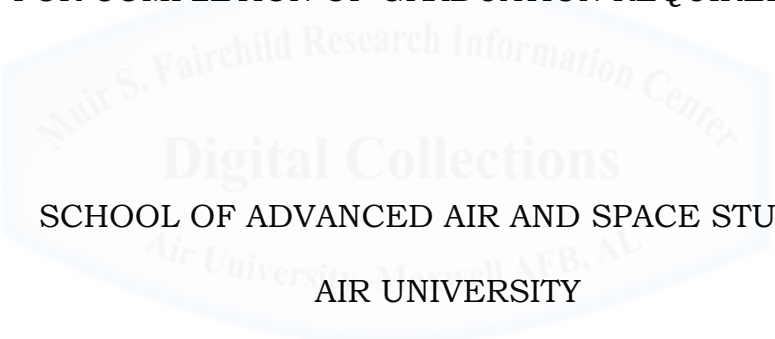


PEOPLE, PROCESS, AND POLICY:
CASE STUDIES IN NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISING, THE NATIONAL
SECURITY COUNCIL, AND PRESIDENTIAL DECISION MAKING

BY

JARED J. BRUPBACHER

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DISCLAIMER

The conclusions and opinions expressed in this document are those of the author. They do not reflect the official position of the US Government, Department of Defense, the United States Air Force, or Air University.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Major Jared Brupbacher was a 2003 graduate of Birmingham-Southern College, where he majored in Religion and Philosophy. He earned a Master's degree in International Relations – Conflict Resolution through American Military University in 2009. He has served his 14-year career on active duty with Air Force Special Operations Command as a specialized-mobility navigator, serving under five geographic combatant commands.



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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the conception, growth, and management of the United States (US) National Security Council (NSC). The author traces the history of the NSC's creation, and assesses its role in the national strategy process during the first terms of the Eisenhower, Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations. It analyzes not only the Council's structural and procedural characteristics, but more importantly the roles of the president, principals, and National Security Advisors (NSA) in managing the NSC's functions. It concludes that, while the NSC remains the central and most relevant organization for conducting strategy and executing the interagency process, its role has become relegated to a crisis-management body rather than a grand strategy forum as originally intended in 1947.

As determined by each president's desires, the principals' and NSAs' influence on the foreign policy decision-making waxes and wanes from administration to administration, from term to term, and even from crisis to crisis. The NSA, as the leading foreign-policy advisor to the president and the manager of the NSC strategy process, must respond to the president's decision-making style to determine the appropriate role for the NSA. They must also be prepared to depart from their expected role, typically the "honest broker" model, and assume other roles such as policy advocate or entrepreneur, to compensate for the president's shortfalls or to balance the principals' approach to the strategy process. Just as the NSA shapes their own role, they must also adapt the NSC's functions to synchronize the administration's strategy process with the president's management and decision-making style.

By examining three unique US president-NSA-NSC case studies, this thesis shows how different levels of presidential support for the NSA and their NSC strategy and interagency processes, more than any factor, defines the success of the system. This study concludes with recommendations to optimize NSC organizational flexibility and strategy effectiveness. It also proposes recommendations for NSAs to form realistic expectations of their roles in responding to presidential needs, geopolitical challenges, and emergent national security crises.

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Introduction

President Donald Trump, his staff, and his Cabinet face numerous domestic and international security challenges. As it has since its inception in 1947, the National Security Council's (NSC) organization, strategy process, and management will prove essential to formulating successful domestic and foreign national security policy in response to these challenges. Institutionally, the NSC stands as the central, formal executive-branch and interagency venue to discuss, develop, and determine national security policy. While presidents have significantly varied their use of the Council and its inherent ability to impact strategy and policymaking, its smooth and efficient functioning remains a center point of debate and very often the primary organizational challenge for administrations. As the opening months of the Trump presidency have shown, the effective management of the NSC system and its strategy processes remain as relevant and difficult a challenge as ever.

The NSC's conduct in the process of security policy and strategy development depends on several factors, including the president's agenda, management style and organizational preferences, the trust they place in the National Security Advisor (NSA), and their preferred level of involvement *inside* the NSC process. These factors lead to the following research question: How have presidents structured, engaged, and utilized the NSC system as their core instrument for security policy development? The answer to this question has taken many forms, with all approaches dependent on the preferences of the presidents themselves. This work contends that the effectiveness of the NSC system rests fundamentally on not simply its organization on paper, but more importantly, on the ability of its members to facilitate the strategy process and cooperate in practice. While the "organizational chart" intricacies can set the stage for policy process efficiency, the cooperative execution of the strategy and policymaking between the president, their

NSA, and NSC system members realizes its success. This work analyzes the dynamic between these players, and uses case studies from three different US presidencies to answer the following questions: 1) How and why presidents made changes to their systems? 2) What was the net effect of these changes and the president-NSA-NSC dynamic? 3) To what degree did personalities and contexts drive changes to the dynamic? 4) How these three distinct system characteristics played into the NSC's strategy process addressing specific foreign policy challenges?

To analyze the president-NSA-NSC strategy process, this thesis examines the evolution of the NSC system since 1947, focusing on the president's core agenda priorities, organizational preferences, their vision of the NSA's role, and their understanding of the president's role within the NSC system. Specifically, this work evaluates the Dwight "Ike" Eisenhower (1953-1957), William Clinton (1993-1995), and George W. Bush (2001-2005) administrations' management of the NSC system and policy process. These cases exemplify three distinct presidential management styles at work in their unique Cold War, post-Cold War, and post-9/11 contexts. They also provide contrasting levels of engagement between the president, the NSA, and the NSC strategy process that all drive the NSA's decision as to which roles they must play in the system. By analyzing each administration with respect to the four questions highlighted above, this study examines how each president and NSA shaped the NSC and their roles to support their policy agendas, and how those changes succeeded or failed at facilitating the strategy and policy processes. Lastly it aims to uncover useful lessons learned for NSC system designers charged with tailoring this critical United States (US) security policy organization for an increasingly complex, unpredictable, and little understood multi-polar world. Before analyzing the NSC's role in the strategy and policy process for different administrations, it is necessary to define and attempt to clarify strategy and its relation to the policy process.

Problems understanding the term “strategy” begin with its different connotations, and how those widely disparate connotations factor into the national security and foreign policy process. Dennis Drew and Donald Snow, for example, note the common misapplication of the adjective “strategic” representing a distinctive, isolated, or top level of plans and processes populated by an upper echelon of “master strategists” formulating policies.¹ Historians and theorists understandably personify the strategy process through stories depicting “master strategists” dictating the process and expertly making strategic decisions.² Unfortunately, such descriptions overshadow an understanding of strategy as a process executed at multiple, intertwined levels of government, and by more than a few strategic geniuses.³

The etymology of the word “strategy,” from the Greek *strategos*, carries the dual connotations of national and battlefield leadership and direction that undermines the broader conceptualization of grand strategy. Works on leaders such as Napoleon, Lincoln, Churchill, Roosevelt, Hitler, and Kissinger reinforce the myth of the omniscient, omnipotent master strategist.⁴ These leaders executed the strategy process, or strategized, countless times while carrying out their duties. Their ability or inability to master the strategy process better than their opponents qualified them as strategists; not simply their positions atop their societies’ or historians’ retrospective views of them as larger-than-life leaders.

¹ Snow, Donald M, and Dennis M Drew. 2006. *Making Twenty-First-Century Strategy - An Introduction to Modern National Security Processes and Problems*. United States: Createspace: 13.

² In his book *Strategy*, Freedman uses this chapter to illuminate the pitfall of correlating military strategy with grand strategy as it is understood today. He specifically criticizes the tendency to suggest that Napoleon, as described in Clausewitz’s *On War*, was a successful “master strategist.” Freedman, Lawrence. 2013. *Strategy*. 1st ed. New York, NY: Oxford Univ. Press: 237-244.

³ Drew and Snow, *Making Twenty-First-Century Strategy*, 13-14.

⁴ Cohen, Eliot A. *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime*. New York, NY: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2003. Hart, B Liddell. *Strategy*. 2nd ed. New York, N.Y., U.S.A.: Penguin Group (USA), 1991: 94-123, 207-221. Freedman, 237-244.

Strategy within the NSC system is not sequestered in “smoke-filled” rooms by the president and their closest principals and advisors. Strategists devise, adapt, and coordinate national security strategy and foreign policy at multiple staff levels, aimed to gain advantage using various sources of national power and influence. Based on this understanding of strategy, three central themes require further explanation to understand the processes at work within the NSC system: grand strategy, strategy as a process, and the interagency theory of policy development.

For John M. Collins, grand strategy represented “national” strategy, which “fuses all powers of a nation, during peace as well as war, to attain national interests and objectives.”⁵ He asserted that domestic and foreign, military and economic policies all represented elements supporting national interests and security. Combined interests, objectives, policies, and commitments comprise a nation’s grand strategy.⁶

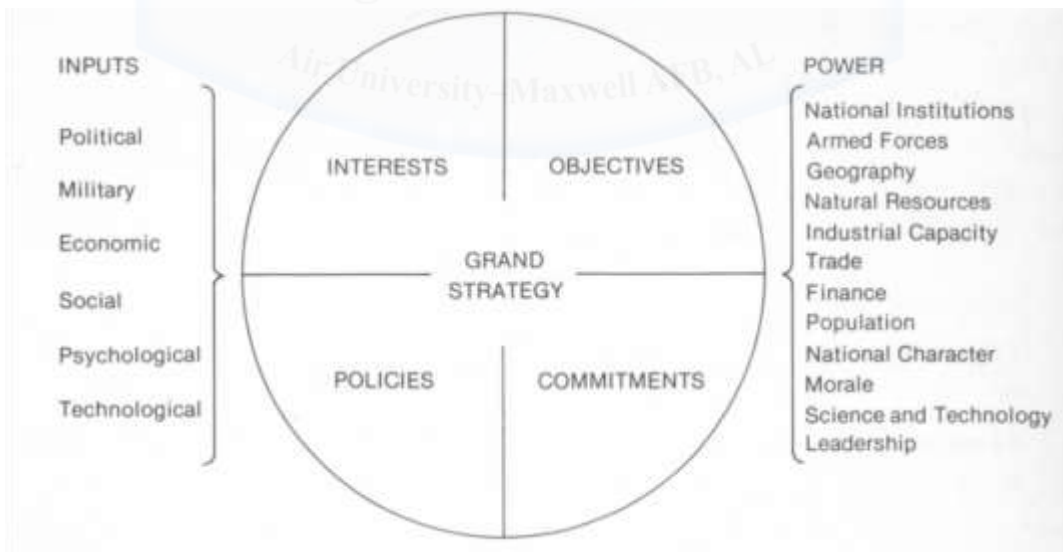


Figure 1 – The Strategic Matrix

Source: Collins, Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices.

⁵ Collins, John M. 1974. *Grand Strategy: Principles and Practices*. New York, NY, United States: Annapolis, Md., Naval Institute Press: 14.

⁶ Collins, *Grand Strategy*, 2.

Glenn Hastedt looked at the component parts of strategy. He described them as, “national interests (as) the fundamental goals and objectives of a country’s foreign policy,” “policy (as) a line of action designed to achieve a goal,” and “grand strategy (as) the lynchpin that unites goals and tactics.”⁷ Taken together, Collins’ and Hastedt’s descriptions illustrate both the components and the underlying purpose of the grand strategy process. These illustrations and definitions exemplify the conceptual complexity of the term strategy as both plan and process.



Figure 2 – The Grand Strategy and Policy Process

Source: Author’s rendition of grand strategy process based on Collins’ and Hastedt’s descriptions.

Everett Dolman, in contrast, defined strategy as both “a plan for continuing advantage,” and as “an unending process.”⁸ The former description delivers a clear and valid understanding of strategy as a plan. It also, however, represents a narrow view that inappropriately suggests that strategy is static rather than dynamic. Dolman’s latter definition aimed to correct this understanding, as did Collins. He described the grand strategy process as: “the art and science of employing national

⁷ Hastedt, Glenn P. 2012. *American Foreign Policy*, 9/E. 9th ed. Boston, MA, United States: Pearson Education: 2-10.

