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**Decision Making, Crisis Management,
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Richard S. Beal**

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Decision Making, Crisis Management, Information and Technology

Richard S. Beal

Until his death in 1984, Dr. Beal was Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, and Senior Director for Crisis Management Systems and Planning. He was Special Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Planning and Evaluation in the White House from 1981 to 1983. Prior to joining the White House staff, he was an Associate Professor of International Relations and Political Science at Brigham Young University. In 1979 he was a Fulbright-Hays Senior Lecturer at the Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi. Dr. Beal had extensive research and teaching experience in Southeast Asia, the Far East, Europe, and England and contributed widely to general, scholarly, and government publications.

As Special Assistant to the President on the National Security Council (NSC), I am responsible for all the crisis management assets within the White House. This is a new position. Formerly the crisis involvement was handled by one member of the NSC in support of the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, with the basic managerial support of the Director of the White House Situation Room. But in the last two years, at the President's directive, we have been involved in a major upgrade of the White House crisis management assets.

What I am about to say is based largely on a premise you will recognize, if you know anything about the interplay between the White House and various elements of the bureaucracy. It is a very common Washington proposition: the White House should have comparatively low participation in many if not most crises. As a matter of principle I find that a good operating premise. In many cases it clearly does not apply, for a variety of reasons. But most everything that has occurred in the last two years has not presupposed that the White House should have a more active role.

I want, first of all, to describe an incident that occurred about a year and a half ago between the National Military Command Center and the White House. The military leadership, with General Vessey in the National Military Command Center (NMCC) in the Pentagon, was briefing the National Security Council including the President, Secretary of State, and other participants in the Council. This incident has shaped, as very often is the case, this President's view of what he could and couldn't do.

There was a discussion about what was going on in Lebanon. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, briefing by video from the NMCC, mentioned the constraints that the President was under because of the rules of engagement (ROEs). Then he pointed to a map to show the President where a particular Israeli activity was, and where the Druze were. The President was very surprised — this is not uncommon for Presidents — that he was constrained by the ROEs. Also, when the Chairman pointed to a location on the map, the President, using the various secure video links, could not see what the Chairman was

pointing to. The briefers thought it was important to have the President pay attention to what they were talking about. But the President's reaction was, first, why should he be constrained by these rules of engagement, and second, he couldn't tell what they were talking about. The President turned to Judge Clark and said, "This is ridiculous. I not only don't know what they are talking about, I don't know where they're talking about it, and I don't have anything in front of me that helps me understand or give context to it."

Now, this anecdote ought not to be surprising to any of you. Indeed, it isn't intended to be a surprise story. It is to confirm that decision making at the highest levels of the American government is not a good system. The participants in it are all well-meaning people; still, it's not that good a system for the decision makers. We spend billions and billions of dollars to collect information, to get it from the field to an analyst in the bowels of the bureaucracy. Don't misunderstand me — that is very, very important. But having spent a lot of money to sustain an information collection, dissemination, and analysis process, we spend virtually nothing on direct support to a senior-level policy maker. Virtually nothing. This is a major theme I am going to talk about: we spend very, very little and we have very few analytic tools for the very high-level people. That leads me to my first major observation. I believe this society pays dearly, every single day, in terms of policy, for its failure to teach truly systems-oriented people to synthesize at the macro level. I daresay we could go through the length and breadth of this land and not find twenty people who have that capacity by virtue of training. A lot of people develop capacities by virtue of experience, but I'm talking about those who are both experienced and trained to synthesize information at the macro level. In my judgment the biggest problem in information processing is not sensors, not telecommunications, not CPUs, not even analytic procedures. Very little work has gone into the synthesis process. I'm not talking about a partial system, a little economics and rational decision making and let's throw a little more in the budget. I'm talking about big pieces.

Furthermore, Presidents, engaging in the decision making process, where you have a very stressful situation, experience high levels of fatigue. People get worn out, they are barraged, there's a lot of pressure on their time. Very few tools exist at that level

to relieve the pressure while supporting their synthesizing activity. I'm repeating myself, but I want to make sure I'm understood: the tools are not there. I think that is so serious that it affects my views on technology. What differentiates man from all the rest of the creatures is that man goes out and builds a tool to do his work for him. He builds tractors and plows to take care of the land, he builds relay stations to take care of signals, he builds computers to process data. Yet the tools for doing synthesis don't exist. In stressful situations, as the principal crisis manager for the President in the White House (I have actively worked every single one of the recent ones), I have to process, to synthesize, megabytes of data in very short periods of time, to give descriptive clarity to what's going on. For instance, we receive situation reports (we get at least ten of them) varying in length from short to quite long, and we have very little time to take those data and crunch them using some data compression technique, and then tease from them the essence of the messages. Believe me, that is not an easy trick during a crisis.

Student: Could you give us an example of that kind of situation? You say it happens every day.

Beal: Certainly: the most serious conflict facing the United States today is the Iran/Iraq war. You may think it's Lebanon, it's not; it's not El Salvador, it's not U.S.-Soviet relations, it is Iran/Iraq. Right now the number of cable messages the White House receives about Iran/Iraq — and that is a smaller pool than the total messages within the national security community — is substantial, around 600 every 24 hours. That pool includes situation summaries coming from at least nine different sources, teasing out economic, political, military, political leadership aspects of what's happening, on a daily basis.

We probably will get something on the order of a minute to two and a half minutes with the President. Try thinking realistically about what is required. We have to take that pool of messages, those summarized reports, the expertise of human beings on hand or out in the community, and prepare a message. You have to know what on earth to tell the President. The synthesizing, integrating process goes through that volume of data, those already synthesized pieces, to put through your final window a page, two pages, five pages, of very, very crystallized information.

To do what? To just inform him? No. Decision makers whom you only inform are not worthy of your effort to inform. Decision makers have to form impressions and act — or else not act, which is a form of acting (I'm not saying that Presidents or their advisors act only by doing something specific; non-action can also be very worthwhile — in fact, as a superpower, we ought to learn to do it more often; it's probably the number one rule of a superpower. Superpower behavior is not to act). So action, or inaction, is the essence of the message. Then you have to weigh all the different factors.

