, 359-65; Kaarbo and Gruenfeld 1998, 230). We still know very little about what kinds of persons can perform effectively in this role and how it can be introduced and maintained so that it is not regarded as an awkward or time-wasting gimmick by members of the group.

Specialists on organizational decision making have formulated proposals for coping with some of these issues. For example, Russo and Shoemaker (1989, 159) argue that the function should be passed around on a rotating basis so the group will not come to dismiss or ignore the criticisms of a single permanent "dissenter." Despite such creative suggestions and a degree of knowledge accumulation over several decades, there is clearly much still to be learned about how best to structure and deploy devil's advocacy. While it is far too soon to dismiss completely the potential of this innovation, one cannot be sanguine on the basis of the experience available to date. There is, first, some question whether the role can be performed with the integrity required to yield the desired impact. Second, there is sobering evidence that a devil's advocate can be put to uses other than those for which the role is ostensibly intended. Let us examine both of these constraints on the utility of devil's advocacy.

Accounts of Vietnam policy making suggest that the device of a devil's advocate can be misused in an effort to "domesticate" advisers who genuinely oppose policy decisions being taken. George Ball, for example, repeatedly disagreed with the development of U.S. policy in Vietnam. From an early stage President Johnson took to calling Ball his "devil's advocate"—a misnomer in this case since Ball was a genuine dissenter. Perhaps Johnson employed the euphemistic label of devil's advocate to soften the import of Ball's dissent and indicate that he would regard it as legitimate and acceptable only if Ball provided his views as a service to the group and kept them within the confines of the group.

1. In the vast prescriptive literature on managing groups and teams, a number of other process roles are described. For example, Beatrice Schultz and Sandra Ketrow (1995, 521-42) suggest the role of "reminder," which combines the role of devil's advocate with that of process monitor in a broader sense. J. Cragan and D. W. Wright (1986) propose a "central negative" role that entails challenging a leader or group when evidence has not been adequately examined or when "uninformed opinions" are dominating within the group.

What this suggests is that in contrast to the often-noted tendency in experimental laboratory groups for the majority to exert crude and extreme conformity pressures on dissident members, in real-world policy groups it is often unnecessary or undesirable to squelch or reject a dissident member. The possibility that dissidents are likely to increase malaise within the rest of the group is often accepted and legitimized in the expectation that they will strengthen on balance the ability of the group to cope with the problems of policy making. But in response, the dissident may moderate the style or manner in which he or she expresses dissent, if not also the full extent of the disagreement, by falling into what James C. Thomson (1968) calls "the effectiveness trap"—that is, the trap that keeps officials from resigning in protest and airing their discontent outside the government. It is possible to be overly cynical and uncharitable about such behavior. The reality of the dilemma, however, cannot be ignored. As Thomson puts it, "To preserve your effectiveness, you must decide where and when to fight the mainstream of policy [by staying and not resigning] one may be able to prevent a few bad things from happening" (p. 49). As for George Ball, who presumably acquiesced in his "domestication," Thomson is quick to concede that matters might have gotten worse faster if Ball had kept silent or left before his departure in the fall of 1966. Albert Hirschman (1970) has expressed concern over the extreme reluctance of Americans in public office to resign in protest against policies with which they strongly disagree. Hirschman's general thesis is that "exit" has an essential role to play in restoring quality performance of government, as in any organization (pp. 114-19; cf. Meltsner 1991, 133-60).

The inefficacy of devil's advocacy has been strongly emphasized, but perhaps overstated, by George E. Reedy, a former press secretary to President Johnson: "It is well understood that he [the devil's advocate] is not going to press his points harshly or stridently. Therefore, his objections and cautions are discounted before they are delivered" (1970, 11).² There are a number of additional incentives, not mentioned by Thomson, that may encourage an executive to hold on to dissident policy advisers. First, hearing negative opinions expressed *and* rebutted may provide top-level officials with the psychologically comforting feeling that they have considered all sides of the issue and that the policy chosen has weathered challenges from within the decision-making circle. Paradoxically, then, having some dissenters within the group may help the others, in particular the leader, to cope with some of the stresses of decision making.

Second, there is rehearsal value in listening to and debating dissenters within the policy-making group. Those who support the policy are then better equipped to reply when they encounter similar challenges in the public arena. For example Gergen (2000, 162-63) describes Ronald Reagan's use of this procedure in preparing for challenges during the 1980 election campaign. The increasingly common practice of rehearsing press conferences and political debates testifies to the practical value of such exercises.

2. Skepticism regarding the feasibility and efficacy of a devil's advocate is also expressed by Avi Shlaim (1976) in his analysis of the causes of "surprise" in the Arab-Israeli war of October 1973:

For devil's advocates to work effectively, therefore, it is not enough to appoint them and then to tolerate with ill-disguised impatience their questioning of agreed assumptions and their challenges to the conventional wisdom. Unless they are actively supported and encouraged by the people at the top, and are seen to be supported and valued, their views will carry little weight. (Pp. 374-75)

Third, the formal modalities of hearing diverse opinions can help hold the group together. The executive's task is not only to select as "wise" a policy as possible but also to achieve some degree of consensus on its behalf among those actors in the system who are most concerned with the issue and those who will have to help implement it (Hermann and Hagen 1998). If giving those advisers who disagree with policy a hearing does not always contribute as much as it might to achieving a wiser decision, it can be useful nonetheless as a vehicle for developing consensus. The feeling that consultation and debate took place before the executive made the decision may assuage some of the disappointment of those whose advice was not followed. It may be easier for them to close ranks, at least temporarily, behind the policy chosen. This is consistent with research findings in other settings that suggest that as long as an individual is satisfied that a proper degree of deference has been granted to his or her point of view by organizational superiors, the subordinate's hostility reaction will, in all probability, be minimal if superiors do not accept the judgement in question (Horwitz 1964, 79-82; Gawthrop 1969, 42). The findings of Meena Bose's (1998) comparative study of advisory processes in the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations also supports these laboratory results. Bose found that Eisenhower's elaborate system for consultations was more effective in generating broad support for his policies within the administration than JFK's ad hoc and somewhat more exclusive arrangements (pp. 91-106; see also Greenstein and Immerman 2000, 343).

