

History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997

Summary

Since the end of World War II, each administration has sought to develop and perfect a reliable set of executive institutions to manage national security policy. Each President has tried to avoid the problems and deficiencies of his predecessors' efforts and install a policy-making and coordination system that reflected his personal management style. The National Security Council (NSC) has been at the center of this foreign policy coordination system, but it has changed many times to conform with the needs and inclinations of each succeeding chief executive.

The National Security Act of July 26, 1947, created the National Security Council under the chairmanship of the President, with the Secretaries of State and Defense as its key members, to coordinate foreign policy and defense policy, and to reconcile diplomatic and military commitments and requirements. This major legislation also provided for a Secretary of Defense, a National Military Establishment, Central Intelligence Agency, and National Security Resources Board. The view that the NSC had been created to coordinate political and military questions quickly gave way to the understanding that the NSC existed to serve the President alone. The view that the Council's role was to foster collegiality among departments also gave way to the need by successive Presidents to use the Council as a means of controlling and managing competing departments.

The structure and functioning of the NSC depended in no small degree upon the interpersonal chemistry between the President and his principal advisers and department heads. But despite the relationships between individuals, a satisfactory organizational structure had to be developed, for without it the necessary flow of information and implementation of decisions could not occur. Although a permanent staff gradually began to take shape, the main substantive work occurred in the departments.

President Truman's NSC was dominated by the Department of State. President Eisenhower's predilection for the military staff system, however, led to development of the NSC along those lines. The NSC staff coordinated an elaborate structure for monitoring the implementation of policies. The NSC's Executive Secretary became an assistant to the President, but was sufficiently self-effacing not to conflict with a powerful Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles.

President Kennedy may have initially looked to a strong Secretary of State to take charge of foreign policy-making, but turned to other strategies when it became apparent that the Department of State did not have sufficient authority over other departments. Kennedy, who preferred policy-making with ad hoc groups, dismantled Eisenhower's elaborate NSC machinery and allowed the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs and his staff to assume the primary coordination role. Kennedy's freewheeling style tended to erase the distinction between policy-making and operations that President Eisenhower's regimented staff system so carefully observed.

Sharing Kennedy's affinity for informal advisory arrangements, President Johnson let the NSC structure atrophy still further and, like his predecessor, relied instead on the National Security Adviser and his staff and various ad hoc groups and trusted friends. But he also consulted regularly with his Tuesday Lunch Group and in 1966 officially turned over responsibility for the supervision and coordination of interdepartmental activities overseas to the Secretary of State, with mixed results.

Under Presidents Nixon and Ford, Henry Kissinger's expanded NSC staff concentrated on acquiring analytical information from the various departments that would allow the National Security Adviser to put before the President the best possible range of options for decision. This system was in perfect accord with President Nixon's preference for detailed written expositions rather than interpersonal groupings. Kissinger concentrated on a handful of major issues and allowed some foreign matters to devolve by default on the Department of State, while weapons and international financial questions were dealt with by the Departments of Defense and the Treasury. Kissinger at first attempted to restore the separation between policy-making and implementation, but eventually found himself personally performing both roles.

Under President Carter, the National Security Adviser became a principal source of foreign affairs ideas and the NSC staff was recruited and managed with that in view. The Department of State

provided institutional memory and served as operations coordinator. Some saw this as an activism-conservatism duality, and the press eventually picked up on the tensions that were present. The National Security Adviser's role as public advocate rather than as custodian exacerbated the difficult relationships with State and other departments.

A collegial approach to government decision-making was emphasized in the Reagan administration. The National Security Adviser was downgraded, and the Chief of Staff to the President exercised a coordinating role in the White House. The collegiality among powerful department heads was not successfully maintained and conflicts became public. The NSC staff tended to emerge as a separate, contending party.

President Bush brought his own considerable foreign policy experience to his leadership of the National Security Council, and restored collegial relations among department heads. He reorganized the NSC organization to include a Principals Committee, Deputies Committee, and eight Policy Coordinating Committees. The NSC played an effective role during such major developments as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the unification of Germany, and the deployment of American troops in Iraq and Panama. The Clinton administration continued to emphasize a collegial approach within the NSC on national security matters. The NSC membership was expanded to include the Secretary of the Treasury, the U.S. Representative to the United Nations, the newly-created Assistant to the President for Economic Policy (who was also head of a newly-created National Economic Council or NEC, parallel to the NSC), the President's Chief of Staff, and the President's National Security Adviser.

For 50 years, 10 Presidents have sought to use the National Security Council system to integrate foreign and defense policies in order to preserve the nation's security and advance its interests abroad. Recurrent structural modifications over the years have reflected Presidential management style, changing requirements, and personal relationships.

Truman Administration, 1947-1953

The National Security Council was created by Public Law 80-253, approved July 26, 1947, as part of a general reorganization of the U.S. national security apparatus. Proponents of the reform realized that no institutional means for the coordination of foreign and defense policy existed, and that the informal management techniques employed by President Roosevelt during the war and President Truman after the war were not suitable for the long haul. The State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC) had been established in 1944 at the Assistant Secretary-level, and by 1945 the Secretaries of State, War, and Navy began holding weekly meetings. President Roosevelt had tended to trust White House aides like Harry Hopkins and Admiral William D. Leahy to carry on necessary day-to-day coordination. President Truman for a time relied upon Special White House Counsel Clark Clifford to provide the Hopkins-Leahy type of personal coordination. Clifford, who was dismayed by the disorder among agencies taking major post-war policy-making decisions, was a key figure in establishing the National Security Council to give institutional stability to national security policy-making.

The National Security Act of 1947 created the National Security Council under the chairmanship of the President, with only the following seven officials as permanent members: the President, the Secretaries of State, Defense, Army, Navy, Air Force, and the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board. The President could designate "from time to time" the Secretaries of other executive departments and the Chairmen of the Munitions Board and the Research and Development Board to attend meetings. While the new Central Intelligence Agency was to report to the NSC, the Director of Central Intelligence was not a member, although he attended meetings as an observer and resident adviser.

The function of the NSC as outlined in the 1947 act was to advise the President on integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to national security and to facilitate interagency cooperation. At the President's direction, the NSC could also assess and appraise risks to U.S. national security, consider policies, and then report or make recommendations to the President. The act created a small permanent staff headed by a civilian Executive Secretary appointed by the President. In neither the National Security Act of 1947 nor subsequent amendments was there provision for the position of National Security Adviser. Initially, the permanent NSC staff had no substantive role in the formulation, let alone implementation, of national security policies.

The NSC did, however, serve other purposes beyond its stated goal of advising on policy formulation. For Forrestal and the Navy, who were opposed to a strongly-unified Department of Defense, it provided top-level coordination of the three armed services without integration or unification. For Defense officials, it ensured a continuing military voice in formulation of related foreign and domestic policies during peacetime. For those, especially in Congress, who doubted Truman had adequate experience in foreign affairs or even doubted his abilities in general, the NSC offered the hope of evolving into a collegial policy-making body to reinforce the President.

Truman was clearly sensitive to this implied criticism and jealous of his prerogatives as Chief Executive. He did not like the idea of Congress legislating who could advise him on national security. Truman, therefore, kept the NSC at arm's length during its first 3 years. He attended the first session of the NSC on September 26, 1947, and then stayed away from all but 10 of the next 55 meetings. Truman continued to rely on a succession of personal White House advisers--George M. Elsey, Rear Admiral Robert Dennison, and W. Averell Harriman--to coordinate for him major foreign policy matters.

Initially, Truman named the Secretary of State as the ranking member of the Council in his absence and expected the Department of State to play the major role in formulating policy recommendations. This decision disappointed Defense officials who hoped that the Secretary of Defense would be allowed to preside in the President's absence and had offered to locate the NSC staff in the Pentagon. Clifford managed to resist Secretary of Defense Forrestal's efforts to gain control of the NSC. Procedures established during the Truman administration set the basic bureaucratic pattern which lasted through the Eisenhower administration: draft NSC papers written primarily by State's Policy Planning Staff, discussion at the NSC meeting, approval by the President resulting in an NSC Action, and dissemination to relevant parts of the bureaucracy. During its initial years, the NSC suffered from haphazard staffing and irregular meetings and was sometimes bypassed entirely. The executive secretaries of the Council had no real authority or influence beyond managing the staff process.

