

Chapter 10

National Security Councils: 1947 to 2015

Supplemental Material

The material in this chapter provides a short history of the National Security Council from Truman to Obama. They are the case studies that underwrite the more general discussion of the previous chapter. Each case provides a description of the events and personalities that shaped the administration's National Security Council system and is followed by a description of the organization and process as formally defined and actually practiced.¹

The organization charts are recreations from primary and secondary sources.² Those sources, unfortunately, emphasize different organizational issues and provide different levels of detail. Charts cannot represent all the complex relationships and interactions, and, of course, no organization chart is entirely stable over four to eight years. NSC organizations are presented here in a common form that sacrifices some detail to facilitate comparison and to reflect administration practices at the chosen level of detail. When informal groups played an influential role, they are shown along with formal committees.

Since 1949, the *statutory members* of the NSC have been the president, vice president, secretary of defense, and secretary of state. The director of central intelligence and the chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff have been *statutory advisors*. With the creation of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency and US Information Agency in the early 1960s, their directors have been *special statutory advisors*. The secretary of energy was added as a statutory member in 2007. It is common in the literature to see *NSC principals* used to include the statutory members and statutory advisors. These expressions are used throughout.

Truman 1947-1953

President Harry Truman signed the National Security Act of 1947 into law and was the first president to serve under it. Truman thought the NSC was needed, but he was suspicious that it could grow to represent cabinet government with secretaries holding their own political power base who might dilute his presidential authority. In the British system of cabinet government, the cabinet as a whole has responsibility for decisions made, but in the US system, the president alone has that responsibility.³

The National Security Council prepared and presented advice to the president. The Council did not make policy; the president did. The president, chairing an NSC meeting, may have signified his agreement with other council members, but a decision was made only when a formal document was presented by the NSC and signed by the president. The NSC's executive secretary coordinated the views of Council members. The NSC was not responsible for implementing policies approved by the president; the agencies had sole responsibility for policy implementation.⁴

Truman preferred the counsel of trusted advisors, including individual cabinet members, over exclusive or even heavy reliance on the formal NSC. The president and the secretary of state made foreign

¹ Richard A. Best, Jr., *National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment* (Huntington, N.Y.: Novinka Books, 2001) provides concise case studies from Truman through the first Clinton term. David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005) provides more detailed coverage and includes the first Bush term.

² Stephen A. Cambone, *A New Structure for National Security Policy Planning* (Washington, D.C.: CSIS Press, 1998) provides organization charts as well as some relevant presidential directives. Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson, *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004) also provides relevant material.

³ Cambone, *A New Structure*, 148. Best, *National Security Council*, 10-11, 51-55. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 35-45. Stanley L. Falk, "The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy," *Political Science Quarterly* 79 (September 1964): 403-434. Anna Kasten Nelson, "President Truman and the Evolution of the National Security Council," *Journal of American History* (September 1985): 377.

⁴ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 35-36.

policy. A fiscal conservative, Truman included the budget director as well to the displeasure of cabinet members who preferred to discuss policy options without fiscal constraint. The NSC was for staffing and coordination rather than as the primary source for recommendations. Once a policy decision was made, the purpose of the NSC was to advise the president on issues requiring interagency coordination.⁵ The NSC was not to be a place to centrally coordinate implementation; that was typically State's responsibility.

Events and Personalities

The State Department led in matters of foreign policy. Secretary of State George C. Marshall, army chief of staff during the war, established State's Policy Planning Staff reporting directly to him. Marshall's brain trust held sway over the new NSC staff in the early Truman administration. The new National Military Establishment was opposed to State's dominance. Secretary of Defense Forrestal, formerly secretary of the navy, lobbied for a stronger military role and offered to house the NSC in the Pentagon.

Prior to the Korean War, meetings of the NSC were infrequent and Truman typically didn't attend. Truman attended the first NSC meeting on 26 September 1947 but he attended only 11 of the next 56 meetings. The secretary of state generally chaired NSC meetings. Truman added the vice president and secretary of the treasury to NSC membership and the DCI began attending. The first meeting was held in the White House Cabinet Room, a precedent followed by subsequent administrations.

The Hoover Commission of January 1949 found the NSC to be weak in its coordination role and weak in producing comprehensive statements of both current and long-range policies. It recommended that the three service secretaries be excluded and that the secretary of defense represent military views. It also recommended improved working relations between the JCS and the NSC.⁶

That same year, Truman took executive action and Congress amended the Act. The secretary of the treasury was directed to attend NSC meetings by executive order. The 1949 amendments to the National Security Act withdrew the service secretaries' statutory membership and designated the collective Joint Chiefs of Staff as the principal military advisors to the president and the NSC.⁷ The chairman of the JCS represented the chiefs at NSC meetings. The law stressed the advisory role of the NSC as opposed to a policy making role and placed the NSC in the Executive Office of the President, created in 1939. The vice president was interposed between the president and department secretaries as number two in the hierarchy.

Nineteen forty-nine was eventful. Communists took control of China, the Soviet Union exploded its first atomic bomb, and NATO was formed. The State Department began a complete national security strategy review that led to what is perhaps the best known NSC document, NSC-68, articulating a containment strategy for the Cold War. The State-Army-Navy-Air Force Coordinating Committee was terminated in June and its functions absorbed by the NSC.

After the North Korean invasion in June 1950, Truman relied more heavily on the formal NSC. In July, Truman attempted to strengthen the NSC. Truman held weekly NSC meetings on Thursday and attended frequently, attending 62 of the 71 meetings, chairing the meetings himself. With the president previously absent, attendance at Council meetings had grown. Truman limited attendance to the statutory members and advisors, treasury secretary, chairman of the JCS, director of central intelligence, executive secretary, and presidential special assistants. He increased the size of the NSC staff to provide continuous support between NSC meetings.

⁵ Best, *National Security Council*, 11.

⁶ The Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government. *National Security Organization* (Washington: GPO, 1949). Commonly called the Hoover Commission, it was chaired by former president Herbert Hoover, appointed by Harry Truman in 1947. The report included 273 recommendations to Congress in a 19-part series. The commission was terminated on 12 June 1949. Congress created a second Hoover Commission on 10 July 1953 during the Eisenhower administration. Like the previous commission of the same name, it was headed by former president Hoover. The Commission sent its report to Congress in June 1955 and was liquidated in September of the same year. The Committee determined that 116 recommendations were considered to be fully implemented, 35 mostly implemented, and another 45 were partially implemented.

⁷ The Joint Chiefs of Staff—then a committee of service chiefs with no one in charge—were designated as the principal military advisors to the president and the NSC. The chairman would attend NSC meetings. He had little authority, no staff of his own, lacked even a vote in JCS deliberations, and only the authority to “induce agreements.”

Truman institutionalized covert actions in the National Security Council. The first policy paper, NSC-1/1 authorized interference in the Italian presidential elections. NSC-4 in December 1947 and NSC-10/2 in June 1948 established the policy for covert actions.

Organization and Process

Truman's early NSC organization was largely composed of an executive secretariat and a number of standing and ad hoc committees supported by a staff of individuals on loan from the various agencies (see Figure 1 below). Standing committees included the Psychological Operations Coordinating Committee or Psychological Strategy Board, the Interdepartmental Intelligence Conference, and Interdepartmental Committee on Internal Security. An ad hoc committee for strategy review led to NSC 68 under State's Policy Planning Staff.

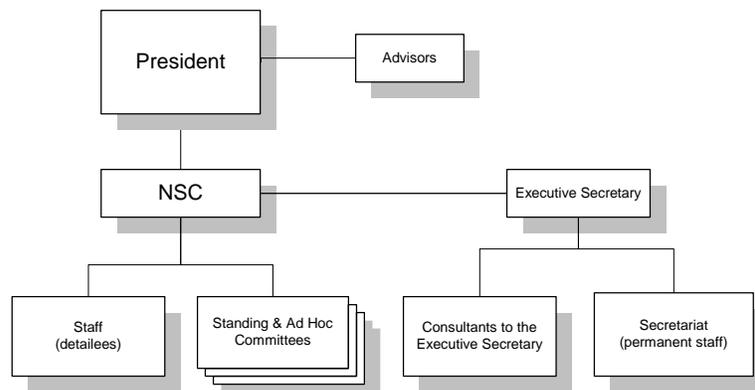


Figure 1. Truman NSC Organization (1947-1950)

Truman selected an individual to head the NSC secretariat to act essentially as the president's administrative assistant. The executive secretary managed a permanent staff and the paper process. Neither the secretary nor the staff had political or substantive policy roles.

Each agency with representation on the NSC provided a consultant to the executive secretary. The consultant was the agency's principal officer responsible for policy and operational planning—the head of State's policy and planning staff and Defense's director of the joint staff, for example. Their permanent "day jobs" were with their respective agencies, and they played a consultative role on a part-time, demand basis.

Much of the substantive work was done by a separate staff of personnel detailed from the agencies to full-time positions with the NSC and retaining a part-time office at their parent agencies. The NSC staff was headed by a coordinator detailed from the State Department. They conducted interagency studies and developed policy papers.

Policy papers produced by the NSC process were of four types. Papers of the first type were high-level, comprehensive policy statements. The second type was specific to geographic regions. The third type was functional in nature, for example, mobilization for war and arms control. The fourth type dealt with organization. After producing an initial round of policy papers in Truman's first administration, the second administration shifted to a systematic policy review. Some papers were produced for information only rather than for decision or action.

The process put in place by Truman, and largely retained by Eisenhower, can be summarized in four steps.⁸

- NSC papers were drafted primarily by the State's Policy Planning Staff.
- Draft papers were discussed at the formal NSC meetings and were perhaps sent back for revision until accepted as final.
- The president approved final papers, resulting in an NSC action.

⁸ Best, *National Security Council*, 53.

- The policy papers were then distributed to those agencies that would implement them.

Most papers originated in State and many from Defense. Either NSC staff or an agency might identify a problem to be addressed, and a staff meeting would be held to scope the problem and response. Staff members queried their respective agencies, and the staff member from the lead agency was responsible for the draft. Typically, State was the lead agency, and State's Policy Planning Staff did much of the work, but some studies were multiple-agency collaborative efforts. The draft was then reviewed and massaged by the entire staff. The military's joint staff was not represented on the NSC staff, but if the issue had a strong military component, the paper was sent to JCS for comment. The draft was then sent to the Consultants who would concur or non-concur and attach commentary. If there was significant disagreement among the Consultants, the executive secretary would convene meetings to seek resolution. The thoroughly staffed paper was then sent to the NSC meeting, and the Council would act on the paper's conclusions. The executive secretary would send the paper on to the president with the Council's recommendations. If the president signed, the paper became policy. The executive secretary notified the agencies for implementation, usually with State responsible for coordinating all actions, and usually requiring periodic progress review.⁹

NSC meetings were also used for current operations, for example, the Berlin Crisis of 1948. These meetings were not characterized by the advanced paper preparation that preceded meetings over long-term policy. Attendance was kept small and discussion was subject to immediate presidential decision.

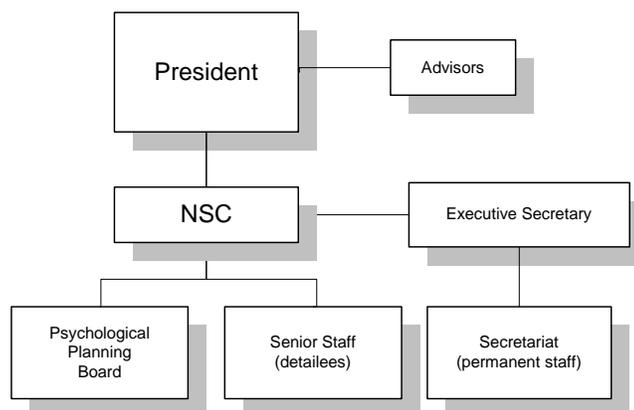


Figure 2. Truman NSC Organization (1951-1953)

After the Korean War began, Truman modified the NSC organization and made greater use of it (see Figure 2). In July 1950, the NSC staff (detailees), consultants, and committees were stood down and their functions taken up by the new Senior Staff. The secretariat of permanent staff remained. The senior staff was staffed at the assistant secretary level. Members had full-time jobs with their parent agencies and served part-time, on demand at the NSC. Each had an assistant from the agency who was assigned full time to the NSC. State, Defense, the National Security Resources Board, Treasury, JCS, and CIA had representation. Direct inclusion of joint staff representation strengthened the uniformed military's contribution and influence. The president directed the head of the new Office of Defense Mobilization to attend, and the Director of Mutual Security (foreign aid) was added in 1951.

In 1951, Truman established the Psychological Planning Board to counter Soviet Cold War political warfare. The PPB was attended by the under secretary of state, deputy secretary of defense, and the DCI. The Board also had a full-time director and staff.

Later in the administration, small meetings were held with only principals present who had been informed with advanced memos. Below were senior interagency group and junior interagency group meetings. A process was established for formal review of existing policy and for regular follow up on implementation.

⁹ James H. Dixon, *National Security Policy Formulation: Institutions, Processes, and Issues* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1984), 21.

Synopsis and Segue

The Truman years provided a rich experimental environment to evolve a new organization and process. For the first time in American history, an attempt was made to produce formal policy statements—of objectives and the methods to achieve them—to guide the actions of all agencies of government.

According to observers, the NSC was not prominent in making policy. Real policy decisions were made on the fly by State, Defense, the White House, and the Budget Bureau in other than a methodical and deliberate process. In general, policy papers expressed principles too abstract to guide government action, and the Defense establishment was largely unaffected by other than budget constraints.

Staff coordination was conducted under State Department supervision in several venues. But the issues considered drifted far from foreign affairs. The State coordinator was also agency oriented.

As attendance grew in the president's absence, two things happened. As more agency representatives attended, principals increasingly represented departmental views rather than playing the role of independent advisor. The president didn't hear the full discussion; he heard only the conclusions presented by his executive secretary. To compensate, agency heads increasingly sought private audience with the president, further weakening the NSC as an advisory body. Real advice was informal. Truman sought advice from his secretary of state, secretary of defense, and budget director in private session.

At end of the Truman administration, both the president and the NSC were reduced in activity as a lame duck president was dragged down by a stalemated and unpopular war in Korea. Eisenhower made the weakness of the NSC, real or perceived, a campaign issue. He argued that planning was needed to be ahead of issues before they became crises. Eisenhower would commission Robert Cutler, a New York banker, to study the problem.

Eisenhower 1953-1961

Eisenhower commissioned a study of the NSC system at the beginning of his administration. Robert Cutler, who became the president's special assistant for national security affairs, delivered the report in March 1953, and the report affected Eisenhower's NSC reorganization.¹⁰ While Truman was distrustful of the NSC but was forced to use it for the Korean Conflict, Ike wholeheartedly embraced it. Eisenhower chaired 329 of the 366 NSC meetings regularly held on Thursday mornings.

Eisenhower's distinguished military career produced in him an understanding and appreciation for staff work. Meetings were large, with 30 or more in attendance—principals and "back seaters." The large audience was consistent with the operation of a military staff assuring that all participants heard the discussion and were able to carry that knowledge back to their agencies and to inform their subsequent actions, while acting in the president's stead. The agenda typically included a CIA briefing and discussion of papers being moved up from the planning board. NSC meetings represented the biggest commitment of time in the president's weekly calendar. Speaking of the role of staff organization and process, Eisenhower said:

Its purpose is to simplify, clarify, expedite and coordinate; it is a bulwark against chaos, confusion, delay and failure ... Organization cannot make a successful leader out of a dunce, any more than it should make a decision for its chief. But it is effective in minimizing the chances of failure and in insuring that the right hand does, indeed, know what the left hand is doing.¹¹

Events and Personalities

Other changes were to take place. The NSRB was abolished in June 1953. The International Cooperation Administration (ICA) was established by NSC Action Number 1290d in December 1954.¹² Its purpose was

¹⁰ Robert Cutler, "The Development of the National Security Council," *Foreign Affairs* 34 (April 1956): 441-458.

¹¹ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 29.

¹² <http://www.icdc.com/~paulwolf/colombia/1290d.htm>. Overseas Internal Security Program. "Overall they sought to achieve a co-ordinated US internal security assistance strategy which would (1) assess the nature and degree of communist threat in target countries; (2) increase the capability of internal security forces to counter subversion and paramilitary operations; (3) revise legislation and reorganise judicial systems in order to permit more effective anticommunist action; (4) exchange information on

to deal with communist-inspired insurgencies and it would oversee what was eventually called the Overseas Internal Security Program to assist foreign countries in resisting communism.

Confident in the role of covert operations, Eisenhower established the 5412 Committee to recommend and review CIA covert operations. All subsequent administrations had a similar NSC mechanism. Eisenhower established a board of consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities to evaluate intelligence effectiveness by executive order 10656. The board expired at the end of his administration, but JFK would establish the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. Abolished in 1977 by Carter, it was resurrected again by Reagan in 1981.