Fourth, if the "doubters" who have opposed policy in the private deliberations of the group can be cast into the role of defending it in public fora, they may well do a better job than firm, enthusiastic advocates of that policy. In such situations, a bit of distance and detachment can provide the kind of equanimity that is often useful under fire—a fact that has not escaped the notice of presidents. For example, Geyelin (1966, 210) notes that "it was a familiar Johnson stratagem to send known dissenters to argue on behalf of his policies." Such a task forces the dissident policy adviser to confront his or her own doubts. To the extent that outsiders share these original doubts, the defense of policy developed is likely to focus on considerations that will be especially salient for them. It is also worth mentioning that in some cases, prior dissenter status may bestow extra credibility on the policy defender, much in the way that Nixon's record of staunch anticommunism actually made it easier for him to defend his detente policies toward China and the Soviet Union (see, e.g., Small 1999, 118).

Finally, there may be important public relations benefits for the executive who follows the practice of hearing dissident advocates and, more generally, who structures the policy formulation process to ensure orderly consideration of alternative options. As George Reedy (1970, 11) has suggested, the objections and cautions of the official devil's advocate "are actually welcomed because they prove for the record that decision was preceded by controversy." In an earlier era, leaders could decide to do what they and their trusted advisers thought best on controversial policy matters without disclosing in detail how and why the decision was made. Leaders could leave the question whether they had acted wisely to the "judgment of history" some generations hence. This possibility has been increasingly denied leaders of democratic governments in the modern era of rapid communications and of acute journalistic and public curiosity as to how the affairs of government are being decided. Journalists and the attentive citizenry are no longer satisfied to wait for the judgment that future historians will render (Brody 1999; Cohen 1999). As a result, new expectations have been

directed toward the presidency, which its modern incumbents have incorporated into the performance of their role. Faced with the heightened demand for “instant history,” presidents and their advisers increasingly cooperate in enabling journalists (and, in their wake, scholars) to write inside accounts of how and why recent decisions were made.

Still, this normative climate may have genuinely beneficial effects on the policy process. The demand of the informed, attentive public for orderly, “rational” consideration of alternative options in which all sides of an issue are considered and debated may indeed serve to strengthen such policy-making procedures within the government. As psychological research has demonstrated, consciousness of accountability prior to a decision may increase the motivation for vigilance (Tetlock 1985; Farnham 1997). However, it should be noted that the impact of these public expectations could also be shallower; administrations may respond by routinizing and ritualizing debate, devising rationalizations, and “domesticating” devil’s advocates to secure public relations advantages.

Summing up, devil’s advocacy is a tactic that, while difficult to implement, may be added to the executive’s bag of tricks as a means of improving the dialectic quality of policy deliberations. However, it is at best a fairly modest and incremental type of intervention.

Multiple Advocacy

The problem of conformity we have emphasized so far is but one of the potential impediments to policy making with which presidents must cope (George 1980; Janis 1989; Vertzberger 1990; ‘t Hart, Stern, and Sundelius 1997). Given the enormous volume and complexity of the issues facing late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century presidents, they must find also means of achieving the necessary lateral and vertical coordination of efforts by the various departments and agencies concerned with foreign policy to collect and analyze information, formulate policy problems, identify and appraise alternative options, and perform generally the advisory function for the chief executive. The formal options system invented by Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger was one way of attempting to cope with the serious impediments that the dynamics of organizational behavior and bureaucratic politics can introduce into the processing of information and the generation of options and their appraisal (George 1980, chap. 10; Porter 1980, 235-41). Let us recall the principal features the formal options approach adopts for this purpose. It employs highly centralized management procedures to weaken and bypass some of the normal ways in which departments and agencies contribute to policy making, and it employs procedures to re-channel their information, expertise, and judgment into well-defined and tightly controlled procedural “tracks” imposed on the system from the presidential level. Thus, a formal options system attempts to order and “rationalize” the search for effective policy; it attempts to prevent latent or actual differences over policy from distorting or biasing “search” and “evaluation”; it attempts to “depoliticize” the expression of disagreements over policy within the executive branch; reduce interpersonal and interagency clashes over policy; and discourage and repress efforts of individuals and agencies to employ bureaucratic resources, strategies, and maneuvers to influence the choice of policy.

Not surprisingly, the formal options system appeals to executives who are most committed to a "rational" and orderly approach to policy making and who are most distrustful of a looser, more competitive approach to policy making. Other students of government, while also aware of the potentially dysfunctional effects of competitive internal processes, attach more weight to the potential advantages of a freer competition over policy within the executive branch. Moreover, they are concerned that much of the value of multiple viewpoints and disagreement over policy will be lost in a highly centralized, tightly controlled formal options system. In their view, disagreements over policy within the executive branch do not inevitably create abnormal strains that must be avoided in the interest of rational decision making. Rather, they feel that the clash of opinion may help produce better policy if it can be managed and regulated properly. Under certain conditions, the presence of disagreement within the group has been found to have a positive impact on its problem-solving activity. Internal disagreement produces this effect by improving the quality of information processing and appraisal (Schweiger, Sandberg, and Ragan 1986, 51-57; Nemeth and Staw 1989; Moscovici and Doise 1994).

Our purpose is to outline a policy-making system in which competition and disagreement among different participants is structured and managed to achieve the benefits of diverse points of view. As we have already observed in the preceding discussion of devil's advocacy, the laboratory- and field-based social and organizational psychological literatures do provide substantial support for this view. The management model in question attempts to provide for a balanced, structured form of competitive advocacy. It should be made clear that achievement of the type of multiple advocacy outlined here is *not* left to the free play of internal organizational processes and bureaucratic politics; the top executive is *not* relegated to a passive role vis-à-vis the competitive struggle among subordinates to define policy. Rather, the framework of multiple advocacy poses sharply defined requirements for executive management of the policy-making system and requires considerable presidential-level involvement in that system. Strong, alert management must frequently be exercised to create and maintain the basis for structured, balanced debate among policy advocates drawn from different parts of the organization (or, as necessary, from outside the executive branch). As such, multiple advocacy encompasses but goes far beyond what is usually meant by "adversary proceedings" or use of a devil's advocate.³

Multiple advocacy is neither a highly decentralized policy-making system nor a highly centralized one. Rather it is a *mixed* system that requires executive initiative and centralized coordination of some of the activities of participants in policy making. This management model accepts the fact that conflicts over policy and advocacy in one form or another are inevitable in a complex organization. Indeed, even the highly centralized system under President Nixon did not succeed in eliminating such disagreements, though it did not have a

3. The concept of "adversary proceedings," which is often recommended for incorporation into policy-making procedures, is borrowed from the judicial system. What the exponents of adversary proceedings in policy making generally have in mind is that explicit provision be made that any policy recommended by staff or subordinates to the top decision maker be subjected to critical scrutiny by someone other than those who advocate that policy (cf. Gabriel's [1985] discussion of military "murder boards" designed to fulfill a similar function). Thus, Task Force VII, "Stimulation of Creativity," of the State Department's (1970) *Diplomacy for the 70s*, notes that "the lack of a system for subjecting policy to the challenge of an adversary view" has been "a major weakness in the department's organization" (p. 294). Though useful, the findings of the task force fall well short of a fully developed system for multiple advocacy.

very effective way of utilizing such disagreements to supplement and improve the workings of the formal options system (Burke 2000, 66-75). The solution it strives for is to ensure that there will be multiple advocates within the policy-making system who, among themselves, will cover a range of interesting viewpoints and policy options on any given issue.

