



THE LIFE OF
NELSON A. ROCKEFELLER
—
WORLDS TO CONQUER
1908-1958

GARY REICH

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By the time Rockefeller returned to Washington, his conquest of the Hanks family was complete. Whatever moral scruples and reservations Bryan and Virginia had about his relationship with their daughter crumbled in the face of his incessant attentiveness and generosity. "This was pretty heady stuff for those two people from Texas," Mitchell remarked. "He completely buffalooed them. They thought he was God." Bryan sent him cloyingly reverent letters of appreciation, letters addressed "to you . . . the maker of such good things." The senior Hanks confessed to Nancy, "He does so much, I am fearful our expressions of appreciation will grow weak because said so often, but in our hearts they grow stronger."

As for Nancy, there was little question that her "comradeship" with Rockefeller had evolved into something else. Said Donna Mitchell, "It was very apparent to me that she was in love with Nelson." And Rockefeller, for his part, gave Nancy every reason to believe that he was equally smitten. "Nancy," he would write to her, "there is nothing more beautiful than our love."

No longer were they simply the undersecretary and his executive assistant. They were also Dr. and Mrs. Snail.

T h i r t y - t w o

OVERT AND COVERT

By the fall of 1954 Nelson Rockefeller was at the pinnacle of his influence at HEW. He was master of the issues, master of the legislative process, and, for all intents and purposes, master of the department. But now that he had attained that state of governmental grace, he felt the old restlessness gnawing at him. He yearned for a seat at the cabinet table, but Hobby was not about to step aside so he could take it. For over sixteen months he had accepted his subservient position, playing the game, loyally deferring to a superior whom he, and everyone else in Washington, knew was hardly his equal in energy or ability. Clearly, he expected some payoff for this most arduous (for him) of exertions: the squelching of his ego. But there was no payoff at hand.

He had also come to recognize that in this administration, domestic policy—particularly matters of health, education, and welfare—was strictly a sideshow. With the Cold War in full swing, the main event was foreign affairs. Unable to secure a foreign policy role for himself in the initial go-round, Rockefeller nonetheless still nurtured the hope that somehow, somewhere, a place for him could be found.

By early November, Rockefeller had served notice on Hobby that he intended to leave to pursue something in the international field. Noticeably reluctant to lose his services, despite the evident strains in their relationship, she dropped hints that she might be departing soon herself. Rockefeller didn't believe it for a minute.

He cast his net over the executive branch, dredging for possibilities. An alluring one soon presented itself—a product, fortuitously, of his efforts at the government organization committee. Heading the Rockefeller panels' warnings that the United States still lacked a coherent foreign economic program,

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Eisenhower had asked his former budget director, Joseph Dodge, to study the question. Dodge, in turn, handed in a report urging the creation of a White House office of foreign economic policy—an office that would be the economic equivalent (and on a par with) the National Security Council. This, of course, was but the latest incarnation of the position Rockefeller had been angling for for years. He was no less eager now than he ever was to take it on.

It was with some anticipation, then, that Rockefeller arrived at the White House for a lunch with the President, at which this new office was to be discussed. Also at the luncheon were Milton Eisenhower and various lower-level White House aides. When the talk turned to the question of who might run the new office, Dodge's name was broached, and spoken of approvingly by all hands. Later, after Milton Eisenhower excused himself, the President raised the possibility that perhaps his brother, rather than Dodge, might do the job. Never, in the course of the lunch, was Rockefeller's name ever advanced—even though he was indisputably the author of the whole scheme they were discussing.

Rockefeller left the luncheon crestfallen, and decided, then and there, that the time for deference, for politely waiting his turn, was over. He stormed over to Sherman Adams' office and insisted he had to see the chief of staff at once. Adams kept him cooling his heels for a full two hours.

When Rockefeller was at last admitted into Adams' presence, he curtly informed the chief of staff that he had reached the end of his rope at HEW. His chief interest, he said, was in the international field. Unless the administration could find something for him in that area, he intended to return to the private sector.