Eisenhower acted on the Cutler Report recommendation by adding the position of special assistant for national security affairs. The executive secretary remained and was funded in the NSC; the new special assistant was funded in the White House budget reflecting his advisory role. As Eisenhower's special assistant, Cutler was more a process manager than substantive contributor. Eisenhower established a separate staff secretary position to screen all foreign policy and military papers submitted to the president. Army Colonel Andrew Goodpaster served in that capacity and as trusted confidant to the president was substantively more influential than Cutler.

Secretary of State John Foster Dulles, as the president's principal advisor on foreign policy, preferred private meetings with Eisenhower. The NSC was for policy review, and the secretary of state held responsibility for day-to-day operations. Like Truman, Eisenhower was a fiscal conservative and frequently included Secretary of Treasury George Humphrey and the Budget Bureau in deliberations. Dulles, like other cabinet members, resented discussing foreign policy under budget constraints.

Organization and Process

The NSC had two principal standing boards, the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB). The Planning Board prepared studies, made policy recommendations, and created basic drafts at multiple levels. The OCB performed its coordination and integration of implementation function by developing detailed plans. Outside the NSC system, Ike created the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board in 1956 by executive order 10656. Eisenhower's staff grew.¹³

The Eisenhower NSC process was one of continual *policy review* and was referred to as the Policy Hill.¹⁴ Policy issues were worked from the bottom and passed up the hill to the president. Lower level officers from the concerned agencies drafted policy recommendations and worked for interagency consensus. When consensus was reached, recommendations were raised to the Planning Board for review and refinement. If consensus was not reached, disagreements were elevated to the Planning Board for resolution. Finally, recommendations were raised to the NSC. The typical output of the process was a policy paper that was sent to the OCB for action.

Rather than being developed by State's Policy Planning Staff, as in the Truman administration, policy statements were produced by concerned agencies that worked toward consensus. Draft papers were then elevated to the Planning Board for review and refinement. Some would be sent back down to the originators for additional work, and some would be sent upward to the NSC for consideration.

The Planning Board met Tuesday and Friday afternoons. It was staffed at the assistant secretary level and attended by representatives from the CIA and JCS. The Board dealt with policy at all levels of implementation, not just high level policy. Draft policies were reviewed and referred upward to the NSC.

The NSC, typically with Eisenhower chairing, met each Thursday morning. In attendance were the president, vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, the director of the Office of Defense Mobilization, and 20 or so additional participants. The DCI often briefed the assembly. The process thus assured that all agency heads had access to the same information. When no agreement was reached,

subversive methodologies; and (5) assist in the development of public information programmes to clarify the nature of the communist threat." Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations (SHAFR) Conference, Georgetown University, 21 June 1997.

¹³ Cambone, *New Structure*, 149. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 30. Reorganization of 1953. Reorganization of 1958.

¹⁴ Best, *National Security Council*, 56.

papers were sent back down the hill for revision. “Genuine policy debates often took place just before the formal meeting.”

When policy papers were approved, they were promulgated vertically, downward to the departments and agencies, and laterally to the Operations Coordinating Board. The agencies implemented the policy, and the OCB monitored policy implementation to ensure that the president’s policy was carried out faithfully.

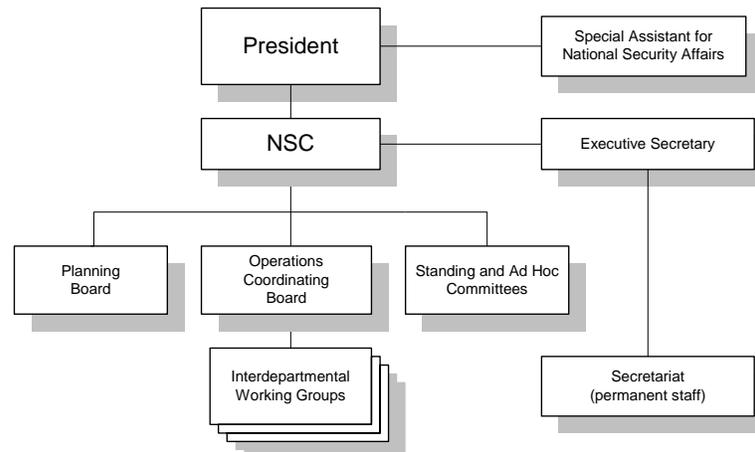


Figure 3. Eisenhower NSC Organization

The OCB met Wednesday afternoons at State. Meetings were staffed at the under secretary level, chaired by the under secretary of state for political affairs, and with the deputy secretary of defense, directors of the CIA, USIA, and ICA, and the president’s special assistants in attendance. Forty Interagency Working Groups (IWGs) were subordinate to the OCB. The Board had a permanent staff of two dozen or so. The IWGs met periodically. The Board’s permanent staff worked full time.

An interdepartmental staff openly discussed and debated policy issues with the requirement to reach a consensus recommendation. By the time the recommendation was formulated and advanced up the policy hill, the agencies represented in the process had already bought in. Policy implementation was thus greatly facilitated.

Secretary of State Dulles didn’t like the big group settings and preferred private sessions. He distinguished between the NSC policy review process and the day-to-day operations of foreign policy, the domain of State. Dulles held enough sway that he successfully resisted the move to have the vice president chair the OCB, keeping control in the hands of the undersecretary of state.

Synopsis and Segue

The functions of Truman’s Senior Staff, composed at the assistant secretary level, were transferred to Eisenhower’s Planning Board. Eisenhower established the position of special assistant to the president for national security affairs to chair the Planning Board and to be the overall executive of the staff. The statutory executive secretary continued to head the work of the career staff. Eisenhower’s process included advocacy and disagreement at lower levels. Disagreements rose to the top for resolution.¹⁵

Where Truman was reactive, Eisenhower was strategic. Eisenhower had a big picture and responded to crises within the context of that image. Unlike other modern presidents, Eisenhower considered Congress to be a full partner in national security matters.

Eisenhower was not a passive observer in the process. As commander in the European Theater of World War II he held together a multinational coalition. He used the same process to hold together a coalition of US government agencies.

Military thinkers have a picture of planning that differs from others. The Prussian von Moltke is widely quoted as saying that no plan survives first contact with the enemy. As advisor to the Truman

¹⁵ Alexander George, cited in Dixon, *National Security Policy Formulation*, 23.

administration, Eisenhower said, “the plan is nothing, planning is everything.” Eisenhower’s process assured that all the agencies with implementation responsibilities had participated in the process, had their concerns heard, and heard the concerns of others. The president had “buy-in” from the implementers by the time he signed the policy statement. And George Patton, in instructions to his subordinate commanders, offered that decision making is easy, it should take no more than 5 percent of their time, the remainder should be devoted to ensuring that their decisions are vigorously carried out. The OCB ensured compliant implementation.

Eisenhower’s large staff and formalized process was capacious. The formal written product gave guidance at all levels. All acted in step and were prepared for crisis.¹⁶ Ike’s process ensured that agency heads were informed and that agency heads gave him informed options. The Policy Hill process was criticized for its formality and by the volume of plans that it produced. It was called a paper mill. These critics focused on the paper product, the plan, rather than the cohesion and shared vision that planning produced. Late in the administration, when Ike was suffering from ill health, the national security apparatus kept working because everyone had participated in the process and knew the old man’s vision.

Eisenhower handled crises outside the NSC, including the Suez in 1956, Quemoy Islands in 1955 and 1958, and Lebanon in 1958.

The Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery chaired by Democratic Senator Henry “Scoop” Jackson had a partisan flavor to it. It operated from 1960 to 1961 while Kennedy campaigned for the presidency. Cutler and Executive Secretary James Lay testified to the committee in the affirmative about the Eisenhower NSC process. Truman’s men, Kennan and Nitze, testified in the negative. The process was called inflexible, overstaffed, slow to react to crises, and involved at too low a level. Policy review did not produce innovation. The consensus process produced the lowest common denominator solution. The Jackson subcommittee produced a report that influenced the incoming Kennedy administration.¹⁷ The report favored informality and a smaller staff to generate multiple options and to deal only with major issues.

Kennedy would stand down the Planning Board and the Operations Coordination Board before having a replacement. The staff would support the president rather than the NSC. And national security assistant Bundy would shift from the long to the short range.

Kennedy 1961-1963

The Jackson Subcommittee report greatly influenced the incoming Kennedy administration. JFK made the State Department the lead agency for foreign affairs but soon found that State lacked authority over other agencies and was ineffective in implementation. Further, JFK quickly became dissatisfied with the lack of creativity in the options developed by State. The president personally retained a dominant role in foreign policy and at the same time increased the strength of his assistant to national security affairs, thus further reducing the effectiveness of the secretary of state.

NSC meetings were held less frequently and less regularly under Kennedy than under Eisenhower and meetings were attended by fewer participants. Council meetings were initially held about twice per month and later about once per month for a total of 49 meetings. The size of the NSC staff was reduced from 74 to 49. Eisenhower’s machinery was stood down before an adequate replacement had been put in place. The Bay of Pigs fiasco and the Cuban Missile Crisis would expose the shortsightedness.

Kennedy rejected Ike’s formality. JFK did not limit himself to direct contact with cabinet officials; he often engaged the departments and agencies at the assistant secretary level or below. Many NSC functions were shifted to the Standing Group. Crises like the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Berlin Crisis caused the creation of ad hoc committees.

¹⁶ Best, *National Security Council*, 58-59.

¹⁷ Senator Henry M. Jackson, ed., *The National Security Council: Jackson Subcommittee Papers on Policy-Making at the Presidential Level* (New York: Fredrick A. Praeger, 1965).

Events and Personalities

McGeorge Bundy was the first true national security assistant. Initially, the NSC was not to be a body between the president and the State Department. State was lead agency. Bundy was young, competent, and smart. He acted as an honest broker getting all agency views to the president. He only presented his personal view when JFK specifically asked. Kennedy brought in General Maxwell Taylor as an advisor similar to the role played by Admiral Leahy in the Roosevelt administration. A recalcitrant bureaucracy was not creative, and Kennedy created an aggressive presidential staff. Bundy headed an activist staff carrying out the president's agenda rather than relying on what the White House saw as a calcified bureaucracy.

Under the Kennedy administration, the NSC would not be the sole source of advice to the president. The NSC offices remained at the Old Executive Office Building next door to the White House, but Bundy's office was moved to the basement of the White House's West Wing, reflecting the closer relationship between the president and his national security assistant. *A rapid shift took place from Eisenhower's NSC emphasis on long-term planning to Kennedy's NSC emphasis on crisis response.* As national security assistant, Bundy took responsibility for day-to-day operations and European affairs. For a time, long-term issues and Latin American affairs were delegated to Bundy's deputy, Walt Rostow.

The plan was to undo the "artificial distinction" between planning and operations that characterized Eisenhower's NSC. The Standing Group would handle many of the old NSC tasks at a level one below the NSC. More specialized issues would be undertaken by an ad hoc special interagency task force created for the purpose. Kennedy terminated the OCB by Executive Order in February 1961. In most cases, State would oversee implementation.

The Bay of Pigs episode in 1961 caused the NSC to reenter as a competitor to the State Department. State was seen as having failed to coordinate the administration's response during the Bay of Pigs episode in early 1961. The CIA was judged to have failed as the operating agency, and the JCS failed to provide good counsel. Having lost faith in State's ability to oversee implementation, the administration returned to monitoring implementation, not implementation of policy as in the Eisenhower administration, but crisis response. For that purpose, the Situation Room was established under Bundy's direction in April 1961 next to Bundy's office in the White House. Teletype machines were installed to allow the White House to monitor real time information flow. The White House monitored all State and Defense overseas cable traffic and some from the CIA. Later, outgoing State Department messages required White House approval. The NSC became a "little State Department."¹⁸

Organization and Process

The Standing Group was chaired initially by the under secretary of state for political affairs and attended by the deputy secretary of defense, the director of central intelligence, and the national security assistant. Others were added later, including the attorney general, the JCS chairman, the under secretary of the treasury, the director of USIA, and the administrator of USAID. The under secretary of state chaired 14 meetings from the beginning of the administration until August 1962. From April 1963 until end of the Kennedy administration the Standing Group was chaired instead by Bundy for another 14 meetings.¹⁹

Special groups, interagency task forces, were established for other than routine business. After the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy reestablished Eisenhower's 5412 Committee as the Special Group to oversee covert operations. It was chaired by the national security assistant and attended by the director of central intelligence, JCS chairman, and under secretaries of state and defense. Another special group was established for counterinsurgency chaired by General Maxwell Taylor. Another was established for Vietnam. The special group established for the Berlin Crisis was chaired by Secretary of State Dean Acheson. Rather than the consistent State Department lead typical under Eisenhower, chairmanship was assigned to the agency with the most expertise to bring to bear on the specific issue.

¹⁸ Andrew Preston, "The Little State Department: McGeorge Bundy and the National Security Council Staff, 1961-1965," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 31, 4 (December 2001): 635-659.

¹⁹ Cambone, *New Structure*, 150.

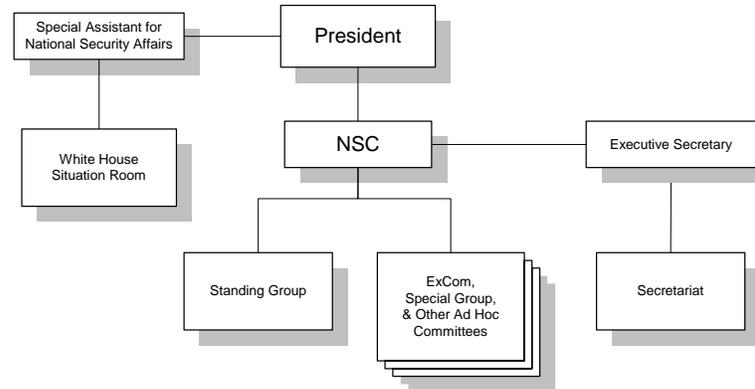


Figure 4. Kennedy NSC Organization

The Executive Committee, or ExCom, was established in response to the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962. It met daily throughout October and met 42 times between October 1962 and March 1963. While the ExCom was active, the Standing Group was not. In attendance was the president; the secretaries of state, defense, and treasury; the director of central intelligence; the chairman of the JCS; and the attorney general. Other influential deputies also attended frequently.²⁰

Rather than the secretariat being exclusively staffed by detailees, the Kennedy NSC staff included some of the “best and brightest” from academe.

Synopsis and Segue

Kennedy was not long in office, but it was already clear that his NSC had lost Eisenhower’s long-range and strategic view and had become reactionary. JFK was driven by day-to-day events and crisis management handled through ad hoc arrangements. Unlike Eisenhower’s Policy Hill that produced a well staffed policy position on long-term issues, Kennedy was presented multiple options for crisis response.

Rather than the detailed policy papers produced by the Eisenhower administration, Kennedy issued National Security Action Memoranda. They were, in general, directives announcing decisions made requiring action and follow up from the affected agencies. Many were single-page memos. JFK issued 272 NSAMs in less than three years, a rate of about 90 per year.

In a memo to Director of Central Intelligence Allen W. Dulles, Bundy said, “I have the strong impression, from my brief experience, that departments and agencies will always be acting just as fast as they can to respond to the President’s directives.”²¹ Eisenhower, with his vast experience, knew better.

The NSC weakened, and the NSC staff became Bundy’s staff. Senior staff members, not just Bundy, had direct access to JFK. The staff was organized by geography and function—e.g., Europe; Middle East, North Africa, South Asia, and Indonesia; or nuclear strategy—each with the focused attention of one or two staff members. The result was a flexible, fast, and activist staff to aid the president in decision making, connected to the implementing agencies largely by two- to three-page NSAMs and faith in the agencies’ will and ability to understand and implement stated policy.

Bundy was the first to be a true national security assistant rather than a policy-neutral process manager. Bundy set the agenda through NSAMs. And he was the first to deal directly with the press.

²⁰ President Kennedy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, CIA Director John A. McCone, JCS Chairman General Maxwell D. Taylor, Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs McGeorge Bundy, and the President’s Special Counsel Theodore C. Sorenson were the ExCom principals. Frequently attending were Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson, Under Secretary of State George Ball, Deputy Defense Secretary Roswell L. Gilpatrick, Ambassador at Large Llewellyn E. Thompson, an Ambassador Adlai E. Stevenson, and former Secretary of State Dean Acheson.

²¹ Quoted in Preston, “The Little State Department,” 644.

Johnson 1963-1969

Soon after Johnson's inauguration, some of Kennedy's NSC staff migrated to the State Department. Apparently an accident of history, the senior brain trust at State was against military intervention in Southeast Asia while Bundy and the remaining NSC staff leaned heavily toward intervention.