⁸ Dolman, Everett Carl C. *Pure Strategy: Power and Principle in the Space and Information Age*. London: Frank Cass, 2007: 4-19.

power under all circumstances to exert desired degrees and types of control over the opposition through threats, force, indirect pressures, diplomacy, subterfuge, and other imaginative means, thereby satisfying national security interests and objectives.”⁹ Collins, Hastedt, and Dolman provide the theoretical framework to define the process of pursuing national interests and continuing advantage (ends) by synchronizing instruments of power (IOP) through grand strategy (ways) based on the application of domestic and foreign policies (means). Drew and Snow added the critical component of strategy as a “*decision-making process*,” a key aspect of the NSC strategy process whereby principals bring foreign policy options to the president for their final decision on implementation.¹⁰ As it translates to security policy development, strategy serves as the cooperative process facilitating careful analysis of both the global security environment and integrated policy possibilities.

One input and output of the strategy process, policy, is best understood as a result of complex interagency and interpersonal endeavors. As Gabriel Marcella defined it, “(p)olicy exists at five interrelated levels: conceptualization, articulation, budgeting, implementation, and post-implementation analysis and feedback.”¹¹ Marcella’s description provides a more nuanced conception of the strategy process in the context of the NSC as an inter-organizational and collaborative body. At its core, this work analyzes how the president-NSA-NSC dynamic defines the health of the NSC as a national security policy-making body. The fact that the NSC’s designers intended it to execute iterative, inter-organizational, and cooperative grand strategy is a central premise of this thesis, and the driving force behind their collaboration leading up to 1947.

⁹ Collins, *Grand Strategy*, 14.

¹⁰ Drew and Snow, *Making Twenty-First-Century Strategy*, 13.

¹¹ Marcella, Gabriel. 2008. *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*. 1st ed. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center: 17.

As stated in *The National Security Act of 1947*, “(t)he function of the Council shall be to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.”¹² This congressional mandate, aside from changes made by different administrations’ directives, remains the overarching organizational mission statement of the NSC.¹³ For the purposes of this work, the core concepts from this excerpt include the NSC’s charge to “cooperate” in order to “advise” the president on the “integration of policies” in the service of national security. This thesis focuses on the tailoring of the NSC, its functional processes, and its ability to conduct cooperative, integrated strategy for the president.

As envisioned in 1947, cooperation between the members of the Council during the strategy and policy process is at the heart of the NSC’s congressionally mandated role as the formal and central advisory body to the president. Statutory members of the Council represent the core departments and instruments of power at play during the strategy process.¹⁴ If the Council is organized and executed to take advantage of these subject-matter experts in an interagency setting, careful and cooperative aligning of ends, ways, and means at the *grand strategic* level lends to effective policy development throughout the whole of government. The president’s NSA, performing as presidential agent, honest broker, and even policy entrepreneur, more than any other individual (other than the president), determines the efficiency and

¹² National Security Act of July 26, 1947 (“National Security Act”), Public Law 80-253, 61 STAT 495, 26 July, 1947; General Records of the United States Government, Record Group 11; <https://www.docsteach.org/documents/document/act-of-july-26-1947-national-security-act-public-law-80253-61-stat-495-to-promote-the-national-security-by-providing-for-a-secretary-of-defense-for-a-national-military-establishment-for-a-department-o>.

¹³ United States Government Manual. Executive Branch. Presidential Offices. July 01, 2015. <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/GOVMAN-2015-07-01/xml/GOVMAN-2015-07-01-103.xml>.

¹⁴ Dolman, *Pure Strategy*, 28-29.

effectiveness of the NSC as the Executive Branch strategy and interagency body. Since Eisenhower created the position in 1953, the NSA and their decision of which role to fill as the president's agent remains a central point of debate in NSC and NSA scholarship.¹⁵

Over time the term "honest broker" is as diffuse as the term "strategy." John Burke explored the history of the "honest broker" NSA model exemplified by Cutler during his first term as Eisenhower's NSA, and analyzed the model's central role in influencing NSAs for each administration through George W. Bush.¹⁶ Based on Alexander George's description of the "managerial custodian," Burke discussed the confusion between NSA "neutral" and "honest" brokerage. The former represents a system administrator concerned only with facilitating the strategy process, while the "honest" broker represents process coordinator coupled with a low level of policy advocacy.¹⁷ Cecil Crabb and Kevin Mulcahey further delineate NSA roles into four categories including administrator, coordinator, counselor, and agent. With the administrator representing the most passive of the four and the agent representing the most dominant, Crabb and Mulcahey suggest most presidents will prefer and NSAs will perform as either coordinators or counselors. Additionally, as the popularity of the honest broker model among scholars and practitioners suggests, the roles of agent, advocate, and entrepreneur are at best under-utilized and at worst shunned.

¹⁵ Dueck, Colin. 2014. "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review". *Orbis* 58 (1): 15-38. doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2013.11.007.

¹⁶ As John Burke pointed out, Eisenhower's NSAs were the first to formalize the "honest broker" model as "attentive to the quality, character, and components of the decision process and, especially, its deliberative forums." Burke rightfully highlighted how the "honest broker" definition changed both over time and at the hands of its "user". He explained "the broker role has also become a common self-definition (or part thereof) of many who have occupied the position of national security advisor, as well as a point of reference for journalistic observers and political pundits." Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*. 1st ed. College Station: Texas A & M University Press: 4-5.

¹⁷ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 5-7. Crabb, Cecil, and Kevin Mulcahy. 2004. "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making". In *Fateful Decisions*, 1st ed., 163-164. New York: Oxford University: 163-165.

Colin Dueck suggested that any role the NSA might play stems from the authority bestowed on them by the president as his or her agent. This includes the NSA's role as honest broker, as well as advocate and entrepreneur.¹⁸ If the president represents the principal as decision maker, then the NSA represents one (of many) agents. In the complex strategy and decision-making process at work within the Council, agents come to the table with a myriad of subjective interests, expertise, and advice that may or may not assist the president in making the best available foreign policy or national security decision.¹⁹ Considering Allison and Zelikow's description of this relationship as "The Agent Problem," the NSA comes to the Council as a direct representative of and with loyalty to the president and their success in the strategy process. The NSA as presidential agent can provide balance of departmental-driven policies or personal preferences of other agents. One can logically argue that it remains in the president's best interest as national security and foreign policy decision-maker, to empower and support the NSA and their NSC to drive the administration's strategy process. Ultimately, the NSA's role and the NSC's worth ultimately rests with the president's support and engagement.²⁰

As this thesis will show and emphasize in each case study, the president must first determine their own strengths, weaknesses, and decision-making preferences prior to choosing the right NSA.²¹ The president's centrality in every facet of the NSC strategy process and the NSA's approach to their role remains an overarching and enduring truth of organizational and procedural decisions for the administration. The NSC's congressionally mandated role as the primary national security policy consideration and advisory board for the president,

¹⁸ Dueck, "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review", 35.

¹⁹ Zelikow, Philip, and Graham T. Allison. 1999. *The Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis*. 2nd ed. New York: Longman: 272-273.

²⁰ Dueck, "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review", 30-33.

²¹ Crabb and Mulcahy, "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making", 162-172.

coupled with its broadly experienced, powerful statutory members, position the Council to execute interagency coordination to lead US grand strategy processes.²² This thesis aims to uncover how the Eisenhower, Clinton, and George W. Bush administrations' unique management of the NSC system and the role of the NSA facilitates their ability to execute strategy as a policy process. These cases not only provide contrasting Cold War, post-Cold war, and post-9/11 contexts, but also describe widely varied presidential-NSA-NSC engagement and leadership approaches to their strategy processes. There are two core questions, answered in the case study chapters, that measure of the NSC's effectiveness: 1) Does the organization, its policy processes, and the NSA's role match and meet the president's needs? 2) Does the president iteratively and responsibly engage with and shape their NSC system and empower their NSA to meet their demands and compensate for their weaknesses?

Each administration faces the challenge of inheriting the previous president's NSC system at the time of inauguration, and taking critical steps to improve the system to best serve the incoming president. Regardless of the geopolitical environment and challenges at hand, the NSC remains the formal means within the executive branch for presidents to manage their strategy and policy processes. Each administration shapes the NSC to reflect core agenda priorities, organizational preferences, the president's vision of the NSA's role, and their decision to involve themselves in NSC processes. These characteristics of a president's NSC system largely define their ability to effectively collaborate with experts, conduct strategy, and implement congruent, consistent, and meaningful national security strategies and policies.

²² Collins, *Grand Strategy*, 1-7.

This work begins by analyzing the twentieth-century history of US collaborative systems, processes, and events which led to the creation of the NSC as the president's centralized grand strategy body in 1947. The next three chapters contain three US-presidential administration case studies—President Dwight Eisenhower (Chapter 2), President William Clinton (Chapter 3), and President George W. Bush (Chapter 4)—highlighting the roles and relationships between the president, the NSA, and administration leaders within the NSC system and interagency strategy process. Framed within the early Cold War context, Eisenhower wisely embraced the planning and grand strategic potential of the Council, and fully empowered Cutler as presidential agent to manage the interagency policy process on the president's behalf. In contrast, both Clinton and Bush initially took the NSC's value in their foreign policy processes for granted, leaving their NSAs to struggle in their roles and fight to ensure the strategy processes succeeded. The work concludes with an assessment of the three administrations' utilization of the NSC as a grand strategy system, and presents recommendations for strategists to consider when designing, engaging, and adapting future NSC systems.

Chapter 1

National Security Council (NSC) Conception and Birth

The National Security Act of 1947 established the National Security Council as the main organ at the summit of the government for advising the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies relating to national security.

Henry M. Jackson
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery
August 11, 1960

During and after World War II (WWII), United States (US) leaders and strategists faced national security and foreign policy challenges more complex than the country had ever known. US leaders were confronted with an unprecedented challenge given the country's new role atop the post-WWII world order. On one hand, the US possessed impressive economic, military, and diplomatic power and leverage. On the other hand, the nation faced an emboldened, enormous, victorious, and seemingly unstoppable Soviet Union.

These statements merely summarize the complex geopolitical landscape facing US leaders charged with crafting the *National Security Act of 1947* and the early NSC system that followed. This chapter provides context of the conception and birth of the NSC system leading up to WWII and in the immediate post-war period through 1949.¹ The chapter performs two functions. First, it tells the story of the NSC system's shared conceptualization by US Cabinet secretaries, Congress, and the White House. Second, it identifies core aspects of the national

¹ In his book *The NSC Staff: Counseling the Council*, Christopher C. Shoemaker broke his NSC analysis into four distinct periods: "the *conceptual* period (1920-1945), the *birth* (1945-1949), the *growth* period (1949-1968), and *institutional maturity* (1969-present). Considering the date of publication, his *institutional maturity* period of analysis concluded in 1991. Shoemaker, Christopher C. 1991. *The NSC Staff*. 1st ed. Boulder, Colo: Westview: 1-12.

security system created in 1947 that continue to define the NSC's successes, failures, and evolution evident in the case studies.

The central architect of US foreign policy during WWII, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, first introduced the idea of a cooperative political-military planning body in 1919. As the Secretary of the Navy, Roosevelt's proposal in the tumultuous wake of World War I (WWI) argued that the State Department take the lead in preventing costly and avoidable future wars. Additionally, his suggestion called for the State Department to attempt to quantify the cost of militarily defending critical foreign policy priorities for the Army and Navy.²

Roosevelt submitted, literally on blueprint paper, an organizational chart for Navy and Army general staffs, and a State Department planning staff.³ Leaders from all three staffs would populate a central, strategically focused "Joint Plan Making Body." This body was tasked with "estimating national resources, both American and foreign, and the key role of defining American objectives for each possible war and assessing the force needed for success."⁴ Ironically, Roosevelt's tendency to centralize his ad-hoc decision making during WWII, rather than deliberately confer with a collaborative body such as the one he promoted in 1919, cemented a national desire after the war for a central but broadly focused strategic council.⁵

During WWII multiple factors, in addition to US leaders' frustration with Roosevelt's centralized decision making, compounded to support the demand for a coordinated security council. By late 1941, Roosevelt

² May, Ernest. 2004. "The Development of Political-Military Consultation in The United States". In *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press: 9-10.