The laconic, stone-faced Adams, whose power was such that reporters had taken to referring to him as the "Assistant President," was known as Eisenhower's no-man. In the words of one of the President's biographers, Peter Lyon, "He said no to cabinet secretaries and to congressmen, to journalists and to jobhunters; he said no short and sharp, without troubling to be polite about it." He didn't say no to Rockefeller, but what he did say was almost as deflating.

He wished, he said, that Rockefeller had said something about this before. Rockefeller returned to his office at HEW with his hopes for a new position seemingly dashed. But as he prepared himself for yet another reluctant exit from public life, certain wheels in the Eisenhower administration began to turn. And the person turning those wheels was Oveta Culp Hobby.

On a Tuesday morning in mid-November, she summoned Rockefeller to her office and told him that after the cabinet meeting the previous Friday she had approached the President on Rockefeller's behalf. She had confided to Eisenhower that Rockefeller really wanted the foreign economic job, and, if that wasn't available, something else in the foreign field. Eisenhower, she reported, seemed glad to hear it.

The overture to the President was, she told Rockefeller, "really the only truly generous thing I've ever done in my life."

Rockefeller then phoned Sherman Adams, who informed him that a new job had indeed been found for him: special assistant to the President for psychological warfare. The position had been vacant for over six months, ever since the departure from government of C. D. Jackson, Eisenhower's guru on the subject. The job was Rockefeller's, if he wanted it.

What Hobby had not disclosed to Rockefeller—and what he only later learned from Jackson—was that just six weeks earlier the White House had floated Rockefeller's name for the Jackson position and had met with a firm rebuff from Hobby. She insisted she simply could not let her indispensable undersecretary go.

So Hobby's approach to the President was not exactly the spontaneous magnanimous gesture she made it out to be. She was simply withdrawing her veto of his move—withdrawing it in the face of the near-certainty that Rockefeller would depart from HEW in any case.

What's more, once he had the offer in hand, Hobby did her best to dissuade him from accepting it. The job, she warned somewhat cryptically, would ruin him politically.

Rockefeller, however, was determined to take it, particularly after a conversation he had with Joe Dodge. Dodge had raced over to see Rockefeller after a breakfast meeting with the President, at which Eisenhower and Dodge had discussed the foreign economic policy position. Dodge told the President he was willing to take the post to get it organized, but didn't want it permanently. That was fine, replied the President; once Dodge stepped down, he would appoint Rockefeller to take his place. (Eisenhower explained that he feared adverse public reaction if he were to tap his brother Milton.)

This added wrinkle left Rockefeller elated. He would have the job he wanted after all. In the meantime, he told aides he was delighted that Dodge was taking the position. Not only was he confident he could work with the former budget director, but at least at the outset Rockefeller felt he could accomplish more with the influential Dodge in place than he could if he held the post himself.

There was only one more element Rockefeller had to consider: the reaction of John Foster Dulles to his psychological warfare appointment. But Sherman Adams reassured him on that score. It had all been cleared with Dulles, Adams said, and Dulles had pronounced himself pleased.

The White House wanted Rockefeller to start immediately, but Hobby objected. She refused to release him until after the President's State of the Union message in mid-January. In the meantime, word of Rockefeller's appointment leaked, in a front-page *New York Times* story by Rockefeller's old confidant James Reston. "The White House," Nancy Hanks wrote her parents, "probably thinks he leaked the story." And well the White House might

have, considering Reston's grandiose characterization of Rockefeller's new position.

"Secretary of State Dulles," he reported, "will, of course, remain the President's principal adviser on foreign affairs, but Mr. Rockefeller will work with him and with the other departments and agencies on the coordination of the Administration's 'cold war' strategy."

This sweeping construction of his new post was advanced by Rockefeller himself in his conversations with friends such as Adolf Berle. After lunching with Rockefeller shortly after the New Year, Berle recorded the following in his diary: "Dulles had asked Nelson to take this new job—Coordinator of International Programs—because Dulles understands perfectly that he is merely putting out fires—if he is putting them out—and is on the defensive everywhere. He himself has no time to think and feels something is lacking, and expects Nelson to supply the miraculous element."