In 1949, the NSC was reorganized. Truman directed the Secretary of the Treasury to attend all meetings and Congress amended the National Security Act of 1947 to eliminate the three service secretaries from Council membership and add the Vice President--who assumed second rank from the Secretary of State--and the Joint Chiefs of Staff who became permanent advisers to the Council. NSC standing committees were created to deal with sensitive issues such as internal security. The NSC staff consisted of three groups: the Executive Secretary and his staff who managed the paper flow; a staff, made up of personnel on detail, whose role was to develop studies and policy recommendations (headed by the Coordinator from the Department of State); and the Consultants to the Executive Secretary who acted as chief policy and operational planners for each department or agency represented on the NSC.

Even Truman's overhaul of the machinery in 1949 did not create a National Security Council that fulfilled the role originally envisioned. Truman was partly to blame. He insisted on going outside NSC channels for national security advice, relying directly on his Secretaries of State and Defense, and increasingly on the Bureau of the Budget. Attendance at NSC meetings gradually increased to a point where the Council became too large for free discussion and degenerated into a bureaucratic battleground of departmental rivalries. NSC lines of authority, never clear, became increasingly blurred. By not attending most NSC meetings, Truman ensured that Council members would seek him out to press their own viewpoints privately.

In 1949, events reinforced the need for better coordination of national security policy: NATO was formed, military assistance for Europe was begun, the Soviet Union detonated an atomic bomb, and the Communists gained control in China. The Department of State seized the opportunity to review U.S. strategic policy and military programs, overcoming opposition from Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson and his allies in the Bureau of the Budget. Initially sidestepping formal NSC channels, State won approval of an ad hoc interdepartmental committee under its Policy Planning head, Paul Nitze. Their report, NSC 68, was submitted directly to Truman in February 1950, who sent it to the NSC for a cost analysis. An NSC committee authorized to consider costs and broader implications of NSC 68 began its work, but before it could be completed the Korean war broke out.

The war in Korea dramatically changed the functioning of the NSC under Truman. Thereafter the Council met every Thursday and the President attended all but 7 of its 71 remaining meetings. Truman

limited attendance to statutory members plus the Secretary of the Treasury, the Chairman of the JCS, the Director of Central Intelligence, two special advisers (Averell Harriman and Sidney Souers), and the NSC Executive Secretary.

The Secretariat was retained, but the Staff and the Consultants were eliminated in favor of a Senior Staff--Assistant Secretary level or higher--supported by Staff Assistants. Truman reiterated that the NSC was to be the channel for all important national security recommendations. During the first year of the Korean war, the NSC came as close as it ever did under Truman to fulfilling that role. Nonetheless, Truman still looked outside the formal NSC mechanism for advice and recommendations, relying on the NSC as much for staffing and coordination of interdepartmental views as for primary recommendations.

Truman made additional structural changes in the NSC in late 1950 and in 1951. He directed the head of the newly-created Office of Defense Mobilization to attend NSC meetings and then made him a member of the Senior Staff. With the Mutual Security Act of 1951, the newly-created Director for Mutual Security (Harriman) became a statutory member with the right to appoint a Senior Staff member. The Bureau of the Budget sent a representative to some Senior Staff meetings. In 1951, the Psychological Strategy Board (PSB), made up of the deputies at State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence, was created to coordinate the response to Soviet unconventional Cold War tactics. The PSB worked closely with the NSC in managing America's covert psychological counterattack. In his retirement President Truman denied any responsibility for "cloak and dagger operations" but it was during his Presidency that covert intelligence operations in support of foreign policy objectives was undertaken on an ever broadening scale. The NSC's first action (NSC 1/1) authorized covert action in the Italian elections. The formal institutionalization of covert actions was established as NSC 4 in December 1947, and NSC 10/2 of June 1948.

During Truman's last year, the Council and the Senior Staff met less frequently and NSC activity abated. Much interdepartmental planning on the NSC books was never completed by the end of the Truman administration. During this period, the NSC reflected Truman's sense of frustration as a lame-duck President caught in a stalemated war.

Eisenhower Administration, 1953-1961

Under President Eisenhower, the National Security Council system evolved into the principal arm of the President in formulating and executing policy on military, international, and internal security affairs. Where Truman was uncomfortable with the NSC system and only made regular use of it under the pressure of the Korean war, Eisenhower embraced the NSC concept and created a structured system of integrated policy review. With his military background, Eisenhower had a penchant for careful staff work, and believed that effective planning involved a creative process of discussion and debate among advisers compelled to work toward agreed recommendations.

The genesis of the new NSC system was a report prepared for the President in March 1953 by Robert Cutler, who became the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Cutler proposed a systematic flow of recommendation, decision, and implementation that he later described as the "policy hill" process. At the bottom of the hill, concerned agencies such as State and Defense produced draft policy recommendations on specific topics and worked for consensus at the agency level. These draft NSC papers went up the hill through the Planning Board, created to review and refine the recommendations before passing them on for full NSC consideration. The NSC Planning Board met on Tuesday and Friday afternoons and was composed of officials at the Assistant Secretary level from the agencies with permanent or standing representation on the Council, as well as advisers from the JCS and CIA. Hundreds of hours were spent by the Board reviewing and reconstructing proposed papers for the NSC. Cutler resigned in 1958 in exhaustion. The top of the foreign policy-making hill was the NSC itself, chaired by the President, which met regularly on Thursday mornings.

The Council consisted of the five statutory members: the President, Vice President, Secretaries of State and Defense, and Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization. Depending on the subject under discussion, as many as a score of other senior Cabinet members and advisers, including the Secretary of the Treasury, the Chairman of the JCS, and the Director of Central Intelligence, attended and participated. The agenda included regular briefings by the Director of Central Intelligence on worldwide developments affecting U.S. security, and consideration of the policy papers advanced by the Planning

Board. The upshot of the discussions were recommendations to the President in the form of NSC Actions. The President, who participated in the discussion, normally endorsed the NSC Action, and the decision went down the hill for implementation to the Operations Coordinating Board.

President Eisenhower created the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) to follow up on all NSC decisions. The OCB met regularly on Wednesday afternoons at the Department of State, and was composed of the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Directors of CIA, USIA, and ICA, and the Special Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs and Security Operations Coordination. The OCB was the coordinating and implementing arm of the NSC for all aspects of the implementation of national security policy. NSC action papers were assigned to a team from the OCB for follow-up. More than 40 interagency working groups were established with experts for various countries and subjects. This 24-person staff of the OCB supported these working groups in which officials from various agencies met each other for the first time.

The President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, a post held under Eisenhower by Cutler, Dillon Anderson, William H. Jackson, and Gordon Gray, oversaw the flow of recommendations and decisions up and down the policy hill, and functioned in Council meetings to brief the Council and summarize the sense of discussion. The Special Assistant was an essential facilitator of the decision-making system, but, unlike the National Security Adviser created under Kennedy, had no substantive role in the process. The NSC staff managed by the Special Assistant grew during the Eisenhower years, but again had no independent role in the policy process.

President Eisenhower had great confidence in the efficacy of covert operations as a viable supplement or alternative to normal foreign policy activities. The seeming clear success of the operations to overthrow Iranian populist leader Mossadegh in 1953 and the left-leaning President Arbenz in Guatemala in 1954 was not without their crisis moments in the White House. In 1954 NSC 5412 provided for the establishment of a panel of designated representatives of the President and the Secretaries of State and Defense to meet regularly to review and recommend covert operations. Gordon Gray assumed the chairmanship of the "5412 Committee" as it was called, and all succeeding National Security Advisers have chaired similar successor committees, variously named "303", "40", "Special Coordinating Committee," which, in later Presidential administrations, were charged with the review of CIA covert operations.

President Eisenhower also created the position of staff secretary with the responsibility to screen all foreign policy and military documents coming to the President. While Colonel Andrew Goodpaster held this position, he tended to eclipse the Special Assistant for National Security.