³ When conducting his research leading up to the cited 1955 article, Ernest R. May "found the original of Roosevelt's letter in the State Department archives, the blueprint was stapled to it, closed, and, as far as I could tell, the staple had never been removed, the blueprint never unfolded."; further stating "Such was the fate of the first proposal for a National Security Council." May, "The Development of the Pol-Mil Consultation in the U.S." in *Fateful Decisions*, 9-10.

⁴ May, "The Development of the Pol-Mil Consultation in the U.S." in *Fateful Decisions*, 9-10.

⁵ Zegart, Amy B. 2000. *Flawed by Design*. 1st ed. Stanford, Calif: Stanford Univ. Press: 54.

revisited his 1919 idea of a War Council with his State, War, and Navy department heads to discuss issues of shared concern.⁶ As Ernest May highlighted, however, the president's efforts "hardly served as a palate for the mixing of military and political views. Rather, it provided the President with a platform from which to announce his decisions already reached with the help of his chiefs of staff."⁷ Roosevelt and the Joint Chiefs designed operational plans, which drove foreign policies, without careful concurrence with operational commanders.

Despite his insistence in 1919 that diplomacy precede military engagement, President Roosevelt relegated the State Department to the back seat behind the departments of War and Navy. Secretary of State Cordell Hull not only often remained stateside while the president traveled for diplomatic engagements, but Roosevelt also ceased requiring his attendance at War Council meetings. Essentially, the War Council devolved from a grand strategy forum to one that executed mainly military strategy.⁸ One might understand Roosevelt's approach given the war's context and import. Neither the Axis nor Allied powers desired a negotiated settlement as the latter's demand for "unconditional surrender" suggested. Ultimately, the president's perception of the flexibility required in his decision-making process trumped the proclivities of deliberate debate he prescribed in 1919 and the impression of cooperation his War Council displayed. While this disjointed strategy process and internal system survived during the early years of the war, the 7 December 1941 Japanese air attack on the US naval base shaped the US and the interagency strategy process more than any other event during the war.

As Douglas Stuart asserted in *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*, Pearl Harbor represented the paramount "trigger event"

⁶ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 6.

⁷ May, "The Development of the Pol-Mil Consultation in the U.S" in *Fateful Decisions*, 12.

⁸ May, "The Development of the Pol-Mil Consultation in the U.S" in *Fateful Decisions*, 12-13.

which “actually **established** national security as the lodestar of American foreign policy.”⁹ While foreign policy for some time stood as a principle means to bolster national interests, the Japanese attack on Hawaii exposed US vulnerabilities, personalized the effects of war, and catapulted the protection of US citizens and territories to the top of the foreign policy agenda. For Stuart, Pearl Harbor began a five-year process of US institutional inspection, criticism, and reprioritization of planning efforts which resulted in the 1947 National Security Act.¹⁰ The results of these introspective analyses pushed interdepartmental strategy to the top of the country’s list of approaches to foreign policy. The US need for unprecedented interdepartmental planning requirements and synchronizing of instruments of power (IOP) for global war cemented this conviction for national leaders observing American war-planning processes.¹¹ To the dismay of proponents of deliberate and balanced foreign policies, Roosevelt reached a different conclusion about the strategy making process in 1942. Roosevelt concluded the emerging scale, violence, and the war’s clear place at the top of US national security priorities called for reigning in and streamlining the strategy process rather than expanding his net of advisors.

While Roosevelt conducted his war planning as he felt the situation demanded, proponents of interdepartmental strategy remained convinced of the long-term benefits of institutionalizing the process. Jon Rosenwasser and Michael Warner highlighted the global and growing military-focused nature of the war as demanding more efficient cooperation. US strategists, intelligence agencies, logisticians, commanders, and diplomats spread from Western Europe to the

⁹ Stuart, Douglas. 2008. "Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act". In *Affairs of State*, 1st ed. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute: 60.

¹⁰ Stuart, "Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act" in *Affairs of State*, 60-61.

¹¹ Richard Leighton and Robert Coakley, *Global Logistics and Strategy*, 2 vols. The U.S. Army in World War II. CMH Publications 1-5 & 1-6 (Washington, DC: Center for Military History, 1955, 1969).

Pacific.¹² While the president and the Joint Chiefs strategized without them in the War Council back home, globally dispersed US commanders were forced to coordinate war plans and logistics directly with foreign national contacts and Allied military leaders without communicating with the president.¹³

The geographical separation of the president, commanders, and planners exposed the lack of a carefully collaborative strategy process to synchronize the nation's efforts during the war. In its review of policymaking, the Congressional Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery provided tangible examples in support of a central national security body based on the success of various organizational models. These models included the British Committee of Imperial Defense, the design of the "staff and subcommittee structure of the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC)" in 1944, and the US's own experience with the Combined Chiefs of Staff and US Joint Chiefs of Staff organizational structures.¹⁴

As Christopher Shoemaker noted, the SWNCC cooperatively dealt with WWII interdepartmental challenges rather than reverting to organizationally isolated strategy processes. He asserted this body, more than any before it, "took an important bureaucratic step in preparing the way for the establishment of an effective interagency body to manage national security affairs."¹⁵ This was not the first time American leaders recognized the need for a more broad, cooperative strategy process. In 1919 Roosevelt proposed the Joint Plan Making Body to fill this same

¹² The scale and nature of the war demanded far-reaching but tight coordination among virtually all power brokers and players in the struggle including: State, Navy, War Departments, Joint Chiefs of Staff, Office of Strategic Services, Office of War Information, and Coordinator for Latin American Affairs; just to name a few. Rosenwasser, Jon, and Michael Warner. 2010. "History of The Interagency Process for Foreign Relations in The United States: Murphy's Law?". In *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating The Labyrinth*, 1st ed: 16.

¹³ May, "The Development of the Pol-Mil Consultation in the U.S" in *Fateful Decisions*, 12.

¹⁴ 1960 Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery: 1-2.

¹⁵ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 7.

strategy void. He realized that the failures of secluded and non-cooperative decision making, combined with the sheer scale of global warfare, necessitated organizations capable of coordinating IOPs like the Joint Planning Making Body. This post-WWI scenario had some similarities, but even more marked contrasts, to the situation confronting US leaders in 1945.

After WWII, the US assumed a role it had never filled before: acting as the leading global power and a proactive defender of democratic states. On one hand, this role saw the US face off against “the Soviet menace.” On the other, partner nations looked to US leadership to help shape a world order aimed to form and support cooperative institutions of global governance.¹⁶ This geopolitical situation, and the strategic planning demands it presented, defined what Shoemaker categorized as the NSC’s birth period.¹⁷ Few dispute that lessons learned during the war and the post-war geopolitical context deeply influenced the NSC’s creators. At the same time, the actual birth of the national security system for some theorists rested more with institutional, personality, and organizational factors.

In her work *Flawed by Design*, Scholar Amy Zegart analyzed the impetus behind the formation of US national security organizations leading up to 1947. She explored organizations through the lens of institutionalist theory in which key “players,” or sets of actors, represent organizational interests. By using this theory, she reaches different conclusions about the core drivers behind and implications of the NSC’s conception and birth. These conclusions are rooted first and foremost in the unique nature of national security and foreign policy institutions, as opposed to domestic policy organizations, players, and processes.¹⁸ For

¹⁶ Rosenwasser and Warner, *The National Security Enterprise*, 17.

¹⁷ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 8.

¹⁸ Zegart contests the most popular narrative of the NSC’s birth in which Congress drove the process. She summarized this popular narrative as “In the beginning, Congress imposed the NSC system on an unhappy and reluctant Harry Truman. Concerned about (FDR’s) freewheeling, ad hoc leadership during World War

Zegart, the main players in the story of the NSC's birth via the National Security Act of 1947 included: the president, the Department of the Navy, and the Department of War (Army). She concludes the debate between these three core players defined the form and function of the NSC system, rather than the more commonly held view that Congress led the charge in designing the NSC.¹⁹

Personality, in addition to institutions, also played a role in developing the NSC. President Harry S. Truman, who succeeded Roosevelt after his death, proved much more deeply concerned about *unification* of the military departments under a Defense Department rather than the NSC system design. The president, while recognizing the benefit of the NSC in coordinating and developing policy, expressed overt concern over the Council's potential to eventually seize his decision-making authority.²⁰ Truman made his reservations clear from the NSC's first formal meeting in September 1947 through the advent of the Korean War in June 1950. He attended only 12 of 57 Council meetings, which the National Security Act recommended he chair in-person.²¹ The convergence of personality and organization emerged as the main contributor to Truman's noncommittal attitude toward the NSC. Most significantly, Truman's inability to decide on the NSC's role opened maneuver room for the War and Navy Departments to dominate the NSC system design; the Navy readily seized the opportunity.

Upon formal request by the James Forrestal, secretary of the navy, on 19 June 1945 Ferdinand Eberstadt submitted a 250-page report

II and worried about the impending challenges of the postwar world, Congress in 1947 set out to embed all presidents in a broader foreign policy decision-making system. The National Security Act of 1947 did this, among other things, by creating a formal, statutory NSC comprising the president and his highest ranking foreign and military policy officials. The idea was both to help and to restrain the chief executive at the same time. Foreign policy had become too important to leave in one person's hands." Zegart, *Flawed by Design*.

¹⁹ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 54-62.

²⁰ Prados, John. 1991. *Keepers of The Keys*. 1st ed. New York: Morrow: 29-30.

²¹ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 10.

entitled “Unification of the War and Navy Departments and Postwar Organization for National Security.” Many scholars view this report, and its recommendations, as the major call for and outline of the National Security Act of 1947 and the NSC system.²² The “specific recommendations” of Eberstadt’s report which substantially impacted the birth of the NSC included the:

...creation of a National Security Council...with the duty (1) of formulating and coordinating over-all policies in the political and military fields, (2) of assessing and appraising our foreign objectives, commitments and risks, and (3) of keeping these in balance with our military power, in being and potential. It would be a policy-forming and advisory, not an executive, body...The National Security Council should take over the functions at present performed by the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee.²³

While these suggestions and the work behind Eberstadt’s study proved constructive for the NSC’s conception and birth, “the so-called ‘Forrestal Revenge’” was driven by deep organizational imperatives largely divorced from betterment of the national security structure.²⁴

In viewing the Navy as an organization driven by self-interest and fighting for post-war autonomy, Zegart highlighted the department’s stance against unification as the primary driving factor behind its recommendation of the NSC system. Investment in the carrier fleet, naval aircraft, and Marine amphibious forces during WWII placed the Navy in a largely advantageous position. Its leaders, including Forrestal, argued

²² Eberstadt defined the core challenge in this context: “The necessity of integrating all these elements into an alert, smoothly working and efficient machine is more important now than ever before. Such integration is compelled by our present world commitments and risks, by the tremendously increased scope and tempo of modern warfare, and by the epochal scientific discoveries culminating in the atomic bomb...(t)he nation not fully prepared will be at a greater disadvantage than ever before.” Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 19.

²³ In Inderfurth and Johnson, reprinted from “Unification of the War and Navy Departments and Postwar Organization for National Security,” Report to Hon. James Forrestal, Committee on Naval Affairs (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1945).