This florid description of his role was patently a spectacular exercise in wishful thinking on Rockefeller's part. He was not "coordinator of international programs"—there was no such job. And the idea that Dulles, the domineering vizier of Eisenhower era foreign policy, would look to Nelson Rockefeller to "supply the miraculous element" was utterly ludicrous.

If nothing else, Rockefeller's wild exaltation of his mission underscored the inscrutability of the role he was taking on. Was his job to "coordinate Cold War strategy"? Was it to wage psychological warfare? Or was it the woolly formulation that Eisenhower cited in his letter appointing Rockefeller to the job: to render "advice and assistance in the development of increased understanding and cooperation among all peoples"?

The truth was, his mission was a strange amalgam of all three elements, and only one man fully comprehended how it was all supposed to work: Rockefeller's flamboyant predecessor, C. D. Jackson. Indeed, it would not be too much to say that the job was the creature of Jackson's idiosyncratic vision and of his grand strategy for the Cold War—a vision in which "international understanding" and "psychological warfare" were truly synonymous.

Charles Douglas Jackson was in many ways an American archetype: a bombastic, Barnum-like figure, a master salesman who ardently believed in the redemptive power of public relations. Tall, urbane, and Princeton-educated, Jackson had the mien of a Yankee aristocrat and the promotional pizzazz of a Tin Pan Alley song hustler.

Early in his career, Jackson latched on to a kindred soul, Henry Luce, and became one of the mainstays of Luce's Time-Life publishing empire (Jackson was the first general manager of *Life* magazine). But for Jackson, the broader canvas of world affairs always beckoned; in 1941, he established the Council for Democracy, "to combat all the Nazi, fascist, communist, pacifist" antiwar groups in the United States. With the American entry into the war, Jackson's

considerable talents as a propagandist caught the eye of Dwight Eisenhower, and when Eisenhower was anointed supreme Allied commander, he tapped Jackson to spearhead his psychological warfare effort in anticipation of D-Day.

Psychological warfare—a fancy term for military propaganda aimed at friends, or foes, or both—was hardly a World War II development. It had been employed by the American armed forces as far back as the Revolutionary War, when Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin devised a plan to incite desertions by Hessian mercenaries through the distribution of propaganda handbills. But it was only under Eisenhower and Jackson's sponsorship that psychological warfare emerged from the shadows and was openly recognized as a vital element in America's war machine. With his radio broadcasts and his leaflets, Jackson roused support in occupied Europe for the Allied invaders; his efforts would win him the French Legion of Honor.

At war's end Jackson returned to Time-Life, becoming publisher of *Fortune*. But his true calling was as a propagandist, and the postwar years presented him with a ripe new psychological battlefield: the campaign against Communism. In early 1951, with the active support of the CIA, Jackson organized the National Committee for a Free Europe to pierce the Iron Curtain with the gospel of freedom. The committee's chief activity was Radio Free Europe, whose broadcasts permeated the Eastern bloc with a mixture of news, entertainment, and outright anti-Soviet propaganda. Always the showman, Jackson reveled in such NCFE stunts as a massive balloon bombardment of Poland and Czechoslovakia; the 17,000 balloons carried 13 million leaflets to "fortify spiritual resistance" until the "day of liberation" arrived. Jackson gleefully launched the first of the balloons himself.

His "American Crusade" attained singular prominence with the presidential candidacy of his old boss in 1952. Enlisted as a speechwriter, Jackson steered the campaign into unabashed advocacy of psychological warfare. In Eisenhower, Jackson saw a leader "who grasps the concept of political warfare" and who recognized that "it was just about the only way to win WW III without having to fight it." Installed in the White House as the new President's special assistant, Jackson savored the chance to make psychological warfare "the entire posture of the entire Government to the entire world."