Let us note that a similar “dialectical” point of departure is a central notion in the advocacy coalition framework (ACF) perspective on policy analysis developed by Paul Sabatier and his collaborators. Though the ACF framework focuses primarily on longer-term, meso-level processes of policy “learning” and change, as opposed to the microdynamics of decision making, the theoretical foundations as well as empirical findings of this research program do tend to support the notion that *moderate* levels of conflict among advocacy coalitions are indeed conducive to “policy-oriented learning” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993, 1999, 123-24, 145-47).

The premise of the multiple advocacy model is that this kind of critical interaction among advocates will tend to improve the quality of information search and appraisal activities, illuminate better the problem(s) facing the executive, generate and clarify a set of alternative courses of action, and facilitate a more rigorous cost/benefit analysis of the options that survive such careful prechoice scrutiny.

Requirements of the Model: Four Conditions

If a system of multiple advocacy is to function effectively, sufficient diversity of opinion must exist within the system, each participant must have adequate resources for analysis and advocacy, and certain rules of the game will be needed to ensure proper give-and-take. Such rules are essential if interaction is to be directed in the direction of constructive rather than destructive forms of conflict and competition.⁴

A system of multiple advocacy works best and is likely to produce better decisions when four conditions are satisfied:

1. the cadre of advocates exhibits an adequate degree of diversity of views with regard to the issues at stake;
2. no major maldistribution among the various actors in the policy-making system of the following intellectual and bureaucratic resources:
 - A. intellectual resources:
 - i. competence relevant to the policy issues;
 - ii. information relevant to the policy issues; and
 - iii. analytical support (e.g., staff, technical skills, informational infrastructure);

4. Amason and Thompson (1995, 3-5) differentiate between type C (or cognitive) conflict—which is a natural function of diversity and focuses on substantive differences of perception and opinion—and type A (or affective) conflict—which is personalized and tends to emerge between particular individuals who experience emotions such as anger and resentment. On this point, see also Eisenhardt, Kahwajy, and Bourgeois (1999, 173-81).

5. This includes a number of different factors that determine the degree of influence and bargaining advantages that an advocate can muster vis-à-vis other advocates and the president himself: (1) the formal and traditional responsibilities accruing to the incumbent by virtue of the office (e.g., secretary of state, secretary of defense, etc.); (2) access to and standing with the president and other senior officials and the ability to use their confidence and trust as a bargaining asset; (3) control over the agenda or procedures for communication and decision making (functions often associated with those planning, convening, and chairing meetings); (4) responsibility for implementa-

- B. bureaucratic and political resources:
 - i. status, power, standing with the president;⁵ and
 - ii. persuasion and bargaining skills;
- 3. presidential-level participation to monitor and regulate the workings of multiple advocacy;
- 4. time for adequate debate and give-and-take.⁶

Clearly, the first condition's emphasis on diversity greatly heightens the potential for competitive advocacy, but this is a potential that is much less likely to be realized if the other conditions are not met. In fact, our increased emphasis on this precondition is inspired in part by the findings of Moens (1990, 170-71) in his application of the multiple advocacy framework to the foreign-policy-making processes of the first few years of the Carter administration. Moens found that in the cases he examined (SALT II, the Ogaden War, U.S.-China relations, and the fall of the Shah of Iran), Carter's foreign-policy-making system functioned poorly due to inadequate diversity. Vincent A. Auger's (1997, 61) findings regarding the early years of the Clinton administration are strikingly similar, reinforcing the view that presidents should be cognizant of the risk posed of excessive homogeneity within the foreign-policy-making system.

The second condition is a forceful reminder that the mere existence within the policy-making system of actors holding different points of view will not guarantee adequate multisided examination of a policy issue. Competence, information, and analytical resources bearing on the policy issue in question may be quite unequally distributed among the advocates. As a result, one policy option may be argued much more persuasively than another. There is no assurance that the policy option that is the best—according to the relevant substantive criteria in question—will be presented effectively, for this requires that the advocate of that policy possess adequate intellectual resources.

Maldistribution of resources needed for advocacy can take many other forms. A marked disparity in the bureaucratic resources available to the advocates may well influence the outcome of the policy disagreement to a far greater extent than the intellectual merits of the competing positions. For example, an option put forward by an advocate with superior competence, adequate information, and good analytical resources will not necessarily prevail over an option advanced by an advocate who is less resourceful in these respects but operates with the advantage of superior bureaucratic resources or unusual persuasive skills. In fact, this risk is often heightening by personality factors. Individuals with hyperconfident, domineering personalities often rise to high levels in the advisory system. Once such individuals become convinced of the merits of a policy option, they can be exceedingly persuasive and forceful in selling it. The impact on the group's deliberations and on multisided analysis of options can be harmful if not countered by skillful balancing.

tion of policies decided upon, which amplifies one's voice in policy making; and (5) the ability to go outside the executive branch to secure powerful allies in Congress, among foreign-policy specialists, among corporate leaders, and in the media. See also Katzenstein (1996, 329).

6. The time pressures of national and international crises are likely to strain the workings of multiple advocacy even while making such advocacy more important than ever for obtaining a balanced, multisided examination of options. It should be noted, however, that time is a very scarce resource for top-level government officials even under "normal conditions." Ironically, crises sometimes create opportunities for devoting more concentrated time and attention to a given issue than is practically possible under other circumstances.

Implications for Presidential-Level Involvement

The potentially damaging effects on the policy-making process of maldistribution of the intellectual and bureaucratic resources relevant to effective advocacy pose some rather sharply defined requirements for managing the advisory system. There are three general tasks that the chief executive and designated staff aides will have to perform to ensure reasonably adequate forms of balanced multiple advocacy.