The strength of the NSC system under Eisenhower was that it provided for regular, fully-staffed, interagency review of major foreign and national security issues, culminating in discussion and decision at the highest level of government. The resulting Presidentially-approved NSC papers provided policy guidance at every level of implementation. Eisenhower felt that the regular policy discussions kept his principal advisers fully informed, in step with one another, and prepared to react knowledgeably in the event of crisis. His commitment to the system was such that he chaired every Council meeting he could attend (329 of a total of 366). The NSC meetings, including prior briefings and subsequent review of NSC Actions, constituted the largest single item on his weekly agenda.

Secretary of State Dulles, on the other hand, had reservations about the NSC system. He was the strongest personality in the Eisenhower Cabinet and jealously guarded his role as principal adviser to the President on foreign policy. He had constant, direct access to the President and did not feel that some of the most sensitive issues should be discussed in groups as large as were involved in most NSC meetings. He drew a sharp line between the NSC policy review process and the day-to-day operations of foreign policy, which he maintained were the province of the Department of State. Dulles and his deputies were not comfortable with the scope the NSC review system gave to Secretary of the Treasury George Humphrey, another strong figure in the Cabinet, to intrude budgetary limitations into policy considerations. And Dulles successfully resisted a proposal to substitute the Vice President for the Under Secretary of State as chairman of the OCB, arguing that such a change would impinge on his role as principal adviser to the President on foreign policy.

Critics of the Eisenhower NSC system have argued that it was inflexible, overstaffed, unable to anticipate and react to immediate crises, and weighed down by committees reporting in great detail on long checklists of minor policy concerns. The most thorough critique of the system emerged from the hearings conducted in 1960-1961 by the Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, known as the Jackson Subcommittee for its chairman, Senator Henry Jackson. Cutler and NSC Executive Secretary James Lay testified in support of the effectiveness of the system, but their testimony was offset by that of former Truman administration officials such as George Kennan, Paul Nitze, and Robert Lovett. They argued that foreign policy was being made by a passive President influenced by a National Security Council rendered virtually useless by ponderous, bureaucratic machinery. Basically, they argued, the NSC was a huge committee, and suffered from all the weaknesses of committees. Composed of representatives of many agencies, its members were not free to adopt the broad, statesmanlike attitude desired by the President, but, rather, were ambassadors of their own departments, clinging to departmental rather than national views. To make matters worse, critics added, the NSC system by its very nature was restricted to continuing and developing already established policies and was incapable of originating new ideas or major innovations. The critics suggested replacement of the formal, "over-institutionalized" NSC structure with a smaller, less formal NSC which would offer the President a clear choice of alternatives on a limited number of major problems.

Eisenhower was certainly not a passive President, dominated on foreign policy and national security issues by his Secretary of State. In fact, Eisenhower was actively in command of his administration, and the NSC system met his instincts and requirements. There is substance in the criticism that the Eisenhower NSC became to some extent the prisoner of a rigidly bureaucratic process, but the criticism misses the point that Eisenhower and Dulles did not attempt to manage fast-breaking crises or day-to-day foreign policy through the NSC apparatus. An examination of several of the major foreign policy problems that confronted the Eisenhower administration reveals that the NSC system was used to manage some and was virtually bypassed in others. When the question involved a policy debate between departments with strongly-held, contending positions, as it did in the case of the debate between the Departments of State and Defense in 1956-1957 over whether to introduce a more modern generation of weapons into Korea, the NSC process focused debate and produced an agreed decision after discussion of three draft policy papers.

Crisis situations, however, such as the Suez crisis of 1956, the off-shore island crises of 1955 and 1958, and the Lebanon crisis of 1958, were typically managed through telephone conversations between Eisenhower, Dulles, and other principal advisers, and through small meetings with the President in the White House, normally involving Dulles and other concerned advisers. Eisenhower sometimes used trusted NSC staffers to serve as an intermediary to gain information outside the chain of command as he did with Colonel Goodpaster during the Quemoy crisis in 1955. There was great similarity between this process of crisis management and that adopted by subsequent Presidents, such as Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon, except for the fact that the ad hoc meetings in the Eisenhower White House did not involve a National Security Adviser as a substantive participant. And in the event that aspects of crisis management depended on contact with the critical man-on-the-spot, as it did in 1958 when Deputy Under Secretary of State Robert Murphy was dispatched to Lebanon to attempt to defuse the crisis, his instructions came from the Department of State and he reported to the Secretary of State rather than directly to the White House, as became the practice during the height of the Vietnam conflict.

When Eisenhower briefed President-elect Kennedy on the NSC system, and when Gray briefed his successor McGeorge Bundy, they emphasized the importance of the NSC machinery in the management of foreign policy and national security affairs. They might have been more persuasive had they pointed to the fact that the NSC system was essentially limited to policy review and was not used to manage crises or day-to-day foreign policy.

Kennedy Administration, 1961-1963

President Kennedy, who was strongly influenced by the report of the Jackson Subcommittee and its severe critique of the Eisenhower NSC system, moved quickly at the beginning of his administration to deconstruct the NSC process and simplify the foreign policy-making process and make it more intimate. In a very short period after taking office, the new President moved to reduce the NSC staff from 74 to 49, limit the substantive officers to 12, and hold NSC meetings much less frequently while

sharply curtailing the number of officers attending. The Operation Coordination Board was abolished, and the NSC was, at the President's insistence, pulled back from monitoring the implementation of policies. The coordination of foreign policy decisions was ostensibly left to the State Department (and other agencies as necessary).

McGeorge Bundy's appointment as the President's National Security Adviser inaugurated this position as it has essentially continued down to the present. The definition of Bundy's responsibilities and authority unfolded and grew during the Kennedy presidency. Bundy's considerable intellectual and bureaucratic abilities as well as close personal relationship with the new President contributed much to evolution of the National Security Adviser position and the new role of the NSC. In a letter to Senator Jackson in September 1961 Bundy sought to define the early relationship sought with the State Department.

". . . the President has made it very clear that he does not want a large, separate organization between him and his Secretary of State. Neither does he wish any question to arise as to the clear authority and responsibility of the Secretary of State, not only in his own Department, and not only in such large-scale related areas as foreign aid and information policy, but also as the agent of coordination in all our major policies toward other nations."

The Department of State's apparent failure effectively to coordinate the administration's response to the Bay of Pigs crisis in early 1961 led to a series of measures aimed at providing the President with better independent advice from the government. It also sparked the NSC process to reenter the arena of monitoring the implementation of policy. The most important step in this direction was the establishment of the Situation Room in the White House in 1962. The Sit Room, located next to Bundy's office in the basement of the West Wing of the White House, was directly linked to all the communication channels of the State Department and the Department of Defense, as well as to some of the channels of the CIA. The Sit Room allowed the President and his foreign affairs advisers to keep abreast of all the cable traffic from overseas posts. More than anything else, the Sit Room allowed Bundy and his NSC staff to expand their involvement in the international activities of foreign affairs community and become, in essence, "a little State Department."

As National Security Adviser, Bundy divided his work with his Deputy, Walt Rostow (and later Carl Kaysen). While Bundy dealt with the immediate day-to-day crises and the range of European affairs, Rostow focused upon long-term planning with a particular concentration on Latin American affairs. Kaysen focused upon foreign trade and economic affairs matters that became increasingly important in the latter part of the Kennedy Presidency.

In addition to Bundy and the NSC staff, President Kennedy reached out still further for foreign affairs advice. Early in 1961 the President appointed General Maxwell Taylor to serve as his military representative and provide liaison with the government agencies and defense and intelligence establishments on military-political issues confronting the administration. Taylor in effect took up the role filled by Admiral Leahy in the Roosevelt White House. General Taylor advised the President on military matters, intelligence, and Cold War planning and paid special attention to the continuing Berlin crisis and growing difficulties in Indochina. The Taylor-Rostow mission to Indochina at the end of 1961 and the resulting report led to military decisions on aid to South Vietnam and the entry of the United States into the Vietnamese quagmire. Taylor had a very personal connection with the President and was not replaced in 1962 when he left. But in 1962 Kennedy appointed former State Department Under Secretary Chester Bowles to serve as his Special Adviser on Foreign Affairs. Bowles had not survived conflicts with Secretary of State Rusk and his appointment to the White House was partly compensatory. His brief was seemingly intended to be the development of policy toward the Third World, but after a year he left Washington to become Ambassador to India.