He scored some quick coups. One was his adroit promotion of an important Eisenhower speech in April 1953 that opened the door to new peace initiatives in the wake of Joseph Stalin's death a month earlier. Jackson literally blanketed the globe with this speech: flooding Europe and Latin America with some 3 million copies, distributing 100,000 handbills in eight languages in New Delhi, India, flying out films and kinescopes of the President's address to television stations on three continents, broadcasting the speech hourly on every Radio Free Europe channel.

Another was Atoms for Peace, a presidential bid for international coopera-

tion in the peaceful use of atomic energy. The idea was Eisenhower's, but it was left to Jackson to shepherd it through a resistant bureaucracy. When Eisenhower presented the plan in a speech to the United Nations in December 1953 (a speech that Jackson ended up rewriting thirty-two times), even the Communist representatives rose in applause.

But all too often Jackson found his quicksilver intellect grinding against the monumental intransigence of Dulles. "Foster Dulles hasn't got the faintest conception—and that is where everything gets off the rails and nothing gets done," Jackson observed in his diary. He sneered at State's "business-as-usual attitude" in the face of popular unrest in East Germany, and fumed at Dulles' negativism about the Atoms for Peace idea. He also found himself frustrated with Eisenhower, complaining about the lack of "command decisions" and, more specifically, about the President's refusal to take on Joe McCarthy.

By April 1954, Jackson had had enough of the White House and returned to Time-Life. His faith in psychological warfare, however, his belief that it held the key to victory in the Cold War, never wavered. What remained to be seen was whether Eisenhower still shared that faith, and who—if anyone—might be tapped to take Jackson's place.

When Jackson heard that Rockefeller was the man, he heaved a great sigh of relief. "As you can imagine," he wrote his successor, "I have been very concerned ever since I left Washington about who might fill that particular slot, and quite humanly couldn't help hoping it would be someone I would feel happy about.

"With Nelson R. in the job I am not only happy, but overjoyed."

Jackson had good reason to be jubilant, for Nelson Rockefeller was as close to a spiritual brother as Jackson was likely to find, inside or outside government.

They were both effervescent idea men with seemingly limitless self-confidence, and their ideas were remarkably congruent. Both men saw business expansion not as an end in itself, but as the ultimate bulwark against the Communist menace. Both perceived the Cold War as a clash on many fronts, not all of them military, a war that could be won with plows as well as with swords. "Defense, in and of itself, is not enough," Rockefeller had written in his Point Four report. "There must be a positive force as well." Those were precisely C. D. Jackson's views.

And, in his own way, Rockefeller was as much of an expert on psychological warfare as was Jackson. The coordinator's office, after all, could be regarded as just one big psychological warfare machine: disseminating propaganda, promoting cultural exchanges, winning the hearts and minds of the Latin American populace with health and sanitation measures and a pinch of Walt Disney. Much of what Jackson was talking about was merely the CIAA program writ large.

In short, Jackson had no need to proselytize his successor, because Rocke-

feller was as much of a true believer in the Jackson creed as Jackson himself. As Rockefeller wrote Jackson, shortly after accepting the job, "I am completely convinced of the absolute essentiality of the program you have been pushing." Now it would be up to Rockefeller to wage the war for the "minds and wills of men," to win the "victory without casualties" that was C. D. Jackson's great crusade.

Although he was now a presidential assistant, Rockefeller did not quite rate a White House office. Instead, he found himself back in the all too familiar confines of the Executive Office Building next door. Not that his quarters there were anything to complain about; he was assigned to the opulent corner suite that was once the office of the Secretary of State, with magnificent views of the White House south lawn, the Ellipse, and the Washington Monument. When Adolf Berle came to call, he asked Rockefeller if he saw ghosts, and well he might have, so rich was the chamber with personal associations for him. It was here that Rockefeller kowtowed to Cordell Hull, here that he bullied Edward Stettinius—and here that he was fired by Jimmy Byrnes.