First, the executive may have to take steps, if not to equalize resources among his or her chief advisers, then at least to avoid gross disparities in them. Multiple advocacy requires a reasonably level playing field to function effectively. It is very important that real and perceived disparities of influence with the president be minimized. This may entail taking steps to “put the brakes” on advocates who are becoming too predominant or taking steps to enhance the status of valued advocates who end up on the losing side of one or more major policy disputes. President George H. W. Bush took considerable pains to avoid such imbalances of influence—and was particularly solicitous of those who had recently suffered policy defeats—and was rewarded with an effective and loyal foreign-policy-making team for the duration of his presidency (Burke 2000, 175; George and Stern 1998, 234-40; Greenstein 2000, 169-70).

Second, the chief executive and his or her immediate staff assistants in a given policy area must be alert to the danger that a sufficient range of policy alternatives may not be encompassed by those playing the role of advocates on a particular issue. For example, subsequent research into why the United States was caught unprepared for the fall of the Shah of Iran found that nearly all of the advocates were focusing on the problem of how to save the Shah and neglecting the eventuality that their efforts might prove in vain (Moens 1990, 135-67). If the perspectives among the players in the inner circle prove too homogeneous, presidents may wish to bring in outsiders or other staff members to serve as advocates for different problem formulations or policy options. It should, however, be recognized that bringing in outsiders to participate in deliberations on highly sensitive issues may entail costs in terms of confidentiality and disruption of group functioning that executives may be reluctant to pay (Hess 1976, 176; Moens 1990, 19, 175). Similarly, it has been suggested that there are serious trade-offs between ensuring diversity and participation of all relevant actors and maintaining an “intimate” environment more conducive to exploration of differences among the key actors (Nutt 1989, 224-26). For example, Porter (1980, 219) suggests that the core group of advocates should be kept small—preferably somewhere between five and eight delegates.

Third, the executive will have to develop certain “rules of the game” to maintain due process for all advocates and fair competition between them and to avoid “restraint of trade” among the advocates. This is essential to discourage advocates from engaging in manipulative tactics or other forms of dirty tricks that are likely to be subversive of the policy process (Maoz 1990, 77-111; Hoyt 1997, 771-90; Garrison 1999). Furthermore, it is not enough for executives to explain the rules—maintaining a system over time requires “policing.” The president (or a surrogate) must ensure that advocates understand the rules and are made aware of the consequences of violations. Experience suggests that when chief executives do not actively set and enforce rules, advocacy tends to degenerate into the more vicious forms of

cabinet and bureaucratic politics and create a chaotic, Hobbesian, policy-making environment.⁷ Undermanaged systems—such as those in force during much of the Reagan administration—also provide fertile ground for the breeding of fiascoes like the Iran-Contra scandal in which allegedly “rogue” operators from the National Security Council (NSC) acting in the president’s name undertook a series of undertakings in Iran and Nicaragua that were not only ill advised and poorly coordinated but were subsequently found to have been of dubious legality (George and Stern 1998, 222-34; Pfiffner 2001, 290-95; Draper 1991).

In brief, top-level authority in the organization—and at every lower level of decision making at which multiple advocacy is desired—has the task of maintaining and supervising the competitive nature of policy making. Multiple advocacy does not just happen. The executive must want it and take appropriate actions for securing and maintaining it.

The NSC Special Assistant’s Role as Custodian-Manager of the Policy-Making Process

Given the myriad demands on the president’s time, the chief executive cannot be expected to carry out personally the tasks identified previously as necessary for maintaining a system of multiple advocacy. Historically, the responsibility for doing so has devolved to the executive secretary of the NSC, which was established in 1947. At the onset of President Eisenhower’s administration, the position of executive secretary was strengthened and retitled as special assistant for national security affairs. While the range of duties and influence exercised by the incumbent of this position has varied under different presidents, the executive secretary/special assistant always has had major responsibility for ensuring that the foreign-policy-making apparatus effectively serves the president’s special needs for information and advice (See, e.g., Prados 1991; Auger 1997; Walcott and Hult 1995; Brzezinski 1988, 80-98; Lord 1988, chap. 3; Shoemaker 1991; Patterson 2000, 49-75). Thus, from the inception of the NSC, the central role assigned to the executive assistant/special assistant has been what might be called “custodian-manager” of the procedures by means of which presidential-level national security policy is made. The role of custodian-manager has embraced a number of subtasks and functions, which may be described as follows:

1. balancing actor resources within the policy-making system,
2. strengthening weaker advocates,
3. bringing in new advisers to argue for unpopular options,
4. setting up new channels of information so that the president and other advisers are not dependent on a single channel,
5. arranging for independent evaluation of decisional premises and options when necessary, and
6. monitoring the workings of the policy-making process to identify possibly dangerous malfunctions and instituting appropriate corrective action.

7. For a useful distinction between relatively benign and more pathological forms of bureaucratic politics, see Rosenthal, ‘t Hart, and Kouzmin (1991, 211-33) and Preston and ‘t Hart (1999, 49-98).

It should be emphasized (with regard to point 6) that early and obvious failures such as JFK's fiasco at the Bay of Pigs or Ronald Reagan's somewhat later one in the Iran-Contra affair can be valuable warnings for a president that something is wrong with the advisory process. These presidents were able to make constructive changes on the basis of the negative feedback. In contrast, Moens (1990, 180) argues that "an inability to learn from early mistakes haunted Carter's process and his own decision style." Similarly, Auger (1997, 67-70) has suggested that Bill Clinton's selective and sporadic interest in foreign policy making during his first term—among other factors—impeded learning from early mistakes.

This "job description" of the special assistant's custodial functions is a composite of some of the most useful tasks performed on occasion by incumbents of the office.⁸ It seems useful to codify these tasks and institutionalize them as part of the duties of future special assistants. In addition to the above-mentioned custodial functions, the special assistant's job has been broadened to include, from time to time, a number of additional major tasks.

The Special Assistant's Additional Roles and Potential Role Conflicts

Over time, since the inception of the NSC, occupants of the executive secretary/special assistant's position have assumed important roles in addition to that of custodian-manager. This trend has been particularly prominent since 1961. A list of the other activities assigned to or assumed by the special assistants from time to time includes the following functions or roles: (1) policy adviser-advocate, (2) policy spokesperson, (3) political watchdog for the president's power stakes, (4) enforcer of policy decision, and (5) administrative operator. To many observers, it has seemed natural and inevitable that the special assistant for national security affairs should add one or more of these roles to his or her basic responsibility as custodian-manager. Nor is this surprising, given the talents and personal qualities of some of those who have served as special assistant, their intimacy with the president, and the encouragement given them to participate more extensively in foreign policy making.