For example, there is a very large British convoy in the Gulf of Oman this morning. I guarantee you that is going to raise all kinds of questions: why is it there, is it new, did we know it was going to happen, all those kinds of things, which for us is a ratcheting up of the question of how we put it together in a context.

Now, a word of caution. Everything I say today is about crises. We can talk about general decision making in a non-crisis sense some other time. The essence of information during a crisis is that it has a very short half-life. Therefore, every time you put information on a piece of paper and imply to your boss — in my case, Bud McFarlane and the President — that this is the way it is, when you know you're dealing with information that has a very short half-life, you are on a precarious edge. So Law One is: if you've got a piece of information that is so perishable that it will not survive the evening, then don't send it up. If your best estimate is that it's that perishable, you've got to be very, very careful about processing it. I know very few tools except experience and judgment that are going to help you in that area.

Oettinger: It seems to me that the background against which to interpret a crisis, against which the decision maker evaluates what he gets fed for two and a half minutes, is an important element at risk. Would you touch on that before we close?

Beal: All right. First, however, let me make a few general propositions. Number one, I would describe crisis decision making, at least in my experience and as I have now come to conceptualize it, as organized anarchy. Sometimes it is an organization, sometimes a decision setting and sometimes a set of decision makers. But its primary characteristic is that in crises

it is always very difficult to establish a set of goals — of preferences. Crises, by their very nature, are like playing Scrabble. When somebody tosses the board and everything is initialized to zero, and most of the pieces are far-flung and in disarray — that's the anarchy. And when confronted with that, a person who makes decisions must decide how to establish preferences. For somebody going back and analyzing it, it's very difficult to elicit, from a set of decisions, what those preferences were. The reason is that most preferences are not someone's will during the period of anarchy, but rather a consequence of a loose collection of ideas and acts. The preferences are functions of action rather than drivers of action.

This in my judgment is very important. In our current situation in Lebanon (which in my judgment is a very clear policy reversal) our preferences and goals have been derived from a set of actions ever so loosely formulated over time. *Derived* from those acts — not the drivers of those acts. Secondly, in crisis situations, with this organized anarchy, the tools available to you are very unclear. You don't always know what you have.

For example, I hope the military is always a political instrument — that it never has strictly military purposes. That's why I find the Lebanon situation just bizarre. Commentators say, "Our forces have been given a mission for which they weren't designed; they were well equipped to do military things, but they were given a political role." The day that isn't true, when that is not what we want from our military capability, is the day we're going to just shoot each other up, because then we will have nothing but military purposes. So, in my judgment, the public discussion on this is absolutely upside down.

That's what happens in a crisis. Your tools become unclear to you. And their uses become unclear, and you apply them inappropriately.

Oettinger: Just so we will be clear: tools, for you, are animate? Inanimate? People? Institutions? Things?

Beal: A tool is an Ambassador Rumsfeld, Special Envoy of the President of the United States. As an instrument in the hands of the President, he has a particular characteristic that makes him very different from Ambassador Walters, who is also a trouble-shooter. Ambassador Walters reports to the Secretary

of State, and he basically is what I call the “bad news boy.” He goes out to tell President Marcos of the Philippines, “Look, you’re in real trouble,” or, “You know, that foreign military assistance is going to drop from \$100 million to \$25 million.” That’s what Walters does, while Rumsfeld reports to the President, not the Secretary of State, and he’s the special envoy to a region, not to a specific conflict. He’s not out there all the time, he’s specially deployed, and he is a tool. And the President has to figure out, with his advisors, how that particular tool is going to be used.

We may want to know how a particular country feels about something we do — we may employ a particular kind of information collection system — and use that to watch how another nation reacts. That’s also a tool. For example, if we went to a new alert status, we’d probably use some of our collection techniques to learn how country X responded to our increased alert. Or if we have some forces out of garrison, and we want to see what the other country thinks of that, we have an instrument to measure it. We may call up Ambassador Kirkpatrick and say, “Would you float the following notion? Maybe we ought to substitute the multinational force for a U.N. force.” So she becomes, in a sense, a tool.

But in crises it becomes unclear which assets you have available, which ones will work, who’s going to use them, who actually controls them. I cannot tell you how often I have heard somebody say in a conversation with the President of the United States, “But sir, we can’t do that. It’s not within the DCI’s prerogative.” That means that the Director of Central Intelligence, in his other hat as director of the intelligence community, is telling the President of the United States, his boss, that he, the DCI, has a charter that is independent of the will and preferences of the President. If you read the 1947 act as amended in 1958, that can’t be. And yet the assets are appropriated, given by law to the DCI, and they are his in the mind of everybody who manipulates them.

Oettinger: It’s not unique to the Presidency. We’re talking about decision makers in a very generic way, through these focused observations.

Beal: Yes, and not being unique, it’s very critical during times of crisis. Why? Because you’ve got very compressed decision time, whether in reality or simply in the mind of the decision maker. He or

she can’t tolerate that sort of element being fed into the decision — it puts tension into the process, that makes it very difficult to come to some sensible set of decisions.

The third major characteristic I’d like to emphasize is that all crises involve what I call fluid participation in the decision making process. That is, in this organized anarchy, each time the President and the National Security Council meet, it may involve ten people — and in three successive meetings not even three of them will be the same. People are constantly sending their substitute, while somebody else gets dragged away. Why? Because a superpower is involved in managing all kinds of things in a non-crisis area while it handles a crisis.

That will always be the case. In 1973 it meant that there were major elements of the State Department having nothing to do with the Middle East, processing other kinds of matters and demanding the attention of the Secretary of State. Furthermore no one set of participants is both analytically competent in the region or the specifics, and also high enough in position in the government to be in the meetings. So the experts who really know Iran/Iraq (generally they only know Iran and not Iraq) brief a boss who briefs a boss, who goes to the meeting with the President. He may not know a single thing about this particular issue.

This may touch on your question of background. The critical thing is that analytic, competent people are not that valuable to you in the decision making setting — this is going to strike you as a little perverse and a little upside-down — because they do not control the assets of the organization they are members of. So you have to have somebody in the meetings who can speak for the agency, allocate its resources, and make commitments to the President during the crisis decision making — not the expert on Iran/Iraq. No matter how much the expert knows about the foreign minister or whatever, that’s not what is frequently critical in those settings.