The NSC declined in influence during Johnson's tenure. There was nothing like Eisenhower's Policy Planning Board or Operations Coordinating Board. Instead, preferring smaller and less formal meetings, Johnson established the Tuesday Lunch Group. There he received candid advice and open discussion. The Tuesday Lunch Group met 160 times. In attendance were the president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, and national security assistant. Later, attendees included the director of central intelligence, the president's press secretary, and the JCS chairman. LBJ got candid conversations, but no records were kept, and little information was promulgated.

Events and Personalities

Secretary of State Rusk and Secretary of Defense McNamara were averse to open discussion with Kennedy in NSC meetings with such a large audience. The larger the audience, it was felt, the greater the potential for leaks. Johnson said that NSC meetings "leaked like a sieve." To some, Johnson's concerns for leaks bordered on paranoia. Johnson and his principals preferred small settings for open and frank discussion without the possibility of leaks.

Formal NSC meetings were generally short and dealt with a wide range of issues. They were mostly briefings to the president. LBJ began holding NSC meetings every two weeks but suspended them during the election year. From February 1965 to midyear 1966, NSC meetings were almost exclusively on Vietnam, and they were generally used to rubber stamp decisions already made. The crisis in the Dominican Republic (April and May 1965) was never the topic of an NSC meeting.

Johnson was more inclined to delegate foreign affairs to the State Department than was Kennedy, although neither was altogether sanguine about State's abilities. Delegation to State was deemed ineffective. To compensate, LBJ established the Senior Interdepartmental Group and several subordinate Interdepartmental Regional Groups all under State Department lead. Kennedy's ad hoc approach continued; the Arab-Israeli Six-Day War spawned a special committee like Kennedy's ExCom.

Delegation to State and the Tuesday Lunch Group meant that the NSC declined in importance. The NSC "More managed policy process than giving policy advice." Walt Whitman Rostow replaced Bundy in April 1966 as national security assistant. By then, the formal NSC was of little consequence. Rostow held formal NSC meetings to consider a broad range of anticipatory issues, but not for decision making. The Lunch Group overshadowed the NSC in importance. The Kennedy and Johnson NSC systems solidified the strong advisory role of the national security assistant.

Organization and Process

Johnson continued Kennedy's informality and the preference for looking outside the NSC for advice. The Tuesday Lunch Group was for all practical purposes a substitute for formal NSC meetings. Under the NSC, Johnson established the Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) somewhat analogous to Kennedy's Standing Group. Beneath the SIG were large numbers of Interdepartmental Regional Groups (IRG).²²

²² Cambone, *New Structure*, 151. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 66-67.

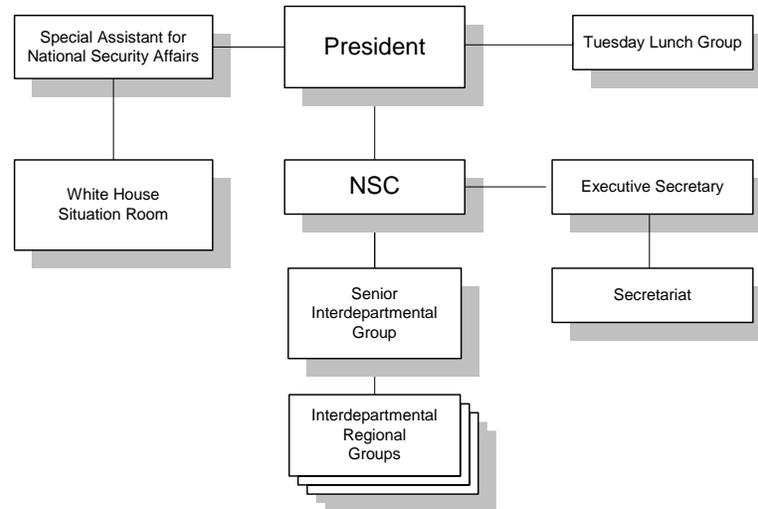


Figure 5. Johnson NSC Organization

Johnson held NSC meetings every other week during his first 11 months. The Council dealt with broad issues in short meetings. After May, meetings were mostly briefings. Meetings were suspended in anticipation of the November election. But from February 1965 to middle 1966 meetings addressed Vietnam almost exclusively.

Bundy stepped down in February, and Rostow stepped up in April. In March 1966, NSAM-341, authored by Maxwell Taylor, “assigned the secretary of state official responsibility for the overall direction, coordination, and supervision of interdepartmental activities overseas and created a mechanism to carry out the responsibility consisting of the SIG and IRGs.” The SIG was chaired by the under secretary of state.

The Interdepartmental Regional Groups (IRGs) were chaired by assistant secretaries of state and reported to the SIG. The NSC staff included about 48 permanent staff members.

Synopsis and Segue

Kennedy had issued 272 NSAMs in less than three years, about 90 per year, many directing agency follow up. In the next five-plus years, Johnson issued only 95 NSAMs, most within the first year, and few requiring follow up.

Formal NSC meeting time was consumed by Vietnam. For other issues, Johnson continued Kennedy’s ad hoc approaches. NSC meetings later became more information briefings to the attendees rather than advisory or decision meetings. The Tuesday lunches can properly be considered NSC meetings, or an adjunct to them. They were candid and collegial, but there was little or no staff preparation and the discussion and decisions were not recorded and disseminated to the agencies.

Johnson drew his advice from the “Big Three”—McNamara, Bundy, and Rusk—and withdrew from the NSC proper. The NSC staff became Bundy’s staff. The NSC was thus weakened while the national security assistant was elevated.

Johnson’s innovations—including the Tuesday Lunch Group, informative NSC meetings, and the SIG/IRG structures—expired with his presidency.

Nixon 1969-1974 and Ford 1974-1977

Nixon made the NSC a campaign issue. Having served as vice president under Eisenhower, he better understood and preferred more formal mechanisms to the informal and ad hoc approach of Kennedy and Johnson. But unlike Ike, Nixon wanted a range of options to choose from rather than a homogenized view produced by an interdepartmental staff process.

Nixon wanted foreign policy and national security policy formulated in the White House from the beginning. To signal and affect White House dominance in the foreign policy domain, Nixon picked a weak secretary of state, William Rogers, who lacked foreign policy experience. And Nixon wanted and

found a strong national security assistant in Henry Kissinger. The NSC would dominate in important issues with less important issues delegated to State.

Nixon had even less trust and confidence in the State Department and Central Intelligence Agency than did JFK and LBJ. In fact, Nixon thought the bureaucracies disliked him personally. Nixon and Kissinger met foreign dignitaries, while Rogers was commonly excluded. Kissinger retained prominence in relations with the Soviet Union, China, and Israel. The rest was left for Rogers.

Events and Personalities

Centering foreign policy in the White House allowed the Nixon administration to operate in greater secrecy than previous administrations, and it allowed for greater control of agency operations. The Nixon administration saw a big infusion of modern information technology into the White House. Kissinger used the Situation Room to monitor State's and Defense's foreign cable traffic. Eventually, the White House asserted clearance authority prior to policy cable transmissions. CIA communications channels and White House Communications Agency assets were employed to keep State in the dark. Jeanne Davis, NSC executive secretary, installed a document tracking system that vastly improved the ability to manage the paper flow of the NSC.

Kissinger established himself in the dominate position for policy formulation and execution. Not only was there the traditional competition between the president and the secretary of state, the NSA imposed himself as a third claimant. State was excluded from operations. The Rogers Plan attempted a ceasefire in the Arab-Israeli Conflict, but Kissinger was opposed. Nixon sided with Kissinger and did not apply the necessary presidential pressure to back Secretary Rogers' effort.

Watergate greatly decreased the power of the president and by default increased Kissinger's influence. Rogers resigned in August 1973. On 22 September 1973, Kissinger became the secretary of state while retaining his position as national security assistant. Even Kissinger said that playing both roles was untenable. Kissinger's most strident staff followed him to State.

Gerald Ford became president in August 1974. He kept the Nixon NSC organization. There was public and congressional disapproval of the power that Kissinger had amassed. Still his relative strength grew with the arrival of a new president without foreign policy credentials. In a cabinet shakeup on 3 November 1975, Air Force Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, Kissinger's deputy national security assistant, was elevated to assistant. Scowcroft played the role of honest broker, objectively presenting the president with the views of the various departments, clear analysis, and meaningful options for decision. Thus, Secretary Kissinger could play the traditional role as chief foreign policy advisor to the president. Scowcroft would play a somewhat different, but equally competent, role when he later returned to salvage the Reagan NSC post Iran-Contra.

Ford vetoed a bill making the secretary of the treasury a statutory member of the NSC in December 1975. George H.W. Bush served as director of Central Intelligence that last year of Ford's administration.

Organization and Process

Kissinger began considering the national security machinery soon after Nixon's November 1968 election. On 27 December, Kissinger sent Nixon a memo identifying shortcomings of Johnson's NSC and recommending fixes. Kissinger said about LBJ's system that "decisions are conveyed orally to the departments, with frequent uncertainty about precisely what was decided." He added that decisions announced by NSAMs typically did not convey the rationale behind the decision. Lacking the underlying logic, detailed implementation was difficult or impossible. Nixon approved Kissinger's recommendation for two distinct document types. The National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM) would commission issue-specific studies. The National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) would announce presidential decisions and communicate the reasons behind the decisions.²³

NSDM-2, issued 20 January 1969, inauguration day, specified the workings of the National Security Council. From this time forward, most presidents have announced their national security organization immediately upon entering office.

²³ Cambone, *A New Structure*, 152, 190. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 69.

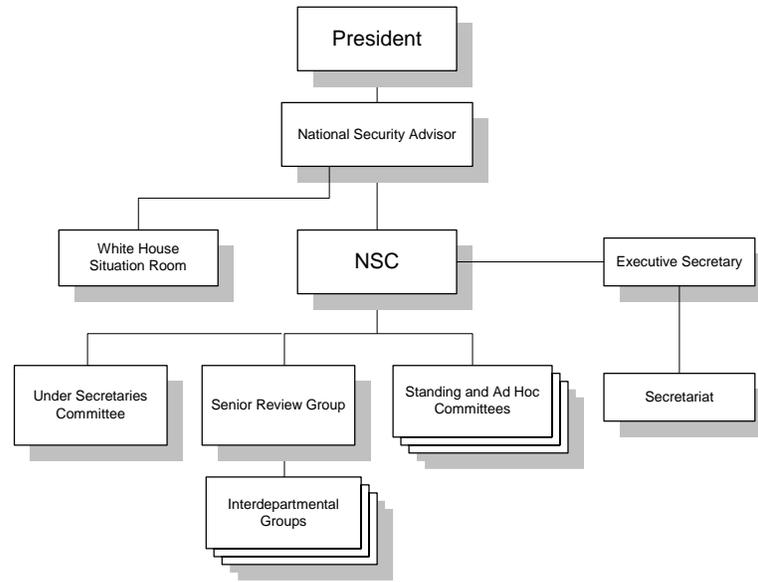


Figure 6. Nixon-Ford NSC Organization

The NSC staff initially grew from 12 to 34. Within three years, the staff grew to 50 professional staffers and 80 support staff. It was the largest NSC staff to date, to be surpassed only by the Clinton administration. And it was an activist staff, like Kennedy's, aggressively pursuing the president's agenda. Kissinger would chair all those committees he wished to control.

The Kissinger process bore some resemblance to Eisenhower's Policy Hill, but Kissinger's was driven more top down. In the first 100 days of Nixon's administration, Kissinger produced 55 NSSMs. A total of 85 studies were initiated in 1969. Each NSSM assigned study responsibility to one of the standing or ad hoc interagency groups and set a suspense date for study completion. Studies sometimes were required to recommend a problem solution, but more frequently were required to present alternative courses of action each with its supporting argument.

The heavy lifting was done in the interdepartmental groups. They conducted the studies, prepared the study response, drafted decision directives, and sent them to the SRG for review. The SRG ensured that the study was responsive to the study memorandum, and then passed it to the NSC. The issue was debated openly by the principals in front of the president. To close the meeting, the president summarized the aspects of the discussion that would most influence his eventual decision. Within the next 7 to 10 days, the president would meet individually with select NSC members and would announce the decision made in an NSDM. If implementation problems arose later, the Under Secretaries Committee would convene to deal with them.

The Senior Review Group had responsibilities not unlike Ike's Policy Planning Board and LBJ's Senior Interdepartmental Group. The Senior Review Group was chaired by the national security assistant, Kissinger himself, and dealt with a wide range of issues. Separate standing groups addressed crises and arms control.

Several standing groups were established during the administration, and Kissinger chaired the most important ones. He chaired the Washington Special Actions Group to deal with serious crises, chaired the Verification Panel for arms control, chaired the 40 Committee overseeing covert operations, chaired the Intelligence Committee dealing with intelligence policy, and chaired the Defense Program Review Committee that considered the defense budget in the context of the president's foreign policy objectives. He did not chair the International Energy Committee or the Intelligence Resources Coordinating Committee. An ad hoc group was established for Vietnam.

The Under Secretaries Committee, chaired by the deputy secretary of state, took on some of the responsibility of Eisenhower's Operations Coordination Board. Ike's OCB was in perpetual motion

ensuring that implementation was compliant with policy, but Nixon's Under Secretaries Committee was energized only when implementation became problematic. It eventually withered away.

Johnson's Interdepartmental Regional Groups became Nixon's Interdepartmental Groups (IGs) that retained their regional focus. The several IGs were staffed with representatives from State, Defense, CIA, JCS, and NSC. The representative from State chaired. The IGs were responsible for contingency planning and policy development. The IGs responded to NSSMs, drafted NSDMs, and reported to the Senior Review Group.

Synopsis and Segue

Critics of the Nixon NSC said that it took 10 meetings at the IG level to prepare for each SRG meeting, and it took 5 SRG meetings to prepare for each NSC meeting. Some went so far as to suggest that the process was designed to tie up the resources of the bureaucracy so that the White House could more easily dominate. Consistent with that claim is that Kissinger admitted that the critical decisions were made absent NSSMs and NSDMs and out of sight of the bureaucracy.

Others argued that the NSSM-NSDM process successfully forced the departments to "think hard" about their positions and to effectively argue them in an interagency forum. The process effectively engaged the expertise resident in the various agencies and provided that expertise to the president. Specifically, four exhaustive studies were done prior to strategic arms limitations talks with the Soviet Union.

Kissinger set a new high-water mark, acting more like a deputy president for national security affairs than advisor to the president. After defining the committees, he chaired all those he wished to dominate. He set the NSC agenda by identifying issues, commissioning studies, and chairing the ensuing debate. The president and his advisor were both intelligent and experienced men who shared a strategic vision. Given this arrangement, the system they devised worked well for their purposes. But the State Department continued in its decline. When the administration came to an end, critics thought that too much power had been accumulated by one, unelected official.²⁴

Two schools of thought were now apparent and had been tested. The first school is consistent with the Scoop Jackson recommendations and roughly adhered to by Kennedy and Johnson. Advice to the president was informal and committees were established ad hoc as issues arose. These administrations tended toward the reactionary. The second school is more consistent with Robert Cutler's recommendations that were roughly adhered to by Eisenhower and Nixon. There was more formality and regularity to the process and a much greater focus on long-term planning. Crises were typically handled in the context of larger strategic context.

Carter 1977-1981

The pendulum would swing again. Carter's concept of NSC operations certainly was driven by his decision making style, but much of it was driven by a backlash against the perception of Kissinger's amassed power and the effect of limiting options presented to the president. It was widely held that not only did Kissinger have too much power but that too much power had been centralized in the White House where secrecy prevailed and policy was made out of sight of the agencies and Congress.

Carter wanted the system to present him with multiple options and competing visions rather than policies emanating from a single individual like Kissinger. As other presidents would claim, Carter wanted cabinet government with strong department secretaries leading in their respective policy domains. But Carter, too, wanted a strong intellectual advisor at his side. Zbigniew Brzezinski—a Columbia University professor—would be that intellectual advisor as the assistant to the president for national security affairs. And Cyrus Vance would be the strong secretary of state. The NSC staff would not dominate but instead be coequal with the departments and agencies. The stage was set for a competition between the secretary of state and the national security assistant. Brzezinski had the advantage of proximity to the president by being officed in the White House.

²⁴ John P. Leacacos, "Kissinger's Apparatus," *Foreign Policy* (winter 1971-1972): 3-27.

To preserve options, no one was to stand between the president and his cabinet. And to preserve objectivity, no one cabinet official would dominate with a parochial, departmental view. There was to be collegiality between advisors. These objectives could be met through informal meetings of the president and his cabinet and through formal NSC meetings. But Carter would rarely hold formal NSC meetings and the work of the NSC would devolve to its two principal supporting committees where the design objectives could not possibly be met.