The NSC continued to meet during the Kennedy Presidency, but far less frequently than had been the case under his predecessor. It met 15 times during the first 6 months of 1961, then averaged one meeting a month for the rest of his Presidency, reaching a total of 49 meetings. "Much that used to flow routinely to the weekly meetings of the Council is now settled in other ways, Bundy reported in September 1961. Some of the NSC activities were taken up by a smaller, more select body called the Standing Group. This small NSC coordinating panel was chaired by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs and included the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, and

Bundy. It considered a wide range of foreign affairs issues at 14 meetings the last of which was in August 1962. The Standing Group resumed in April 1963 with Bundy as its chairman and with the added membership of the Attorney General, the Chairman of the JCS, the Under Secretary of the Treasury, the Director of USIA, and Administrator of AID. It also met 14 times during the remainder of the Kennedy Presidency.

The Kennedy administration abandoned the Eisenhower-era efforts at long-range planning in favor of a heavy reliance upon ad hoc inter-agency working groups functioning in a "crisis management" atmosphere. The leadership in these special groups did not automatically fall to the State Department. Trusted officials from other agencies or outside the foreign affairs community often took the lead. There were special groups on counter-insurgency (chaired by General Taylor), on Vietnam, and the Berlin crisis, the latter presided over by former Secretary of State Dean Acheson. The Executive Committee of the National Security Council (ExCom) was established in the autumn of 1962 to manage the emerging Cuban Missile Crisis. A much smaller group than the NSC, it consisted of the President as chairman, the Vice President, the Secretaries of State, Defense, and the Treasury, the Attorney General (the President's brother), the Director of Central Intelligence, and Chairman of the JCS as well as National Security Adviser Bundy. After the missile crisis was successfully weathered, the ExCom continued to meet with Cuba as its primary subject but with discussions of other matters during its 42 meetings between October 1962 and March 1963.

U.S. covert actions and paramilitary activity during the Kennedy administration were administered generally outside the NSC system. Following the Bay of Pigs fiasco in early 1961, the President reconstituted the 5412 Committee that monitored covert actions as the Special Group. Chaired by National Security Adviser Bundy, the new body included the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Under Secretaries from the State and Defense Departments. This body reviewed and endorsed a number of covert action projects in the first 2 years of the Kennedy Presidency. President Kennedy also added to the responsibilities of the President's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board (PFIAB), originally created by President Eisenhower in 1956. Kennedy met with the Board 12 times and conferred frequently with individual members. The Board reviewed a wide range of intelligence matters and made some 120 recommendations to the President.

In effect, Bundy had the first and last words on policy. He worked in close proximity to the President who valued highly his competence and opinions; he served on most major ad hoc committees and the Executive Committee, and he attended the occasional formal meetings of the National Security Council. It is possible to overemphasize Bundy's substantive skewing of Presidential policy formulation. Most observers credited him with being scrupulously fair in presenting opinions of the agencies to the President, even when they conflicted with his own. He offered his views to Kennedy only when specifically asked. Bundy's influence was oblique rather than direct. Essentially, he served an administrative function and did not seek to advance a personal overview of American security and foreign policy. The most significant aspect of Bundy's tenure as Kennedy's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs was that he headed an aggressive Presidential staff that believed its job was to protect the President's interests, provide him with independent advice, and lead a recalcitrant bureaucracy toward his policies. In addition, Bundy was an effective channel to the President for his activist staff.

Johnson Administration, 1963-1969

The abrupt transition of power to the Johnson administration brought no dramatic change in the formal role of the National Security Council. Like Kennedy, Johnson much preferred small, informal advisory meetings to large Council meetings supported by an elaborately organized staff. According to one of his aides, Johnson felt the NSC was "not a live institution, not suited to precise debate for the sake of decision." Moreover, Johnson thought NSC meetings were prone to leaks--they were "like sieves," he once remarked--and he inherited advisers who shared his views. Secretary of State Dean Rusk later observed that during the Kennedy Presidency neither he nor Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara liked to "get into much discussion" in the NSC with "so many people sitting around the room" and the possibility of leaks so great.

Despite his misgivings about the Council, Johnson started out convening it fairly regularly, about every 2 weeks on average during his first 11 months in office. The sessions dealt with a broad range of issues but were relatively brief in duration and, after May 1964, consisted largely of briefings. With the

approach of the Presidential election in November, Johnson suspended NSC meetings, but then in early 1965 he shifted gears. From February 1965 through mid-1966 he convened the NSC almost exclusively to discuss Vietnam, doing so irregularly and, following a flurry of meetings in February 1965, infrequently. Several participants later charged that Johnson used the NSC during 1965 not to consult on Vietnam as he committed major U.S. ground forces but to "rubber stamp" decisions made beforehand. The other major foreign policy crisis of the period, the intervention in the Dominican Republic during April and May 1965, was not brought before the Council at all.

As the Council's formal advisory role diminished, so too did its institutional support. Johnson treated the NSC staff as a personal staff, and dropped meetings of the NSC Standing Group, which convened intermittently under Kennedy to deal with planning and operations problems. Official records of Council actions were discontinued, and National Security Action Memorandums, which Kennedy had instituted to inform government agencies of Presidential decisions requiring follow-up action, were issued with decreasing frequency. Whereas Kennedy had issued 272 NSAMs in less than three years, Johnson issued 46 in 1964, 35 during 1965 and 1966, and a mere 14 during his final 2 years in office.

Disinclined to use the Council meetings for advice, Johnson, like Kennedy, relied heavily on his National Security Advisers: McGeorge Bundy, who remained in office through February 1966, and Bundy's successor, Walt Rostow, who served to the end of the administration. Indeed, scholars looking at the evolution of the NSC from its inception to the 1970s contend that the National Security Adviser and his White House centered staff increasingly assumed a more prominent role than the official National Security Council and that Johnson, like Kennedy before him, played a key role in this development. Focusing on Johnson's Presidency alone, however, some of his advisers, including Secretary of State Rusk and Walt Rostow, insisted that the Council's advisory role was actually performed principally by another institution, the Tuesday Lunch Group, and that those lunch meetings were in effect regular NSC meetings.

The small, informal, Tuesday luncheon meetings were much more to Johnson's liking than formal NSC meetings and quickly gained a prominent place in the decision-making process. Embracing the Secretaries of State and Defense and the National Security Adviser, the Tuesday Lunch Group met 27 times between February and September 1964. In all Johnson convened some 160 Tuesday luncheons during his Presidency, and the group was gradually expanded to include his press secretary, the Director of Central Intelligence, and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The participants uniformly praised the "strong collegial sense" at the meetings and the opportunity for "extraordinary candor," but subordinates often complained that the secrecy and informality that encouraged candor also made it hard for them to prepare their superiors properly for the meetings and implement the decisions that were reached.

Upon succeeding Bundy as National Security Adviser in 1966, Rostow came to grips with the issue of how to make effective use of the formal Council, which by then was virtually moribund. He advised Johnson neither to pretend to use the Council meetings for making major decisions nor to focus on day-to-day operations. Instead he proposed regular, "anticipatory-type" sessions devoted, as Johnson explained at the first of the new series, to "discussion of complex problems requiring careful exploration before they were to come to him for decision." Clearly intended to complement rather than challenge the primary advisory roles of the Tuesday luncheons and the National Security Adviser and his staff, NSC meetings for the balance of the administration considered a broad range of anticipated rather than pressing issues and gave little attention to Vietnam. As one NSC staff member put it, Council members now convened for "reflective and educational discussions, rather than decision-making meetings."

When not relying for advice and support on the Tuesday Lunch Group and the National Security Adviser and his small staff, Johnson turned to a variety of ad hoc groups and trusted friends inside and outside the government. Following the outbreak of the Six Day War, for example, he established an NSC Special Committee, modeled on the NSC Executive Committee that met during the Cuban Missile Crisis, to coordinate U.S. policy in the Middle East for several weeks. But none of these arrangements substituted fully for the functions that the NSC's Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board provided under Eisenhower.