You also have what I call the integration-of-knowledge problem. By the time you reach decision making settings, you’ve already had to go through the analytic stuff, and have cast this problem in its decision making macro terms. That’s not where you need analytic smarts, you need integrating smarts, and people capable of allocating the resources and assets of the society.

Fourth proposition: every piece of analysis I have ever seen is incomplete, because the bureaucracy and the political element (I don't want to imply anything other than a very positive approach) never know anything about Blue (Red is the enemy and Blue is you). Nobody ever analyzes Blue. Nobody ever finds out what this country will support, accept, tolerate — what Congress will tolerate. They leave out major portions of what the law will permit a President to do, what the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) will permit a President to do, what Congress will permit — so they don't complete the total analysis. We could have a posture as to what we intend to do with the West Europeans and the Japanese if the Iran/Iraq war goes into the Persian Gulf — yet it might be perfectly impossible to get that done domestically. And we would never know it, because neither the Defense Department nor the State Department is permitted or mandated to know anything about America! I have the greatest possible respect for all of them, but they don't analyze America domestically.

Oettinger: Conversely, the domestic folks are not permitted to get into national security. So synthesis becomes extraordinarily difficult.

Beal: That is one of my major points. One of the fundamental questions in foreign policy is, is your foreign policy driven by domestic sources, or is it derived from the interaction between the two or three nations involved? Well nobody has ever decided to have a Bureau of U.S. Affairs in the Department of State. You have to have certain specialized tickets if you want to play in national security affairs, and one of them is: Don't know anything about America. Of course I've overstated, but not unfairly, I think.

An article by Bill Bundy, from *Foreign Affairs*, talks about how American foreign policy is conducted. It always turns on four elements. First, the central views, style, and characteristics of the President. Well, Ronald Reagan is still an enigma to everybody. Second, coordination of policy within the executive branch, including the relative influence of key advisors, is never analyzed; it's never even a part of analysis; it would be inappropriate if somebody wrote it down. It's outrageous if somebody

raises it. Third, relations with Congress. Well, Congress is never in on it; in fact, the people who conduct legislative affairs knew zero about Grenada, for example. Intentionally, they were never even given a piece of the knowledge ahead of time. Fourth, the level of popular support for the administration, especially the President personally. I think that's remarkable for William Bundy or anybody to say. I have spent a lot of my academic and professional life doing surveys, but if Richard Wirthlin in the current administration uttered a word to the Secretary of State on what the public will tolerate, you would have the longest discussion about the fallacy of polls. Few people are as good at the balance between domestic and foreign as Wirthlin is, but he wouldn't be permitted to speak.

Another principle. There is no domestic/foreign interface. It is not there, and that is very, very serious. In my judgment it is the single most critical factor in being unable to sustain foreign policy. It's not really our difficulties with one nation or another, but the problem of not being able to sustain domestically almost any policy you can name in a crisis. You have to remember that a characteristic of a crisis is generally high public tolerance for a President, his advisors, and Congress as they work through the problem. That's one of the things we know about crises: there is a suspension of immediate criticism about what you are doing. During Grenada, for example, it was decided that we could do the action, that it was correct, we could finish it, pack it up, and return — all before we had to truly defend the policy. Invasion of an island — and I don't see any point served in altering those words — invasion of an island for the specific purpose of overthrowing the government did not have to be sustained as an argument over the long term, because you could put the forces there, clean it up, and take them home before you had to really debate the policy. During crisis you have to think of the sustainability question as much as you possibly can.

Next is what I call Gray's Principle. Gray* is a Marine General, commanding officer of Camp Lejeune, and a remarkable man in many respects. To get understanding about some of the problems we had, I visited General Gray at Camp Lejeune. I did not understand why there was miscommunication

*Major General Alfred M. Gray, Jr., Commanding General, 2nd Marine Div., Fleet Marine Force.

between the President and some of his military advisors about use of the MAU force in Lebanon — the Marine Amphibious Unit, one of the basic elements the Marines use for certain kinds of actions.

General Gray and I were going over some of the concepts that the Navy and the Marines were going to use, and I asked him, "How do you keep all this coordinated?" It was a very large landing on a beach front with lots of forces and lots of firepower and lots of other things. And I was interested in the information questions, the command and control.

Now this is my proposition, though you may disagree. I believe command and control structures are always pyramidal. They have to be; otherwise they can't possibly sustain command and control. By contrast, all information structures are, in my judgment, initially horizontal. And they are horizontal all the way up and down, because for a variety of reasons they have to be. Command and control, however, and the information in a command and control structure, always have to run up or down, pyramidally through the structure.

But, as I have said, the information systems that support command and control are always horizontal and they are characterized by network flows more than by vertical action. And what General Gray said to me I found very interesting: that in times of stress, every echelon in the organization must understand the organization's immediate goals and act to fulfill them, without further information. That means that there is an information suspense period in a command and control structure. The horizontal flow is not active during certain restrictive periods. Especially in stressful conditions, you cannot expect the same kind of information network flow across the horizontal "planes" and up through the various echelons. Another point: much of command and control information is punitive. It has to be. A directive: you do this; you send me feedback that you've done it. If you haven't done it, get your butt out there and take care of it. And that's why the command and control structure passes what is not passed in a horizontal structure: how we are doing on the intelligence side.

Now, in crisis decision making most presumptions about the highest level are that it is pyramidal. But in organized anarchies it is anything but pyramidal. Why? To go back to my first notion, nobody knows what the preferences are, so nobody can act to meet the intermediate goals. How do you ever know what

the preferences are? By inferring it from actions that are very difficult to interpret. And during a crisis this is one of the things that gets interrupted.

The next proposition I want to give to you is what I call the theory of night operations. During the Gulf of Sidra incident, when Navy aircraft on the U.S.S. *Nimitz* shot down two Libyan fighters, you may remember that there was discussion in the press about who woke up the President to tell him. Well, I'm one of the lower players in that loop. And my opinion is that it is dumb to wake up the President to tell him that two Libyan jets have been shot down and everybody else in the Libyan air force has gone back to their bases and they are sitting on the runways. There is nothing to say. What are you going to wake him up to tell him? That's like saying, "There are a lot of stopped-up toilets in Milan." What are you going to do about it?