Carter saw the role of the NSC as providing policy research and policy coordination. The NSC structure would comprise two principal committees. One would deal with issues centered in a single department and would be chaired by the chief executive of that department, typically the secretary of state, thus creating parochial dominance of a single department. The other committee would deal with issues cutting across the policy domains of multiple departments and would be chaired by the national security assistant, thus placing someone between the president and his cabinet. In practice the former committee would be more research and study oriented and the latter committee oriented more on coordinating policy action.

Events and Personalities

To give Brzezinski's chair position clout, Carter, in an unprecedented move, gave Brzezinski cabinet rank. Brzezinski's authority would be constrained by limiting his chairmanship to only one of the two prominent committees. Carter originally saw the review committee as a "think tank" whose work would dominate the work of Brzezinski's coordinating committee. But as crisis response issues rose, Vance's review committee meetings declined and coordinating meetings increased in frequency and importance, leaving Brzezinski in a more powerful position than originally intended.

Much is made of the tensions between Carter's secretary of state Cyrus Vance and national security assistant Zbigniew Brzezinski. If a president wants, as several have professed, multiple options ensured by cabinet government, then disagreements are not only to be expected, but desired. And someone must manage them. Differences between Kissinger and cabinet members were common enough, but Kissinger and Nixon were politically and strategically attuned allowing policy to move forward in a consistent direction. Carter, instead, vacillated between Vance's and Brzezinski's advice sometimes producing what observers would call incoherency.

Highlighted by the media, and perhaps exaggerated by partisan opponents, the differences between Vance and Brzezinski were real and substantive. Part can be explained by their respective positions as secretary of state and national security assistant, and part by the different NSC committees they chaired. Part can be explained by their individual views and styles. Perhaps most important is Carter's lack of a consistent strategic view and his inability to produce coherent policy from the competing views he desired and received.

Carter continued Nixon's détente to define the relationship with the Soviet Union. Vance's style was more consistent with détente and the long-term containment strategy. Brzezinski, with strong anti-Russian feelings since his youth, was more confrontational.

Much of the Carter administration effort went to arms control in general and the Strategic Arms Limitations Talks specifically. Critics noted that Carter was firmly committed to arms control, but that he held to no firm principles of his own on the matter. His principal advisors, however, did have strong views. One consequence was that principals skewed the discussion and limited the options that were presented to the president. The president was sometimes swayed by the last argument presented to him.

Brzezinski chaired the committee dealing with strategic arms control and Vance chaired the committee dealing with wider US-Soviet relations. Brzezinski advocated linking SALT negotiations to broader issues. Vance preferred far less linkage. Given the narrow versus wide perspectives, disagreements were inevitable. Vance went to Moscow in March 1977 with the administration's new proposals; they were rejected soundly. Brzezinski's committee met with increasing frequency between 1977 and 1979 with the president personally engaged. At the June 1979 summit in Vienna, Carter and Brezhnev signed SALT II.

According to Vance, the Brzezinski-inspired SALT specifics contributed to Brezhnev's decision to invade Afghanistan. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on 25 December 1979 was a momentous event. Brzezinski's confrontational views were vindicated and elevated in Carter's estimation. The invasion led

Carter to abandon SALT II ratification efforts and to follow Brzezinski's anti-Soviet policies. The invasion was also what military strategists call the *culminating point*—the point at which the Soviet Union's demise was assured.

Turmoil in Africa exposed division between the administration's regionalists and globalists. Vance and US Ambassador to the UN Andrew Young viewed African conflicts through a regional lens and sought "African solutions to African problems." Brzezinski viewed the same conflicts through the Cold War lens of East versus West. Carter sided with regionalists before the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and sided with globalists after.

The Iranian revolution presented another opportunity for disagreement. Demonstrations began in January 1978. The national security assistant saw the revolution as an emerging crisis to be managed and recommended military intervention to prevent Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini from coming to power. As is common among secretaries of state, Vance was concerned with maintaining long-term relations through which US interests could be pursued. Vance was willing to come to terms with the new Khomeini regime and was against military intervention. Carter's failure to resolve the dispute led directly to the failure to develop a timely and coherent response. A theocratic constitution was signed in December 1979 with Khomeini in charge.

The 4 November 1979 student capture of hostages from the US embassy in Tehran brought the Vance-Brzezinski competition to a head and to an end. Vance promoted a negotiated solution with the new regime while Brzezinski promoted a military solution. The hostage rescue attempt, strongly opposed by Vance, was complex and risky. It ended in disaster on 24 April 1980 and resulted in Vance's, not Brzezinski's, resignation. Vance resigned in protest holding the announcement until 27 April 1980. Vance's replacement, Edmund Muskie, was appointed on 8 May and would serve until the end of the Carter administration. To complicate matters, Iraq invaded Iran on 22 September 1980 beginning an 8-year war. The agreement releasing the hostages, the Algiers Accords, was signed on 19 January 1981. The US chief negotiator was Carter's deputy secretary of state Warren Christopher. But the announcement was made the next day by Ronald Reagan on his inauguration day.

Organization and Process

Prior to Carter's inauguration, Brzezinski proposed a seven-committee structure much like Ford's. Carter quickly and unequivocally rejected the plan in favor of a much simplified two-committee structure. PD-2, signed 20 January 1977, laid out the organization and responsibilities of Carter's NSC system. The NSC staff was initially cut in half and would later operate with about 35 members. The number of standing committees was cut from 8 to 2: the Policy Review Committee and the Special Coordinating Committee. The Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) replaced the National Security Study Memorandum, and the Presidential Directive (PD) replaced the National Security Decision Memorandum, reflecting little more than a name change. Executive Order 12036 added foreign intelligence requirements on 24 January 1978.²⁵

The Policy Review Committee (PRC) took on more long-term, persistent issues of foreign, defense, and international economics. Subordinate interdepartmental groups (IGs) were established to provide full-time support. Issues centered in the policy domain of a single agency but with important implications for other agencies were assigned to the PRC. Chairmanship rotated between agency heads depending on the issue being addressed. As a matter of practice, the State Department was typically lead agency and chairmanship fell to the secretary of state, Cyrus Vance. When intelligence matters were addressed, as specified in EO 12036, the director of central intelligence chaired. PRC membership included the vice president, secretary of defense, secretary of state, national security assistant. The DCI and CJCS regularly attended and invitations were extended to others as appropriate.

²⁵ Cambone, *New Structure*, 152-3, 194. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 72, 94-95. Best, *National Security Council*, 22-25, 68-73. Dixon, *National Security Policy Formulation*, 25-27.

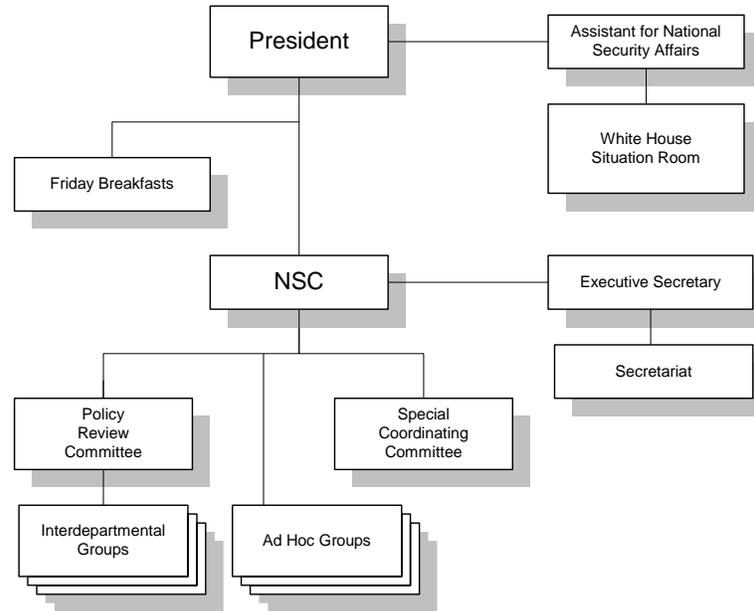


Figure 7. Carter NSC Organization

The Special Coordinating Committee (SCC) handled issues that cut across the policy domains of multiple departments and agencies. Arms control was the most frequent and prominent issue addressed. Crisis management and covert actions were also within the domain of the SCC. The SCC had cabinet-level membership, including all the statutory NSC members except the president himself. Brzezinski chaired. When special intelligence actions were discussed, as per EO 12036, statutory members were required to attend as were the attorney general, JCS chairman, and director of the Office of Management and Budget. If counter intelligence issues were on the table, then the director of the FBI attended. In practice, the SCC tended toward the emerging issue rather than the persistent.

A proposed review or policy initiative came from the PRC or SCC in the form of a PRM. The PRM established the study question or problem, assigned a suspense date, and assigned it to one of the two committees. A member of the committee was designated as study director and an ad hoc interagency working group was established. Either the PRC or SCC could stand up an ad hoc interagency working group to conduct the committee's business on a full-time but temporary basis. In the PRC, the staff of the chairing department prepared the paper response for the PRC. If, instead, the SCC initiated the action, the NSC staff prepared the response.

When the review committee was satisfied with the working group's response, the product was reduced to a 2- to 3-page memo that included the major options. The memo was submitted for presidential decision. The final PD was derivative of the working group's memo and was distributed by the national security assistant to the relevant agency heads for implementation.

Formal NSC meetings were relatively unstructured and infrequent. Only 10 were held in Carter's 4 years compared to 125 during the 8 years of Nixon-Ford. Carter's Friday breakfasts, replacing Johnson's Tuesday lunches, was the more likely decisionmaking venue. In attendance were the vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, national security assistant, and the president's chief domestic advisor. Friday breakfasts had no agenda, no preparation, and no record. Brzezinski held a weekly lunch, called the VBB lunches, attended by Vance, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, and Brzezinski. Brzezinski maintained careful and complete notes of the VBB lunches and prepared valuable weekly reports for Carter.

Synopsis and Segue

Critics concluded that too many major initiatives diluted the Carter administration's efforts. Major initiatives included human rights, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, the Panama Canal Treaty,

apartheid in South Africa, and conventional arms control. A strong focus on arms control weakened efforts on broader issues. Carter's NSC system shifted its role to giving policy advice at the expense of overseeing policy implementation.

The Friday breakfasts, conducted as they were, had the predictable consequences. Breakfasts were informal and attended by principals only. Without aides present, the principals acted more in an advisory capacity than as representatives of their respective agencies. The president felt good about the candid advice he received and the frank discussion. There was no agenda, preparation, or notes taken. The advisors left with a variety of interpretations. They returned to the agencies they led without written guidance.

Brzezinski was a stronger national security assistant than the president might originally have imagined. Brzezinski, not Vance, was the presidential emissary sent to normalize relations with China. He maintained his own formal relations with the Soviet Union. He continued to monitor cable traffic through the Situation Room. Brzezinski frequently functioned as a public speaker announcing the president's foreign policy positions. While not the deputy president model as with Kissinger, Brzezinski was a powerful national security assistant in competition with a similarly strong secretary of state.

At the end of the Carter administration, there was both the perception and reality of foreign policy incoherence. The administration had proposed the withdrawal of military forces from Korea, and then had to reverse its position. Poor internal communications resulted in a reversal of a UN vote concerning Israel and Jerusalem. The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan caused a strategic reversal in the administration. But the inability to affect the release of hostages from Tehran, highlighted by the tragic failed rescue attempt, gave a picture of an administration in crisis. Reagan certainly made Carter's incoherence a campaign issue, but he would soon take the NSC to new depths.

Reagan 1981-1989

The post-Kissinger pendulum swing had not yet reached its apogee. Like Carter before him, Reagan promised a return to cabinet government. One part of the solution was to weaken the assistant to the president for national security affairs to the point of reverting to the era when the assistant was less an advisor and more an executive secretary with a staff to manage the process and paper flow. Another part of the solution was the appointment of strong cabinet officials at State and Defense. A powerful and protective White House staff was also part of the mix.

Events and Personalities

A very strong White House staff controlled access to the president. White House advisors—Counselor Edwin Meese III, Chief of Staff James A. Baker III, and Deputy Chief of Staff Michael K. Deaver (image manager)—were referred to as the troika or triumvirate that buffered the president from the rest of the administration. Information flow was inhibited in both directions. The president was protected from “detail,” some of it critically important. Options were not presented, guidance not given, and decisions not made. Reagan's first national security assistant, Richard V. Allen, reported to Meese, not to the president. Donald Regan replaced Baker in late 1985 and would be followed later by Senator Howard Baker. Reagan would appoint six national security assistants, more than any other president.

Two strong cabinet officials with opposing views were appointed at State and Defense. Retired Army general Alexander M. Haig, Jr. had a long military career that culminated in the most prominent Cold War military position—NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Haig would take the helm at State. Casper “Cap” Weinberger, a competent executive with experience in California politics but little in defense, would serve as secretary of defense. Their disagreements were many and substantive. This could have given the president options and choices, but the president remained aloof and did not resolve disputes between his cabinet officials, allowing the disputes to fester.

The stage was set. There would be a competition over foreign policy leadership between the secretary of state and the president's White House. And there would be a National Security Council staff on its own detached from presidential decision making. Without a president engaged, the system would run

amok ending in congressional investigations and criminal charges brought. Reagan's is widely regarded as the nadir in the history of the National Security Council.

Secretary of State-designate Haig submitted a 15-page paper to the White House on inauguration day. A statement of national security organization customarily would have been signed as a presidential directive within the first days of the new administration. To this and repeated initiatives, Haig received no response. Reagan's White House advisors were concerned that a highly active secretary of state could upstage the president as chief enunciator of foreign policy. There was no apparent attempt by the national security assistant to initiate an NSC organization.

A 25 February 1981 meeting chaired by Counselor Meese and attended by the relevant cabinet members produced an agreed to NSC organization. The same day, NSDD-1 was issued announcing nomenclature changes—National Security Study Directives and National Security Decision Directives would replace Carter's Presidential Review Memorandum and Presidential Directive series. No mention was made of NSC organization or process.

As part of Reagan's planned cabinet government, the secretary of state was returned to primacy in foreign affairs. Haig would continue to assert State Department leadership over NSC committees. The national security assistant not only lost cabinet rank, he was denied direct access to the president. Reagan's national security assistant, Allen, was supportive of the new arrangement. Three Senior Interdepartmental Groups (SIGs)—foreign policy, defense policy, and intelligence—were established. SIGs would be supported by Interdepartmental Groups (IGs), as needed.

Haig would immediately and continually assume more support from the president than his palace guard would allow. Haig's strident public rhetoric lost him support in the White House. Haig publicly announced his position as the president's foreign policy "vicar" in his confirmation hearings. When a Special Situation Group (SSG)—to be chaired by the vice president—was proposed on 24 March, Haig strongly and publicly opposed it. The 30 March assassination attempt on the president moved Haig even further into the national spot light and gave him additional opportunity to exaggerate his position.

Already without advisory or policy formulation responsibilities, the national security assistant's role would erode even further. In July 1981 the NSA stopped the traditional morning briefings to the president. Instead, Allen delivered a written report to a three-times-per-week advisory group. The meeting included the president, vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, DCI, and White House aides. Allen resigned 4 January 1982 and was replaced by William P. Clark the same day. Israel's 6 June 1982 invasion of Lebanon created increased friction and caused Haig to resign in June. George Schultz would take his place at State the next month.

Reagan's NSC system had produced little tangible product in the administration's first year. Clark's appointment would bring some much needed energy to the system. Clark, a former California Supreme Court justice and long-time acquaintance of the president, had Reagan's confidence and was granted more direct access, bypassing White House counselor Meese, but still limited by Baker, chief of staff. The NSA began its climb out of its all time low point.

Within a week of Clark's appointment, the administration released its first NSC organization statement, NSDD-2, on 12 January 1982, almost a year into the administration. The secretary of state was the principal foreign policy advisor, "responsible for formulating, coordinating, and executing foreign policy." The existing SIGs and IGs were officially blessed and would continue to be the principal interagency bodies carrying out the work of the National Security Council.

Several changes followed. A permanent secretariat was established in the State Department to support the foreign policy SIG, further strengthening State's position over the NSC staff. The State-chaired SIG-FP would come to dominate the other SIGs. Clark would assert NSC jurisdiction over long-range planning, formerly under State's purview. Arms control issues shifted from a committee chaired by State to one chaired by NSC staff.

Reagan's NSC would continue to grow and evolve. A group chaired by the deputy national security assistant was established in May 1982 to plan for potential crises, the Pre-Crisis Planning Group. A 1983 reorganization resulted in rank inflation with many receiving impressive new "assistant to the president" titles. The role of the NSC's executive secretary was elevated to its former status. In July 1983 deputy

national security assistant Robert “Bud” McFarlane replaced State’s Ambassador Philip C. Habib as chief negotiator in the Middle East, a shift from State to the NSC.