²⁴ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 9. Douglas Stuart wrote that Eberstadt’s report was “designed to shift the debate from the military, per se, to civilian-military coordination...It not only opposed the merger of the armed services, it omitted any reference to a Defense Department or Secretary of Defense.” Stuart, “Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act” in *Affairs of State*, 69.

before Congress that unification jeopardized its amphibious and air capabilities, its flexibility in command and control and decision-making, and its future role in air warfare and atomic weapons. In this sense, Forrestal proposed Eberstadt's NSC suggestions as an alternative to unification under a secretary of defense and in opposition to the War Department's wishes.²⁵

In contrast, Army leaders made their case for post-war unification. During the war, General George C. Marshall first suggested unification to offset the expected loss of the Air Corps to an independent air force. Truman initially supported this plan.²⁶ Army leaders also expected a budget battle with the Navy. The Navy emerged from the war not only as a more "glamorous" investment than the Army, but also as a service capable of global force projection and extended homeland defense. Zegart summarizes the Army position in the following way: "(in) this context, the War Department saw unification as much more than a policy conflict; it was a fight for the future of the Army."²⁷ Viewed through the lens of Zegart's National Security Agency Model, the final National Security Act of 1947 and the NSC system emerged from a cauldron of bureaucratic and institutional power struggle rather than a careful design process with national security and grand strategy in mind.²⁸

Ultimately President Truman proved the most influential architect of the NSC's birth, setting its course into history. Truman forced the compromise between the departments by proposing both the NSC and the Defense Department to Congress, which approved his suggested plan

²⁵ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 59-67.

²⁶ Stuart, Douglas. "Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act" in *Affairs of State*, 67-68.

²⁷ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 57-59.

²⁸ Zegart's National Security Agency Model rests on "three related factors: (1) the agency's original setup; (2) the ongoing interests and capabilities of key political players; and (3) exogenous events. Design choices made at an agency's birth condition its development from that moment forward." Zegart, *Flawed by Design*.

with only one change.²⁹ Section 101 of the formal National Security Act called for:

the National Security Council...to be composed of (1) the President; (2) the Vice President; (3) the Secretary of State; (4) the Secretary of Defense...(7) Secretaries and Under Secretaries of other executive departments and of the military departments, when appointed by the president. The Council shall have a staff to be headed by a civilian executive secretary who shall be appointed by the President.³⁰

The National Security Act's charge to the Council was:

1) to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the President in connection therewith; and 2) to consider policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the Government concerned with the national security, and to make recommendations to the President.³¹

Congress ultimately based the National Security Act on Truman's suggestions. When this language is compared to Eberstadt's recommendation to Forrestal, it is evident that neither the War Department, nor the president, nor Congress altered the Navy's recommendations in any significant way.³² Aside from his concerns of the NSC "intrud(ing) on his presidential prerogatives," Truman signed the Act on 26 July 1947, the day after Congress proposed the law.³³

²⁹ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 67-75.

³⁰ The original National Security Act included the service chiefs and the National Security Resources Board (NSRB) chairman as statutory Council members. In August of 1949 Truman removed these members.

³¹ Inderfurth, Karl, and Loch Johnson. 2004. "The National Security Act Of 1947". In *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, 1st ed., 24-26. Oxford: Oxford University: 24-26.

³² Stuart, "Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act" in *Affairs of State*, 73.

³³ Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 30.

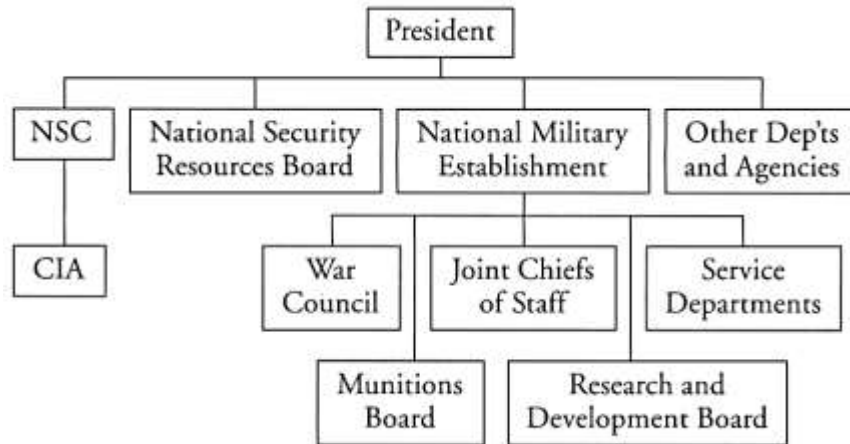


Figure 3 - Structure Created by National Security Act of 1947

Source: Cambone, Stephen A, Patrick J Garrity, and Alistair J.K Shepherd. 1998. *A New Structure for National Security Policy Planning*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies: 160.

The president planned to exercise his authority to limit the Council's power in other ways.

President Truman subsequently and single-handedly determined the initial culture within and his limited expectations for the NSC. In its first three years, the president ignored Congressional direction in the National Security Act by rarely attending meetings.³⁴ Through the Reorganization Plan No. 4 of 1949, he stripped the Council of its "policy-making" powers while paradoxically placing it formally in the Executive Office of the President.³⁵ These first two years exemplified a fundamental truth of the NSC system: the president first and foremost retains authority and freedom to shape the NSC system to serve their unique needs, management styles, and national security context. The remainder of this theses shows why, how, and to what end Presidents Dwight Eisenhower, William Clinton, and George W. Bush, in cooperation with their NSAs, exercised broad and absolute authority over their respective

³⁴ In Title I—Coordination for National Security Sec. 101 (a) of the 1947 National Security Act states "The President of the United States shall preside over meetings of the Council: Provided, that in his absence he may designate a member of the Council to preside in his place."

³⁵ Falk, Stanley L. 1964. "The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy". *Political Science Quarterly* 79 (3): 405-406. doi:10.2307/2145907.

NSC systems to meet their own foreign policy and national security challenges.



Chapter 2

The Council's Organizational Growth and the Birth of the National Security Advisor

“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.”

President Dwight D. Eisenhower¹

President Truman was not finished shaping the NSC after its birth, amending its charter in August of 1949.² The outbreak of the Korean War forced his hand in turning to and depending on his council in the waning years of his presidency. For the foreseeable future, the divisions between the infant NSC Staff and trusted Cabinet secretaries proved unavoidable. Truman corrected course in 1949-1950, however, by pulling the Council into the Executive Office of the President, changing the NSC's statutory members, shaping the emerging role of the executive secretary, and pulling the NSC Staff into the president's strategy and foreign policy process. These moves put the Council into a position of increased importance, and facilitated the transition to the NSC system Eisenhower inherited in 1953 and institutionalized during his presidency.

¹ Inderfurth, Karl, and Loch Johnson. 2004. *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, 1st ed., 24-26. Oxford: Oxford University: 29.

² Truman's August 1949 amendments removed the three military service secretaries and the National Security Resources Board (NSRB) Chairman as statutory members of the Council. In the same stroke, he added the vice president (VP), the Chairman of the JCS (Joint Chiefs of Staff), and the Chairman of the newly created (by the 1947 National Security Act) Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). The latter two would attend as advisers, leaving the president, VP, secretary of state, and secretary of defense as permanent, Principle's Committee members. Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 31-32.

After briefly introducing the changes Truman implemented from 1949-1952, this chapter examines Eisenhower's revision and management of the NSC structure, the NSA's role, and the NSC strategy process. Through Eisenhower's clearly defined "New Look" vision, Ike and Cutler's efficient NSC operations, and their Project SOLARIUM grand strategy process, the president empowered his NSA and NSC system to execute grand strategy in-practice. To highlight their success, this chapter aims to answer the following questions: How did Eisenhower and Robert Cutler envision, guide, and create the role of the special assistant to the president for national security affairs (later renamed the National Security Advisor-NSA)? How did the Eisenhower-Cutler team reform the NSC system to effectively execute the strategy and policy process, while integrating, coordinating, and implementing the president's policies? Lastly, how did Eisenhower utilize his NSC to determine and implement America's nuclear, and by extension Cold War, policies from 1953-1957? Prior to handing the system over to Eisenhower in 1953, Truman began the "growth" process by reforming the system he marginalized during his first term in office.³

At the outbreak of the Korean War, Truman realized the shortcomings of his informal strategy process and negligence of the NSC to assist his policy formulation. Before his 1949-1950 revisions to NSC processes, Truman attended approximately 21-percent of his Council's meetings.⁴ His absence allowed unfettered attendance at meetings by an exceedingly large number of "consultants and departmental advisers, which tended to inhibit members from expressing their views."⁵ After Truman decided America would enter the war, he attended virtually all formal NSC meetings.⁶ He also downsized the committee meetings by

³ Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 10-12.

⁴ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 27-28.

⁵ Prados, John. 1991. *Keepers of the Keys*. 1st ed. New York: Morrow: 40-41.

⁶ As R. Gordon Hoxie noted in 1982, the president "with the outbreak of the war, the NSC met more frequently and Truman began presiding on a regular basis. He did so in 62 of the 71 meetings between

forbidding additional and unnecessary departmental advisors and consultants from attending the more intimate “Principals” meetings unless expressly invited.⁷ Both adjustments, while organizationally modest, moved the NSC into the realm of practical relevance. Truman realized the benefits of a deliberative body which he controlled, populated by experts outside of his inner circle of trusted advisors. The secretaries of state and defense shared the president’s concerns before the Korean War about the NSC infringing on their policy-making authority. Once Truman decided to engage the Council in 1950, the secretaries had no choice but to participate.⁸ Ultimately, the president’s trust in the NSC’s executive secretary would facilitate the Staff’s modest but necessary growth and the NSA’s formidable role in the coming years.

At the start of its “growth period,” the formal NSC Staff included only three professional staffers.⁹ Its leader, Executive Secretary Sidney W. Souers, shaped Truman’s vision of a NSA that could manage and drive the Council’s processes, while objectively advising the president. In November of 1949 Souers, a Rear Admiral in Naval Intelligence during the war who the president deeply trusted, penned a letter to Truman outlining the core attributes of the NSA.¹⁰ Souers’ key recommendations for the NSA included the following:

He should be a non-political confidant of the president...a trusted member of the president’s immediate official family...but should not be identified with the immediate staff of personal advisers. He must be objective and willing to

June 1950 and January 1953. Hoxie, R. Gordon. "The National Security Council." *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 12, no. 1 (1982): 108-13. <http://www.jstor.org.aufric.idm.oclc.org/stable/27547786>. 109.

⁷ Truman limited formal meetings to the four statutory members, plus the secretary of the treasury, the CIA Director, Chairman JCS, and a special assistant to the president (precursor to the NSA). Inderfuth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 28.

⁸ Falk, Stanley L. 1964. "The National Security Council under Truman, Eisenhower, and Kennedy". *Political Science Quarterly* 79 (3): 414-416. doi:10.2307/2145907.

⁹ Souers’ professional NSC Staff included three members in 1947, but grew to include 15 by 1950. Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 10-11.

¹⁰ Both Indiana businessmen, Souers gained the president’s deep trust by advising him during the postwar intelligence agency reorganization. He also served as the first “director of central intelligence (prior to formal establishment of CIA). Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 30-31.

*subordinate his personal views on policy to his task of coordinating the views of all responsible officials... (the deputy executive secretary was) 'only a servant of the president and the other members of the Council. His job is not to sell the president an idea with which he is in sympathy, but rather to insure [sic] that the views of all interested departments and agencies are reflected...he must be willing to forego [sic] publicity and personal aggrandizement.'*¹¹

From 1949-1952, Souers' recommendations guided Truman's impression of the executive and deputy secretaries' roles. Upon taking office, Eisenhower would demand many of the same traits from his special assistant(s) to the president for national security as the NSA "coordinator" model.¹²

With Souers' guidance and James Lay's leadership as Souers' successor, the NSC Staff independently established its functional relevance despite Truman's initial and residual marginalization of the Council.¹³ Although the NSC Staff consisted of only 15 personnel, Truman's new approach to his strategy process steered the Council in a more productive direction. His increased attendance and respect for the NSC executive secretary now demanded the Cabinet secretaries' respect for the Council's increased role.¹⁴ In the words of Stanley Falk, "as a discussion forum and as a medium for the drawing of formal statements of national policy on a wide range of subjects...(Truman's NSC)

¹¹ Considering Souers soon after resigned for personal reasons and recommended Deputy Executive Secretary James Lay as his successor to lead the Council, Souers surely intended the final statement (in italics) to apply to both the Deputy *and* Executive Secretaries. Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 34-35.