To make sure we had all our facts straight, I was sent to the U.S.S. *Nimitz* to have a discussion with Captain Ilg and Admiral Martin, then the admiral of the Fourth Task Force. Martin's a POW from Vietnam, and both are very remarkable people. While I was there they were doing maneuvers and night operations. For a person who didn't spend any time in the Navy, this was to me a remarkable experience. During these night operations the *Nimitz* was moving during the night moored to two replenishment vessels — taking on food and supplies on one side, and petroleum on the other. Although the *Nimitz* is a nuclear-powered vessel it still needs petroleum for a variety of things on board.

So we're going through the ocean, three ships hooked together. It is an incredible experience to see them doing this with the ocean rolling. All this time they were landing aircraft on the deck and taking off, at night. Night operations are very different from day operations. One characteristic is that pilots are trained to disregard most of the information available to them to land an aircraft. They are told, "Keep your eye on the meatball" — the lights on the left-hand side that have to be kept horizontal. The pilots are trained to focus not on the ship, not on their instruments, not on what they are hearing, not on what they are seeing, not on how the ship is tossing. This is an aircraft they have to get down, one of the most complex manned machines. I'm not telling you this because I like stories about the military; we're talking about technology, information, decisions during short, compressed periods of time; and to get

to get that aircraft down they had taken the volume of information that one might pass to that pilot and reduced it down to "Keep your eye on the meatball."

Student: But you know what the pilot's preferences are: to come down in one piece.

Beal: That's the preference not only of the pilot but everybody associated with him. The guys who clear those planes want very much for that pilot to get that aircraft down. But within the context of my own observations, I know very well that keeping your eye on the meatball works — and this is my point: you can have information reduction and compression only when you know preferences. All the other characteristics of night operations and crisis decision making are very much alike, but the crisis decision maker can never say "Keep your eye on the meatball" because he doesn't know what the meatball is.

You go through all the other processes: data reduction, data compression, short periods of time, high risk — let me tell you, putting that aircraft on that flattop is high risk. Somebody has worked out a manned machine, the technology is clear, the instruments that you have available to you are clear. But they are successful in landing that aircraft only to the degree that they get all that coordination.

If you apply all those pieces to the pre-crisis stage, you discover that people who say to the President "Sir, keep your eye on the meatball and we'll get through this," are deceiving him. Advice-giving during crisis periods, for precisely the reasons I have alluded to, is very dangerous. In crises most of the advice the President receives is inaccurate and fallacious. Everybody will be telling the President, "Keep your eye on the meatball, sir, and we'll make it," because that's their job. But since they are likely to be wrong, the President is denied the number one thing he personally needs: high confidence that the advice given to him in the privy council is correct.

Student: The word "correct" troubles me. Instead it is really incomplete, isn't it?

Beal: It is incomplete, incorrect, and inadequate.

Student: Isn't the adviser saying, "Based on my experience with you, Mr. President, I believe your preferences are thus, and therefore I think this indicator is the only one that will do it." Isn't that an effort to distill in some meaningful way...

Beal: It is. But my proposition to you is that, in all probability, whether it is the Secretary of Defense or the Secretary of State, whoever it is, he's wrong. In my judgment you have to operate from the premise that when you are in a crisis condition, he is likely to be wrong. That's the risk you run in the circumstances. Anarchy can surround everything they do, and it simply makes almost everyone's good advice not that good. The conditions no longer permit them to concentrate on one thing. In a crisis a lot of the effort goes toward finding a path to solve the problems; they have to meet, they have to bolster each other and get a certain kind of consensus to get the thing resolved. That's the basis of Irving Janis' "group think" theory. They have to build consensus and get the President on a path, then they have to do the proselytizing and cheerleading. And in my trivial way, I keep records about who says to the President, "This will work." I red-flag that, since if anybody is convinced, in my judgment, that is likely to be dangerous — because in a crisis you just don't know.

What do I conclude from this? I do not have a prescription if you are a weak nation. But if you are the United States, because of the conditions I have described, you need to act very, very slowly. Short of a nuclear exchange, there is no crisis that this nation ever has to respond to in very compressed time, either real or psychological. I think that is one of the major problems we face: advice given under stress to a leader of a superpower causes that superpower to act precipitously and unnecessarily, without the basis of consideration that you fundamentally need. Am I arguing for "give-it-a-week?" No, but any time you get in a crisis, the major thing is, let's not go too fast.

I will give you a case in point. I think in the Korean airliner incident, from the time we knew the plane had gone down to the time the Secretary of State went on the air, and the President's first public statement about it, did not exceed 24 hours. In my judgment it caught the Soviets so ill-prepared for the speed at which we were processing information that that very thing boxed them into a corner — first to deny it and then coming back and saying, "Well, yes we did it, but we had every right to do it, it was the correct thing for us to do." That is a response we didn't really need to evoke, had we not been moving the issue too fast on them. Not that we weren't correct on the moral aspects or the other dimensions of the situation.

Now, if our larger concern were not to beat the Soviets bloody over an issue but to foster U.S.-Soviet relations, we could take all the measured response we really need. Moving too rapidly is probably the single most significant error we make.

Student: To what extent were there really confrontations with the Soviet Union? Before we really did anything, did we really try to figure out what they knew?

Beal: I think the direct answer is that we did not sit down and discuss this with the Soviet Union at any length, at any time, because our initial evaluation was that, in every way we could determine, we knew more about what was going on than they did. We were absolutely convinced that they had shot the airliner down, and that we probably had all the information we needed. This was never seen as an opportunity for us to have a good congenial talk with them.

Student: If the incident were to occur today, do you think things would be handled differently?

Beal: Yes, I think that we would do several things today that we did not do at that time. The delicate issue from the NSC's perspective, and, I believe, from State's perspective, is that we could not have done what we did had we not had the verifying evidence from the Japanese. It was not possible to go forward with what we alone had even though we had evidence. We are not a credible nation — not the President, not the nation. There are all kinds of reasons why we could not have sustained the debate in the various international forums where it has been discussed without the collaborative evidence of the Japanese. And if it were to occur again, the fact that they had it and we eventually got it from them would make that process go a lot more smoothly than it did.