Military operations in Grenada in late 1983 convinced Congress that the executive branch would not or could not solve the long-standing problems of bringing together the four uniformed services. Weinberger opposed congressional hearings because they might give the appearance of further disarray in the administration and jeopardize support for weapon system acquisition programs. By Executive Order 12526, issued 15 July 1985, Reagan created a presidential commission in an attempt to claim the initiative. The president’s Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense, more commonly referred to as the Packard Commission after its chair, reported out in June 1986. The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986 was the legislative output from Congress. The administration would measure progress against the Packard Commission’s recommendations rather than against the law.

Clark left on 17 October 1983 and was replaced by his deputy, Bud McFarlane. McFarlane had greater expertise than Clark but he lacked the personal relationship with Reagan. McFarlane retained the NSC organization and retained access to the president. He maintained a lower profile, but he moved into day-to-day operations weakening State further. The shift toward operations under McFarlane accelerated under Vice Admiral John Poindexter who would replace him on 4 December 1985.

NSC activism was high in 1985 and 1986. Poindexter, more competent with operations than policy formulation, moved the NSC further into operations. Following the relatively inactive period of Allen’s tenure as NSA, Clark, McFarlane, and Poindexter saw the creation of 22 SIGs and 55 IGs. Some met only once. Iran-Contra would take place in this swirling stew of mismanagement and undersupervised activist junior officers.

The Iran-Contra scandal became public in November 1986. Poindexter was relieved on 25 November. Congress conducted hearings in July and August 1987.²⁶ A special prosecutor was appointed to investigate as well. Deaver had resigned in May 1985 under investigation, convicted of perjury, and fined. As president, George H.W. Bush pardoned Weinberger and McFarlane. Poindexter was convicted of multiple felony counts that were reversed on appeal. Oliver North was convicted on three felony counts that were reversed on a technicality. No one served time.

As with military reform, the White House created its own commission to look at NSC reform, a review the administration claimed it was prepared to do anyway. The committee, established on 1 December 1986, was composed of former senator John Tower, former senator and former secretary of state Edmund Muskie, and former national security assistant Brent Scowcroft. The president’s board was commonly referred to as the Tower Commission for its chair. The supposedly safe Commission was harsher on Reagan’s weak management style than was the more generous congressional committee led by the opposition party. In its 26 February 1987 report, the Tower Commission had to tell the president the obvious.²⁷

A President must at the outset provide guidelines to the members of the National Security Council, his National Security Advisor, and the National Security Council staff. These guidelines, to be effective, must include how they will relate to one another, what procedures will be followed, what the president expects of them. If his advisors are not performing as he likes, only the President can intervene.

The Commission concluded that NSC SIGs chaired by a cabinet member inhibited consideration of views from other departments. Rather than department or agency head, the Commission recommended that the national security assistant chair the senior-level committees to promote cooperation but not to compete with cabinet officials.

The NSC staff was “actively involved” in preparing the national intelligence estimate on Iran published on 20 May 1985. There was the impression that White House policy preferences had perturbed the

²⁶ Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition, the Inouye-Hamilton Joint Committee, was co-chaired by Senator Daniel K. Inouye (D-Hawaii) and Representative Lee Hamilton (D-Indiana).

²⁷ Tower Commission (President’s Special Review Board), *Tower Commission Report* (New York: Bantam/Time, 1987).

estimate. The Commission asserted that the intelligence process must produce unbiased estimates and remain out of the policy advocacy role.

The Commission put forward a clear model for the National Security Council system, including the role of the national security assistant and staff and the interagency process. The national security assistant had primary responsibility for managing the process assuring that the full range of issues are raised to the president; that prospects, risks, and legalities are fully analyzed; and decisions are informed by all relevant sources. The assistant, with direct access to the president, was also to be an advisor presenting personal views as well as fairly representing the views of other advisors. The assistant should adopt a low profile leaving articulation of national policy to the president and the cabinet.

There were also recommendations for the NSC staff. The NSC was an advisory body, not an alternative to circumvent the agencies. The job is to review but not to compete with or replicate the functions of the departments and agencies. The NSC staff must stay out of implementation. The staff should be small, experienced, and highly competent. Staff should be balanced, including detailees from the executive departments and agencies and experts from outside of government. Assignments should be long enough to develop expertise but generally less than 4 years, and they should be staggered to provide continuity from administration to administration. The NSC staff should have its own legal advisor.

The most important change to Reagan's NSC was the appointment of Ambassador Frank C. Carlucci as national security assistant in December 1986. Access was no longer constrained by the White House chief of staff. Carlucci would chair the senior committees. Schultz initially objected to Carlucci chairing on the grounds that he was not subject to Senate confirmation or to congressional accountability. But Carlucci would not revert to the executive secretary position. Within 3 months, Carlucci replaced more than half of the staff he inherited from Poindexter with more experienced foreign policy professionals.

The administration responded with NSDD-266 on 31 March 1987. Much of the directive was a reiteration of the basics of the National Security Act of 1947, as amended. The administration adopted the Commission's recommended model. The secretary of state would lead in foreign policy formulation and advice. The functions of the national security assistant were detailed consistent with the Commission's recommendations. The NSA would be manager of the NSC process, principal advisor, and member of the White House staff. The NSA was to be an honest broker, provide an independent voice, and chair the senior-level committees.

NSDD-266 directed three significant reviews. A review of the NSC's interagency process would result in a draft NSDD no later than 30 April 1987 recommending continuation or termination of subordinate interagency groups (SIGs and IGs). Similarly, the NSC's Planning and Coordination Group was directed to review all covert action programs and to report via draft NSDD no later than 30 April 1987. A third review was commissioned to examine the integrity of the intelligence process due by 31 July 1987.

NSDD-276 followed on 9 June 1987. It reiterated its acceptance of the Tower Commission's recommendations. It announced a new NSC organization including the most prominent interagency groups: the new Senior Review Group and Policy Review Group and the existing National Security Planning Group and Planning and Coordination Group. The disposition of the original SIGs and IGs was not resolved. NSDD-276 directed a review of SIGs and IGs for continuation or termination no later than 30 June 1987. The national security assistant was granted authority to act on that review.

After Weinberger's resignation and Carlucci's appointment as secretary of defense, Lieutenant General Colin Powell, Carlucci's deputy, stepped up in November 1987. Powell, Shultz, and Carlucci resolved to collegiality. For the remainder of Reagan's administration, the three met every morning at 7:00 am in Powell's West Wing office. Morning meetings had no agenda and no aides in attendance. Collectively, the new triumvirate would restore order, credibility, and legitimacy to the NSC and the president's process.

Organization and Process

The NSC system in place from the beginning of the administration, described in NSDD-2, and up to the Iran-Contra reorganization is depicted in Figure 8. NSDD-2 called for the establishment of Senior Interagency Groups (SIGs) at the cabinet level and Interagency Groups (IGs) at the sub-cabinet level. Beyond those called for in the directive, additional SIGs and IGs could be established as needed. A Special Situation Group, National Security Planning Group, and Planning and Coordination Group followed. SIG

and IG meetings were to be convened periodically but their members had significant full-time responsibilities in their parent agencies. IGs established working groups, perhaps temporarily, but staffed on a full-time basis by detailees from the departments and agencies.²⁸

The NSC remained the “principal forum for consideration of national security policy requiring presidential decision.” SIGs sat at the level immediately below the formal NSC. SIGs were to advise and assist the NSC in their assigned functional area when interagency attention was required. They selected issues for consideration, monitored execution of policy, and evaluated performance of implementation. Issues that could not be resolved at the SIG level were elevated either to the relevant department or agency head or to the NSC proper. SIGs were explicitly established for foreign policy (SIG-FP), defense policy (SIG-DP), and intelligence (SIG-I). Establishment of dedicated, full-time staffs was directed in each lead agency rather than in the NSC staff.

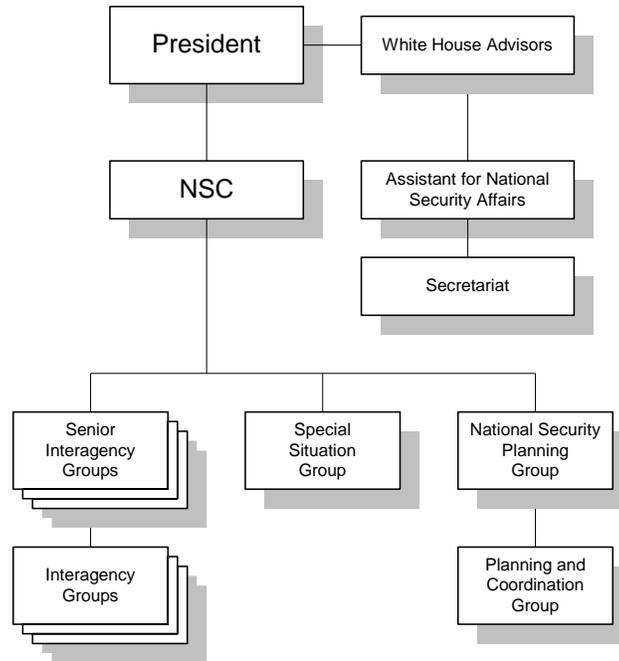


Figure 8. Reagan NSC Organization (pre Iran-Contra)

The foreign policy SIG was chaired by the deputy secretary of state. Its members were the director of central intelligence, national security assistant, deputy secretary of defense or under secretary of defense for policy, and the chairman of the joint chiefs. The director of ACDA was invited when arms control issues were discussed. SIG-FP established both regional and functional IGs. The regional IGs corresponded to State’s regional bureaus. The regional IGs were chaired by the assistant secretaries of state for Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Membership was drawn from across the agencies. Each IG was responsible for contingency planning and for being prepared to support the NSC during crisis response. SIG-FP also established two functional IGs: Political-Military Affairs and International Economic Affairs. The defense policy SIG established functional IGs that worked with SIG-FP’s political-military IG. SIG-I established a counterintelligence IG.

Beyond the SIGs called for in NSDD-2, two other SIGs deserve mention. The Special Situation Group (SSG), chaired by the vice president, was proposed on 24 March 1981. The group was chartered on 14 December 1981 but met only once.

The National Security Planning Group (NSPG) was formally established in the summer of 1981. To prevent leaks, attendance was limited to the vice president, secretary of state, secretary of defense, director of central intelligence, and JCS chairman. The group met weekly with the president. The NSPG

²⁸ Cambone, *New Structure*, 153-155, 198-205, 205-214, 214-218. Dixon, *National Security Policy Formulation*, 27-31. Best, *National Security Council*, 25-29, 73-77.

functioned much like Johnson's Tuesday lunch group and Carter's Friday breakfast group. But its formal responsibilities also included covert actions. The Planning and Coordination Group (PCG) served at the sub-cabinet level and reviewed current and proposed covert actions. Covert action responsibilities for the NSPG and PCG were specified in NSDD-7 signed in the second half of 1981 and revised as NSDD-159 signed on 18 January 1987.

Midstream in the Reagan administration, there were about 50 NSC staffers divided equally between military detailees, career civil servants, and outsiders including academics and other professionals.

The SIGs rarely met and the regional IGs never established a regular pattern of meeting and production. Department heads would not willingly subordinate themselves to another department head chairing a committee, and there was no presidential intervention to force subordination.

The national security organization after the Tower Commission reforms is depicted in Figure 9. NSDD-266 and NSDD-276 were the most prominent directives implementing the Tower recommendations.²⁹ NSDD-276 made explicit reference to 6 interagency groups: the National Security Council, the National Security Planning Group, the Senior Review Group, the Policy Review Group, and the Planning and Coordination Group. The directive called for a review of the SIGs and IGs by 30 June 1987 and gave the national security assistant approval authority for their continuation or termination.

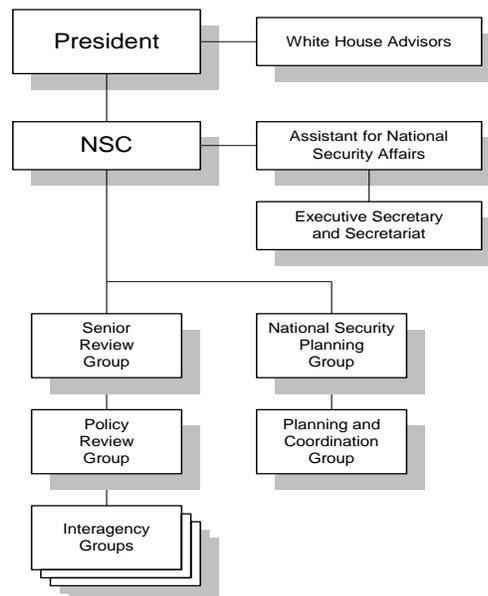


Figure 9. Reagan NSC Organization (post Iran-Contra)

Carlucci, as national security assistant, chaired the cabinet-level Senior Review Group (SRG). The SRG was also attended by the secretary of state, secretary of defense, president's chief of staff, DCI, and CJCS. Carlucci's deputy chaired the Policy Review Group (PRG) attended by representatives from the offices of the vice president and White House chief of staff, and representatives at the under or assistant secretary level from State, Defense, CIA, and OMB. The responsibilities of the Crisis Pre-Planning Group and the Terrorist Incident Working Group were consolidated under the PRG.³⁰ The PRG oriented on the day-to-day functioning of the interagency process. Much of the work of the NSC was done by the Interagency Groups and their supporting working groups. The Policy Review Group and Senior Review Group reviewed issues that could not be resolved at the lower levels.

The cabinet-level National Security Planning Group and the subcabinet-level Planning and Coordination Group were continued. Their responsibilities for covert action, formerly specified in NSDD-159, were specified in NSDD-286, *Approval and Review of Special Activities*, signed on 15 October 1986. This

²⁹ NSDD-159, NSDD-30, and NSDD-207 were also relevant.

³⁰ NSDD-30 and NSDD-207 specified those responsibilities.

influential document was carried forward by future administrations. NSPG membership was expanded to include the president and vice president; secretaries of state, defense, and treasury; the president's national security assistant and chief of staff; directors of central intelligence and OMB; and the JCS chairman. The PCG was similarly attended at the deputies' level.

Synopsis and Segue

President Reagan's style, disinterested in "detail," variously described as big picture and hands off, is more accurately described as maladministration. In the end, the impression was widespread that the administration was incompetent.

Reagan refused to delegate foreign policy to the secretary of state and simultaneously failed to manage the national security apparatus himself. Until Carlucci, Reagan chose a weak national security assistant who could not manage the national security system or the competition between State and Defense. Reagan also lacked an administrative structure to manage the national security process until after the Tower Commission recommendations were implemented by Carlucci.

Haig's departure did much to reduce the friction between the White House and State. There was some competitive friction between the national security assistant and secretary of state but it was minor in comparison to the competition between the secretary of state (first Haig, and then Schultz) and secretary of defense (Weinberger). Late in the Reagan administration, Secretary of State Schultz and Secretary of Defense Carlucci worked well together along with Powell as national security assistant.

The effectiveness of national security assistants was dependent on their personal connections with the president. Those without a personal relationship with the president were unable to wield derivative political power. Assistants who lacked Washington political sensitivity, specifically McFarlane and Poindexter, undertook covert operations strongly opposed by cabinet officers and congressional leaders.

Several of Reagan's earliest top advisors lacked serious foreign policy credentials. Loyalty to and confidence of the president was what mattered—not competence born of relevant experience. Carlucci, in contrast, brought to the job high-level experience within State, Defense, and the CIA.

Covert operations, operations in general, conducted by the NSC staff undercut the responsible agencies. The Tower Commission report consistently referred to them as unprofessional in implementation. They failed to take advantage of agency contacts and expertise and the reservations that come from experience. The responsible agencies are subject to congressional oversight, the NSC, an advisory body, is not.

The National Security Council system differed in many ways before and after the Tower Commission. Both changes in organization and process occurred. Personal loyalty to Reagan slowly gave way to national security experience. From the weakest national security assistant, the position slowly regained some of its past strength, eventually recovering in the end. Even beyond the later emphasis on experience, the change in personalities offers the best explanation for the improved performance at the end of the administration. The president's detachment was a constant throughout.³¹

Bush 1989-1993

Even given the apparent success of the Carlucci-Powell system, George H.W. Bush adopted a system of his own. The Bush NSC system did, however, remain faithful to the recommendations of the Tower Commission, not entirely surprising given a prominent Commission member's appointment as national security assistant. The Bush NSC organizational structure would be carried forward by future administrations and provide a degree of stability.

