

## NAS revamping itself, limiting military studies

After 30 months of study and wrangling, the National Academy of Sciences has formally approved a major restructuring of its advisory apparatus. The action came last week in Washington at the annual NAS business meeting. At the session the 109-year-old private organization also set up procedures for members to object to acceptance of contracts for classified military studies and passed a resolution urging that the United States place less reliance on military force in its foreign policies.

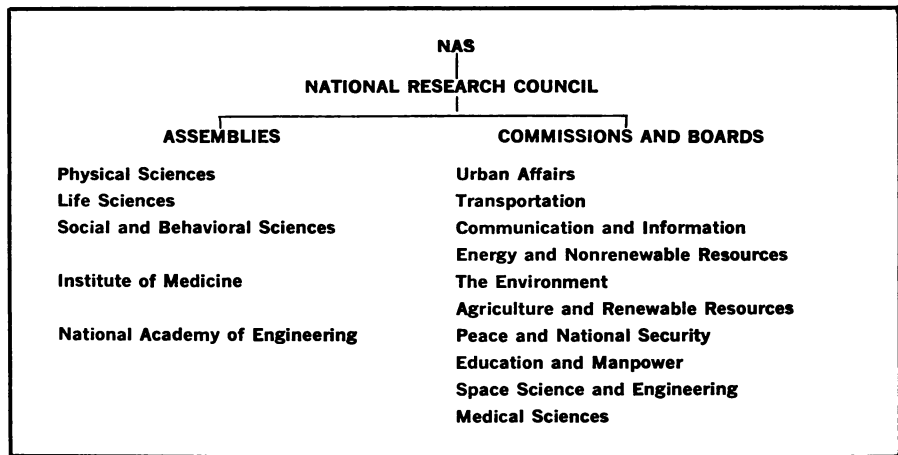
Of the actions, the classified-research guidelines and the foreign-policy statement had more novelty, glamor and, in a sense, newsworthiness. But NAS President Philip Handler contended that the restructuring of the advisory functions had more long-term significance. He may be right—if an organizational restructuring can fulfill the goals Handler and his NAS colleagues had in mind. The basic purpose is to revamp and modernize the advisory machinery so that it is better suited to deal with the problems of society.

The Academy has expanded steadily in recent years. It now has an annual budget of \$35 million, a staff of 1,000 (including 300 professionals), and is being called upon to provide advice on increasingly broad and complex problems by pressured government agencies and an uncertain Congress.

The reorganization is of the National Research Council, the component of the NAS that actually carries out most of the advisory studies the organization conducts for the Government. Since its establishment in 1916, the NRC has been structured along lines of the classic scientific fields.

This arrangement has always caused problems with study subjects that don't fall so neatly into such categories. Which division should handle a study of auto emissions? Of water pollution? Of urban transportation? Handler took office in July 1969 with the intention of making the Academy more vigorous and aggressive and more capable of dealing with interdisciplinary studies. He appointed Franklin Long of Cornell University to head a committee to study the reorganization of the NRC. That group's report the following spring (SN: 5/9/70, p. 453) was the forerunner of further studies that prepared the proposal accepted unanimously by the NAS membership last week.

In essence, it involves dividing the NRC into two parts. One will consist of Assemblies of physical sciences, of life sciences and of social and behavioral sciences. They will oversee traditional studies that fall neatly into disciplinary pigeonholes: a study of,

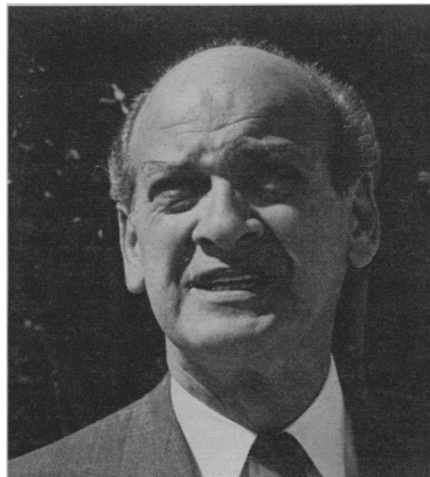


*A major part of the NRC will be restructured into problem-oriented boards.*

say, the status of high-energy physics.

The other arm of the NRC will be constituted into a variety of commissions and boards. These will be structured by problems, not academic disciplines: urban affairs, peace and national security, the environment and six or seven others. Although not a part of the formal reorganization proposal, Handler says that for large studies, the boards and commissions will oversee an upgraded in-house working staff of young post-doctoral type people—"in-house residence scholars, if you will," says Handler. If fulfilled, this in itself would be an important change for the Academy, much of whose staff is drawn from the ranks of retired military officers.

All the changes, Handler emphasizes, will be gradual, although the reorganization should be completed within two years. It is difficult to assess the potential effect of the restructuring. There is always the chance it will amount to no more than a reshuffling of the same cards. But the Academy has frequently been criticized by outsiders and by many of its own members for rigidity and institutional sluggishness. The approval of a reorganization intended to



*Handler: Peace needs positive action.*

make it more flexible and responsive to modern national problems is in itself an achievement of sorts for the reformers.

The new procedures on acceptance of classified research represent a compromise between the status quo (about 2 percent of the NAS's studies are classified) and a proposal to have the Academy reject all classified research. The latter was the goal of Richard Lewontin of the University of Chicago, who last spring resigned his NAS membership in protest. (The resignation was finally accepted last week.) Other members, notably Bruce Wallace and Thomas Eisner of Cornell University, also were pressing for reform. Handler appointed a committee composed of the youngest person in each of the Academy's 18 membership sections to study the problem. It was their report, with some major modifications, that was approved last week.

The resolution approved says the NAS council "shall, to the maximum extent possible, insist that . . . studies . . . be conducted on an unclassified basis." If the council approves a classified contract, it must inform the members. If 10 or more object, they will be entitled to a hearing before the council. If the council still then approves the contract, it must submit "as complete an account as possible . . . to the full Academy membership." Theoretically, the council could then be subject to censure by the NAS membership.

The resolution on foreign policy "requests the President and the Congress . . . to evolve foreign policies in which the development and application of science and technology . . . for the furtherance of human welfare are major elements, and reliance on military force, whether direct or indirect, is de-emphasized." Handler characterized it as broader than an anti-Vietnam statement. In his view, it emphasizes that "a stable, decent peace" will require "positive, constructive actions" rather than reliance on military might. □