

Prime Minister

- 1 You will remember that, two years ago, Elie Kedourie and I sent you a paper suggesting that you might find it useful to have a group comparable to the Policy Unit whose duty would be to consider international and defence questions. We both believe it might be desirable to have a second look at the idea after recent events.
- 2 I attach a copy of this paper.
- 3 We suggested that the group might be staffed by persons whose qualifications would be that they would not be overawed by diplomatic professionalism, and that they would be able to give sound practical and independent advice in particular taking into account internal British politics. The persons concerned would be temporary civil servants, of varying professional qualifications, would have access to all papers and cleared appropriately for security.
- 4 We recognised that the Foreign Office would be hostile to this idea. They have always resisted any idea that there should be anything comparable to the US National Security Council here. Nevertheless it seems that your colleagues as fellow heads of government in Europe do have some such staff. Of course the Foreign Office would have to be handled with tact, and care would have to be taken to avoid any clash with (or duplication of) work undertaken in the Cabinet Secretariat and to avoid a repetition of the ill feeling caused by Lloyd George's "Garden Suburb".
- 5 We put forward this plan now again because of the new proof that the character of domestic policies can be transformed by unexpected international events. Since we sent in our ^{paper} paper, President Carter was reversed primarily because of international events. We feel that the events of the Falkland Islands may not be the only grave international occurrence of your prime ministership.
- 6 The fact that international party relations are ineluctably growing closer may also bear on this: the EDU (European Democratic Union) wants to turn itself into an IDU (International Democratic Union) and will want to exert itself more whether we in Britain like it or not.

Hugh Thomas
April 6, 1982

Prime Minister

1. We wonder whether you have considered the desirability of setting up a group comparable to the Policy Unit whose duty would be to consider international and defence questions.

2. Our belief, following our meeting at Chequers in February, is that occasional discussion with persons such as ourselves may not be quite enough.

3. The purpose of this group would be
 - (a) to hold a watching brief over established orthodoxies and assumptions in foreign policy, and look ahead as far as possible;

 - (b) to consider all international issues from the angle of policies laid down by you and report on their implementation;

 - (c) to pay particular attention to matters which may not receive the attention that they deserve because they fall between the Foreign Office and the Ministry of Defence, or because they fall between existing departments provided for by current arrangements within those ministries; also to the bearing on international political matters of foreign policy decisions.

4. The group might be staffed by persons whose essential qualifications would be that they would not be overawed by diplomatic professionalism, and that they would be able to give sound, practical and independent advice taking into account internal British politics. The persons concerned would be temporary civil servants of varying professional qualifications, would have access to all papers and be cleared appropriately for security. While holding ourselves ready, as a matter of course, to give our views on any issue on which you might wish to consult us, we do not consider ourselves, because of other commitments, appropriate persons for this particular undertaking.
5. The Foreign Office would require some persuasion that this is a good idea. They might initially be sceptical. This scepticism might be greater indeed in that particular department of state than in some others which have now become used to the Policy Unit. Common sense, therefore, would suggest that they would have to be approached with tact and deftness. The Policy Unit whom we have consulted agree with this assessment. Care would have to be taken to avoid any clash with (or duplication of) work undertaken in the Cabinet Secretariat and to avoid a repetition of the ill feeling caused by Lloyd George's "Garden suburb".

6. Still, the existing Policy Unit has not given rise to objections of this sort.

7. There is an additional point which may be made against this proposal that anyone who saw regular Foreign Office telegrams might also see papers relating to, or allusions to, security or intelligence organisations. That would indeed have to be the case. This factor would have to be taken into account in selecting the persons concerned. Trustworthiness would be essential in this undertaking at the very start. It must be said, however, that even quite junior officials in the Foreign Service see many such papers.

8. Do you think this a good idea in principle? Would you like us to explore further how this idea could be most creatively put into effect? Would you like us to come and talk to you about this?

Elie Kedourie

Hugh Thomas

(February 1960)