The acquisition of multiple roles, however, makes it likely that the special assistant will experience role conflict that is likely to eventually undermine the effectiveness with which the basic custodial functions are performed.⁹ Once the special assistant becomes an adviser-advocate to the president as well as the custodian-manager, it will take a most exceptional person to continue to dispassionately and impartially oversee the flow of information and advice to the president; for to do so might well reduce that official's own influence as an adviser.

Similar conflicts with the custodial responsibilities of the position arise when the special assistant assumes the additional roles of policy spokesperson and enforcer of policy. As a result, the special assistant may lack the incentive to encourage timely and objective reevalu-

8. For a comprehensive description of the role of the special assistant as it was played during the Bush and Clinton administrations, see Patterson (2000, 49-75).

9. This point has recently been emphasized in The US Commission on National Security/21st Century Report Road Map for National Security: Imperative for Change report (pp. xi, 51) (released February 15, 2001). Available from <http://www.nssg.gov/reports/reports.htm>.

ation of ongoing policy, which is one of the custodian's responsibilities. As Thomas Cronin has observed, aides who might be able to fashion a fairly objective role in policy formation often become unrelenting lieutenants for fixed views in the implementation stage (as quoted in George 1972, 782-83).

Another role conflict is likely if the special assistant assumes the role of watchdog for the president's power stakes. As such, the concern for maintaining and enhancing the president's political influence may well interfere with the performance of his or her custodial responsibility for serving as an "honest broker" of information and advice.

Logically, the custodial role also can be undermined if the special assistant takes on important operational duties, such as diplomatic negotiations, "fact finding," and mediation. Not only are such activities likely to be time-consuming, but they may distract the special assistant from his or her duties as custodian-manager. Besides, once plunged into the role of administrative operator, the special assistant risks becoming personally identified with the "line" activities that he or she is pursuing, and this can interfere with the custodial responsibility for encouraging timely evaluation and review of ongoing policies (Destler 1980, 80-85; Auer 1997, 46-48).

The role conflicts outlined above are not merely hypothetical. They have manifested themselves, at times dramatically, since at least the early sixties—a fact that has been well documented in the burgeoning literature on national security policy making in the United States.

For example, in his detailed historical survey of the evolution and performance of the position of special assistant for national security affairs, David Hall (1982) found considerable evidence that beginning in the early 1960s, individuals serving in this capacity have experienced appreciable role conflict. Hall also notes that the assumption of roles and functions in addition to those of the custodian-manager has overloaded the individual occupying this position. Both the phenomenon of role conflict and of role overload became noticeable for the first time during the Kennedy administration with the assumption by McGeorge Bundy of additional roles and functions that his predecessors had not undertaken. Hall found that the role conflict and overload experienced by the special assistant were much accentuated in the Nixon administration. Not only did Kissinger's other roles—in addition to the basic one of custodian-manager—become more important than they had been in previous administrations; but in addition, whereas McGeorge Bundy had moderated the potentialities for role overload by delegating and sharing his roles and functions with his senior NSC staff members, Kissinger was much more reluctant to do so (Hall 1982). Even after he became secretary of state, Kissinger retained for a while his position as special assistant. Later, in response to increasing political criticism that Kissinger was allowed to wear two such important hats, President Ford appointed Kissinger's deputy, General Brent Scowcroft, as special assistant. In General Scowcroft's incumbency, there was an appreciable shrinkage of roles and responsibilities and very little evidence of role conflict or overload; nor is this surprising since Kissinger was still secretary of state and was enjoying Ford's confidence and trust (Destler 1980, 85; Prados 1991).

The trend toward proliferation of the responsibilities of the special assistant has persisted well beyond the above-mentioned peak during the Nixon administration. After the change of pace of the Ford years, role conflict reemerged in dramatic fashion in the Carter

administration. Special Assistant Brzezinski played an increasingly assertive role as advocate, spokesman, and administrative operator in Carter's last two years, which ultimately placed Brzezinski on a collision course with Secretary of State Cyrus Vance. These experiences of the 1970s led a number of observers to draw the conclusion that the national security assistant's position embodies irreconcilable tensions and entails a strong structural tendency toward conflict with the secretary of state (Destler 1980, 86; Moens 1990; cf. Destler, Gelb, and Lake 1984).

However, from the vantage point of the far side of the new millennium—and with the benefit of the experience of another three administrations (and the first act of a fourth)—it appears that these concerns, while legitimate, have been somewhat exaggerated. First of all, the smooth working relationship between Kissinger and Scowcroft during the Ford years was not an anomaly. Reasonably cordial and constructive relations between the special assistant for national security and the secretary of state have been the rule rather than the exception for both the Bush and the Clinton administrations. Patterson's (2000) striking assessment is that "during the Bush and Clinton administrations, however, the historic tensions were at least contained if not damped down almost entirely." (p. 74; see also Auger 1997, 59-63). Furthermore (and despite the trauma of the Iran-Contra scandal), the main and persistent cleavage in the conflict-ridden Reagan administration was not between special assistant (of which Reagan had no less than six) and secretary of state (of which he had but two) but rather between Secretary of State Schulz and Secretary of Defense Weinberger (George and Stern 1998, 232-33). As John Prados (1991) puts it in the conclusions to his history of the NSC, *Keepers of the Keys*, "Ultimately it is the President's responsibility to keep his house in order and banish the conflicts among unruly subordinates. Presidents have compiled a rather poor record in this regard" (p. 561). Thus, excessive conflict between these officials should be seen as a contingent and by no means a structurally determined phenomenon.

Furthermore, the experience of the Bush and Clinton administrations strongly suggests that it is possible (though not necessarily easy) to maintain cordiality even when a special assistant combines process management with additional operative and public relations functions. However, it should be noted that this accomplishment appears to depend at least in part on a salutary mix of personalities; a major investment in time for personal meetings, telephone calls, and other forms of consultations; and a high degree of mutual respect and self-restraint among the players. Reportedly, Clinton's second-term team of Secretary of State Albright, National Security Adviser Berger, and Secretary of Defense Cohen followed "four rules for not killing each other":

1. "No friendly fire": refrain from criticizing each other publicly.
2. "Walk ourselves back": retreat voluntarily from an unreasonable stand.
3. Presume innocence: "Before you accept the fact that your colleague has been engaged in some kind of mischievous, dishonest effort, you pick up the phone and talk it through."
4. "No policy by press conference": "agree to things *before* we make policy." (Adapted from Patterson 2000, 74-75; who in turn draws on Sciolino 1998, A9; emphasis added)

While by no means eliminating the potential for role-based conflict among the key NSC principals, mutually understood rules of the advocacy game such as these can help to regulate and lubricate the public and behind-the-scenes interactions of the key “players” in a manner beneficial to the policy-making process (and the prospects of the executive presiding over it).