¹² Inderfurth and Johnson defined this role as "whereby the job takes on the added dimension of taking greater policy initiative by defining policy options for the president." Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 139.

¹³ R. Gordon Hoxie noted "the NSC under Truman remained of subordinate use." Secretary of State Dean Acheson proved the driving force behind Truman's limited war doctrine. Truman's most notable Korean War NSC paper, NSC-68, "was not the work of the NSC or its Senior Staff but rather that of a joint State-Defense study group. At no time under Truman was the NSC a decisive policy instrument." Hoxie, 109.

¹⁴ Despite the positive changes Truman made in the relationship between he and his NSC system, he never fully embraced the NSC to lead his strategy process. As Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman noted, NSC-68, Truman's most notable and impactful National Security analysis and treatise, was led by Paul Nitze as a "State-Defense working group" rather than one executed as an NSC project. Bowie, Robert R, and Richard H Immerman. 1998. *Waging Peace: How Eisenhower Shaped an Enduring Col War Strategy*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press: 16-17.

represented the first attempt in the nation's history to formalize and set specific national objectives and methods of achieving them in a series of carefully constructed policy papers intended to serve as guides to action for all government agencies."¹⁵ President Truman's need for counsel during the Korean crisis thus placed the NSC into the center of the collaborative interagency strategy process, and set the stage for Eisenhower to institutionalize the NSC Staff and Robert Cutler to create the "honest broker" NSA standard.

The NSA and the Council System Take Center Stage

Presidential candidate Dwight D. "Ike" Eisenhower ran as the Republican candidate in 1952 based on his "New Look" grand strategy to win the Korean War and to confront the looming Soviet threat without bankrupting the country through immense defense expenditures.¹⁶ The nuclear standoff between the superpowers and Ike's insistence on avoiding war at all costs underpinned both foreign policy challenges, and defined the US-Soviet conflict for decades. Balancing these three core national security challenges with responsible economic spending defined Eisenhower's grand strategy, and demanded a deliberate, efficient, and responsive foreign policy decision-making system to fit his leadership style.

Eisenhower's career provided him with a variety of intangible skills suited to the position of president. In contrast to Truman before and Kennedy after, "Eisenhower, who had led 5 million Allied troops to victory in Europe and later also served as army chief of staff, the president of Columbia University, and then the first Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, the head of NATO's military forces...brought with him decades of

¹⁵ Falk, "The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy", 409.

¹⁶ David Rothkopf noted that during the campaign Eisenhower was openly critical of Truman's 'soft' stance toward communism and poor management of the Executive Branch decision making processes. Rothkopf, David J. 2006. *Running the World: The Inside Story of The National Security Council and The Architects of American Power*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs: 63-65.

command and policy experience.”¹⁷ He understood his limits, the benefits of an efficient and effective staff, and the complexities of the emergent national security environment he faced. During the campaign, Eisenhower was sharply critical of not only Truman’s failure to effectively counter the Soviet threat and his inability to end the Korean War, but also Truman’s inept management of the NSC’s organization and processes.¹⁸ Eisenhower knew immediately he needed people he could trust and processes he could depend on to provide meaningful but flexible policy options to succeed on the Korean Peninsula and against the Soviet Union.

To swiftly reform the NSC system, the president established the position of Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs his first day in office and nominated Robert “Bobby” Cutler for the position.¹⁹ In many ways, Cutler embodied the job description and personality traits Souers outlined to Truman in late 1949.²⁰ Also, in parallel to the Souers-Truman relationship, Cutler and Eisenhower shared similar backgrounds in the military and had previous experience working together. Cutler also wrote speeches for Eisenhower during the campaign. For many students and historians of the NSC and the NSA, the Eisenhower-Cutler partnership and the NSC system they

¹⁷ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 63.

¹⁸ Falk, "The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy", 418. Rothkopf described the deteriorating relationship between Truman and Eisenhower, writing "Eisenhower was wooed by both parties because of his appeal...(b)ut Eisenhower rebuffed Truman’s entreaties (among others) that he become a Democrat (and in so doing alienated Truman to such a degree that the transition between the wo was among the chilliest in memory, with nothing but a few pleasantries spoken in the car on the way to Eisenhower’s swearing in). Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 63.

¹⁹ For brevity, in this chapter the term “Special Assistant” will represent the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.

²⁰ Crabb, Cecil, and Kevin Mulcahy. 2004. "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making". In *Fateful Decisions*, 1st ed., New York: Oxford University. The author’s recognized Souers as the “model of political rectitude and administrative restraint, was extremely sensitive, even deferential, with regard to the position of the State Department...(based on) President Truman’s high personal regard for his secretaries of state md defense and realized that Truman preferred the ‘classical model’ of State Department dominance of foreign affairs.” 163-164.

institutionalized exemplify the system's potential for conducting strategy in the service of US foreign policy.²¹

Eisenhower envisioned the special assistant serving a more nuanced role than simply managing the NSC Staff as the executive secretary did for Truman. While Souers and Lay served as the executive secretary leading the NSC Staff, Eisenhower and Cutler intended the special assistant to act as an advisor to president directly, rather than only managing the NSC Staff. As Shoemaker noted, "(t)he special assistant was an altogether new position; it was designed to institutionalize what had been a de facto national security post in previous administrations...(a)lthough the special assistant initially had no formal supervisory responsibility over the NSC Staff, a marriage of convenience quickly occurred; the special assistant needed staff support to function in an increasingly complex government, and the NSC Staff needed a champion of substance to lead it into bureaucratic relevance."²² Cutler recommended the new special assistant position to Eisenhower during the presidential campaign, and quickly proved the ideal person to lead the administration's efforts to revise the NSC system.

Cutler understood efficient and effective staffing given his previous experience as a military staff officer and brigadier general. He relayed his frustration and criticism of Truman's failure to leverage his NSC to Eisenhower, even inserting critical comments into some of Eisenhower's campaign speeches. On his first day after his taking office, the president directed Cutler to further his analysis of the NSC and recommend changes to reform the system.²³ Cutler turned to the veterans of the process, soliciting advice from the de facto drafter of the National Security Act, Ferdinand Eberstadt, Secretary of State George Marshall, Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett, Truman's NSC Executive Secretary

²¹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 65.

²² Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff*, 10-12.

²³ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 28.

James Lay, and the NSC Staff members from the Truman Administration who remained through the transition. Cutler also recommended that Eisenhower allow him to retain both Lay as executive secretary and S. Everett Gleason as deputy secretary.²⁴ This retention would capitalize on their expertise on the inner workings and pitfalls of the NSC system, and facilitate a more efficient transition to the new policy process. It also reflected Eisenhower and Cutler's willingness to consider these men's differing opinions which they shaped during their time under Truman.²⁵

Through these men's inputs and Cutler's insights into what Eisenhower needed to succeed, Cutler submitted a report to Eisenhower on 16 March of 1953. This report outlined a functional reorganization meant to institutionalize the organization and streamline the policy process. Cutler and Eisenhower envisioned a "central Council supported by a grid of highly standardized procedures and staff relationships and a complex interdepartmental committee substructure. In its final form, this machinery was geared to support the executive decision-making process not as Truman or Kennedy would conceive of it, but, properly, as Eisenhower practiced it."²⁶ In an important and reassuring sign of Eisenhower's trust in Cutler, the president approved the plan and its sweeping changes effectively establishing the "NSC system" blueprint on the following day.²⁷

²⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 66.

²⁵ The White House Transition Project's 2017 report on the NSA and the NSC Staff stated "In Cutler's view their institutional memory from the Truman years would be helpful. They are 'devoted, capable, and well-informed,' he told Eisenhower, 'They will provide continuity, effectively operate the staff mechanism, and greatly help in the policy planning.' It is an important lesson in the importance of the continuity of expertise and substantive knowledge in the transition from one administration to the next." Burke, John P. 2017. *The National Security Advisor and Staff*. The White House Transition Project. Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy. http://www.whitehousetransitionproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/WHTP2017-24_National_Security_Advisor.pdf.

²⁶ Falk, "The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy", 418.

²⁷ Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 62.

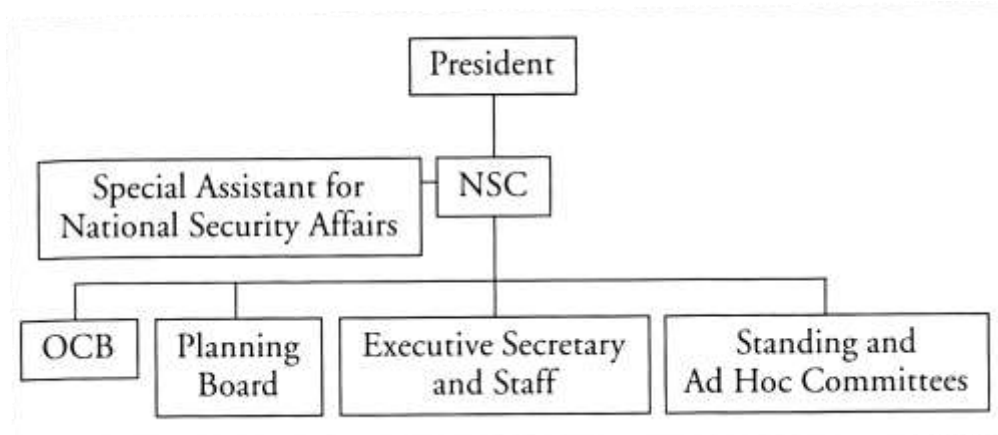


Figure 4 - The Eisenhower National Security Council (1953)

Source: Cambone, Stephen A, Patrick J Garrity, and Alistair J.K Shepherd. 1998. *A New Structure for National Security Policy Planning*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies: 149.

As Raymond Millen noted, “Eisenhower had a system that provided him and the NSC with integrated staff work, education on the issues, and meaningful debate—all of which cultivated strategic thinking.”²⁸ Cutler and his team’s central goal became establishing the process and ensuring its efficient execution.

Cutler not only developed the machinery of the administration’s NSC system known as “Policy Hill,” he and the NSC Staff ensured the key organizational elements remained on-task and synchronized throughout the deliberative policy process. The main, structural elements of the Eisenhower NSC system were the “Planning Board,” known as the “Senior Staff” during the Truman Administration, and the “Operations Coordination Board” (OCB), which replaced Truman’s Psychological Strategy Board. Eisenhower and Cutler formally instituted the OCB through presidential order on 2 September 1953.²⁹

²⁸ Millen, Raymond. "Eisenhower and US Grand Strategy." *Parameters* 44, no. 2 (Summer, 2014): 35. <http://aufric.idm.oclc.org/login?url=http://search.proquest.com.aufric.idm.oclc.org/docview/1565830291?accountid=4332>.

²⁹ Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery. 1960. *Organizational History of The National Security Council During the Truman And Eisenhower Administrations*. Washington, D.C.: United States Senate: 23-36.