In March 1966 the Johnson White House sought to remedy this situation through issuance of NSAM 341, the brainchild of General Maxwell Taylor. NSAM 341 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 Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG), chaired by the Under Secretary of State, and several Interdepartmental Regional Groups (IRGs) beneath it, each chaired by an Assistant Secretary of State. But following a fast-paced start, the SIG entered a period of quiescence that saw it meet only three times from late July 1966 to mid-July 1967, reflecting in part Under Secretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach's initial hesitancy to exploit its possibilities upon taking office in October 1966. The SIG gained new vitality in mid-1967, however, and together with the more active IRGs played a complementary and supporting role to the Secretary of State and the NSC, especially in easing the burdens of the national security adviser and his staff with respect to interagency coordination and follow-up.

The innovations of a Presidential administration often do not survive its close, reflecting as they do the distinctive views and management style of the President and his immediate advisers. The close of the Johnson administration brought an end to several of the adaptations it had made to manage foreign policy: Tuesday luncheons, anticipatory-type NSC meetings, and the SIG/IRG structure.

Nixon Administration, 1969-1974

President Nixon and his National Security Adviser, Henry Kissinger, dominated the making of U.S. foreign policy during the Nixon Presidency. As Nixon recalled in his memoirs: "From the outset of my administration, . . . I planned to direct foreign policy from the White House. Therefore I regarded my choice of a National Security Adviser as crucial." Henry Kissinger worked through a National Security Council apparatus he revised and fashioned to serve his needs and objectives and those of the President. The close relationship between the President and the National Security Adviser was the basis for their ability to carry out American foreign affairs leadership around the world. The National Security Council system was the mechanism for the period of unprecedented American activism in foreign policy and the exercise of Kissinger's growing power. Kissinger wrote later that "in the final analysis the influence of a Presidential Assistant derives almost exclusively from the confidence of the President, not from administrative arrangements." The two men developed a conceptual framework that would guide foreign policy decisions. Kissinger's intellectual ability, his ambition, and his frequent discussions with Nixon were all factors in increasing within the government both his own power and the unchallenged authority of the NSC system he personally directed.

The Kissinger NSC system sought to combine features of the Johnson and Eisenhower systems. The Senior Interdepartment Group (SIG) of the Johnson White House was replaced by an NSC Review Group (somewhat similar to the Eisenhower-era NSC Planning Group) together with an NSC Under Secretary's Committee. The Kissinger NSC relied upon interdepartmental working groups (IGs) to prepare for NSC directives. Critics observed that 10 IG meetings prepared the way for each SIG-level meeting, and 5 SIG meetings were needed to prepare for each NSC meeting.

White House direction of foreign policy meant the eclipse of the Department of State and Secretary William Rogers. Nixon did not trust the Department bureaucracy. According to Kissinger, Nixon picked Rogers, who was inexperienced in foreign affairs, to indicate that the President would dominate the relationship between the NSC and the Department of State. Throughout Nixon's first term, only Kissinger participated in the President's important discussions with foreign state visitors. Nixon excluded Rogers from his first meeting with Soviet Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin in February 1969. The NSC also took control of the process of clearing key policy cables to overseas posts. Kissinger and Rogers became rivals and developed formal contacts in place of substantive discussions.

The NSC-Department of State power relationship was reflected in institutional arrangements. During the transition period before Nixon assumed power, Kissinger recommended that the NSC be buttressed by a structure of subcommittees to draft analyses of policy that would present clear decision options to the President. The National Security Adviser was to be chairman of a Review Group to screen interagency papers before their presentation to the full NSC chaired by the President. Nixon insisted on the abolition of the SIG chaired by the Department of State. These recommendations were incorporated in National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM) 2, issued shortly after Nixon's

inauguration on January 20, 1969. NSDM 2 was rightly perceived as a victory for Kissinger and helped to establish his foreign policy authority at the outset of the administration.

Kissinger moved quickly to establish the policy dominance of the NSC. He expanded its staff from 12 to 34; not only was it the cadre for his centralized policy-making, but it was also his antennae throughout the bureaucratic structure. In the President's name, Kissinger set the NSC agendas and issued the numerous National Security Study Memoranda (NSSM) that set forth the precise needs for interagency policy papers. An NSC Under Secretaries Committee, chaired by the Deputy Secretary of State, gradually withered away. By the time the increasingly complicated committee structure was settled, Kissinger chaired six NSC-related committees: the Senior Review Group (non-crisis, non-arms control matters), the Washington Special Actions Group (serious crises), the Verification Panel (arms control negotiations), the 40 Committee (clandestine operations), the Intelligence Committee (policy for the intelligence community), and the Defense Program Review Committee (relation of the defense budget to foreign policy aims).

Nixon also increasingly bypassed the Department of State to supervise personally sensitive negotiations in order to avoid what he and President Nixon agreed were likely bureaucratic disputes and inertia. The President made clear that he wanted the National Security Adviser to conduct important matters directly out of his office. Nearly every foreign ambassador called upon Kissinger at least once. With Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin, Kissinger maintained a special relationship that completely bypassed the Department of State and Secretary Rogers. Dobrynin was told by Kissinger to deal with the Secretary of State only on a limited range of less vital matters. Kissinger also maintained similar relationships with Chinese leader Chou En-lai and Israeli Ambassador Rabin.

In carrying on his activist, operational undertakings, Kissinger relied upon special controlled communications. CIA communications were used for his "back channel" messages so that the Department of State was kept in the dark. He also used the White House Communication Agency including the use of special aircraft as communication centers. With his negotiations in Paris in 1971 regarding Vietnam, with Israelis and Arabs after 1973, and with the Soviet Union in advance of summit meetings, Kissinger was a traveling negotiator, and the NSC was a system on the move. Jeanne Davis, the NSC Executive Secretary, also facilitated the handling of sensitive correspondence by propelling the NSC staff into the computer age with a document tracking system unheard of by Kissinger's predecessors.

The waning of Nixon's power during the Watergate affair further increased Kissinger's influence. On September 22, 1973, Kissinger became Secretary of State, replacing Rogers. For the first time, one individual held simultaneously the positions of National Security Adviser and Secretary of State.

Under these unique circumstances, Kissinger strengthened his institutional base as the administration's principal foreign policy adviser. Kissinger later admitted, however, that the union of the two positions did not work. Department of State representatives were his subordinates while he wore his Secretary of State hat. When he chaired a meeting, they had to represent his point of view or else all interdepartmental matters would be outside his control. Kissinger indicated he was in an inherently absurd position of either pushing his Department's views as chairman or dissociating himself from his subordinates.

Ford Administration, 1974-1977

President Ford, who assumed office in August 1974, was relatively inexperienced in foreign affairs. He therefore relied almost exclusively on Kissinger's expertise and advice. During 1975, however, there developed strong public and congressional disapproval of the accretion of so much power over foreign policy in the hands of one man. As part of a Cabinet shakeup on November 3, 1975, Ford named Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, Kissinger's deputy at the NSC, as National Security Adviser.

Kissinger was at first resentful of the loss of his unique, dual position. He soon discovered, however, as he wrote in his memoirs, that Scowcroft's appointment in no way diminished his real power within the administration because he kept Ford's confidence and unlimited access, and Scowcroft in no way sought to advocate policies in competition with the Secretary of State. Kissinger continued to have a cordial relationship with Scowcroft, and both men exchanged ideas constantly. In turn, Scowcroft was content to operate in a quiet, unobtrusive way. He took seriously the NSC obligation to present the

President with clear analyses and options for decision. He managed a toned-down version of the Kissinger NSC system that was compatible with the Secretary of State's role as the President's chief foreign policy adviser. Many of the most aggressive members of Kissinger's NSC team also made the move to State, allowing Scowcroft to fashion a staff that reflected the new relationships.

Carter Administration, 1977-1981

Carter began his term determined to eliminate the abuses he ascribed to the Kissinger NSC under Nixon and Ford. He believed that Kissinger had amassed too much power during his tenure as NSC Adviser and Secretary of State, and effectively shielded his Presidents from competing viewpoints within the foreign policy establishment. Carter resolved to maintain his access to a broad spectrum of information by more fully engaging his Cabinet officers in the decision-making process. He envisaged the role of the National Security Council to be one of policy coordination and research, and reorganized the NSC structure to ensure that the NSC Adviser would be only one of many players in the foreign policy process. Carter chose Zbigniew Brzezinski for the position of National Security Adviser because he wanted an assertive intellectual at his side to provide him with day-to-day advice and guidance on foreign policy decisions.