Yet even if excessive rivalry between the secretary of state and the special assistant is not inevitable, the proliferation of responsibilities of the latter does pose serious risks of overload. Similarly, there is no easy answer to the tension between the requirements of the “honest broker” posture essential for a custodian-manager and the “partisanship” that tends to be needed for effective advocacy. As a result, a number of analysts have proposed that the functions of personal adviser to the president and process manager should be divorced from each other and allocated to different individuals (Szanton 1980, 89-91; Moens 1990, 181-83). More recently, Greenstein and Immerman (2000, 337-39) have looked back nostalgically to the Eisenhower administration, calling for a presidential national security assistant who is “a process manager and not a policy advocate.”

The Executive’s Role as “Magistrate”

In addition to balancing actor resources and maintaining the rules for effective multiple advocacy, the executive must consider how to define his or her own role. When making use of multiple advocacy, the executive should adopt the stance of a magistrate—one who listens to the arguments made, evaluates them, poses issues and asks questions, and finally judges which action to take either from among those articulated by advocates or as formulated independently by himself or herself after hearing them (for a very useful discussion of ways for executives to cultivate listening skills, see Nichols and Stevens 1999, 1-24). There are also some things the executive must *not* do since they would undermine the workings and utility of multiple advocacy. Thus, the leader should be very careful about prematurely revealing personal views that would excessively constrain the issues and options the group of advisers will consider or tilt them in the direction he seems to favor. If necessary to avoid this, the executive should absent himself from early meetings of his advisory group, as Kennedy did during some of the Cuban Missile Crisis deliberations (Janis 1982). This stricture against premature disclosure of executive preferences does not, of course, preclude executive influence over the agenda and parameters for the process of multiple advocacy. Assignment of tasks and mandates, as well as nudging the group toward issues where group input is thought to be particularly needed, is of course a legitimate (and often essential) function of organizational leadership (George 1997, 48).

The magistrate role is of central importance to effective multiple advocacy. It is only because a magistrate presides at the apex of the policy-making system that a constructive, disciplined form of multiple advocacy can be assured. The presence of a magistrate, together with the rules and norms he or she imposes on the policy debate, means that the controversy among the advocates is not one that they must resolve somehow by themselves (as would be the case in a fully decentralized bargaining system that lacked an authoritative leader). Rather, the advocates in this system are competing for the executive’s attention and are seeking to influence his judgment, at the leader’s invitation, and via reasoned argumentation.

Therefore, it is difficult to sustain multiple advocacy without sustained presidential participation—a lesson that has been recently reinforced by the experience of the early Clinton administration, which initially suffered greatly from sporadic and erratic presidential participation in foreign policy making (see also George and Stern 1998; Hyland 1999, 18; Gergen 2000, 276-77, 339-40).

Disciplining Advocacy through High-Quality Analysis

Multiple advocacy does not attempt to eliminate partisanship, parochial viewpoints, and bargaining from the policy-making process. Rather, it attempts to strengthen the analytical component of these familiar features of internal organizational politics. As systems analysts have suggested for several decades, analysis can usefully moderate bargaining processes and improve the quality of the debate (Rowen 1970, 31-37; Capron 1970, 354-71; Enthoven and Wayne Smith 1971; cf. Lindblom 1990). To this end, multiple advocacy not only encourages competitive analysis but, at the executive's insistence, forces the "partisan" analysis offered by the advocates to meet high standards. To ensure this, the executive needs to maintain a competent analytical staff of his or her own and use it in such a way as to evaluate and discipline the analyses offered by advocates in support of their positions.

As this implies, in the role of magistrate, the executive and staff aides do not passively accept the arguments of the advocates or simply decide in favor of the strongest coalition of advocates. Rather, the executive's central position, resources, and ultimate responsibility make it possible to force advocates to meet higher standards of analysis and debate. When executives succeed in setting such standards, individual advisers will be motivated by the knowledge that they are to be held accountable for the quality of their work and the tactics used in competitive advocacy—which is likely to improve the quality of the advisory process as a whole.

The executive's position also imposes on him or her the obligation to evaluate the relative merits of competing positions. Sometimes this will entail rejecting the options presented and sending the issue back for further study and crafting of new options. On other occasions it may be necessary for the president to decide against the majority view of the advisers. To facilitate an active presidential assessment of options, access to both expertise and qualified policy/political judgment will often be required. For example, Greenstein (2000, 51-53, 55, 151) usefully contrasts Reagan's alleged passivity toward the options placed in front of him or her by his advisers with Eisenhower's active, critical assessment and often creative restructuring of options. Thus, to discharge these evaluative responsibilities, the executive who employs multiple advocacy will require a strong, independent, analytically oriented staff such as that of the NSC.

Selective Use of Multiple Advocacy

This is not to say that multiple advocacy must be used on every occasion; rather, it would have to be employed selectively and with some degree of flexibility. From time to time, the executive will find it desirable to initiate policy advocacy himself or herself, particularly when departmental officials do not become advocates for certain policy options that

deserve serious consideration either because they do not attach high enough priority to them or because they perceive departmental disadvantages in those options. Presidential-level initiatives from time to time, then, are part of the “balancing” function that is required to achieve more effective policy making.

Even an executive who generally favors multiple advocacy will be well advised to bypass it as a vehicle for policy making on occasion. Time constraints may not permit it; or some of the other costs and risks of multiple advocacy may make it inadvisable in certain situations. One can only hope that the executive will exercise good judgment in dispensing with multiple advocacy on occasion and forgo the temptation to do without it simply because the leader believes he or she already knows what the best policy is in a particular situation. We must deal in this connection with the observation that multiple advocacy would invariably be “bad advice” and “unwelcome” to an executive who already knows what he or she wants to do and regards the chief problem to be that of getting acceptance and understanding of the decision on the part of subordinates and those who would have to implement it. Certainly, there will be many occasions on which an executive must, if necessary, eventually impose policies on other actors in the executive branch (Moens 1990, 18; Hargrove 1974, 145-46).