Events and Personalities

George H.W. Bush assembled a competent and collegial national security team. Bush appointed as secretary of state former senator, former Reagan White House chief of staff, and long-time friend and advisor James Baker. Former Representative Dick Cheney brought experience from the Nixon White

³¹ Powell, *My American Journey*, 335.

House to the position of defense secretary. Brent Scowcroft served again as national security assistant. Former national security assistant Colin Powell served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs. The president himself, former vice president and director of central intelligence, brought considerable national security experience to the job. Bush's appointments were from the Eastern Establishment rather than the ideologues from the New Right that surrounded Reagan. Even Brzezinski called Bush's closest advisors seasoned and competent.

The assembled team shared a mutual trust and respect. The intrigue of the Nixon administration was not present, nor was the unmitigated competition between secretary of state and national security assistant of the Carter administration. And gone was the out of control and unmanaged process of the Reagan years.

Bush returned to the tradition of formally announcing the administration's national security system soon after inauguration. NSC documents were renamed National Security Decision (NSD) and National Security Review (NSR). NSD-1 was signed 30 January 1989.

NSD-1 explicitly took precedence over Reagan's NSDD-266 and NSDD-276. And it explicitly abolished the National Security Planning Group, Planning and Coordination Group, Senior Review Group, and Policy Review Group. All other committees, without being named, were to be abolished by 1 March 1989 unless the national security assistant and the heads of departments and agencies explicitly reestablished them.

Organization and Process

Bush employed a hierarchy of interagency groups within the NSC supported successively by the Principals Committee, the Deputies Committee, and several Policy Coordinating Committees. Like other presidents, Bush relied heavily on a group of trusted advisors outside the formal National Security Council system—his “core group” of advisors. The Bush NSC system is depicted in Figure 10.³²

The NSC was the “principal forum for consideration of national security policy issues requiring presidential determination.” The NSC was the principal means for coordinating the departments and agencies efforts in developing and implementing national security policy. National security policy was defined as the sum of domestic, foreign, intelligence, and economic policies.

Attendance at NSC meetings included the four statutory members, the two statutory advisors, along with the White House chief of staff and the national security assistant. The secretary of the treasury would attend unless directed not to. When covert actions or Justice Department jurisdiction was involved, the attorney general would attend. The special statutory advisors would attend when their jurisdictions were addressed. Others would be invited as appropriate.

National Security Council meetings were infrequent. It met only 4 times in 1991 and 3 times in 1992. But infrequency of formal NSC meetings did not mean inactivity. Bush met frequently with his “core group,” sometimes called the “Big 8.” The core group met regularly, usually in the Oval Office, throughout the Gulf War. It included Bush, Scowcroft, Baker, Cheney, Powell, Vice President Dan Quayle, DCI William Woolsey, and White House Chief of Staff John Sununu. The unofficial core group was more the decision making venue than the formal NSC. Its limited membership was leak proof and lent itself to candid discussion.

NSD-1 established the Principals Committee (PC) below the level of the NSC. It was the senior, cabinet-level, interagency forum. It had the same membership as the NSC but without the president and vice president. It was chaired by the national security assistant. The NSC attendance rules applied for the secretary of the treasury and attorney general. The Principals Committee would screen issues before consideration by the formal NSC. In practice, the Principals Committee met infrequently.

³² Cambone, *A New Structure*, 155-156, 218-223. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 124-129.

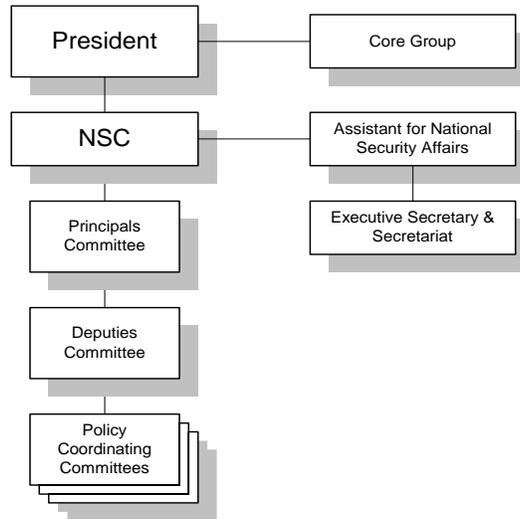


Figure 10. Bush I NSC Organization

The Deputies Committee (DC) was the next level in the NSC hierarchy. Membership was drawn from the same agencies and was chaired by the deputy national security advisor. Defense was represented by the under secretary for policy and State by the under secretary for political affairs, although the meeting could be convened with the deputy secretaries instead. The deputy director of central intelligence and vice chairman of the JCS represented their respective agencies. Covert program review required attendance by a representative of the attorney general's office. The Deputies Committee provided quality control before PC or NSC meetings. It reviewed and monitored the NSC interagency process. It was responsible for both policy review and crisis management. The DC was the engine of change and management within the NSC. The Deputies Committee met frequently, 160 times in 1990 alone.

NSD-1 also established several NSC Policy Coordinating Committees (PCCs) with assistant secretary level representatives from the relevant departments. There were initially six regional and four functional PCCs. The committees above the PCCs dealt with more overarching national security policy issues. The PCCs were more narrowly focused, dealing with specific regional or functional issues.

Initially, regional PCCs were established for Europe, the Soviet Union, Latin America, East Asia, Africa, and the Near East and South Asia regions corresponding to the regional bureaus of the State Department. The regional PCCs were chaired by the assistant secretary of state of the respective regional bureau.

Functional PCCs were established for defense, international economics, intelligence, and arms control. An assistant secretary level officer would be assigned to chair the PCC by the secretary of defense, secretary of the treasury, director of central intelligence, or national security assistant, respectively.

Other PCCs would be established as needed. NSD-10 added nine more functional PCCs, including committees for counterterrorism, special intelligence activities, refugees, emergency preparations and mobilization, and non-proliferation. Chairmanship was assigned in most cases from State or from the National Security Council staff.

The PCC level was the principal interagency forum for the development and implementation of national security policy. PCCs were responsible for identifying and developing policy issues for NSC consideration within their jurisdiction. The national security assistant appointed an NSC staff specialist to act as the PCC chair's executive secretary.

The exact method of crisis response was not specified in NSD-1, but the president announced his intentions to manage crises through existing committees rather than through ad hoc arrangements.

Synopsis and Segue

Bush held few formal NSC meetings, relying instead on Deputies Committee meetings for policy review and long-range strategy. Crises were handled by existing groups. The DC and supporting PCCs were

prepared to and were used to support the president and the NSC during a crisis within their functional or regional area of responsibility. As is common, critical events shifted initial attention away from policy review responsibilities toward crisis management later in the administration.

Scowcroft had a close relationship with the president that allowed candor and informality. There was no public stress apparent between the national security advisor and cabinet members. That is not to say that there were no disagreements, but that they did not erupt into public displays. Scowcroft managed a collegial interagency process and maintained non-competitive relations with State. Scowcroft was without an independent agenda but not devoid of opinions that the president valued. He remained an honest broker, giving his view when asked, but always faithfully representing the views of other senior advisors. Where Reagan had six national security assistants in eight years, Bush had one in his four years.

President Bush himself contributed to the chemistry in a very specific way. Since his tenure at the CIA, when confronted with particularly significant information, he had the reputation of going directly to the responsible analyst rather than accepting information filtered through a bureaucracy. He also had the well-deserved reputation for delegation of authority to his subordinates once a decision had been reached. The ability to drill down to get the information necessary to make critical decisions and simultaneously not micromanage is a rare ability and certainly is part of the explanation for the success of the Bush NSC.

The organization, the process, and the core group proved adequate to manage the fall of the Berlin Wall, the invasion of Panama, and the Gulf War.

There were those who would disagree with the policies pursued by the Bush administration, but the National Security Council system that supported presidential decisionmaking was not the object of criticism. Unlike previous election campaigns, the incumbent's national security system was not an issue. The Clinton administration would adopt and carry forward the Bush NSC organization.

Clinton 1993-2001

President William J. Clinton issued two presidential directives on inauguration day, 20 January 1993. The first, PDD-1, announced new nomenclature for documents associated with the NSC's interagency process. Presidential Review Directives (PRDs) would be used to commission studies and policy reviews. Presidential Decision Directives (PDDs) would be used to promulgate presidential decisions. PDD-2 announced the organization and process of the administration's NSC system, almost a copy of the system established by predecessor Bush but with greater emphasis on economic issues.

Clinton's focus on the economy was reflected at the highest levels of his administration. The most significant organizational innovation was the establishment of the National Economic Council parallel to and modeled on the National Security Council. Secondly, NSC membership was expanded to include expertise in economic policy.

National economic security would be pursued under the National Economic Council (NEC). Attendance of the NEC was twice that of the NSC, bringing together representatives of the executive branch that dealt with both domestic and foreign economic policy. Membership included the president and vice president; the secretaries of state, treasury, agriculture, commerce, labor, housing and urban development, transportation, and energy; chair of the Council of Economic Advisers; director of the Office of Management and Budget; US Trade Representative; and assistants to the president for economic policy, domestic policy, national security affairs, and science and technology policy. Its purpose was to advise the president, to coordinate the interagency economic policy-making process, and to monitor implementation.³³ Robert E. Rubin would be the first assistant to the president for economic policy.

The Clinton administration's NSC system employed the same hierarchy of committees established by the Bush administration. The Principals Committee and the Deputies Committee remained in name and function. Bush's Policy Coordinating Committees survived under the name Interagency Working Groups (IWGs, eye-wigs).

³³ Executive Order 12835, Establishment of the National Economic Council, dated 25 January 1993. NEC-1, Establishment of Presidential Review and Decision Series, 4 March 1993. NEC-2, Organization of the National Economic Council, 24 March 1993.

Attendance at NSC meetings was expanded, largely driven by the president's focus on the economy. The statutory members and statutory advisors were accompanied by the treasury secretary, the US representative to the UN, the president's chief of staff, assistant to the president for national security affairs, and assistant to the president for economic policy. Consistent with Tower Commission recommendations, the attorney general would be invited when covert actions were discussed. Others would be invited as needed.

Events and Personalities

Clinton's NSC system was collegial. W. Anthony Lake was Clinton's first national security assistant. Lake was an experienced foreign service officer who had worked on Nixon's NSC staff under Henry Kissinger and who had been director of State's Policy Planning Staff in the Carter administration. Warren M. Christopher, a Los Angeles international lawyer in private life, was appointed secretary of state after serving as deputy secretary of state under Carter. Lake maintained collegial relations with Christopher and Rubin. Initially, Lake maintained a low public profile but eventually felt compelled to be a more public enunciator of foreign policy as Clinton declined and Christopher failed.

In the second term, Samuel "Sandy" R. Berger, former deputy national security assistant, took Lake's position on 14 March 1997. Madeleine Albright, who served as ambassador to the United Nations in the administration's first term, was appointed secretary of state in the second. Although she had served on the NSC staff under Carter and Brzezinski, her career had largely been in academe. As secretary, she emphasized her foreign policy advisory role over the executive role at State.

Neither of Clinton's secretaries of state brought significant executive experience to the office, and the Department continued its decline in morale and capacity.

The DCI's counterterrorism center informed Clinton that Osama bin Laden was planning attacks on the United States in a memorandum entitled, "Bin Laden Preparing to Hijack U.S. Aircraft and Other Attacks," dated 4 December 1998.

Organization and Process

The Principals Committee was the cabinet-level forum for addressing national security issues not requiring presidential decision and not resolved at lower levels. The president and vice-president did not attend. Otherwise, membership was the same as the NSC. When the secretary of defense or state was not available, the department deputy or other designee could represent the secretary. The national security assistant chaired Principal Committee meetings.³⁴

The Deputies Committee was the senior subcabinet-level forum. The DC was responsible for reviewing and monitoring the interagency process—including both policy making and implementation. Committee meetings were chaired by the deputy national security assistant and attended by the under secretary of defense for policy, under secretary of state for political affairs, deputy DCI, vice chairman of the JCS, and deputy national economic advisor. Others, including a representative of the attorney general, were invited under the same rules as in higher committees.

The functions carried out at the deputies' level were many. The DC determined when policies were in need of review. It served a quality control function as well, assuring that studies carried out a full analysis, considered a full range of options, and fairly considered both prospects and risks. The DC could be convened for crisis management (DC/CM). In that role, the DC was responsible for crisis prevention, contingency planning, and crisis management. The DC/CM would have a small, dedicated staff. The DC had the authority to establish interagency working groups and to task them.

³⁴ Cambone, *New Structure*, 157. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 103, 107-123.

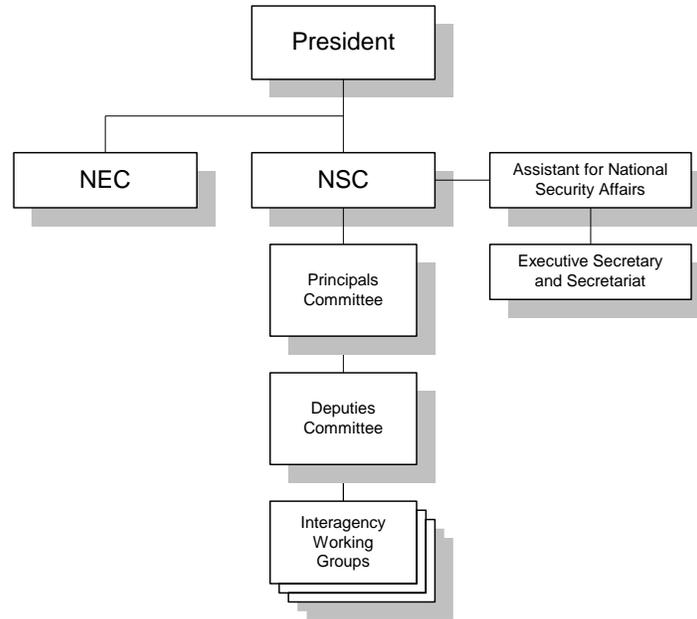


Figure 11. Clinton NSC Organization

The administration allowed for both permanent and ad hoc interagency working groups (IWGs). They would review and coordinate implementation. Administration policy was that IWGs should be kept to a minimum, but following that policy would be problematic. Permanent IWGs were established for defense and foreign policy issues, generally directed at the assistant secretary level. A permanent IWG for international economic issues was chaired by a representative of the Treasury Department or staff of the NEC. Permanent IWGs dealing with intelligence, nonproliferation, arms control, and crisis management were chaired by a member of the NSC staff.

Synopsis and Segue

Although the Clinton administration adopted a National Security Council system virtually identical to the Bush administration, there were meaningful differences worth examining. One was the division of labor between the national security assistant and the deputy. Under Bush, national security assistant Scowcroft emphasized his advisory role with the president. His deputy, Gates, managed the interagency process. Under Clinton, Lake and Berger divided regional and functional issues between them, but neither undertook management of the interagency process. The expected result was a weakly managed process at all levels.

The Clinton administration, in response to the end of the Cold War, reduced the size of the NSC staff. But at the same time, it stood up more specialized offices than Bush's NSC staff. In an attempt to maintain its dominance over the departments and agencies, NSC staffers chaired as many committees as possible. The overall result was a poor interagency process at the DC and IWG levels.

Because of campaign promises and a genuine desire to focus "like a laser" on the economy, Clinton was not heavily engaged in the national security process. Clinton inherited Somalia and initiated actions in Haiti, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. He also initiated peace talks in the Middle East. Clearly, Clinton did not ignore national security and foreign policy issues, but his attention was divided. An NSC system not well managed compounded by a president not heavily engaged resulted in performance that was less than desirable.

In Clinton's second term, the NSC staff reversed course and ballooned to over 100 professional staffers, the largest staff ever. A powerful and visible NSC existed at the expense of a State Department that was weakened and demoralized. Still, campaign criticisms were focused on Clinton's strategy, specifically the role of "nation building," and not on NSC organization.

Bush 2001-2009

The national security team formed quickly around President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, Secretary of State Powell, and Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Condoleezza Rice. Cheney brought with him congressional experience, experience in the secretive Nixon White House, and a strong performance as secretary of defense under the elder Bush. Powell had a lengthy and distinguished military career including experience as the elder Bush's national security assistant and as JCS chairman during the Gulf War. He brought "star power," credibility, and popular support to the administration. Rumsfeld, too, brought considerable experience, including a previous assignment in the Defense Department's top position under Ford. Rice held an NSC staff position under Scowcroft. The weakest link in the national security chain was the president, followed by his national security assistant.

The transition from the Clinton to the Bush White House was accompanied by some counterproductive emotionalism. At the trivial level, the Bush staff inherited computer equipment with the 'W' removed from the keyboard by the previous inhabitants. At the more substantive level, the new administration brought with it "Anything But Clinton" (ABC) thinking. Policies and people were guilty by association with Clinton. The effects would prove to be considerable.