The Planning Board started the policy process and represented “upslope” of Policy Hill. Their task was to develop policy options and prepare policy papers for Cutler to review prior to the Council meetings. The special assistant, working by, with, and through the Office of the Executive Secretary and his NSC Staff, remained at the center of the process and on “both sides of the hill.” They reviewed policies as they went “up the hill” to be considered at Council meetings. The president and his principals on the Council represented the “top of the hill,” where policies were debated and ultimately decided. Then, Cutler and his NSC Staff, based on the president’s decisions, refined the policies on its way “down the hill” to be disseminated for implementation by the administration.³⁰ The OCB, after policy approval, worked the interagency coordination and policy implementation stage of the process.³¹

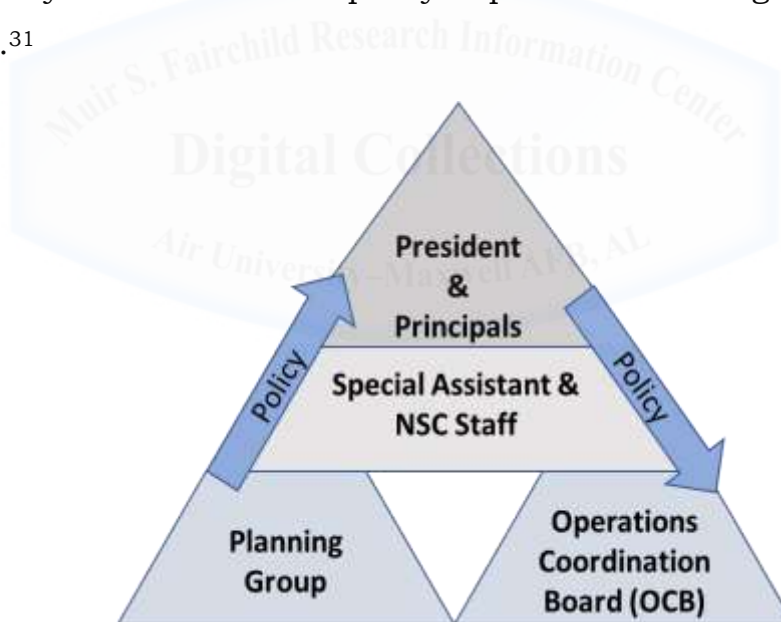


Figure 5 - Eisenhower NSC “Policy Hill” Process

Source: Author’s original work based on description provided by Special Assistant Robert Cutler. Cutler, Robert. 1956. “The Development of The National Security Council”. *Foreign Affairs* 34 (3): 441. doi:10.2307/20031176.

³⁰ This committee of statutory members eventually became known as the “Principles Committee.”

³¹ Cutler, Robert. 1956. “The Development of The National Security Council”. *Foreign Affairs* 34 (3): 441. doi:10.2307/20031176.

The special assistant chaired the NSC Planning Board, which consisted of Assistant Secretaries, “nominated by the department heads and approved by the President,” representing each Council Principal.³² This vetting process supported the president’s insistence that representation, not only on the Council but also within the Staff and the core of NSC system, be relegated to individuals with significant expertise and authority. The Planning Board was charged to prepare “studies, policy recommendations, and basic drafts for NSC coordination” and consideration by the president and principals.³³ The Assistant Secretaries cooperatively developed and polished policies for weeks, even months, prior to distributing them to the principals for review before the upcoming Council meeting.³⁴ Aside from State and Defense, Planning Board members included Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), NSC Staff executive and deputy executive secretaries. The special assistant invited advisors and consultants to bring unique perspective and subject-matter expertise to the planning table. In 1953 alone Cutler chaired 120 Planning Board meetings.³⁵

The OCB, which met on Wednesdays, became the central venue to execute interagency coordination to facilitate policy implementation. At the time of its creation in 1953, the OCB reported to but did not organizationally fall within the formal NSC structure. As the 1960 Senate report “Organizational History of the National Security Council during the Truman and Eisenhower Administrations” (The “Jackson Report”) stated, the OCB provided a venue to cooperatively coordinate implementation measures for approved policies passed down from the Council. In principle, OCB members possessed significant authority

³² The Planning Board met every Tuesday and Friday afternoon. Falk, “The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy”, 420.

³³ Best, Richard A. 2011. *CRS Report for Congress The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL30840.pdf>: 8.

³⁴ Cutler, “The Development of The National Security Council”, 444.

³⁵ Falk, “The National Security Council Under Truman, Eisenhower, And Kennedy”, 420.

within their organizations, and would facilitate smooth implementation of policies without interposing the OCB between the president and the heads of the executive departments and agencies.³⁶ This new entity provided consistency and congruency throughout the national security enterprise to ensure not only coordination, but also “implementation” and “post-implementation” measures after the president and his principals determined an administration’s policy. As Marcella noted, these last two phases of the policy process ensure “programmed application of resources to achieve the policy objectives...and feedback (as) a continuous effort to assess the effectiveness of policy and to make appropriate adjustments...conducted by all the agencies in the field.”³⁷ Unfortunately, OCB members often refused to shed their department loyalties regardless of their higher obligation to the president. Recognizing its importance and potential dysfunction, in 1957 Eisenhower formally placed the OCB within the NSC structure and appointed the special assistant as the chairman.³⁸ The president understood that without monitoring of a policy’s implementation and effects, deliberation and implementation were of little use. The OCB, as envisioned, created, and reinforced by Eisenhower and Cutler, embodied the “whole-of-community” concept paramount to today’s successful interagency and foreign-policy process.

One cannot understate the level to which the president and special assistant shaped the NSC’s relevance and effectiveness through their guidance and action. Throughout his presidency, Eisenhower chaired 90-

³⁶ The Jackson Report also noted standard OCB duties and tasks included, “(a) operations plans for foreign countries or regions or major “functional” areas; (b) reports to the NSC on assigned policies; (c) semiannual appraisals of the validity of assigned policies and evaluations of their implementation; (d) the Activity Report...(e) special reports for the OCB or the NSC prepared by OCB working groups to meet specific needs for information or action; and (f) oral reports which may serve as background briefings for papers on the agenda or as the basis for discussion at current problems of major interest.” Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery. 1960. *Organizational History of The National Security Council During the Truman And Eisenhower Administrations*. Washington, D.C.: United States Senate: 43.

³⁷ Marcella, *Affairs of State*, 17.

³⁸ Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery: 37.

percent of Council meetings, missing only six of 179 during Cutler's tenure. In all he presided over 329 of 366.³⁹ Most of those he missed were due to illness, in which case the vice president (VP) presided according to Eisenhower's revision to Council policy.⁴⁰ The president remained engaged to ensure success, revising the system and correcting members' inability to adhere to his expectations. As John Prados noted, in "1955, Ike saw fit to instruct NSC members, in a formal letter, that they sat on the Council as his personal advisers and not the representatives of departments and agencies."⁴¹ For Eisenhower, the Council members first and foremost must operate as a "corporate body" advising the president, rather than a gathering of disparate agencies and departments representing their own bureaucratic positions.⁴²

By garnering lessons learned from Truman's marginalization of his NSC, Eisenhower recognized the need to reform the NSC system and its formal staff if it were to serve him in conducting grand strategy. At the head of this team, Robert Cutler dutifully served in an increased policy-advisory role to the president, chaired over 120 NSC Planning Board Meetings, and ensured the NSC agenda reflected the most pressing, emerging policy challenges for the Principles to discuss. As David Auerswald recognized, these geopolitical challenges encompassed no less than "the increasingly frigid Cold War, to include crises in Greece and Turkey; communist control of Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia; the Berlin blockade; and the fall of China, to say nothing of the two-year-old and then-stalemated Korean War."⁴³ Perhaps the most relevant and pressing problem remained the nuclear "standoff" with

³⁹ Formal Council meetings were held on Tuesday Morning. The Planning Board would meet immediately after, and again on Friday. The OCB met formally on Wednesdays. Brzezinski, Zbigniew. 1988. *In Quest of National Security*. 1st ed. Boulder [etc.]: Westview press: 58.

⁴⁰ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 88-93.

⁴¹ Prados, *Keepers of The Keys*, 65.

⁴² Cutler, "The Development of The National Security Council", 441-442.

⁴³ Auerswald, David. 2011. "The Evolution of The NSC Process". In *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University: 36.

the Soviet Union. At the center of his policy system, the president's NSC would be put to a formidable test in its preparedness and flexibility to develop his "New Look" grand strategic posture.

The NSC and Project SOLARIUM⁴⁴

For President Truman, the Korean War remained a central issue of internal strife between the president and his military leaders, especially General Douglas MacArthur. The debate revolved around not only troop levels or the war's priority with respect to America's evolving foreign policy agenda, but also the administration's stance on the potential use of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula and within the context of the struggle against communism. Truman's NSC-68, finalized on 14 April 1950, recognized the connection between the Korean conflict, the threat of communism, and Chinese and Soviet support for North Korean aggression to support the spread of communism abroad. NSC-68 was a markedly more militaristic policy than George Kennan advocated during the earliest years of the Cold War. Coupled with Truman's decision to pursue thermonuclear weapons, the new policy held the potential to deter the enemy. The approach remained, however, too reactive to establish true strategic containment of the spread of communism.⁴⁵ Eisenhower campaigned on resolving the Korean conflict, and leveraged his NSC to decide and establish nuclear policy that might end the Korean conflict while establishing a strategically advantageous Cold War policy.

Eisenhower felt Truman's stance in resisting Soviet aggression and advancement was "too soft," while his expanded defense budget threatened economic security. The "Truman Doctrine," or NSC-68 as it was formally known, became the focal point of opposition for both

⁴⁴ Authors and experts have commonly referred to Project SOLARIUM as "The Solarium Project." Eisenhower apparently chose the name "Solarium" because he held the meeting where he proposed the idea to his key advisers in the White House solarium. Millen, "Eisenhower and US Grand Strategy," 35.

⁴⁵ Craig, Campbell. 1998. *Destroying the Village: Eisenhower and Thermonuclear War*. New York: Columbia University Press: 34-43.

Eisenhower and Secretary of State John Foster Dulles who argued the policy “created an American bunker mentality in Europe... (and) led to the stalemated war in Korea and \$50 billion defense budgets.”⁴⁶ The principles of Eisenhower’s “New Look” policy stood in stark contrast to Truman’s approach and defined his national security concerns, while his “Great Equation” stressed the importance of balancing military capability with cost, morality, and democracy.

Eisenhower’s experience working with the Soviets during WWII cemented his impressions of the challenge ahead. He not only witnessed their strength and resolve first-hand, but pragmatically recognized Soviet aims. They aimed to gain power, spread communism, and counter the West. Eisenhower’s belief in American physical and ideological superiority, which in turn influenced his definition of national security, rested on four principles: “(1) complete devotion to democracy, which means a faith in men as men (essentially a religious concept) and practice of free enterprise...(2) industrial and economic strength; (3) moral probity in all dealings; (4) [and only lastly) necessary military strength.”⁴⁷ To ensure these long-term national objectives, the president convened an NSC-led, highly secret strategy and policy planning session at the National War College known as Project SOLARIUM.⁴⁸

SOLARIUM received its name not for cosmic reasons but rather more humble ones reflective of President Eisenhower’s personality and temperament. Eisenhower apparently chose the name because he proposed the idea to his key advisers in the White House solarium. Ultimately the strategy meetings convened under Project SOLARIUM

⁴⁶ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 41. As Bowie and Immerman noted, “there developed growing disparity between the avowed objectives of NSC 68 and the actual forces, priorities, and budgets. In the end, the objectives of NSC 68—notably across-the-board preponderance, less reliance on nuclear weapons, and rollback—proved impractical or illusory, producing disarray and incoherence in policies, programs, and strategy.” Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 40.

⁴⁷ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 47.

⁴⁸ Brzezinski: 58. For a highly-detailed analysis of the source of inspiration, organization, focus, methods, and results of Project SOLARIUM, refer to Bowie and Immerman’s *Waging Peace*, 96-138.

resulted in the creation of NSC drafts of the Basic National Security Policy (BNSP) and NSC 162/2 (originally labeled NSC 162 prior to NSC staff edits). These two documents became the cornerstones of president's national security strategy and his first concrete declaratory nuclear policy.⁴⁹

SOLARIUM, based on three distinct strategy options proposed by then Secretary of State Dulles, divided into a supervisory working committee headed by Cutler, a panel chaired by General James Doolittle, and three Task Forces designated as A, B, and C. The task forces' objective was to each analyze and defend one of Dulles' three proposed strategy options. As part of their analyses, the members of each task force weighed "forces needed, costs in manpower, dollars, casualties, world relations; intelligence estimates; time-tables; tactics in every other part of the world while actions were being taken in a specific area; relations with the UN and our Allies; disposition of an area after gaining a victory therein; influencing world opinion; Congressional action required."⁵⁰ Most importantly they were to address the challenge that VP Nixon put forth at the 13 May NSC Council meeting: What would be done once the Soviet production and possession of nuclear weapons reached parity with the US's stockpile? President Eisenhower commented, showing his true intent behind SOLARIUM, "that Project Solarium was being initiated with this precise problem in mind."⁵¹ With these challenges in-mind, Project SOLARIUM set out to define the administration's strategic vision and determine the best policies to ensure America's continuing advantage in the Cold War.