He brought with him, from HEW, a full complement of assistants and secretaries, including Nancy Hanks, Donna Mitchell, and Hal Haskell. Appalled by how many people Rockefeller was adding to the White House payroll from his old unit, Sherman Adams cracked down, informing Rockefeller, "They will come at their present salaries. They will not get a raise." As Adams would later ruefully point out, "Jackson was pretty much a lone operator. But Rockefeller liked to have a lot of people around."

In fact, the HEW crew was merely the advance guard. A veritable army of aides followed in their wake, many of whom were presently employed by the Office of the Messrs. Rockefeller in New York. Stacy May was brought in as a three-day-a-week economics consultant, and was assisted by a full-time economist, Shaw Livermore, another New York import. Frank Jamieson agreed to spend two days a week in Washington helping his once and future boss. Then three more secretaries were brought down from Room 5600 to work directly for Rockefeller.

Realizing there was no way he could get the pinchpenny Adams to approve such an augmentation of the staff, Rockefeller did what he always did when budgetary exigencies got in the way of his plans.

He paid for all these people out of his own pocket.

He paid their salaries. And he paid their travel expenses; in cases where the government allowed them per diem reimbursements, he personally made up the difference between the modest per diem and their out-of-pocket costs. (The U.S. Treasury was not let totally off the hook, though. It footed part of the bill indirectly, when Rockefeller claimed, and won, a tax deduction for his share of the extra expense.)

Rockefeller's extravagance in his new position did not stop there. He

wanted that he always had, wherever he worked in the government: his own chart room. But the White House—no doubt recalling the political flak the HEW room had engendered—said no. So he decided to pay for that, too, from his personal treasury. Not only would he pay for the remodeling of the room, but he made it known he would also buy the projectors and assume the printing expenses and all the other costs of preparing his elaborate presentations.

The financing, however, turned out to be only half the battle. Rockefeller wanted to set up his chart room in the West Wing of the White House, as close to the Oval Office as he could get, but there was no space large enough to accommodate it. He eyed the basement bowling alley, and the White House swimming pool, but Eisenhower was unwilling to part with either of those amenities for the sake of Rockefeller's picture shows. Rockefeller had no choice but to find something in the vast warrens of the Executive Office Building.

There, he happened upon one promising, albeit unorthodox space: the old State Department library on the top floor of the building. It was still fitted out as a Beaux Arts library, with old cast-iron shelving and small staircases between levels, with turreted study alcoves and a huge skylight bathing the room with a magisterial radiance. Rockefeller was swept away by the grandeur of the room—until the Secret Service and CIA came around and informed him that all those nooks and crannies would be impossible to secure. "My God," the CIA man said, "think of all the places to hide microphones."

Instead, Rockefeller found a smaller, more nondescript setting for his chart shows, the former Office of Defense Mobilization library on the Executive Office Building's fourth floor. And, as it turned out, it was just as well. Despite Rockefeller's best efforts to lure him, Eisenhower never showed up for a single one of his special assistant's multimedia displays.

By the time Rockefeller settled into his new job, the brief glimmer of hope that flared after Stalin's death and after Eisenhower's Atoms for Peace speech had long since been extinguished. The Cold War had deteriorated into a glacial impasse. U.S. foreign policy, under the stewardship of Eisenhower and Dulles, vaulted from one icy precipice to the next, the footing less sure with each leap.

The previous year, 1954, had seen the fall of the French stronghold at Dien Bien Phu and the final collapse of the French position in Vietnam. Amid talk of falling dominoes and a Red tide swarming over Southeast Asia, the United States contemplated stepping into the breach, but thought better of it. Grudgingly, the administration accepted the partition of the country negotiated with the Communist Vietnam in Geneva, while pledging support of the new regime of Ngo Dinh Diem in the south—and secretly dispatching a CIA paramilitary team, under Colonel Edward Lansdale, to Saigon.