More telling, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Richard Cheney formed a power center that overshadowed the NSC interagency process in presidential decision making. Both had been former defense secretaries, both had White House and congressional experience, and they continued a long established professional relationship. Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs Condoleezza Rice chose a weak role in managing the interagency process, favoring her advisory role to the president. The immensely popular Secretary of State Colin Powell brought a different and potentially balancing world view to the mix, but the hard-line response in Iraq resulted in Powell's marginalization. These and other factors produced dominance of the military instrument over orchestration of the several instruments of power—Pentagon process dominated a weak interagency process.

The events of 9/11 allowed the ascendancy of hardliners, closeted decisionmaking, and the trap of groupthink. Rather than an array of policy options thoroughly analyzed through a rigorous interagency process, the hardliners began with a preferred solution. Chosen policies, created without the active involvement of experts in the departments and agencies, failed frequently and predictably in implementation.

Events and Personalities

The Bush administration was slow to issue its first presidential directive announcing the organization of its National Security Council system. But the transition team's pre-inaugural thinking was put into place before the official directive was issued. Beyond the defective keyboards, the word on the street was that the vice president was lobbying to chair important NSC committees, chairmanships traditionally held by the national security assistant or secretary of state. A new competition was emerging. Rather than the more predictable competitions involving the president, secretary of state, and national security assistant, the vice president would enter the fray and, according to many, it was a competition he would win.

One early article reported on the forming NSC system prior to promulgation of the presidential directive.³⁵ Rice would consciously model her NSC system on the Scowcroft system she earlier served in. Rice would be an honest broker, neither a policy initiator nor implementer. She expected to be less visible than her predecessor Sandy Berger. Just prior to inauguration day, she described the role that the NSC would play.

We at the National Security Council are going to try to work the seams, stitching the connections together tightly. If we can do that, if we can provide glue for the many, many agencies and the

³⁵ Karen DeYoung and Steven Mufson, "A Leaner and Less Visible NSC; Reorganization Will Emphasize Defense, Global Economics," *Washington Post*, 10 February 2001, A1.

many, many instruments the United States is now deploying around the world, I think we will have done our job on behalf of the President of the United States.³⁶

Early expectations were that State would chair meetings of regionally oriented committees. For those other committees addressing functional, cross-cutting issues where no single agency was the obvious lead, Rice or a member of the NSC staff would chair. The article ended with one of the ABC issues—organizationally, how the NSC would deal with terrorism.

Still up in the air is what to do with the NSC office of Transnational Threats, initiated and headed under Clinton by Richard A. Clarke. Clarke has remained in place while the administration decides what to do with the office.³⁷

The DCI's counterterrorism center had informed Clinton that Osama bin Laden was planning attacks on the United States.³⁸ Clarke and Berger lobbied Rice and the Bush transition team hard about the threat of terrorism and bin Laden, but the advice was tainted with Clinton's legacy and was not a Bush priority.

Transformation was the Bush administration's initial charge to the Department of Defense. Richard Armitage was the clear favorite for the deputy secretary of defense position. The top contenders for the number one spot at Defense were Senator Dan Coats and Paul Wolfowitz. Neither captured the president's favor. Donald Rumsfeld was the last minute, surprise nominee. An immediate clash developed between Rumsfeld and Armitage. Wolfowitz would get the deputy job at Defense and Armitage would become number two at State under Powell. State would be led by combat veterans, Defense would not.

Transformation of the military was always an ill-defined mission. Rumsfeld's early behavior alienated the service chiefs and highly influential, pro-defense members of Congress. Betting pools circulated in the Pentagon predicting Rumsfeld's date of departure. The events of 9/11 reversed his sinking fortunes. The public rallied around the flag, and Rumsfeld's personal actions at the attack site gave him political capital that he had not previously possessed. His public popularity soared. Both would slowly sour along with the war in Iraq.

Rumsfeld's staff did more than alienate Congress and the Joint Chiefs. The secretary asserted his advice and effectively minimized the uniformed military's voice in policy making. Distrusting of the information provided by the CIA and DIA, Rumsfeld established an intelligence capability, the Office of Special Plans, responsive to him. The remnants of the US Information Agency had been ineffectually spread across the State Department. Rumsfeld attempted to establish his own information instrument, the Office of Strategic Influence, but the ensuing negative publicity led to its early demise. Its functions were reassigned. Rather than rely on the NSC's interagency process, Rumsfeld hastily attempted to assemble all the instruments of power under his command.

Rumsfeld, choosing to circumvent the NSC's interagency process, bypassed Pentagon processes as well. Pentagon processes move at a glacial pace. Some of that is just parochial, bureaucratic resistance. But some reflects the military's deeply conservative nature preferring deliberate, incremental change based on experience rather than risking the catastrophe that could fall from radical, civilian-induced change based on reason divorced from experience.

Rumsfeld bypassed the Joint Strategic Planning System, assigning missions to combatant commanders that were non-starters. Briefers often could not get past their first slide. Decisions were seemingly made, but there was no follow through. Rumsfeld's directives included both good and bad, as is the case with any secretary. While his public popularity soared, he failed to tap the expertise in the Pentagon and failed to lead. Rumsfeld resigned on 18 December 2006 and was replaced by Robert M. Gates.

Defense rose in prominence in policy formulation. Either from presidential direction or acquiescence, the Defense Department was becoming a super agency wielding all the instruments of national power. Foreign policy was further militarized.

³⁶ Condoleezza Rice, remarks made at the US Institute of Peace, 17 January 2001.

³⁷ DeYoung and Mufson, "A Leaner and Less Visible NSC."

³⁸ Director of Central Intelligence memorandum, "Bin Laden Preparing to Hijack US Aircraft and Other Attacks, 4 December 1998.

Powell, like most Army officers, spent his career in alliance structures in Europe and Korea. He knew the value and complexities of alliances like NATO. Thus informed through experience, he was highly inclined to work through international institutions. Alliances and coalitions induce friction but they bring legitimacy and resources. Bush, Cheney, and Rumsfeld were unilateralist and weren't willing to accept the delay and limitations of coalition building. Cheney thought State was too moderate to be trusted. Powell and State were marginalized in the policy formulation process. Although marginalized as an adviser, Powell was a very effective chief executive, attracting resources from Congress and increasing State Department staff by 1200. Powell resigned as quietly as possible on 26 January 2005, following the election and inauguration. Rice would serve as secretary of state in the second term. She brought a deep understanding of White House intentions, but not the skills of a chief executive.

The interagency process was not collegial, it was competitive, and Defense was in a league of its own. The State Department's policy and planning organizations were active but ineffective. State's Policy Planning Staff—the staff that created NSC-68 and the containment strategy—continued to attract highly qualified staff but could not compete with Defense. State's Office of the Under Secretary for Political Affairs was not staffed to compete with its counterpart in Defense—USD (Policy). For every staffer State could bring to bear on an issue, Defense could bring four, according to Marc Grossman, State's under secretary for political affairs.³⁹

The Bush administration retained Clinton's National Economic Council and the treasury secretary retained a seat at the NSC table. Paul H. O'Neill was appointed secretary of the treasury and Lawrence B. Lindsey headed the NEC. Both had strong credentials. But the administration's economic emphasis would quickly fade.

Treasury Secretary O'Neill was apparently hired for his considerable economic expertise developed and demonstrated in government and industry. His economic advice ran afoul of ideologically driven tax policy and initiated his downfall. O'Neill and Chairman of the Federal Reserve Alan Greenspan, long-time colleagues, immediately brought their extensive expertise to bear in an examination of the economy. Finding it essentially sound, they proposed steps to fine tune the weaker segments. The tax cuts to the upper income brackets did not follow from their analysis and they proposed phasing the tax cuts in slowly if at all. O'Neill's Treasury Department produced a report in 2002 based on a more comprehensive analysis. The report included forecasts of huge budget deficits and recommendations for tax increases. The 2002 report was excluded from the president's February 2003 annual report. After 9/11, O'Neill, argued to investigate the financial connections between al-Qaeda and the United Arab Emirates but was overruled.

At the NEC, Lindsey calculated the projected costs of invading and occupying Iraq. In a 15 September 2002 interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, he estimated the cost at about \$200 billion, or 1 to 2 percent of GDP. The president's OMB countered with an estimate of only \$50 to 60 billion. Rumsfeld endorsed the OMB estimate, based on a quick military victory and the assumption that Iraqi oil revenue would pay the long-term costs. By June 2007, the CBO estimated costs associated with Iraq exceeded \$500 billion. Forecasts exceed \$1 trillion.

O'Neill and Lindsey were replaced at the end of December 2002. The message was clear, an expert understanding of the problem was not an input valued by White House decision makers. The agencies' purpose was to implement the president's decisions, not to inform decision making. Implement the tax cut, fund the war, and defer the fiscal consequences until later.⁴⁰ Within two years, the economic emphasis was lost and the NEC was moribund.

With respect to the NSC, some predicted early that Rice would exert considerable, and from some perspectives undue, influence with the president due to her personal relationship, strengthened by her tutoring him on foreign policy during the campaign. There were others who feared that Rice would be no

³⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 409.

⁴⁰ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 402-403.

match for Cheney, Powell, or Rumsfeld, all of whom might vie for the top position as advisor to the president. The president was unknown and untested, and he remained a question mark.

Rice's deputy, Stephen J. Hadley, arrived with considerable experience in national security and defense. He served on the NSC staff (1974-1977) in the Ford administration, and as general counsel on the Tower Commission late in the Reagan administration. He later served as assistant secretary of defense for international security policy (1989-1993) under Paul Wolfowitz and Dick Cheney. Hadley replaced Rice in Bush's second term as Rice replaced Powell at State.

One of the repeating patterns is the incoming administration's belief that the previous administration's NSC staff was too large. This administration would be no different. The Clinton NSC staff was the largest in history, and Rice said it was "too big, too bloated, too powerful." She immediately made substantial cuts, but eventually regrew the staff.⁴¹ Reflecting Rice's desire to maintain a lower public profile, the NSC's communications function was moved to the White House staff, but it would later return.

Just as Rice was initially cutting her NSC staff by one third, Cheney was creating a powerful staff of his own. The president stated that the two staffs would work as one. By way of comparison, Gore had a single foreign policy advisor, Leon Fuerth, and two aides. Dan Quayle had only one or two foreign policy advisors. Estimates of Cheney's national security staff range from 15 to 35 compared to the president's national security staff of 80. (The vice president's office is not subject to the Freedom of Information Act and is not inclined to willingly share this information, so informed estimates are all that are available.) Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, was also the vice president's assistant for national security affairs and held another title, assistant to the president, on a par with Rice. That Cheney had such a large national security staff is without precedent but not without consequence.⁴²

The events of 9/11 caused two significant reorganizations of government—the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and a significant restructuring of the intelligence community. Both had the feel of knee-jerk responses, theater to demonstrate that government was responsive, but there was more to it than that.

Soon after 9/11, Rice established an ad hoc NSC group for homeland security headed by her deputy, Stephen Hadley. The group quickly grew into a new Homeland Security Council (HSC) on a par with the National Security Council and National Economic Council. Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge would head the HSC. Elsewhere within the executive branch, a dramatic realignment of agencies took place under the new Office of Homeland Security that later became the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) with Ridge as its first secretary.⁴³

The result is a cumbersome new bureaucracy in DHS. Clearly, there are elements of the realignment that make sense, and some were overdue. Conservative opponents of DHS argue that a slower, incremental realignment would have achieved better results. Apologists argue that it is too soon to judge; it will take several years for the new department to reach maturity. Critics of HSC point out that the National Security Act of 1947 established the NSC to integrate the foreign, military, and domestic policies of national security and that an HSC to coordinate domestic policy was the wrong approach. Hurricane Katrina challenged the new organization and its additional layers of political appointees.

A significant reform of the intelligence community also took place. Since 1947, the director of central intelligence (DCI) both directed the national intelligence community and directed the Central Intelligence Agency. A new position, the director of national intelligence (DNI), was established to oversee the broader intelligence community, leaving a separate director to head the CIA. The various elements of the community detailed personnel to the new DNI staff. Responsibility for the president's morning intelligence briefing shifted to the DNI. Critics argued that the new staff had already grown beyond the lean staff desired and that another layer of bureaucracy had been added to an already layered and divided

⁴¹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 404.

⁴² Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 421.

⁴³ Speech given 15 September 2001, Tom Ridge to head HSC. A late September executive order established a permanent deputies staff, then DHS.

community. Apologists argued that the new organization had not yet had enough time to mature and show its value.

Established power relations were apparent by the 20 March 2003 invasion of Iraq. Rumsfeld personally removed units from the uniformed military's carefully developed force deployment lists. Still, the military was innovative and made quick work defeating Iraqi forces. When the initial military mission was accomplished, the lack of a meaningful follow-on interagency plan was apparent. The State Department had developed an interagency plan under Powell. It was submitted to Rice and apparently vanished. Retired general Jay Garner was given the original post-conflict reconstruction mission. Garner sought subject matter expertise from across the agencies, but Rumsfeld blocked appointments of State Department officials with lengthy experience with Iraq and marginalized State and the CIA.⁴⁴ Garner was quickly replaced by Ambassador L. Paul Bremer who reported to Rumsfeld at Defense but exercised considerable independence. Interagency planning and interagency implementation was widely regarded as a failure.

Organization and Process

The Bush administration announced its formal NSC organization and process in NSPD-1, signed 13 February 2001. Clinton's Presidential Decision Directives and Presidential Review Directives were abolished and both replaced by the National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) series.

The organization and interagency process laid out in NSPD-1 was a continuation of the NSC system established in the elder Bush administration and adopted by the Clinton administration. The hierarchy was the same, starting with the formal NSC and supported by the Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, and Policy Coordinating Committees (see Figure 12). The process, in practice, differed considerably.⁴⁵

NSPD-1 called for attendance at NSC meetings to include the statutory members, treasury secretary, national security assistant, and the statutory advisors. The president's chief of staff and economic policy assistant were also members. Others were invited when their jurisdiction was at issue, explicitly including the counsel to the president, director of OMB, and attorney general. NSC membership was not unlike the previous Bush and Clinton Councils.

The Principals Committee (PC) would be the primary forum for NSC principals to consider national security policy issues not requiring presidential decision. In previous administrations, attendance at the PC was the same as the formal NSC except that the president and vice president were not in attendance. In this administration, Vice President Cheney attended most PC meetings casting a large shadow over Rice's chairmanship.

Deputies Committee (DC) meetings were attended by deputies and undersecretaries from the various agencies. As with previous administrations, DC meetings attempted to achieve interagency solutions without raising them to higher levels, to perform quality control on written products on their way up the hierarchy, and to add specificity to taskings down the hierarchy. Unlike past administrations, members of the vice president's staff attended meetings. The DC meetings, like the higher level meetings, tended toward overarching issues.

Rather than the overarching issues addressed by the two higher-level committees, there were several Policy Coordinating Committees (PCCs) each with a more narrow focus on a region or on a single function. NSPD-1 specified six regional and eleven functional PCCs. Others could be initiated as needed. PCCs would be chaired at the under or assistant secretary level.

Regional boundaries were shifted from the Clinton administration's alignment to reflect the new administration's view of the geostrategic environment, including a less prominent role for Russia. Regional PCCs were established for Europe and Eurasia, Western Hemisphere, East Asia, South Asia, Near East and North Africa, and Africa. The secretary of state was given authority to designate an individual to chair each regional PCC.

⁴⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 420.

⁴⁵ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 388-441. Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 124-129.

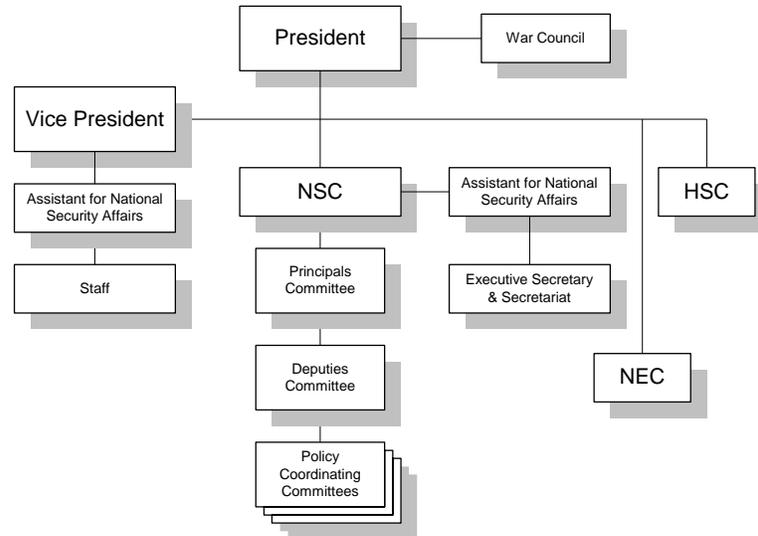


Figure 12. Bush II NSC Organization

Eleven functional PCCs were identified in NSPD-1. The assistant to the president for national security affairs would designate the chair for 6 PCCs:

- Democracy, Human Rights, and International Operations;
- Counter-Terrorism and National Preparedness;
- Arms Control;
- Proliferation, Counterproliferation, and Homeland Defense;
- Intelligence and Counterintelligence; and
- Records Access and Information Security.