This is the first time I knew anything about it at this kind of level; in fact, I am sure it is the only time when a third party has truly and genuinely helped us make a case about Soviet complicity in a horrible act.

Oettinger: That is a theme worth taking up again with Leo Cherne, under the heading of the role of public opinion in both U.S. and foreign countries in crisis for long-term national security management.

Student: It appears to me that what you are saying is that the President shouldn't be involved, because when it goes up to that level, you don't want to give him a series of briefing papers so that his reaction is just "What am I supposed to be doing with this?" By involving the President you make more likely a precipitous decision that may be inappropriate and based on inaccurate or incomplete information. Is that right?

Beal: I wouldn't necessarily infer that by bringing in the President you are much more likely to commit a precipitous act. But I would thoroughly agree that most people — including many people in the NSC — do not understand what it means to get the President involved in anything. The White House only has one asset: the President, and his attention to anything. This is the single most important asset the White House allocates. Symbolically it means the most. If you know anything about open pluralist systems like ours, the asset we have is whether or not the President will pay attention to an issue; and everybody in the society who wants to get his or her issue acted on has got to get that issue on his plate. I guarantee you that when Mr. McLaughlin worked for the Post Office, the number one concern, when he had a big enough issue, was to get the Postmaster General to take the issue as high as he could. The Secretary of Defense constantly has pressure from within or from without to get issues before the President. That is the number one game in Washington.

Now to get a President into a situation means that you have to understand how to control that situation a lot better than when he is not in it. In that sense I thoroughly agree with your point. In fact, most White Houses have, in my judgment, basically been brought in as part of what I would call their default political considerations. It is by nature a political issue whether you bring in the President, but it has been a default issue; that is to say, it was largely a question of time, or having met with a group, or is he giving proper treatment to some department or agency compared to some other. It has basically been a default balancing act; it's paying everybody off.

Most administrations try to focus on the big domestic issues of the time. But then invariably the national security items start to take over, and they run around scratching their heads and wondering why this happened. I'll tell you why it happened: because every

White House in modern times has allocated the National Security Adviser time every day to brief the President. No domestic counselor has ever been granted, to my knowledge, that separate, independent allocation of time — and believe me, we plan it and manipulate it and control it, and it is the number one thing we have to deal with. The second major factor is that we have kings, presidents, prime ministers, foreign ministers as power leverage. The NSC leverages that against the President through the time in his calendar to get him involved.

Now, let me get specifically to crises. The presumption is that the President is involved if it's a crisis. Sam Donaldson says, "Hey, when did you tell the President?" It doesn't matter how low-level a crisis it is; it can be a terrorist attack in southern Sudan (there have been three). "When did you tell the President? When did you notify him?" It is a public issue. We even get calls from Senators: they read it in the press. "Is the President aware?" So, in my judgment, the expectation is that in all crises you put the President in the loop — and then that makes the scale of the game very different.

I think this is a fascinating problem, because I am a big believer in management of time. That's "upward boss" management. We had some interesting feedback from the Soviet Union on the Korean airliner incident, from people in the Institute for U.S. and Canadian Studies, who told us "When Secretary of State Schultz announced it we didn't think it was a big deal." Just imagine. They can shoot an airplane down with civilians on it, and after the fact they knew what it was — that's not a big deal; the Secretary of State goes on TV. It was a big deal only after we got the President involved.

Now, having said "default/political," having accepted the proposition that it really matters, my contention is that in crises one of the things you have to manage is whether the President is in or out — because if the President's in, then this nonsense that the Secretary of State or Defense will run the crisis is not possible: the President has to. Even if he delegates it to the Vice President just to manage the meetings, that creates a tremendous public hullabaloo. So, no matter what you do, once you put the President in, that says, "All right, Secretary of State, you now play not the coordinator of the crisis, but diplomacy, foreign affairs — that's your job. Secretary of Defense, or DCI, yours is intelligence."

I'll give you a case in point. Recently the Libyans invaded the northern part of Chad. The first issue we dealt with was, "Is this a matter worthy of Presidential involvement?" The NSC made the decision that it was not, that there was only a very limited role for the President of the United States. It was determined that he would only have a role if we had to have president-to-president relations with Francois Mitterand. This was largely not an American issue, and there was little we really could do about it, but if it did involve the French, it might involve president-to-president contact. Otherwise it was a problem for the Secretary of State, and he turned it over to the director of P/M (political/military), Admiral Howe, and Admiral Howe ran the crisis. The President played only one role in the Korean airliner crisis. After the strategy was laid out as to what we would do and how we would do it, it was decided that we would not use our first gun up front. We would bring in the President later, and then only in a way that would enable us to sustain the international momentum.

Student: Something really bothers me: you said the U.S. is not a credible nation. What do you mean by that?

Beal: There are so many elitists and people around the world who will not believe us when we make a case — for example, about use of gases and toxins in the various fighting zones around the world, or KGB activities. We basically can't convince anybody. And we can't convince many of the leaders of the third world about positions we take in international forums. Many people believe that the CIA is the root of a lot of things.

What is the evidence, by the way, that the Korean airliner was shot down? The ocean eventually yielded some debris. But when we first made the accusation nobody knew the aircraft had been shot down by the Soviets. Furthermore lots of documents are forged; it goes on all of the time. We are just not able to use international forums like the United Nations to make a case. I lived a significant part of my recent life in India, and I guarantee you that the Indian government would not have accepted our explanation of the shootdown.

Student: Is that something we just have to live with for the next few decades, or could we do something about it?

Beal: I haven't really thought about that. I don't think it's something you consciously do something about. We need to be a more credible player across the board, in my opinion. Ask Leo Cherne about that when he is here.

Student: You mentioned a consolidation of crisis management functions within the White House. Could you describe that in more detail?

Beal: Yes. The White House decided, as a result of the President's directive, that we really could not use the situation room — which is a very small place, smaller than this classroom — as our single location for management of crises. During the last year or so we have built some additional capabilities, largely to support the NSC, the Vice President and the National Security Adviser in the analytical role in which the senior members of the NSC staff support the President. The room holds additional telecommunications, computer capabilities, and a few other things.