Initially, Carter reduced the NSC staff by one-half and decreased the number of standing NSC committees from eight to two. All issues referred to the NSC were reviewed by one of the two new committees, either the Policy Review Committee (PRC) or the Special Coordinating Committee (SCC). The PRC focused on specific issues that fell largely within the jurisdiction of one department. Its chairmanship rotated to whichever department head had primary responsibility for the issue, most often the Department of State, and committee membership was frequently expanded as circumstances warranted.

Unlike the Policy Review Committee, the Special Coordinating Committee was always chaired by the NSC Adviser. Carter believed that by making the NSC Adviser chairman of only one of the two committees, he would prevent the NSC from being the overwhelming influence on foreign policy decisions. The SCC was charged with considering issues that cut across several departments, including oversight of intelligence activities, arms control evaluation, and crisis management. Much of the SCC's time during the Carter years was spent on SALT issues.

President Carter changed the name of the documents in the decision-making process, although the mechanics of NSC review differed little from that of previous administrations. The Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM) replaced the National Security Study Memorandum (NSSM), and the Presidential Directive (PD) supplanted the National Security Decision Memorandum (NSDM). PRMs identified topics to be researched by the NSC, defined the problem to be analyzed, set a deadline for the completion of the study, and assigned responsibility for it to one of the two NSC committees. If the selected committee were the Policy Review Committee, a member was designated to serve as study chairman. The study chairman assigned an ad hoc working group to complete the study, which was ultimately reviewed by the responsible committee (either the PRC or SCC). When the committee was satisfied that the study had incorporated meaningful options and supporting arguments, the study's conclusions went to the President in a 2- or 3-page memorandum, which in turn formed the basis for a Presidential Directive.

The actual operation of the NSC under Carter was less structured than under previous Presidents. The Council held few formal meetings, convening only 10 times, compared with 125 meetings during the 8 years of the Nixon and Ford administrations. Instead, Carter used frequent, informal meetings as a decision-making device, typically his Friday breakfasts, usually attended by the Vice President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the NSC Adviser, and the chief domestic adviser. The President counted on the free flow of ideas, unencumbered by a formal setting, to increase the chances of an informed decision.

Critics have contended that the Carter NSC staff was deficient in certain respects. The NSC's emphasis on providing advice was effected at the expense of some of its other functions, particularly its responsibility to monitor implementation of the President's policies. Also, the President's and some of his principals' commitment to arms control skewed the formation and execution of a broad range of foreign policy options on national security questions. Without any clearly-developed foreign policy

principles beyond a commitment to arms control, he often changed his mind, depending on the advice he was receiving at the time.

Carter's preference for informality and openness increased the diversity of views he received and complicated the decision-making process. Every Friday, for example, the President breakfasted with Vice President Mondale, Secretary of State Vance, Secretary of Defense Brown, Brzezinski, and several White House advisers. No agendas were prepared and no formal records were kept of these meetings, sometimes resulting in differing interpretations of the decisions actually agreed upon. This problem led to one of the most embarrassing episodes of the Carter administration in which the United States had to retract a UN vote involving Israel and Jerusalem. Brzezinski was careful, in managing his own weekly luncheons with Secretaries Vance and Brown in preparation for NSC discussions, to maintain a complete set of careful notes. Brzezinski also sent weekly reports to the President on major foreign policy undertakings and problems, with recommendations for courses of action. President Carter enjoyed these reports and frequently annotated them with his own views. Brzezinski and the NSC used these Presidential notes (159 of them) as the basis for NSC actions.

At the outset of the administration, Brzezinski successfully persuaded Carter to make the National Security Adviser chairman of the SCC. This meant that Brzezinski was given oversight responsibility for the SALT negotiations, which became an important focus of the Carter administration's foreign policy. Brzezinski's coordination of the arms control process also gave him major input into the administration's policy toward the Soviet Union. Thus from the beginning, Brzezinski made sure that the new NSC institutional relationships would assure him a major voice in the shaping of foreign policy. While he knew that Carter would not want him to be another Kissinger, Brzezinski also felt confident that the President did not want Secretary of State Vance to become another Dulles and would want his own input on key foreign policy decisions.

Vance voiced his displeasure with this arrangement, which threatened to diminish the role of the Department of State on arms control. The SCC, however, functioned fairly smoothly on arms control. Following Vance's visit to Moscow in March 1977 to present new arms control proposals, which the Soviet leadership abruptly rejected, the SCC developed and refined arms control proposals for U.S. negotiators at the SALT talks in Geneva. President Carter carefully monitored the work of the SCC, which met with increasing frequency from 1977 to 1979. The President's personal commitment to SALT II ultimately overcame fundamental differences between the National Security Adviser and the Secretary of State. Brzezinski wanted to link arms control to other security issues, such as the administration's commitment to the development of the MX missile and normalization of relations with the People's Republic of China. Vance, however, did not want SALT linked to other Soviet activity. When the SALT II negotiations with the Soviet Union verged on success, an NSC working group, including a Department of State representative, formulated the subject areas for an agenda at the Vienna Summit (June 1979), at which Carter and Brezhnev signed the SALT II Treaty and discussed other bilateral and Third World issues.

Brzezinski's power gradually expanded into the operational area during the Carter Presidency. He increasingly assumed the role of a Presidential emissary. In 1978, for example, Brzezinski traveled to Beijing to normalize U.S.-China relations. Like Kissinger before him, Brzezinski maintained his own personal relationship with Soviet Ambassador Dobrynin. Brzezinski had NSC staffers monitor State Department cable traffic through the Situation Room and call back to the Department if the President preferred to revise or take issue with outgoing Department instructions. He also appointed his own press spokesman, and his frequent press briefings and appearances on television interview shows made him a prominent public figure although perhaps not nearly as much as Kissinger had been under Nixon.

In other areas the NSC system did not work effectively. The reasons stemmed less from inherent institutional defects than from strong policy differences within the administration and President Carter's inability to discipline his advisers and forge a more coherent response to the crises of the last few years of his Presidency. The Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 further damaged the Vance-Brzezinski relationship. Vance felt that Brzezinski's linkage of SALT to other Soviet activities and the MX, together with the growing domestic criticisms in the United States of the SALT II Accord, convinced Brezhnev to decide on military intervention in Afghanistan. Brzezinski, however, later recounted that he advanced proposals to maintain Afghanistan's "independence" but

was frustrated by the Department of State's opposition. An NSC working group on Afghanistan wrote several reports on the deteriorating situation in 1979, but President Carter ignored them until the Soviet intervention destroyed his illusions. Only then did he decide to abandon SALT II ratification and pursue the anti-Soviet policies that Brzezinski proposed.

The Iranian revolution provided the coup de grace to the disintegrating Vance-Brzezinski relationship. As the upheaval developed, the two advanced fundamentally different positions. Brzezinski wanted to control the revolution and increasingly suggested military action to prevent Khomeini from coming to power, while Vance wanted to come to terms with the new Khomeini regime. As a consequence Carter failed to develop a coherent approach to the Iranian situation. Brzezinski continued, however, to promote his views, which the President eventually accepted. Vance's resignation following the unsuccessful mission undertaken over his objections to rescue the American hostages in March 1980 was the final result of the deep disagreement between Brzezinski and Vance.

Reagan Administration, 1981-1989

The Reagan administration, like its predecessors, faced the recurring dilemma of determining which official or agency would have primary responsibility for the direction, control, and supervision of U.S. foreign policy. During the 1980 campaign, Ronald Reagan pledged to downgrade the post of National Security Adviser in order to end the rivalry between the NSC and the Department of State that had plagued previous administrations. On inauguration day, Secretary of State-designate Alexander Haig presented a draft National Security Decision Directive (NSDD) on the organization of U.S. foreign policy to Presidential Counselor Edwin Meese III. The intent of Haig's draft was to place overall responsibility for the direction and implementation of U.S. foreign policy within the Department of State. Relying on his experience in the Nixon administration, Haig wanted to ensure Department of State control of the interagency groups within the NSC because they were the "key [to] the flow of options to the President," and thus to policy control.