The assistant to the president for economic policy would designate the chair for the Transnational Economic Issues PCC. The president's assistants for national security affairs and economic policy would jointly designate the chair for the Global Environment PCC. The secretaries of state, treasury, and defense, respectively, would designate the chair of the International Development and Humanitarian Assistance PCC; International Finance PCC; and Defense Strategy, Force Structure, and Planning PCC.

Like Johnson's Tuesday Lunch Group and Carter's Friday Breakfasts, Bush relied on an advisory group outside the formal NSC, his War Council. Bush met frequently, often in the Situation Room, with National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, CIA Director George Tenet, Chief of Staff Andrew Card, Secretary of State Colin Powell, Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Wolfowitz, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Richard B. Myers.

In practice, neither Rice nor Hadley had the wherewithal to manage the interagency process. Without a strong manager of the NSC process, the NSC staff was weakened relative to the vice president's staff and the defense secretary's powerful staff. The secretary of state's staff also exerted weak influence on the process.

Rumsfeld held little truck with formal process, either within his own department or in his approach to the president. When presidential action was needed, Rumsfeld could approach the president directly or indirectly through Cheney, Rice, or White House Chief of Staff Andrew Card. Only the easy went through Rice. Bypassing Rice further weakened her, the NSC staff, and the interagency process.

A separate power bloc developed based on the strong personal relationship between Vice President Cheney and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld. Although Rice was the closest and most loyal to the president, Cheney had considerable access to the president, and exerted greater influence. When Cheney and Rumsfeld were in agreement, only the president could overrule. When Cheney and Rumsfeld were in agreement, Defense processes dominated interagency processes.

Other developments served to strengthen Rumsfeld's position and to weaken the interagency process. The Office of the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy grew in power in Rumsfeld's Pentagon. During

the Cold War, USD (Policy) had been largely occupied by treaty obligations, military coalitions, and arms control. With the Cold War gone, its work began to look less like defense policy and more like foreign policy. It was under USD (Policy) that the neocons and hardliners took root. The neocons got their start in the Reagan administration, grew stronger in the first Bush administration, and achieved prominence in the second Bush administration. Paul Wolfowitz followed that path. He was an assistant secretary under Reagan, under secretary for policy under Bush 41, and deputy secretary of defense under Bush 43. Scooter Libby, Cheney's chief of staff, had served under Wolfowitz. The controversial Douglas Feith was appointed USD (Policy) in the Bush 43 administration.

Distrustful of the CIA, the DIA, and State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research, Rumsfeld established the Office of Special Plans, an alternative source of "policy-driven intelligence" in the Office of the USD (Policy). Its critics accused the new office of "cherry picking" the available intelligence to support predetermined policy choices. In addition, Rumsfeld established an Office of Strategic Communications, also under USD (Policy) to perform the functions no longer available from the defunct US Information Agency. Both of these new offices were created under Feith. Under the DIA, Rumsfeld established the Strategic Support Branch to reduce his dependence on the CIA for human intelligence.⁴⁶

The character of another organization changed in the Bush administration. The Defense Policy Board Advisory Committee (DPB) was chartered in 1985 to provide independent advice to the secretary of defense, deputy secretary of defense, and under secretary of defense for policy. The DPB reports to USD (Policy). Regular meetings are scheduled quarterly and are classified. Members are selected by USD (Policy) and approved by the secretary of defense. Members are drawn from past office holders, prominent industrialists, and limited numbers of active officials. Positions are unpaid and provide the member access and influence without confirmation or accountability.

An advisory board like the DPB can be constituted to provide a wide range of policy perspectives, but diversity of view was not desirable in this administration. Feith would nominate and Rumsfeld would approve a board packed with neoconservatives and hardliners. Neocon Richard Perle chaired and hardliners like Newt Gingrich exerted their influence from this out-of-sight and unaccountable position.

A hard-line echo chamber was established from USD (Policy) and the DPB through the secretary and deputy secretary of defense, and through the vice president to the president. Foreign policy expertise at State, warfighting expertise in the JCS, intelligence expertise across the community, was bypassed. Interagency processes were replaced by hard-line positions resident in the echo chamber. The hardliners began with the preferred solution. There was no need to engage the expertise resident in the agencies. Powell put it more graciously. Speaking of Bush, Powell said, "He knows what he wants to do, and what he wants to hear is how to get it done."⁴⁷

The interagency process is designed to orchestrate the instruments of national power housed in the departments and agencies of government. Instead of employing the interagency process, building on the capacities and expertise of the other branches of government, Rumsfeld hastily attempted to assemble in his own department all the instruments of power—under his command. Defense didn't dominate the interagency process, it largely replaced it.

Another common interpretation of events is that there was no process at all. "The process of assessment must consider all the relevant variables that can affect US interests, all the possible ways of pursuing US objectives and the pros and cons of each way, and all the things that could go wrong, as well as their likelihood of going wrong." The decision to invade Iraq was made without an assessment engaging the expertise resident inside and outside of government.⁴⁸

Synopsis and Segue

National security decision making was the domain of a small clique of likeminded individuals, specifically President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld, and a small number of senior

⁴⁶ Barton Gellman, "Secret Unit Expands Rumsfeld's Domain," *Washington Post*, 22 January 2005.

⁴⁷ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 401.

⁴⁸ Paul R. Pillar, "Informed Decisions: Process Before Policy," Accessed 10 October 2007, http://www.americansecurityproject.org/issues/iraq_lessons_learned.

defense officials. The publicly popular Secretary of State Powell, with a far greater understanding of the limits of military force and the importance of coalitions, was not likeminded. Marginalized as an advisor, he successfully applied his considerable executive skills in rehabilitating his department from past neglect. As secretary of state, Rice retained her personal relationship with the president and was weak in the application of executive authority to the position. The department suffered.

The competition for the positions of principal enunciator of foreign policy and of principal advisor to the president worked out differently than in previous administrations. Cheney dominated Rice in influencing presidential decisionmaking. Cheney, an articulate man with a calming and reassuring voice, avoided the limelight. Rice chose a low profile, but when she did speak, she lacked the requisite gravitas. Bush, lacking the communications skills of Reagan or Clinton, was the principal enunciator of US foreign policy.

In the various instantiations of the NSC's interagency process, the common practice was to engage at all levels in the agencies that would implement the policies being formulated. The process tapped the expertise resident in the agencies, exposed possible problems, and challenged assumptions. In the Bush administration, presidential decisions would be informed, instead, by a small group of like-minded advisors. The agencies, not engaged in the formulation process, were then expected to implement the president's decisions. The results were that the president was not informed by a range of thoroughly analyzed policy options and was supported by agencies that could not implement or did not understand the president's policies.

But there is scant evidence that the president wanted to consider a range of well reasoned policy options. Advice from outside the inner circle was seldom sought. The administration's policy elite offered answers, and the system, not engaged in the decision-making process, was expected to implement. When advice was offered, it was dismissed. Those in the field or on the staff who identified and brought problems to the attention of senior decision makers were deemed not to be team players. Decision makers and decision making were closeted. The word incompetent is often used to describe implementation.

Obama 2009-

President Barack H. Obama issued his first presidential policy directive, PPD-1, specifying his NSC organization on 13 February 2009. The NSC committee structure retained the now stable structure established by Bush 41. Presidential policy directives (PPDs) and presidential study directives (PSDs) replaced Bush 43's national security presidential directives. The NSC process was announced by memorandum on 18 March with subject "The 21st Century Interagency Process."

Obama inherited three large interagency councils: the National Security Council, Homeland Security Council, and National Economic Council. A February PSD initiated a study of White House organization with respect to homeland security and counterterrorism. A 26 May press release announced the merger of NSC and HSC staffs into a single National Security Staff. The HSC remained as did the position of assistant to the president for homeland security and counterterrorism on par with the assistant to the president for national security affairs with direct access to the president.

The Obama administration continued the hierarchy of committees established by the Bush 41 administration. The Principals Committee and the Deputies Committee remained in name and function. Bush 43's Interagency Working Groups were renamed Interagency Policy Committees.

Attendance at NSC meetings included the invited principal plus one. The statutory members and statutory advisors were accompanied by the treasury secretary, attorney general, secretary of homeland security, US representative to the UN, the president's chief of staff, and assistant to the president for national security affairs. Invitations were extended when international economic issues, homeland security and counterterrorism, or science and technology issues were on the agenda. Others would be invited as needed.

Events and Personalities

Just as Clinton's inauguration represented a baton passing from the World War II generation to the Vietnam generation, Obama's inauguration represented another generational transfer, but members of his

cabinet and senior members of Congress remained anchored in the past generation. Obama campaigned on being the first post-partisan president, but hyper-partisanship would impose severe restrictions on the administration.

President Obama, Vice President Joe Biden, and Secretary of State Clinton arrived from the Senate without significant executive experience and with varying degrees of national security experience. Obama's almost four years in the Senate included membership on the Foreign Relations Committee, while Biden, a senator since 1973, brought decades of service on the Committee. Clinton served on the Senate Armed Services Committee for six years. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a holdover from the Bush administration, brought considerable credibility and decades of experience in national security affairs. National security assistant, General James L. Jones, USMC (Ret), brought 40 years experience in both command and staff positions including service as commandant of the Marine Corps and supreme allied commander of NATO.

The most successful NSCs included a close working relationship between the president and national security assistant. Kennedy and Bundy, Nixon and Kissinger, had compatible working styles. Jones was accustomed to a military hierarchy and deliberative and formal staff process. His style might have been more compatible with Eisenhower's style, for obvious reasons. Obama's style is more like Kennedy's. Obama favored informal settings with trusted advisors rather than getting advice from a formal organization. Obama's decision making style included hours-long, intense, substantive discussions, and confident decision. Jones resigned his position 8 October 2010 and his deputy, Thomas Donilon, stepped up. Obama's and Donilon's styles are more compatible, the results remain to be seen.⁴⁹

Gates resigned 1 July 2011 after a long and distinguished career of public service and was succeeded by Leon Panetta who had been serving as director of the CIA. In turn, Panetta was followed by General David Petraeus, USA (Ret). Admiral Dennis Blair, USN (Ret), became the third director of national intelligence on 29 January 2009 after a successful naval career culminating as the commander in chief of the US Pacific Command, and after losing his presidency of the Institute for Defense Analyses over conflict of interest issues. The president asked for his resignation on 20 May 2010 partially due to the vagaries of the DNI position and partially due to policy and political missteps. Blair was the wrong person to stand between the president and the intelligence community. He was followed by low profile Lieutenant General James Clapper, USAF (Ret), former director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, director of the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, and undersecretary of defense for intelligence, a far better match for the job.

[merge below into above]

Obama retained the NSC committee structure established by the elder Bush. The customary adjustments were made to the NSC staff organization to accommodate changing emphases. The administration quickly merged NSC and HSC staffs into a single National Security Staff.

Initial top-level appointments included Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, a holdover from the previous administration, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, General James Jones, USMC (Ret) as national security assistant, Leon Panetta as director of the CIA, and Admiral Dennis Blair, USN (Ret) as director of national intelligence. The president's relative lack of experience in national security affairs was buttressed by Jones' and Gates' extensive experience. Biden brought decades of experience on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Clinton brought six years on the Senate Armed Services Committee. Jones' experience included combat in Vietnam and service as Marine Commandant and Supreme Allied Commander Europe. Gates had served competently in a number of significant national security positions.

Obama's decision making style is more like Kennedy's and Clinton's. It includes intense, hours-long, substantive discussions with trusted advisors. The process included diverse views, debate, and collegiality. Clinton brought the Centrist Democrat's interventionism. Biden brought caution born of the Vietnam era and a preference for discrete action over protracted conflict. Gates brought a preference for a strong military and some caution in its use. The process led to confident decision making but contained the potential to create a presidential bottleneck, and it did not thoroughly engage the expertise in the departments and agencies.

⁴⁹ I.M. Destler, "Donilon to the Rescue?" *Foreign Affairs*, 13 October 2010, and "Jonestown," *Foreign Affairs*, 30 April 2009.

Problematic initial appointments were addressed early and the normal cycle brought other replacements. Jones' style, a product of career development, relied on a strong staff organization producing well developed alternatives, a style more compatible with Eisenhower's NSC. Jones resigned and was succeeded by his deputy, Tom Donilon, whose style was more compatible with the president's. Blair was replaced by Lieutenant General James Clapper who had far more experience and credibility in the intelligence community. Robert Gates' retirement after decades of distinguished service brought Panetta to the Pentagon after competent service at the CIA. And General David Patraeus, USA (Ret), succeeded Panetta at the CIA after long and highly visible service that ended in personal scandal. Chuck Hagel, a combat veteran of Vietnam, replaced Patraeus. John Kerry, another Vietnam combat veteran, replaced Clinton.

Organization and Process

Membership on the formal NSC remained essentially the same as in recent administrations. The Principals Committee remained unchanged. The national security assistant served as chair of the committee and was responsible for determining the agenda, assuring that papers were prepared for input, and assuring that conclusions and decisions were promulgated. Biden regularly attended as did his predecessor, Cheney, but unlike earlier vice presidents.

The Deputies Committee also remained in name, composition, and purpose. It was responsible for reviewing and monitoring the interagency process, assuring that work coming up was properly prepared, and that a full range of options were considered and thoroughly analyzed. It was also responsible for overseeing policy implementation to assure that presidential decisions were being carried out faithfully and in a timely manner. And it was responsible for day-to-day crisis management. The deputy national security assistant chaired committee meetings. The DC was responsible for establishing the necessary interagency policy committees in accordance with presidential priorities.

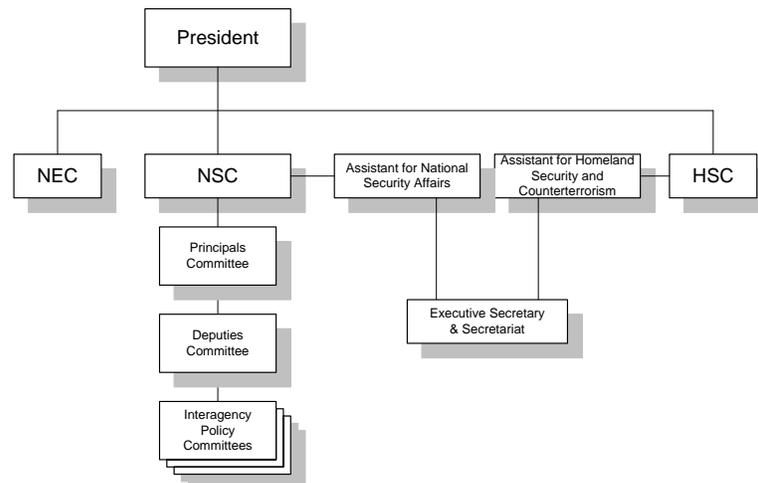


Figure 13. Obama NSC Organization

The 19 March 2009 memorandum, “The 21st Century Interagency Process,” was distributed under Jones' signature. It is easy to see specificity on aspects that were perceived to be weaknesses in the previous NSC process. One expert on NSC organization and process said, “Bobby Cutler would be proud,” referring back to the Eisenhower process. The process would be strategic, focused on the most important issues that may confront the president, so that crises would not be met with ad hoc responses. The process would assure against “premature policy consensus” by generating and analyzing multiple options.

Like Eisenhower's process, all affected agencies participate in policy formulation. “[A]gencies have a right to be aware and participate in the daily activities of the NSC and in interagency meetings.” All members of the NSC were invited to establish a senior person in their offices to serve as a bidirectional conduit between the agency and the NSC.

Meetings were to be regularly scheduled to establish a predictable process. A regular schedule prevented last minute meetings without agenda and preparation. Agenda was circulated in advance of meetings, participants were to be prepared to discuss agenda items and be able to speak for their agency. Meeting outcomes were to be distributed within 48 hours.

And finally, the NSC process included monitoring implementation of decisions made, like the Eisenhower NSC and unlike the Kennedy NSC.

Synopsis

At the time of this writing, the official histories have not yet been written on the Obama administration, and most presidential directives have not been released to the public. No catastrophic national security decisions have been apparent. The appointments of Gates and Clinton produced positive performances. Where appointments proved problematic, as with Jones and Blair, learning was demonstrated, and follow-on appointments represented improvements.