⁴⁹ As Edward Kaplan noted, "In 1956, Paul Nitze, author of NSC-68 and former chief planner at the State Department, wrote an article in *Foreign Affairs* about nuclear strategy, which introduced a useful distinction between two forms of policy. 'Declaratory policy,' the public face of nuclear strategy, consists of the nation's announced nuclear stance. 'Action policy' is how a nation actually prepares to carry out nuclear strategy. These policies are distinct, often uncoordinated, and relevant for that fact." Kaplan, 19.

⁵⁰ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 125.

⁵¹ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 125

Cutler and the administrative team divided SOLARIUM into three planning bodies to “red team” policy options. Eisenhower selected George Kennan to lead Task Force A in defense of his and Truman’s containment policies. Task Force B analyzed and defended a nuclear-centric containment policy, which closely resembled Dulles and Eisenhower’s initial albeit short-lived massive retaliation policy established in 1953. Finally, Task Force C “developed a more intricate (and highly classified) and activist strategy designed to roll back communist bastions by employing a variety of means, including nuclear and conventional warfare, covert action and propaganda.”⁵² After 20 days of planning and deliberation, the three task forces presented their cases on 16 July 1953 to the president and the Council at the first of a series of special NSC meetings (the first lasted all day).⁵³ Eisenhower, although impressed with the level of analysis and thought dedicated to the exercise, proved clearly frustrated at the obvious failure of all three task forces to weigh their proposals against the other “Great Equation” variables.

The president discounted propositions that might alienate allies, exacerbate over-spending, risk general war or, stress an aggressive Soviet “rollback” policy. The latter was essentially the proposal of Task Force C, of which then Colonel Andrew Goodpaster was a member.⁵⁴ The

⁵² Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 44-45.

⁵³ Millen, “Eisenhower and US Grand Strategy”, 39.

⁵⁴ “Cutler later informed Goodpaster that Eisenhower assigned (Goodpaster) to Task Force C because Eisenhower ‘wanted the rollback option thoroughly evaluated, and he said he wanted somebody with common sense ... on Task Force C to see that they didn’t go completely off on their analysis.’” According to Goodpaster, Eisenhower’s decision “‘against the rollback policy . . . was finalized at the (start) of the Solarium exercise.’” Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 127. Goodpaster also played a central role in Eisenhower’s administration, although in his formal role as White House staff secretariat, he resided “outside” of the NSC system. While Eisenhower wholly supported and engaged his NSC, he (like every president) still utilized informal venues such as Oval Office meetings to discuss and decide policy. In this role, Goodpaster built the president’s daily agenda and coordinated his meetings with his secretaries and Agency chairmen. Goodpaster also remained on at the start of the Kennedy administration, consistently advising against Kennedy and Bundy’s move to dismantle Eisenhower’s NSC system and processes. Nixon and Kissinger elicited Goodpaster’s expertise and advice on constructing Nixon’s NSC process. Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor And Presidential Decision Making*. 1st ed. College Station: Texas A & M University Press: 41-59, 100-110.

president concluded the Council meeting by directing the SOLARIUM players to fully cooperate with Cutler and the NSC, who Eisenhower made responsible for turning the project's results into formal administration policy.⁵⁵ The development of the Basic National Security Policy (BNSP) spanned from 30 July to 30 October 1953 with the adoption of NSC 162/2.⁵⁶ Cutler convened an *ad hoc* SOLARIUM special committee comprised of formal Planning Board members from the Department of Defense, Department of State, Joints Chiefs of Staff (JCS) and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and representatives from each SOLARIUM task force. They were directed to use any supporting documentation they required, including the SOLARIUM reports, National Intelligence Estimates, minutes from Council meetings, and even the Oppenheimer Report, to conduct an open-minded, independent planning session to develop their draft of the BNSP.⁵⁷ This process, fully supported by the president, demonstrated his great trust in Cutler and the NSC Planning Board's abilities to formulate strategy and policy.

As always, Eisenhower "insisted that he wanted Board members, as well as Council members, to advise as individuals and not merely represent their agencies."⁵⁸ He also reinforced the premise that the Planning Board, guided by Cutler, remained the final author of the draft that would meet the Council. While competing views and disagreements remained, the Planning Board largely agreed with the special committee's draft, and NSC 162 was presented to the president at the Council

⁵⁵ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 123-138.

⁵⁶ Millen, "Eisenhower and US Grand Strategy", 40.

⁵⁷ The Oppenheimer Report was the official report delivered to President Truman by the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) in October 1949. The report, drafted by J. Robert Oppenheimer, the lead scientist of the AEC's General Advisory Committee (GAC) advised *against* the pursuit of a thermonuclear weapon. The report reflected a moral conviction that the thermonuclear "superbomb" would wield unfathomable destructive power. It stated that regardless of Soviet pursuits, the US should not build a thermonuclear bomb and could still balance the Soviet threat with a large stockpile of atomic weapons rather than thermonuclear devices. Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 22-27.

⁵⁸ Cutler, "The Development of The National Security Council", 441-442.

meeting on 7 October.⁵⁹ After the NSC Staff made minor edits to NSC 162, it was formally established as policy NSC 162/2. For Secretary Dulles, NSC 162/2 proved too vague in some areas. For the president, “Great Equation” economic-austerity considerations, seemed cast aside. In response, he directed NSC 162/2 begin with a section which read:

Basic Problems of National Security

1. a. To meet the Soviet threat to U.S. security.
- b. In doing so, to avoid seriously weakening the U.S. economy or undermining our fundamental values and institutions.⁶⁰

After tense but productive debate, the Council agreed that the draft fully and specifically outlined the nation’s strategic imperatives. President Eisenhower, through Project SOLARIUM and the NSC, had codified the strategic vision necessary to advance US foreign and declaratory policy on multiple fronts, including military force composition and posture, collective security, and the use of nuclear weapons.⁶¹ Specifically, nuclear weapons retaliatory policy largely determined the resolution of the Korean stalemate and the enduring reluctance for the US and the Soviet Union to wage general war.

The threat of massive retaliation via conventional and nuclear weapons to a communist threat, even of “peripheral” interest in a region such as Korea, changed the decision calculus for the superpowers. Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ public statements, beginning as soon as 1953, provided the preconditions for strategic brinksmanship Truman never enjoyed. 162/2 provided the policy logic for deterrence, while the buildup of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe and Strategic Air Command’s bomber force made the threats of nuclear retaliation a reality. On the one hand, Eisenhower remained convinced that any war, even the peripheral

⁵⁹ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 139-143.

⁶⁰ The National Security Council. 1953. *NSC 162/2: A Report to The National Security Council by The Executive Secretary on Basic National Security Policy*. Washington, D.C.: The National Security Council: 1.

⁶¹ Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 186-201.

Korean War, would expand into general and nuclear war. On the other hand, Dulles openly stated the US retained the intention to use nuclear weapons in defense.⁶² As Kenneth Waltz stated, thanks to the Eisenhower-Dulles retaliation policy “the Soviet Union and China may have been convinced (by Eisenhower and Dulles) that (the US) would widen the Korean War and raise the level of violence if a settlement were not reached.”⁶³ While they agreed on a nuclear-centric retaliation policy that served multiple immediate and strategic national security interests, Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ convictions were not logically identical and thus fueled an intense debate within the Council through 1957.

Through 1957, nuclear policy debate flourished in and dominated NSC meetings, while the Planning Board remained the centerpiece for turning proposition into policy papers, into official US policy. John Foster Dulles and Secretary of Defense Charles Erwin Wilson advocated for large conventional *and* nuclear capabilities, while Secretary of Treasury George M. Humphrey and Special Assistant to the President and Chairman of the Council on Foreign Economic Policy, Joseph M. Dodge, insisted on a more economically responsible, basic retaliatory nuclear force. Additionally, as subsequent paragraphs reveal, the disparate logic behind Eisenhower’s and Dulles’ decision to embrace nuclear retaliatory and preemptive policies underpinned the debate within the NSC. Eisenhower embraced both the concept that, in theory, limited war in the nuclear age would result in nuclear war, and that the US retained the right to employ nuclear weapons for deterrence, retaliation, or defense. While Dulles broadly agreed with the right to use weapons for deterrence, retaliation, or defense, he believed the US could (and perhaps should) engage in limited war without fear of escalation to nuclear war. These differing views between Eisenhower, Dulles, and their fellow

⁶² Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 44-48.

⁶³ Sagan, Scott Douglas, and Kenneth N Waltz. 2013. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons*. 1st ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Co: 16.

administration leaders placed the NSC at the center of attention as a deliberation, decision-making, and policy production venue.⁶⁴

At Council meetings during July and August, prior to publishing of NSC 162/2, the Dulles-Wilson and Humphrey-Dodge camps hotly debated the future posture of nuclear forces outlined by SOLARIUM Task Force B.⁶⁵ In 1954 the Council forum played host to the Eisenhower-Dulles debate. In August 1954, the NSC revised the BNSP with NSC 5422/2. 5422/2 essentially rejected Dulles' position which outlined that "because 'limited war was not feasible,' the US would wage war against the Soviet Union 'with all available weapons,' and remained skeptical at the suggestion of disarmament.⁶⁶ The Director of the CIA, Allen Dulles (John Foster Dulles' brother), took the opportunity at Council meetings to object to NSC 5422/2 and press for NSC 5440, renouncing massive retaliation and establishing "flexible response" as a declaratory policy.⁶⁷

In 1955, the NSC formally initiated and published the president's policy to pursue rapid Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) buildup, and continued to serve as the primary venue for debate surrounding the 1956 BNSP, NSC 5602. In what Cambell Craig labeled "perhaps the richest NSC meeting on nuclear strategy during the entire Eisenhower era," Eisenhower openly objected to Dulles' limited war policy, but eventually capitulated and allowed US declaratory policy to remain a "flexible and selective nuclear deterrent."⁶⁸ Finally, in 1957 the president

⁶⁴ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 44-70.

⁶⁵ Dulles and Wilson advocated for large conventional *and* nuclear capabilities, while Humphrey and Dodge insisted on a more economically responsible basic retaliatory nuclear force. As Craig noted, "The resulting American nuclear force posture from 1953 to 1955 consisted of three main components: a small deployment of tactical nuclear weapons in Europe; a modest Civil Defense Program; and the centerpiece of the New Look, an integrated bomber force, still under the direction of LeMay's Strategic Air Command, which would carry out massive nuclear retaliation." Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 45-46.

⁶⁶ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 49.

⁶⁷ The term "flexible response" was not common vernacular until the early 1960s. Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 51-52.

⁶⁸ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 56-58.

turned to his NSC “Net Evaluation Committee” for an updated projection of US-Soviet nuclear exchange destruction. Despite the report, delivered at a Council meeting, that the US would suffer 40-percent casualties in the wake of such an exchange, the president chose to “double-down” on nuclear investment and attack prevention. He directed Cutler and the Planning Board to draft NSC 5707, which would define the nation’s two-year outlook on strategic threats, nuclear posture, and military preparedness for limited and general war.⁶⁹

The final document, 5707/8, reflected US strategic imperatives and foreign policy principles to meet Cold War threats. The US would “require a flexible combination of military, political, economic, psychological, and covert actions (to counter) ...the disastrous character of total nuclear war, the possibility of local conflicts developing into total war, and the serious effect of further Communist aggression.” America would “place main, but not sole, reliance on nuclear weapons; to integrate nuclear weapons with other weapons in the arsenal of the United States; to consider them as conventional weapons from a military point of view; and to use them when required to achieve national objectives.”⁷⁰ For Eisenhower, this expanded, nuclear-weapon employment policy served multiple purposes. It not only clearly stated America’s stance on nuclear weapons employment to deter both nuclear and limited wars, it also ended his debate with Dulles. Dulles ultimately ceased his open opposition to the president, and at the 27 May meeting the Council approved NSC 5707. The policy decisively supported and established Eisenhower’s practical stance on the nation’s conduct of war under his watch, and strategically “allow(ed) Eisenhower to avoid war altogether.”⁷¹ His ability to avoid entangling the US in war remained perhaps his greatest legacy.