Haig's initiative, which he repeated on several occasions, was never responded to. Senior members of the White House staff, Counselor Meese, Chief of Staff James A. Baker III, and Michael Deaver were concerned that the proposed reorganization took too much power out of the President's hands and that an activist Secretary of State operating with wide powers could eclipse the President in his public role as the chief enunciator of U.S. foreign policy. Although the Haig initiative failed, the Secretary of State appeared to achieve for a time broad authority over the formulation of foreign policy. The President placed National Security Adviser Richard Allen's office under the supervision of Meese, and for the first time in the history of the NSC, the National Security Adviser lost direct access to the President. In subsequent public statements, the President underlined his belief that his Secretary of State was his "primary adviser on foreign affairs, and in that capacity, he is the chief formulator and spokesman for foreign policy for this administration." Allen, who had less personal authority, undertook a role as National Security Adviser that emphasized the "integration" of the proposed policies and views of the foreign affairs agencies. Nor did he take on any of the articulation of administration foreign policy--a responsibility left to Secretary Haig who at first thought of himself as the "Vicar" of foreign affairs.

Changes were made in the NSC from the outset of the Reagan presidency. At a February 25, 1981, meeting chaired by Meese, Cabinet-level heads of the major foreign affairs agencies agreed on a plan to establish three Senior Interdepartmental Groups (SIGs) on foreign, defense, and intelligence problems, chaired respectively by the Secretaries of State and Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence. Under the SIGs, a series of Assistant Secretary-level Interdepartmental Groups (IGs), each chaired by the agency with particular responsibility, dealt with specific issues. The NSC staff was responsible for the assignment of issues to the groups.

One example of a failed effort to create a new NSC organ in the hopes of improving interagency coordination and reducing friction among the Departments of State and Defense, the CIA, and the NSC, was President Reagan's order on March 24, 1981, naming Vice President George Bush as chair of a proposed administration crisis management team. The NSC was charged with providing staff support for this effort. The crisis group, referred to as the Special Situation Group (SSG) received a formal charter on December 14, 1981, but in fact only met once. Secretary Haig immediately and forcefully complained that the SSG would remove coordinating responsibility from him.

In another effort to improve policy coordination during the summer of 1981, the President authorized the creation of a National Security Planning Group (NSPG) composed of the Vice President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the Director of Central Intelligence, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the National Security Adviser. This group met weekly with the President and shaped policy prior to formal meetings of the NSC.

In January 1982, following the resignation of National Security Adviser Allen, the President appointed a close personal friend, Deputy Secretary of State William Clark, as his new adviser. The brief episode of the weakened National Security Adviser was over. Clark would report directly to the President and not through Meese or the other two members of the triumvirate of Baker and Deaver as Allen had done. President Reagan issued a written directive (NSDD-2) in January 1982 outlining the structure and functions of the National Security Council. The directive placed responsibility for developing, coordinating, and monitoring national security policy with the National Security Adviser in consultation with the NSC members. It assigned to the Secretary of State "authority and responsibility" for the "overall direction, coordination and supervision of the interdepartmental activities incident to foreign policy formulation, and the activities of executive departments and agencies overseas," except for military activities. NSDD-2 delineated the functions of the three SIGs. It designated the Secretary of State as chairman of the Senior Interdepartmental Group for Foreign Policy (SIG-FP), and established a "permanent secretariat, composed of personnel of the State Department," augmented "as necessary" by other agency personnel requested by the Secretary of State, to deal with foreign affairs matters.

To assist the SIG-FP, the Secretary of State set up Interagency Groups (IGs) for each geographic region, politico-military affairs, and international economic affairs. The IGs, in turn, created full-time working groups. The two other SIGs followed a similar structure under the leadership of the Secretary of Defense and the Director of Central Intelligence. Over the next 5 years, the Reagan administration established an additional 22 SIGs and 55 IGs within the NSC system. Some committees met only once. Observers pointed out the overuse of SIGs and the increasing snarl of responsibilities that led to enterprising NSC officials like Colonel Oliver North developing their own sub-domains within the policy-making system. Zbigniew Brzezinski described the NSC as entering its "Mid Life Crisis" during the Reagan years.

Clark took a very active role in coordination of policy among the agencies in such areas as intelligence and the protection of classified security information. He replaced a number of senior NSC staff members and reorganized his office to create three "clusters" to deal with political, military, and intelligence matters. Clark emerged as a major spokesman for Reagan administration foreign policy, particularly with the Congress. He publicly reaffirmed President Reagan's stated policy that the Secretary of State would be the primary "formulator and enunciator of foreign policy." At the same time, however, Clark insisted that the role of the President as the final arbiter on matters of foreign policy be kept in front of the public. He also asserted NSC staff jurisdiction over long-range policy review, formerly a Department of State function.

The NSC system under Clark did not solve the coordination problems. Friction between the Department of State and the NSC continued and came to a head during the intense debates within the administration over how the United States should act in the Lebanon crisis in the spring of 1982 following the Israel invasion. The disputes resulted in Secretary Haig's resignation on June 25, 1982, and President Reagan's appointment of George P. Shultz as his new Secretary of State. In his July confirmation hearings, Shultz emphasized the primary role of the President in the formulation of policy and stressed the collegial nature of policy formulation in the Reagan administration. Shultz also referred to the delegation of authority as laid out in NSDD-2 as the source of his own responsibilities and authority.

The apparent resolution of the dimensions of the Secretary of State's authority ironically coincided with ever-increasing activities in the foreign affairs field. The NSC frequently disagreed with the Department of State over the management of daily U.S. foreign relations problems. One observer called the NSC a "bee hive of activity." An NSC-chaired group took over arms control responsibilities from a State-chaired group (SAC/G) and ramrodded the tough negotiating position favored by ACDA Chief Fred Ikle and Richard Perle of the Defense Department. Deputy National Security Adviser Robert McFarlane replaced Philip C. Habib as the chief U.S. Middle East negotiator in July 1983, and the National

Security Adviser became directly involved in the operations of foreign policy. It led to a major change in how the NSC system worked.

In October 1983, McFarlane replaced Clark as National Security Adviser, with Admiral John Poindexter as his deputy. The new National Security Adviser had a background in both military and diplomatic affairs. Retaining the NSC structural changes established by Clark, McFarlane played a highly active role in attempting to compromise interagency disputes. He lacked the personal ties with the President that Clark enjoyed, but continued to have direct Presidential access. During his tenure, the National Security Adviser stepped back from the previous high profile in public policy enunciation, but became more involved in the direct management of key areas of foreign policy.

During 1985 and 1986, the National Security Adviser and certain staff members took a particularly activist role in the formulation and execution of policy in the Caribbean, Central America, and the Middle East. It was an activism run amok in the "Iran-Contra affair" that brought the NSC to a nadir of public trust and brought upon it Congressional investigation and the threat of prison for those involved. The Iran-Contra matter resulted from NSC-led efforts to develop a policy to befriend Iran and provide arms to that nation in exchange for its resistance to the Soviet Union and, more particularly to assist in the freeing of American hostages held by Moslem extremist groups in the Middle East. National Security Adviser McFarlane and Admiral Poindexter, who succeeded him in December 1985, played major roles in these matters. The efforts to provide arms for hostages eventually became connected, through the transfer of funds made with arms sales, with the NSC staff's ardent support for the Nicaraguan "Contras" in their civil war against the left-wing government of Nicaragua. Investigations in 1987 and thereafter by a Presidential Review Board (the Tower Board), the Congress, and a Special Prosecutor examined in great detail the activities of the NSC staff, as well as the actions and responsibilities of the President, the National Security Adviser, and the heads of agencies.

The Tower Board, headed by Senator John Tower and including former Senator Edmund Muskie and former National Security Adviser Scowcroft, not only reviewed the events of Iran-Contra but made a body of recommendations for the reform of the NSC. NSDD-266 of March 31, 1987, adopted the Board's major recommendations: reduction of the size of the staff, appointment of a legal counsel, removal of the Crisis Pre-Planning Group, and its replacement with Policy Review Committee. The spirit of the reforms was given more content by the new NSC leadership appointed by President Reagan in November 1987: National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci and Deputy National Security Adviser Lieutenant General Colin Powell. Carlucci reformed the NSC by replacing more than half of the professional staff within 3 months. Carlucci largely withdrew the NSC from its operational roles, but in the matter of Nicaragua, NSC continued to exercise the coordination that was not forthcoming from any of the agencies.