Having stepped back from the brink in Vietnam, the United States was stepping toward it in China. Under pressure from the potent China lobby seeking the restoration of the Nationalist regime of Chiang Kai-shek—now in exile on the offshore island of Taiwan—the administration was backing Chiang's campaign of harassment and sabotage against the Red government. In November 1954 Beijing announced it had shot down a planeload of Americans trying to drop supplies to teams of saboteurs. The thirteen prisoners—eleven U.S. airmen and two CIA agents—were convicted of espionage and sentenced to terms ranging from four years to life.

By January 1955 Chiang's campaign was on the verge of escalating into all-out war. Seeking to retaliate against his trespasses, the Chinese launched attacks against several smaller islands occupied by the Nationalist forces. Eisenhower and Dulles, fearful that this might be a prelude to a Red invasion of Taiwan, determined, in the President's words, that "the time had come to draw the line." The question was where the line would be drawn: which islands would be defended, and at what cost. On January 24, Eisenhower went before the Congress and declared "our readiness to fight, if necessary, to preserve the vital stake of the free world in a free [Taiwan]." Suddenly, the rocky outcroppings of the Matsus and the obscure fishing ports of Quemoy were looming as potential tinderboxes of a third world war.

Brinkmanship—the term coined to describe Dulles' policy of calculated confrontation—was manifesting itself in Europe as well. The West alarmed the new Soviet leadership by bringing West Germany into NATO and urging the Germans to rearm. Then Dulles raised the ante at a NATO meeting in mid-December by pressing the Western allies to accept nuclear weapons on their soil—purely as a defensive measure, of course.

With the Soviets now possessing hydrogen bombs of their own, a fearsome stalemate existed: a "balance of terror," in Churchill's words, in which only the specter of nuclear annihilation kept the two sides in check.

In the minds of American policy makers, the doctrine of containment—the arresting of Communist influence and expansion by any means short of all-out war—still held sway. And the means included not only overt actions—strategic alliances and the like—but covert measures, too. The CIA, run by Dulles' younger brother Allen, was now arguably America's most potent foreign policy tool.

In 1953, CIA operatives in Iran orchestrated the overthrow of Prime Minister Mohammed Mossadeq, whose nationalization of British oil interests stirred fears he was moving into the Soviet camp. A year later, the agency was at it again, secretly choreographing the ouster of Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán. Arbenz, like Mossadeq, had committed the cardinal sin of expropriating foreign property: in the Guatemalan's case, vast acreages belonging to the giant banana grower United Fruit. And, like Mossadeq,

Arbenz was seen as a potential Soviet ally (although the evidence, in both cases, was flimsy).

The success of these two operations—achieved, as one historian of the agency pointed out, with “a minimum of fuss, bloodshed, and time expended”—spurred a rapid proliferation of CIA covert activity around the globe. The agency was given a secret green light by the National Security Council to “create and exploit problems for international communism” through measures ranging from “propaganda and political action” to “sabotage” and “subversion against hostile states.” Thus, the CIA was in the vanguard of the ongoing struggle for the “minds and wills of men”—a fact that was not lost on the new special assistant to the President for Cold War strategy.

From the start, Rockefeller understood that there were dimensions to his job that went well beyond the bland charter (“increased understanding and cooperation among all peoples”) given to him by the President.

The line between psychological warfare and intelligence activity, if there was one, had always been indistinct. Bill Donovan’s OSS, the predecessor of the CIA, had, after all, started out as an information agency. And C. D. Jackson’s definition of his work encompassed endeavors—such as the bombardment of Eastern Europe with propaganda balloons—that might just as well have been thought up at CIA headquarters. Jackson’s National Committee for a Free Europe was funded by the CIA, and at one point Jackson was moved to express his appreciation to CIA director Walter Bedell Smith: “We would never have been able to create these things . . . had it not been for the attitude that you and your organization had toward us.”

In his White House position, Jackson conferred regularly with Allen Dulles and was one of the agency’s most vociferous cheerleaders in the administration; he was, among other things, a forceful advocate of the action in Guatemala. More to the point, Jackson’s job put him in the direct chain of oversight over CIA covert activities. He was the President’s representative on the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB), a committee of the National Security Council whose other members were the Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the director of the Foreign Operations Administration (Stassen), and the CIA director. The OCB’s job was to oversee the “timely and coordinated execution of . . . policy and plans”; the “policy and plans” included clandestine actions.