Student: High tech. But the policy making team hasn't changed?

Beal: Well, it has changed in the sense that once you build an instrument, that causes you to change the players, the team, even the rules of the game. So there now are, internally within the White House, a lot more rules of the game, as to how you play, who plays, and under what conditions.

Oettinger: To go back a bit, your statement about putting the President in or out — compared with the last three or four years' record of this seminar, and much of the other literature — is probably the most eloquent and pithy statement of the impact of modern technology on decision making. That was an option that didn't exist in the old days. You sent off Ben Franklin, or the Ambassador, or the European Sales Chief, and that was that. It was some time before you could even get new instructions from the boss. Flexibility began increasing with the telegraph, increased with the telephone, and is so greatly increased now that it even raises the question whether

you need the top of the pyramid. It is, I think, at the heart of some of the questions of modern management under conditions of high technology. Flexibility makes that question impossible.

Student: That worked in reverse, too. We lived through a period when with this apparatus, for the first time in history, there was a crisis called "the Vietnam War." And it was a continuous crisis. And the President could read the newspapers and get detailed information from the wire services faster than the official apparatus could provide it to him — faster even than it could decide whether to involve him or not. So he decided.

Oettinger: LBJ was the prize first example, sitting down there in the situation room saying, "I'm going to run this stuff myself at a distance." But the funny thing is that the staff people learned to stop him and others from doing that. There's a whole history of that — and it's exactly the point I'm trying to make, which is that the flexibility is there. So there is a whole new set of conditions under which people either play, or protect themselves from that game — either from the President downward, or upward. That set of possibilities is an important element.

Beal: When Dave McManis gets here he can tell you all about Johnson sitting there and moving I-Corps around in the sandbox, and I think that will reinforce the point you're making. But most people don't understand the difference between information structures and command and control structures. I don't want to appear to defend President Johnson, because I think he had a propensity to do this no matter what. However, there is a tendency for the bottom to say, "We will not send this kind of information to the top because it would tempt that echelon to come back down, make tactical decisions, and turn all the tactical knobs." They don't want that to happen at all; they'll do everything they possibly can to prevent it.

Now, that confuses the pyramid and the horizontal structures — because the number one thing everybody up the various echelons has to contend with is uncertainty, and information denial creates higher degrees

of uncertainty than necessary. Instead, if you understand the horizontal information structure, the tendency will be to pass more synthesized, properly integrated information, which reduces uncertainty. It also encourages the real process, which is for a President or a person at whatever echelon to delegate the authority, establish accountability, and then get feedback as to what is happening in that loop. That is the delegated authority accountability loop, which is the thing a decision maker wants to know most about. But once you start snipping up those pieces on him and denying information, he will be looking into tactical matters every single day, and in my judgment he ought to be. Why? Because he's ultimately responsible, and without thorough synthesized information that enables him to make macro-level synthesized decisions, he is going to make the ones he can make, and they will be tactical. In short, a decision maker will be strongly tempted to make tactical decisions if he is being denied strategic, integrated information.

Oettinger: And this is the gentleman who is three years plus into an administration. That was my second point. I don't know when you learned that, but every four years all that knowledge disappears and a brand new set of players moves in. So another set of the dynamics is institutional, having little to do with modern technology, which is global, with different degrees of use, different degrees of awareness and so on. This is a matter of continuity of understanding. Every once in a while a Soviet leader dies, and it's international news. But our leaders routinely disappear! Not only the President, but all the others — a whole administration. And what's more, they clean out the files before the brand new team comes in. The continuity rests on support people like McManis, who bridges the Johnson-era situation room to the Reagan-era national intelligence scene. It takes each new administration months to reconnect and find out where those people are. They're certainly not among the initial team the new President brings in. They are a lucky accident, or an unfortunate one, depending. I'm not trying to give theories of government here — clearly there are different patterns, but that's the United States.

One last thing, then I'll break off this interruption. You said something about how difficult it is for the

White House apparatus to get resources, and about all the information gathering going on at the lower echelons and nothing at the top for synthesis. There's a poignant record of some of that in a book by a man who was in the White House Communications Agency: Gulley's *Breaking Cover*. Though it has the appearance of a backstairs gossip piece, his stories of his administration — Johnson's I think — raiding Navy funds to pay for Number One's phone bills and so forth make interesting reading.

Beal: I should pick up on that. It is not in the interest of a lot of resource people to allocate much of their resource's power to the White House. White Houses have enough resources and power by virtue of their sheer overbearing character — so that if they were really endowed with all the assets they need to do their business, it might be a real problem. However, the White House is the least well-supported front office I've ever worked in, bar none. I mean, they think a big deal is getting a parking pass. It is not properly supported and in my opinion the law to provide telecommunications to the President is being circumvented. An example is the White House Communications Agency under Brigadier General Tuck — he worried every day whether he was within the law in his support to the President as Commander-in-Chief. We support, with our communications, the President of the United States in his Commander-in-Chief role, and really in no other role. The law doesn't provide for communications support to his role as chief executive, as party leader, as political leader — nobody cares one iota about that, and Congress would never appropriate funds to him, and probably shouldn't.

Presidents have to go hat in hand. A little while ago it dawned on me to compare when technology was introduced in this society and then when it was introduced into the White House. I had my staff look it up, and the lead-lag relationship is staggering. Think of the telecommunications-computer revolution that has gone on in this society, penetrating educational institutions and corporations. When I arrived, the White House had a great big corner office, room 200, utterly without technology. I found a pencil. But I had ten times the technology when I was at the University — much more than ten times, because it's a factor against zero. I find that absolutely terrible. In many respects the White House is the hollow

center. And when people contend with the White House to keep it the hollow center, they are unwise, because then it all depends on the personal assets of the President. And that's how you keep presidents at bay.

Oettinger: As a checks and balances question both vis-a-vis the Congress and the games within the Executive Branch, that phenomenon bears study. You couldn't have started us off better. When I invited you, I didn't know you were going to so eloquently echo the theme we began with: that the fragmented learning students get elsewhere in this school does not begin to address central problems of synthesis, and what it is like to be a CEO, not just of the United States, but in organization X, Y, or Z. The rest of the information you're getting here is for slaves, not for CEOs. The main thing you can get out of this course is: maybe you can't all be bosses, maybe you can't all be President of the United States, but if you want to serve the President of the United States or any organization's CEO, you've got to think like one, and not like a slave. Mr. Beal is doing a fantastic job of making clear just what that means.