In the autumn of 1988, Carlucci was called to the Defense Department to succeed Caspar Weinberger, and for the third time among his six appointments to the position of National Security Adviser during his presidency, Reagan promoted the Deputy. General Powell directed an NSC that strived to provide balanced coordination of major foreign policy presentations for the President. Managing the Policy Review Group and the National Security Planning Group that Poindexter had so favored in preparing the NSC for discussions, Powell conducted an NSC process that was efficient but low key. There were no longer free-lancers operating out of the NSC staff. Under Powell's direction, the President and his chief advisers weathered the Persian Gulf crisis in 1987-1988, the wind-down of the Nicaraguan Contra effort, and the Reagan-Gorbachev relationship culminating in the Moscow Summit of June 1988--the smoothest ever seen by observers at the time.

Bush Administration, 1989-1992

After serving 8 years as Vice President and participating in the momentous foreign affairs events of the Reagan administration, President George Bush made many changes in the NSC machinery reformed by Carlucci and Powell. On the date of his inauguration, January 20, 1989, President Bush issued NSD-1 providing the charter for NSC administration. A Policy Review Group was enlarged to a Committee, the Deputy National Security Adviser managed the Deputies Committee, and a Principals Committee screened matters for the NSC to consider. Eight Policy Coordinating Committees assumed regional and functional responsibilities in place of the multiple interagency groups from the Reagan era. NSC policy papers were named National Security Review papers (NSRs) and National Security Directives (NSDs) to distinguish them from the Reagan era documentation.

President Bush brought deep experience to the NSC leadership with his appointment of General Brent Scowcroft as National Security Adviser. Scowcroft had served in the Kissinger NSC, had been National Security Adviser in the last years of the Ford administration, and had chaired the President's Board examining the Iran-Contra scandal. Robert Gates served as Deputy National Security Adviser under Scowcroft until his appointment as Director of Central Intelligence in 1991. Scowcroft's direction of the NSC was distinguished by the informality but intensity of the relationship with the President. The NSC also maintained good relationships with the other agencies, and Secretary of State Baker and Scowcroft appear to have maintained the most comradely working terms. Through the collapse of the USSR and the unification of Germany, Operation Just Cause which sent American troops into Panama in December 1989, and Operation Desert Shield and Desert Storm, the NSC worked effectively in facilitating a series of American foreign policy successes. Nor did Scowcroft fail to involve in key operations Deputy Secretary of State Eagleburger, such as when he visited China in July 1989 to try to improve U.S. relations with China in the aftermath of the pro-democracy demonstrations in Tiananmen Square.

Clinton Administration, 1993-1997

President William J. Clinton on January 20, 1993, the day of his inauguration, issued Presidential Decision Directive I to departments and agencies concerned with national security affairs. PDD I revised and renamed the framework governing the work of the National Security Council. A Presidential Review Directive (PRD) series would be the mechanism used by the new administration to direct that specific reviews and analyses be undertaken by the departments and agencies. A Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) series would now be used to promulgate Presidential decisions on national security matters. The Bush administration's National Security Review (NSR) series and National Security Directive (NSD) series were abolished.

On January 21, 1993, in PDD 2, President Clinton approved an NSC decision-making system that enlarged the membership of the National Security Council and included a much greater emphasis on economic issues in the formulation of national security policy. The President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense were members of the NSC as prescribed by statute. The Director of Central Intelligence and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as statutory advisers to the NSC, attended its meetings. The new membership of the National Security Council included the following officials: the Secretary of the Treasury, the U.S. Representative to the United Nations, the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, and the Chief of Staff to the President. Although not a member, the Attorney General would be invited to attend meetings pertaining to his jurisdiction. The heads of other Executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisers to the NSC, and other senior officials would be invited to attend meetings of the NSC where appropriate.

The new position of Assistant to the President for Economic Policy, which had been promised by Clinton during the election campaign, was intended to serve as a senior economic adviser to coordinate foreign and domestic economic policy through a newly-created National Economic Council (NEC). Robert E. Rubin was the first to be appointed to this position. The NEC was to deal with foreign and domestic economic issues in much the same way as the NSC coordinated diplomatic and security issues, and the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy was to be included in meetings involving international economic issues.

In January 1993, Clinton appointed W. Anthony Lake as his National Security Adviser. Lake, a former Foreign Service officer, served under Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser, and as director of the Department of State Policy Planning Staff during the Carter administration. During the Carter years, Lake had witnessed the negative effects of bureaucratic infighting and squabbling between Secretary of State Vance and National Security Adviser Brzezinski. As Clinton's National Security Adviser, Lake was effective in maintaining cordial relations with Secretary of State Warren M. Christopher and in developing an atmosphere of cooperation and collegiality. Lake initially maintained a low public profile, avoiding public appearances and television interviews, so as not to upstage the Secretary of State as Kissinger had done in the Nixon administration. In September 1993, however, in response to criticism that the Clinton administration had not adequately explained its foreign policy, Lake began to appear as a public speaker.

The National Security Council framework in the Clinton administration included an NSC Principals Committee, a forum available to Cabinet-level officials to discuss and resolve issues not requiring the President's participation. An NSC Deputies Committee served as the senior sub-cabinet interagency forum for considering policy issues affecting national security and for reviewing and monitoring the work of the NSC interagency process. This process included Interagency Working Groups (IWGs), which were to convene on a regular basis to review and coordinate the implementation of Presidential decisions in their respective policy areas. Among the most urgent issues the NSC dealt with in the first year of the Clinton administration were Bosnia, Haiti, Iraq, and Somalia. The several dozen other questions the NSC system dealt with initially included such issues as illegal drugs, United Nations peacekeeping, Zaire, strategic arms control policy, China, and global environmental affairs.

Samuel R. "Sandy" Berger, a longtime foreign policy adviser to Clinton who had been Lake's deputy since 1993, became National Security Adviser in March 1997, after Clinton nominated Lake to be Director of Central Intelligence. (Lake subsequently withdrew from the nomination.) Berger initiated a review of principles that would guide the foreign policy of Clinton's second term. These included the integration of Eastern and Western Europe without provoking tensions with Russia; promoting more open trade; improving defenses against such transnational threats as terrorism and narcotics; and promoting a strong and stable Asian-Pacific community by seeking trade cooperation with China and avoiding confrontation on human rights issues. In the spring and summer of 1997, the National Security Council became occupied with such issues as the ratification of the Chemical Weapons Treaty, NATO enlargement, the Middle East peace process, the U.S-Russian Summit at Helsinki, and the Denver Economic Summit.

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Appendix
Assistants to the President for National Security Affairs
1953-1997

Established March 23, 1953, by President Eisenhower, in response to a report on NSC organization by Robert Cutler.

Stephen Hadley: January 26, 2005 - PRESENT
Dr. Condoleezza Rice: January 22, 2001 - January 25, 2005
Samuel R. Berger: March 14, 1997 - January 20, 2001
W. Anthony Lake: January 20, 1993 - March 14, 1997
Brent Scowcroft: January 20, 1989 - January 20, 1993
Colin L. Powell: November 23, 1987 - January 20, 1989
Frank C. Carlucci: December 2, 1986 - November 23, 1987
John M. Poindexter: December 4, 1985 - November 25, 1986
Robert C. McFarlane: October 17, 1983 - December 4, 1985
William P. Clark: January 4, 1982 - October 17, 1983
Richard V. Allen: January 21, 1981 - January 4, 1982
Zbigniew Brzezinski: January 20, 1977 - January 21, 1981
Brent Scowcroft: November 3, 1975 - January 20, 1977
Henry A. Kissinger: December 2, 1968 - November 3, 1975 (served concurrently as Secretary of State from September 21, 1973)
Walt W. Rostow: April 1, 1966 - December 2, 1968
McGeorge Bundy: January 20, 1961 - February 28, 1966
Gordon Gray: June 24, 1958 - January 13, 1961
Robert Cutler: January 7, 1957 - June 24, 1958
Dillon Anderson: April 2, 1955 - September 1, 1956
Robert Cutler: March 23, 1953 - April 2, 1955