In December 1954, just prior to Rockefeller’s arrival on the scene, the CIA’s charter for covert operations and the OCB’s oversight of them were clarified by the National Security Council. The CIA was given a blanket authorization for the full gamut of covert activities, and the OCB was to be its watchdog, to be “advised in advance of major programs involving covert operations.” Thus, the President retained some measure of control over the

agency—while preserving his deniability if any of the operations were exposed or went awry.

When Rockefeller arrived, he took Jackson’s seat on the OCB. Working with the CIA was nothing new for him. Soon after joining HEW, he was asked to address an internal CIA seminar on the role of the agency in a changing economic world. (His appearance was arranged by Joan Braden, obviously working her special connection to the CIA higher-ups through hubby Tom.) And according to a report that surfaced two decades later, while at HEW he was aware that his department was used as a cover for some of the CIA’s most sensitive programs, code-named Artichoke and MK-Ultra: programs of experimentation with the new hallucinogenic drug LSD. Reportedly, Rockefeller knew—and Hobby didn’t—that the CIA was funding some of its experiments through the HEW’s National Institute of Mental Health.*

Rockefeller, with his unabashed enthusiasm for clandestine operations dating back to his coordinator days, was perfectly comfortable with the strong links to the CIA that his new position entailed. In fact, he was eager to make them even stronger, to formalize the relationship. He knew full well that in this administration the already blurred line between psychological warfare and covert activity was growing ever fainter. Close ties to the ascendant intelligence agency would undoubtedly magnify his effectiveness; a weak relationship would, just as surely, undermine it.

And so, in his first weeks on the job, the new special assistant sought to pull the CIA even more into his orbit. Using skills honed in numerous past turf battles, he endeavored to carve out a special role for himself in the agency’s affairs.

In this, he found himself the beneficiary of Eisenhower’s penchant for organization and planning. Believing that the administration’s Cold War efforts—specifically, its economic, psychological, political warfare and foreign information activities—ought to be better coordinated, the President asked the Budget Bureau to pull together some proposals. The study conveniently coincided with Rockefeller’s arrival on the scene; no sooner had he settled himself in than he began working vigorously to leave his stamp on the deliberations.

* Actually, as good as Rockefeller’s relations were with the CIA, his brother David’s were better. During the war David had served in Army intelligence in North Africa, and afterward he discreetly maintained his contacts with the intelligence community. “David kept in very close touch,” recalls Tom Braden. “He was a friend and confidant of Allen Dulles, and in some instances furnished a front”—agreeing to finance a do-good foundation that was a CIA cover. “I remember briefing him, in great detail, about the work of the division that I headed in the CIA. Allen asked me to brief him, and I gave him a full briefing, so that he knew everything that I was doing. And I think he did it with the other division chiefs, too. He was close to intelligence work—much, much, much closer than Nelson was.”

Rockefeller's intervention had its impact. Indeed, the report by budget director Rowland Hughes that landed on the President's desk in early March sounded very much like a typical Rockefeller manifesto. It spoke of the need for "dynamic, new and imaginative ideas" and "imaginative planning"; it cited the need to more effectively use "U.S. private organizations and foreign individuals and groups and foreign public and private organizations."

What was required to attain all this, Hughes concluded, was the creation of "a small, high-level group" that would "aid in developing planning in both overt and covert fields." This group would consist of the Undersecretary of State, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, and the director of the CIA—and its chairman would be special assistant Nelson Rockefeller.

The potential power of this new Planning Coordination Group would be considerable. On the overt side, it would "advise and assist the responsible operating agencies in the coordinated development of plans and programs" to carry out national security policies. As for the covert, it would "be advised in advance of major covert programs initiated by the Central Intelligence Agency . . . and should be the normal channel for giving policy approval for such programs." Thus, it would supplant the OCB as the CIA's White House overseer. The agency would have to go to the Planning Coordination Group, under Nelson Rockefeller, whenever it needed a green light.