Two observations, however, are relevant. First, the question remains whether the executive’s preferred policy option is the most effective and desirable one. It may indeed be “unwelcome” but not “bad advice” to an executive who already “knows what should be done” to encourage him or her to subject initially preferred options to serious scrutiny and debate. In fact, there are numerous documented examples of leaders changing their minds in response to concerted and effective advocacy from the cadre of advisers. Bruce W. Jentleson’s (1990) research has shown that dissenting unity among the key advisers may strongly influence presidential policy propensities. One can hope that a president will see that it is advantageous to avoid reaching premature closure in his or her own mind as to the best course of action until the policy-making system—whether via multiple advocacy or other means—has generated sufficient information and appraisal of options to facilitate a rigorously informed choice. Certainly the final choice of policy has to remain with the president. Most everyone, however, agrees that the leader should have real alternatives from which to choose. It is not only other actors in the policy-making system who, when bureaucratic politics get out of hand, can narrow and delimit the president’s choice; the executive can deprive himself or herself of genuine alternatives, warnings of possible difficulties to be overcome, and an opportunity for a vigilant choice (Janis 1989).

Second, even when the executive is confident from the beginning that he knows what the best course of action is and is concerned only with the task of imposing policy and ensuring its implementation, it may still be useful as time permits to go through a process of multiple advocacy. This will enable those who favor another course of action to be heard and allow the executive and his or her “allies” an opportunity to articulate the reasons for favoring their course of action and opposing alternatives. Policy discussion of the president’s preferred course may result in marginal improvements of that option. And if properly managed, the policy debate can enhance understanding of the basis for the executive’s preferred option. Finally, as we have noted, allowing everyone to be heard can facilitate acceptance of the decision.

Taking Stock: Caveats and Research Findings

As do all other prescriptive theories for organizing policy making, multiple advocacy, too, has practical limits and costs attached to it.

In the first place, the executive's receptivity to multiple advocacy is of course critical. This way of structuring the advisory process is likely to suit the style and temperament of some presidents (and other officials who make lower-level policy at departmental and agency levels) more than others. Multiple advocacy is a poor prescription for a president who, as Nixon did, finds it quite uncongenial to his cognitive style and working habits. Some executives—such as Ronald Reagan, according to several credible accounts—find it extremely distasteful, disorienting, and enervating to be exposed directly in face-to-face settings to the clash of opinion among their advisers (Cannon 1991, 176-210; Smith 1988, 572; Morris 1999, 488-89; Kowert 2002). In addition, they may be reluctant to listen to the persuasive effort of any determined advocate, even in a private setting in which no other advocates are present, for fear of being swayed in favor of or against a favored position by nonrational considerations. Such executives prefer a depersonalized presentation of the arguments for and against different options, either in writing or as presented orally by a neutral staff assistant. Insofar as multiple advocacy is acceptable to them, they can tolerate and benefit from it only if the element of interpersonal conflict is removed altogether from the development and presentation of options to them, or at least from the presentation. If sharp interpersonal disagreement among advisers is altogether anathema to an executive, he or she will have little confidence in or receptivity to multiple advocacy in any form. He or she is likely, then, to prefer some variant of a formal options system to any advocacy. If a president's personal antipathy to manifestations of policy conflict among advisers is less extreme, he or she may still be able to benefit indirectly from multiple advocacy that minimizes face-to-face exposure to it. For example, a president may permit a trusted surrogate or alter ego to attend meetings at which multiple advocacy takes place in the absence of the leader. Alternatively, the executive may be willing to read and benefit from cogent written presentations submitted by advisers acting as advocates. Other students of multiple advocacy concur that it is in fact possible to minimize the face-to-face component of competitive interaction such that written communications become the primary medium for advocacy (Porter 1980, 241).

In the second place, multiple advocacy is not a panacea that can ensure high-quality policy making. The content and quality of policy decisions is determined by many other variables—for example, the personalities, ideological values, and cognitive beliefs of the policy makers and a number of other factors that have been identified in the literature (see, e.g., George 1980; Vertzberger 1990; Preston 2001). The way policy-making procedures are organized—whether via multiple advocacy or according to some other procedural model—often may make little difference as far as the substance and quality of decisions are concerned. It would be naive and misleading to suggest that any particular policy-making model can guarantee “good” decisions in all or even most instances. Rather, the case for multiple advocacy must rest on the more modest expectation that it will help prevent some very bad decisions and should generally improve the quality of information processing and appraisal. Thus, for example, when there are competing values and a variety of beliefs within the circle of policy

makers around the executive, the procedure of multiple advocacy is more likely than a highly centralized policy-making system to secure critical examination and weighing of these values and beliefs before they are permitted to influence choices.

Third, an effective system of multiple advocacy is not easily achieved in practice. It is not easy to recruit able persons for all the senior positions in the policy-making system and to ensure that they will acquire and know how to use the intellectual and bureaucratic resources needed to become effective advocates.¹⁰ And in any case, having the resources for advocacy does not ensure that the actors will actually engage in advocacy of all the options that need to be considered. They may avoid advocating options that run counter to the bureaucratic interests of their departments and agencies. They may decline to raise unpromising options, even if they believe in them, for fear of ending up on the “losing side” too often, thereby losing “influence,” tarnishing their “reputation,” or expending limited bargaining resources in fruitless or costly endeavors.

Quite obviously, then, the policy system has to be designed and managed to give participants a stake in ensuring that multiple advocacy works effectively. Some things can be done to reduce to tolerable proportions the tendencies noted above. These would include selective recruitment of persons for senior positions, socialization of incumbents of these positions into their roles, management of incentives, and selective employment of multiple advocacy for problems and circumstances less likely to arouse these inhibitions. The executive (and surrogates charged with managing the policy-making system) must define the norms of the working of the advisory system in a manner consistent with the requirements of multiple advocacy. There is more latitude in defining policy-making norms than might be imagined: witness the widely different norms and role definitions for his advisers that Kennedy introduced into the policy-making group in the Cuban Missile Crisis as compared to the earlier Bay of Pigs (George and Stern 1998, 210; Stern 1997; Longley and Pruitt 1980). Nor is the Kennedy experience unique. As we have shown elsewhere, the norms and dynamics governing policy making in the Reagan years varied greatly across the eight years of the administration and a succession of different constellations of leading players (George and Stern 1998, 222-34).