Student: You said there were two categories: nuclear confrontational decisions, and the others. And in the case of a nuclear confrontation you automatically involve the President, which makes sense. But how does that translate into a different magnitude of the problem? How does that change the analysis? It seems to me to be a whole different category of problems.

Beal: I'll admit a certain bias in my answer to your question. I believe my work generally involves what I hope will be the 99.9999 percentage of non-nuclear crises we're actually going to deal with. When we get into nuclear decision making, the characteristics of the decision making, the number of people who are already in that loop, all the factors are a quantum jump. I'm not saying we're ready for that. A lot of work has gone into it, theoretical approaches are on the books. An awful lot of things would have to be factored in if we were ever really confronted with that rather tense, to say the least, kind of decision making. We have adopted crisis-management procedures that will allow us to transition into it if we are

ever actually involved in an eyeball-to-eyeball issue. I must confess though, in terms of all we have done in the last two years, that has not been our focus — based on the belief that we would have many more of the other kind of crises before we ever got to any nuclear one. Moreover, people who have dealt with crises have learned their lessons of history out of Berlin blockades, the Cuban missile crisis, Middle East tensions — and people do study the Quemoy and Matsu experience, though very few have ever learned any lessons from it.

So, in my judgment, in a nuclear crisis you have a "takeoff," by which I mean that the magnitude of the data categories you have to deal with just gets staggering. It's handled in many departments and agencies by SOPs; they are out there, they exist. How good they are qualitatively we would have to have the right security level to discuss, but they are all in place. The other dimension in a nuclear crisis is all the verification issues, authenticity and accreditation.

In non-nuclear crises we have something similar, but on a different scale. For example, the bombings of the Embassy and the Marine Headquarters immediately raised authenticity and accreditation questions. Who did it, and how do we know they did it, and what can we say about that publicly? What should we say, even if we can say something? In a nuclear crisis you have that category of problem in spades. Because the moment you go outside the crisis management early warning or warning identification question into emergency management procedures, the number of agencies involved increases, and that's a whole different ball game.

Student: But if the other crises are barely manageable, a nuclear crisis would seem to become unmanageable in terms of information overload. Presumably, the preference of any NCA would be just to postpone the decision to use nuclear weapons for as long as conceivable. At least his objective would be to slow things down.

Oettinger: Which is precisely why, among other things, there is all this attention to the lower-order crisis. We really would rather not let any of these things escalate to that level; and — I echo what Dr. Beal has said — not enough attention has been paid to the lower-level crisis. As a consequence, the risk

of getting to the higher-level ones is greater. After all, there can hardly be anybody left around the world who doesn't agree that one would really rather not enter into nuclear confrontation.

Beal: Let me make one observation. The work in crisis management we're doing now involves looking at the other side. Certain assumptions and certain scenarios about the world would lead one to conclude that we generally think of crisis management as dampening. That is, you have a problem out there, you want to avert its adverse consequences, so you try to dampen the prospects of the crisis — or, once you get one, you try to keep its negative consequences down.

But the whole other end of that spectrum has to be considered: sometimes you want a crisis. A crisis can serve as a firebreak for you, burning against the forest fire itself. So you may want to precipitate one. You need to think what that might mean; so having an amplifying as well as a dampening strategy is an essential part of understanding crises and their value to you.

Surely you all know that the Chinese character for crisis has opportunity in one part and danger in its other part. I think that's quite true. We tend not to be as manipulative as we might — at least we tend not to admit to manipulating the opportunity side of the character, but the opportunity is there.

Student: I wanted to ask you about one of the characteristics of crisis decision making. You mentioned fluid participation. A lot of analysts have written that in crisis decision making the big characteristic seemed to be that the number of decision makers gets smaller. So in the majority of cases a few top policy makers isolate themselves more from incoming information. That doesn't seem to fit in with what you're describing here.

Beal: It doesn't fit because we've read that too, and we'd like to avoid that problem. Item one: we probably have as many errors in our crisis activities as you can imagine — but not because we isolated the decision makers. Two: in very tense settings I believe the President will have privy councils. I think this is really very important. I don't believe you can

deny any President the right — without any of our technology or anything we can provide him — to go into a room and receive counsel privately and have the assurance that it is the best judgment he can possibly get.

Now, I have some problems with that. I think the most dangerous products can come out of the privy council process. Comparing certain activities we've been involved with over the last year, some privy councils are better than others, and you can examine the differences in structure and membership of those groups. But privy councils tend to be small. I do not believe you can have a large group that's very fluid. The group has to be fairly small, with considerable diversity, and you have to cope with the fluidity problem I mentioned earlier. This is absolutely serious; you cannot, in the middle of a Central America or Grenada crisis, have the Assistant Secretary for Inter-American Affairs or Latin American Affairs coming in one session and his deputy the next, sitting in with the President of the United States. It just doesn't work. They're not confidantes; in fact the President may not even know who that guy is. And when you go into that meeting you can feel the chill: this is the wrong mix of people. And you just pray the President has the good sense to end the meeting early.

Oettinger: You're veering again to the question of the role of background and earlier input at the time of crisis. Obviously you can't have a President memorize the geography of every place, so that when you tell him about it he knows exactly what it is. But what is the role of fact-finding?

Beal: Maybe Dave McManis could talk to this more appropriately than I. But the departments and agencies have enormous access to the President, and during crises we have constant contact with them. You learn to use these departments and agencies, and they can give you all kinds of information, fast and analyzed. It's a question of knowing how to ask them the right questions and get to the right people. You can get confused. The first premise is that, by virtue of its contact with the operations centers in each of the departments and agencies, the White House can have almost instantaneous high-quality information on warning conditions, possible threat areas and background. When the Chad crisis broke,

the intelligence community had been talking about border buildups, incursions and other border problems for a long time. We had more than enough strategic warning to know this was a hot spot we needed to worry about. But what kind of information should the President see? You can go through a whole litany of questions about what you should have the community prepare for you.