There is no available record of the behind-the-scenes bureaucratic maneuvering that produced this proposal. The only documentation of what went on was the final Hughes memorandum to the President, once secret, now declassified. So it is impossible to precisely chart Rockefeller's role in pushing it through and the resistance he might have encountered in the process.

Nonetheless, the memo does make it clear that in the end he and Hughes obtained the necessary consensus from the powers that be in favor of the plan. The President's National Security Adviser, Robert Cutler, signed off on it, as did Allen Dulles, Undersecretary of State Herbert Hoover, Jr., and Deputy Defense Secretary Robert Anderson. The plan also had the persuasive concurrence of Walter Bedell Smith.

With these consents in hand, Rockefeller and Hughes presented the memo to the President on March 4. Always reassured by a show of unity among his advisers (unlike Franklin Roosevelt, who thrived on just the opposite), Eisenhower gave his approval. The Planning Coordination Group came into being, and Nelson Rockefeller had his coveted direct line into the clandestine workings of the CIA.*

* Rockefeller was proud of his CIA connection, and had no compunction about playing it up within the inner councils of the administration. When the White House that spring circulated a guide to the agencies for which various presidential aides were responsible, Rockefeller was aggrieved when the CIA was not listed under his name. At his insistence, "CIA (operations)" was added to the list. Source: Andrew Goodpaster to NAR, April 29, 1955, NAR Special Assistant Book 16, RAC.

Within weeks after this secret executive order, some new, unfamiliar faces began popping up in the office of the special assistant to the President. They were not the usual cast of economists, lawyers, and p.r. men that made up Rockefeller's entourage. To anyone who was unaware of the Planning Coordination Group, the arrival of these mysterious newcomers was ample indication that there was more on the special assistant's plate than forging "increased cooperation and understanding."

The first to arrive was William Kintner, a former U.S. Army colonel who had most recently been attached to the National Security Council's planning board. Kintner's background was in military intelligence, and the Army early on had singled him out for special training, sending him off to Georgetown University for a Ph.D. in international relations. Those who would come to work with him in Rockefeller's office knew Kintner as an astute judge of the Soviets, a broad-gauge thinker with impressive connections with the leading academic foreign policy theorists. What they might not have known—it was not exactly trumpeted—was that Kintner had worked in the CIA before coming to the NSC, and that from 1950 to 1952 he was chief planner of covert operations.

At Kintner's suggestion, Rockefeller brought in another military man, Brigadier General Theodore Parker, to serve as the Planning Coordination Group's chief of staff. Parker was on active military duty, with a particularly sensitive assignment—overseeing the emplacement of Nike anti-aircraft missiles in the Chicago area—when the word came that Rockefeller wanted to see him. The general was decidedly reluctant to give up a prestigious command position for what he regarded as a Washington desk job, and told Rockefeller as much. "I explained to him that, if he didn't mind, I would just like to go back to where I was, and let it go at that. I was honored that he had asked me, but I was really not interested," relates Parker. "He nodded and smiled. Ten days later, I was in his office working."

If there was still any question about the direction in which Rockefeller was headed, it was dispelled by the identity of the third individual assigned to the PCG. He was one Richard D. Drain, and he came to Rockefeller's staff directly from the CIA. While Kintner was to be the PCG's thinker, and Parker its administrator, Drain's exact role was unclear. Perhaps he was meant to be Rockefeller's personal liaison with the CIA; perhaps, as his colleagues came to suspect, he functioned as an undisguised CIA mole in Rockefeller's office. ("Drain always felt he was a little responsible to his people back home," says Parker, "and I suppose for that reason we didn't include him quite as much in our discussions.")

"I've got my general," a beaming Rockefeller announced to his staff one day. "I've got my Soviet expert. And I've got my man from the CIA." He was ready to go to work—or, more precisely, to go to war.