Even though the requirements for effective multiple advocacy are not easily or consistently achieved, knowledge of them on the part of the executive is useful. Such knowledge can sensitize leaders (and their staffs) to defects in the way the policy-making process is operating when important decisions are being made. It can alert the executive and/or his or her chief staff assistants to the emergence of various procedural “malfunctions” in the advisory process (George 1980, chap. 6) and thereby encourage some appropriate balancing or remedial action. In any case, multiple advocacy need not work perfectly to be valuable. In some cases, even a modest amount of multiple advocacy may suffice to highlight considerations that would otherwise be neglected or improperly appraised. Again, in judging multiple advocacy, one must compare it with some alternative system, not with an ideal standard. No policy-making system that could possibly be implemented in the real world looks very good when compared with the ideal.

10. As a result, by the early 1980s, presidents had begun to make use of professional recruiting consultants—so-called head-hunters—to aid them in the search for political talent for their administrations (e.g., Gergen 2000, 169-70).

Fourth, it must be recognized that for an executive to submit to multiple advocacy may sometimes entail costs that he or she would rather avoid incurring (‘t Hart 1997). Thus, the time required for the give-and-take among advocates may on occasion impose undue delays on decision making. Or competition and conflict within the advisory circle may occasionally become excessive, strain the policy-making group’s cohesion, and impose heavy human costs in terms of stress and staff turnover. Then, too, cast into the role of advocates, officials may be quicker to go outside the executive branch in search of allies for their internal policy disputes. This may encourage “leaks” and create political difficulties for the executive regarding relations with Congress and the public; leaders may feel that avoiding the weakening of control over final decisions outweighs on occasion the benefits to be gained from multiple advocacy. There is no denying that multiple advocacy entails costs and risks that may be onerous and difficult to live with from time to time. But similar costs and risks are present in any but the most highly centralized policy-making system and were not altogether absent even in the centralized, formal options system of the Nixon administration. These downsides were in fact quite prominent in the Reagan administration’s foreign-policy-making process, which, as we have seen, bore faint resemblance to multiple advocacy for most of the first six years. Besides, efforts to avoid and minimize some of these costs and risks, as the experience of the Nixon administration has demonstrated, lead to serious costs and risks of other kinds.¹¹

Fifth, since the executive is overburdened and cannot be expected to monitor and manage the system of multiple advocacy personally, the task would have to be delegated to one or more presidential aides. The question arises whether a senior presidential assistant would have enough leverage to maintain and supervise the competitive nature of policy making that is inherent in the system of multiple advocacy.¹² There is considerable historical experience that bears on this question, though it is certainly not easy to draw definitive conclusions.¹³

Insofar as post-Second World War presidents have made use of procedural arrangements resembling multiple advocacy to some extent, or from time to time, they have generally relied on the executive assistant or, as later retitled, the special assistant for national security affairs, to serve as “custodian” of the policy-making process. It seems clear that if the president turns to such an assistant to maintain and supervise multiple advocacy, the “custodian” must be provided with a strong presidential mandate and continuing support for his or her efforts to impose the procedures and norms of multiple advocacy on departmental and bureau officials who participate in foreign policy making. Clearly, a delicate balance must be struck here. The president must make the special assistant strong enough to discipline and integrate the contributions of the other principals, including the secretaries of state and defense, without creating an irresistible temptation for the custodian-manager to dominate the substance as well as the process of policy. The evidence to date suggests that finding such

11. As Gergen (2000, 91-93) points out, Nixon’s exaggerated efforts to deter and identify “leakers” had very negative effects on morale within his administration. Similarly, the heavy emphasis on secrecy and discipline set the stage for the excesses of Watergate. (See also Bundy 1998.)

12. For a debate on this topic, see Destler (1972, 786-90) and the response by A. L. George (1972). See also Destler (1977).

13. For a closer examination of the question of whether the special assistant will have sufficient “leverage” to perform the duties of “custodian-manager” if not assigned additional responsibilities and roles, see Hall (1982).

a balance is difficult but not impossible and that multiple advocacy remains a strong contender as a conceptual model for organizing the policy-making process.

As we have seen, there have been a number of serious attempts to evaluate empirically the performance of multiple advocacy over the past three decades (Porter 1980; Hall 1982; Burke and Greenstein 1989, 286-87; Moens 1990; Bose 1998; Greenstein and Immerman 2000, 344-345; cf. 't Hart 1997, 328-31). The findings from these and other relevant studies—which include systematic empirical research on all of the presidencies from Truman to Carter—may be summarized as follows:

1. Practices associated with multiple advocacy have contributed to improving policy-making processes and uncovering avoidable errors.¹⁴
2. The practice of multiple advocacy has often deviated significantly from the dictates of the conceptual model—which complicates efforts to evaluate the system.
3. Scholars have proposed a number of ways to fine-tune the model (to borrow Moens's [1990] phrase), many of which have been mentioned above.
4. Others have suggested contingency conditions under which multiple advocacy might be particularly likely or appropriate.¹⁵

It is also encouraging that some analysts, such as Porter [1980], have found the model useful for structuring the making of domestic policy, while others have suggested that it could be used for conceptualizing the dynamics of international policy consultations (Keohane 1993, 285-304). The framework has also proved useful in the comparative analysis of presidential speechwriting as well as policy-making processes (Bose 1998, 106-7). However, more empirical research on the presidential practice of multiple advocacy—especially targeting the experiences of the eighties, nineties, and beyond—is clearly needed.¹⁶

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14. Burke and Greenstein's (1989, 286-89) comparative study of Eisenhower's and Johnson's decision making on Vietnam found not only that multiple advocacy facilitated Eisenhower's decision making in 1954 but that the absence of such balanced critical deliberations impacted negatively on LBJ's decision making in 1965. Their conclusion is that "multiple advocacy is not a panacea, but it may ameliorate defective advisory processes" (p. 286).

15. For example, Walcott and Hult (1995, 14-16, 19-24) suggest that resort to multiple advocacy (or in their terminology, "adversarial" multiparty advocacy [p. 15]) is likely to be associated with conditions of uncertainty and controversy regarding both ends and means. See also Burke (2000, 206-9).

16. We are pleased to note an innovative and highly promising empirical research effort in this direction is already in progress under the leadership of I. M. Destler and Ivo Daalder. For a description of the project, which makes extensive use of oral history roundtables, see the home page of *The National Security Council Project* at the Brookings Institution Web site (<http://www.brookings.edu>).

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