In Chad, for example, it took us about two days to find anybody truly competent to know where the oases were and where the roads ran in the middle of Chad around the 15th parallel. You get out the list and count up how many Americans you know who are competent to tell you where the oases are in Chad. And that was no trivial issue. The only truly competent person we had was an American military officer who had spent time with the French in Africa. And as it turned out, the information we received geographically and demographically was the number one thing to know in the Chad case, because it led us to conclude that the Libyans could invade in the north. The population is in the south, but in between are very few roads, airstrips or oases, making for very difficult logistics problems for anything coming through there. So if they were to invade in the north and came down to one of the critical oases, neither we, nor Egypt, nor France, nor any central African nation could get any forces a hundred or so miles up through that area to resist the rebels and the Libyans. But if they then went further down, through the area crossing the 15th parallel, then the Libyans and the rebels couldn't sustain an attack against the capital, because then their logistics problems would be horrendous. So if you didn't resist them in the north you would have a natural partition. What we decided to do was resist the natural partition of Chad if we could avoid it. (Not that Chad's boundaries make any sense to anybody, but put that issue aside.)

So, if you follow me, concerning the question of background information, resources and what we should know, we had one of those scenarios that say, "If the knife drops tonight, what do you know?"

And our work in the Crisis Management Systems and Planning Directorate, which I head, is to take all such areas around the world and ask ourselves how to maintain "threat situation files" on them.

Your information strategy is "high-burst." It's also high-video; if you don't understand that the channel is video, you're going to lose. By that I mean that in

a short period the best way to communicate the highest data rate to a high-level decision maker is to pump to him the equivalent of a sequence of video images with very compressed data. Most of the community is still working in words, writing things down. We don't write things down; we take written things, transform them into what I call video frames, and high-burst that through to the President and the National Security Advisor largely in video form. That way the President can quickly picture where the crisis area is and what is germane to it; and the technology is fairly simple. You identify the area in terms of geographic base, and build windows of information into everything. Then you theoretically touch the screen for additional information. That way the President can interact with the data. Now, that's a wish list more than an accomplished fact but it's as specific as I can be.

McLaughlin: Let me pursue the background issue a little further. Maybe a crisis, a pre-crisis, or a contingency is a matter of definition. The Iran/Iraq situation has been a crisis for 2½ to 3 years or so, and we know it can go critical very easily with a lot of different scenarios. Does your staff worry about when that goes critical? What the options are? Are you trying to define options now?

Beal: Yes. You don't have to be a great warner to pick up on Iran/Iraq. You have to be pretty good analytically to know all its features. Basically we are using the notion of strategic warning. We have an inventory of the parts of the world where the community has alerted the National Security Council that there is a potential threat area that could go critical at any time. Then we are constantly soliciting from the community what I call tactical warning. And tactical warning always has to be timely. If a guy says, "I'm glad you called, because tonight it's going to happen," he hasn't really helped you very much.

It's a question of the liaison between the policy maker and the analytic community, the intelligence community, to keep up that constant exchange over those potentially critical areas of the world. I think we learned during the Iranian crisis that we have to have a critical exchange about who is looking at what, and why. It's our job, we think, to build the inventory, and look at the dimensions of strategic warning and what they tell you you ought to know

about the particular situation. Then draw out the community proactively for the more immediate warning.

Now, there's another category, where we sit around and say, "What could we be surprised by this afternoon?" We do that every day. Tonight before I go home I will have a little pow-wow with the people who work for me, and we'll go over a hundred and seventy-odd places. Some of it is fairly trivial; some of it isn't so trivial. The question is tactical: has our time period changed?

Now, we are trying throughout the crisis management area to arrive at a better planning process for that. That brings up the question of options. First of all, the White House is not the place where you carve out most of your options. If you can't get that in the bureaucracy, then you've got real troubles. And that's our problem. I don't know what your experience is, but I know of very few elements of the bureaucracy that, unless specifically tasked by the President, will offer him (not me, him) options. The courses of action are generally preselected. How? Regardless what books you read — they are all fallacious in my experience — they do not bring forward those options. Often the lower levels of the State Department may pass options forward to somebody else who then passes them to the Secretary, but by the time I see them there are very few options. They don't want us to have a lot of options. I think that's a competency question, a trust-of-government question. After so many people have analyzed something, a certain policy determinacy sets in. The guys who know everything there is to know about every ideographic piece of information will drive you absolutely crazy with facts — they know about this, that and the other thing, but they haven't got a concept. A concept is an alien notion. It is not something to be dealt with.

So concepts and options don't come forth. If we got a set of options, would we know what to do with it? I wouldn't necessarily jump on it with both feet. Why? I come back to my central premise: this society pays dearly for its inability to integrate information.

Let me make one other observation about information processing. Technical, highly specialized information rises without being integrated right to the top. So that Presidents truly are not, and their advisors are not, competent to deal with the pieces they frequently get. This is the great problem with the parts of the intelligence community. They collect a kind of data that is tremendously important, but which must be integrated in the total webbing of knowledge about a particular problem. Yet it is so hot, and sometimes so specialized, and so much a question of the sources and the methods. You don't buy the data unless you know those sources and methods — and it causes them all kinds of grief if you're going to know that, except in the most general of ways. Yet you must act on it — and that's what the Presidents have done. That very President we talked about acted on highly specialized knowledge he was getting, and it was called "raw" but it wasn't raw. Johnson couldn't have acted on raw data. It could not have happened. It had an initial processing. A decision maker who is living in high levels of uncertainty reaches out there and says, "Give me something I can act on, some piece of information on which I can comfortably take the step of allocating enormous resources."

Student: What's your prescription for data integration? How do you go about teaching people, or pushing that to happen in an organization?

Beal: I'm going to leave you disappointed on this; I plead first of all not being competent on the question. It is an issue we really would have to spend some time on. I've thought about it for years. I used to run an international relations program and had sophomores, juniors, seniors, and graduate students asking, "How do I do all this?" That's why I think this particular program is important: you're combining substantive issues with technology information. You know you've got to step across a lot of knowledge domains to be able to handle that probability. It is a basic philosophical question about education that starts very early. I have a lot of thoughts on it, but it really is well beyond what we could cover today.