⁶⁹ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 63-65.

⁷⁰ "Foreign Relations of The United States, 1955–1957, National Security Policy, Volume XIX - Office of The Historian". 1957. *History.State.Gov*. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1955-57v19/d120>.

⁷¹ Craig, *Destroying the Village*, 66-68.

This chapter aimed to answer three questions outlined previously. Based on the wise words of Sid Souers to President Truman, President Eisenhower chose for his NSA someone dedicated to the president and his vision of an efficient, effective, and relevant NSC. Thanks to a sense of trust developed during the 1952 election campaign and his “honest broker” approach to NSA’s duties, Robert “Bobby” Cutler turned Eisenhower’s vision into a reality, putting “Policy Hill” into practice. During his first tenure as Eisenhower’s Special Assistant (1953-1955), Robert Cutler embodied the “honest broker” persona nearly every prospective NSA has openly acclaimed upon appointment and aspired to emulate.⁷² Cutler insisted the advisor support the president’s policy processes as a fair and balanced “administrator,” refraining from advocating specific policies. While these traits serve as the baseline for the honest broker model, when the situation required it Cutler readily evolved into a policy “coordinator” and, albeit very infrequently, performed as policy entrepreneur.⁷³

In stark contrast to Truman, Eisenhower’s clear cooperation with and dependence on his Council demanded much more from his NSA than simply acting as an objective policy analyst neutral to principals’ and agents’ proposals. To serve Eisenhower’s direct requests for the Council to engage not only policy-making but also implementation, Cutler’s (and his successor Gordon Gray’s) role evolved into a “coordinator” of the president’s “Policy Hill,” NSC-centric strategy and policy process.⁷⁴ While Cutler served as coordinator during NSC meetings and the highly successful, deliberate, and focused strategy and decision-making forum at SOLARIUM, his role evolved even further as his tenure unfolded.

⁷² Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 4-5.

⁷³ Crabb and Mulcahy, "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making", 164-165. Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 5-6.

⁷⁴ Crabb and Mulcahy, "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making", 165.

Cutler, as Eisenhower's agent, at times performed as policy entrepreneur in addition to his role as honest broker. This was clear as he intervened in the redrafting of 162/2, insisting that the NSC team stay focused on more economically balanced policy proposals to meet Eisenhower's strategic vision and priorities. He even, on occasion, exemplified the policy entrepreneur in objection to Eisenhower's policy suggestions. For example, during a discussion concerning the 1954 Indochina crisis, Eisenhower began discussing how commanders should arm their troops deployed to the region. Cutler, in response, reminded the president and the Council that the administration's policy was that troops would not be deployed for the conflict. Eisenhower conceded Cutler's point and the discussion ended.⁷⁵

This exchange between Cutler and Eisenhower, witnessed first-hand by the principals and chief NSC staff members, exemplified Eisenhower's trust in and respect for Cutler and his role as the manager of the NSC strategy process. In these examples, Cutler's authority as both honest broker and policy entrepreneur stemmed from his role as the president's trusted agent.⁷⁶ Additionally, while Eisenhower enabled Cutler's honest broker role, that role was simply one of many he was charged to fill to manage the president's strategy process. Cutler's willingness to evolve his role as the president and the situation required helped the president not only establish and maintain a culture of duty and purpose in and around the NSC system, but also set a lasting and superb precedent for the practical role of the NSA. When he returned to the post in 1957, he continued to embody the standard he set in executing the NSC's processes and implementing Eisenhower's, and the NSC's policies.

⁷⁵ Greenstein, Fred I., and Richard H. Immerman. 2000. "Effective National Security Advising: Recovering the Eisenhower Legacy". *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (3): 335-345. doi:10.2307/2658121: 342.

⁷⁶ Dueck, Colin. 2014. "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review". *Orbis* 58 (1): 15-38. doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2013.11.007, 34-35.

The process the Eisenhower-Cutler team created was much more than “Policy Hill,” although the ability of the 10-15-person NSC Staff to handle the planning, drafting, and implementation of formal policy seldom faltered. While this deliberate, efficient, and responsive policy machinery served both Cutler and Eisenhower well, the NSC’s growth and rise rested more so on the president’s dedication to the process and willingness to share the floor. His attendance as Chairman of 90 percent of the Council’s meetings speaks volumes to his interest in and dedication to his NSC. As outlined in this case study’s unfolding of “New Look” and nuclear policy within the NSC from 1953-1957, the fact that Eisenhower afforded both the opportunity and the venue for open criticism and debate of his policies remains a testament to the NSC’s potential value as a forum to develop and implement strategy.

Project SOLARIUM, led by Cutler at the outset of the presidency, remains the best case of Eisenhower’s faith in his people and the process he envisioned. As Robert Bowie and Richard Immerman phrased it, “No president before or after Eisenhower, however, ever received such a systematic and focused briefing on the threats facing the nation’s security and the possible strategies for coping with them.”⁷⁷ Ultimately, even the experts and the department secretaries were confident enough in Cutler and the NSC Staff to support their role in completing the process of drafting 1953 BNSP and NSC 162/2.⁷⁸ As Edward Kaplan noted, “(t)he NSC worked as designed in national security matters, including basic decisions about general war, atomic weapons, and the Soviet threat...(and) the hazards of the late air-atomic age”⁷⁹ Eisenhower’s strategy process, centered in the NSC and guided by his Cutler as the president’s agent, honest broker, and policy entrepreneur,

⁷⁷Bowie and Immerman, *Waging Peace*, 127.

⁷⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 72.

⁷⁹ Kaplan, Edward. 2015. *To Kill Nations: American Strategy in The Air-Atomic Age and The Rise of Mutually Assured Destruction*. 1st ed. Ithaca: Cornell University Press: 108-109.

proved its worth in formulating the administration's nuclear and Cold War policy.

Ultimately, Eisenhower institutionalized an NSC system and process that efficiently generated emergent nuclear and limited war policies. His approach demanded the Council then act as a venue where his principals would openly debate and refine the administration's strategy and policies. Within the Staff, the Planning Board and OCB generated formal policy releases that made NSC decisions official, declaratory policy.⁸⁰ As Auerswald aptly summarized Ike's system, "the Eisenhower NSC was the epitome of a structured, systematic NSC process, something that the administration thought was needed given both the circumstances confronting it and the personality of the president."⁸¹ Despite the efficiency and effectiveness of Ike's system and Cutler's role, presidents retained the paramount right to appoint their "own" NSA, reorganize their NSC structure, and shape their decision-making methods to meet their needs.

Sidelining the NSC's role in policymaking, subsequent Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson, and Richard Nixon moved the strategy process into the Oval Office of the White House. Ronald Reagan and his eight NSAs attempted to empower and depend on their NSC more than his predecessors. Ultimately his efforts backfired as the NSC Staff became entangled in the Iran-Contra affair, facing "charges" by the 1987 Tower Commission for "operationalizing" and operating in a rogue manner. Not until George H. W. Bush and his NSA, Brent Scowcroft, did an administration fully revive the Eisenhower institutionalized NSC system and Cutler's honest broker NSA model. Following Bush and Scowcroft's lead, William Clinton and George W. Bush intended their

⁸⁰ It must be noted that the OCB, while indispensable in Eisenhower's, Cutler's, and Gordon Gray's eyes, the OCB never reached its full potential. Its role, however, as the interagency integration arm of the NSC, represented the potential to ensure the success implementation and post-implementation (feedback) phases of policy making.

⁸¹ Auerswald, "The Evolution of The NSC Process", 36.

NSCs to and NSAs to operate in principle on the Eisenhower-Cutler model.⁸² Unfortunately, their processes did not work out as smoothly as planned. The next two chapters examine their unique president-NSA-NSC policy process models, and analyze their NSAs' ability to direct the strategy process.



⁸² Auerswald, "The Evolution of The NSC Process", 37-43.

Chapter 3

Leadership for a Post-Cold War Council

The currency of national strength in this new era will be denominated not only in ships, tanks and planes, but also in diplomas, patents and paychecks

1992 Presidential Candidate William Clinton

This administration wanted to put foreign policy on autopilot, and the Clinton people consciously chose the Bush model to do that.

Former NSC Staffer

In 1992 President-elect William “Bill” Clinton inherited a highly capable and efficient NSC system from the George H. W. Bush Administration, and an outstanding example of the NSA honest broker model from Lt Gen (Ret) Brent Scowcroft. On the surface Clinton clearly declared his strategic vision to shape “an entirely new foreign policy for a world that has fundamentally changed.”¹ For Clinton this meant prioritizing economic concerns and strategies over military policy preferences prevalent in the Cold War. Considering Eisenhower’s “Great Equation” mandate to balance between a healthy economy and rising military expenditures, this approach made sense. In contrast to Eisenhower’s clear emphasis of “New Look” in principle and NSC practice, Clinton failed to redefine what the end of the Cold War meant for the future of US grand strategy. As this chapter aims to show, this lack of strategic clarity, coupled with his inability to fully direct and empower his administration’s key leaders, led to significant, systemic struggles within his NSC strategy and foreign policy processes.² The

¹ Auger, Vincent. 1997. "The National Security Council System After the Cold War". In *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 1st ed. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh: 42-43

² Ripley, Randall, and James Lindsay. 1997. "Continuity and Change After the Cold War". In *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 1st ed. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh: 316-318.

Bosnian crisis case study presented in this chapter illustrates the dysfunction within the NSC that the president's failures caused. Although Clinton put the "economy first" principle into organizational practice by altering his national NSC system to prioritize economic strategy, he mistakenly put "foreign policy on autopilot."³ The people, organization, process, and policies that functioned well for Bush were designed to facilitate his decision-making style, but not Clinton's.

Considering Clinton's choices to remove himself from the NSC strategy process, to retain most of Bush's NSC organization and process model, and to establish the new National Economic Council (NEC) parallel to the NSC, this chapter aims to answer: How did the Clinton NSC culture support or undermine the system's ability to execute cooperative national security strategy, while integrating and implementing policies using the interagency process? How did the NSA's roles and responsibilities change under Clinton in response to the president's approach? How did Clinton's changes in his NSC improve or disrupt the Council's ability to execute strategy and the foreign policy decision-making process to shape US intervention in Bosnia from 1991-1995?

As is the case with most presidents, Clinton instituted his changes and began shaping the NSC's culture even before taking office. As Burke noted, Clinton's "Economy First" message became reality when he introduced his economic team 10 days prior to deciding that Lake would serve as his NSA, and Berger as his Deputy NSA on 22 December 1992.⁴ On 20 January 1993, he signed his Presidential Decision Directives (PDD) 1 and 2. In the first paragraph of PDD-2, Clinton announced the establishment of the National Economic Council (NEC),

³ Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 42.

⁴ Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*. 1st ed. College Station: Texas A & M University Press: 337-338.

which would be a parallel organization modeled on the NSC.⁵ Major organizational and procedural conflicts between the councils quickly strained the administration.

The NEC “Primary Committee” (PC) had 18 statutory members, including the president, which was twice as many as the NSC Principals Committee (NSC/PC). The NEC Staff in total, however, was less than half that of the NSC, and doubtfully capable of “the implementation and consistency of the administration’s economic policies.”⁶ Vincent Auger also pointed out that “absent from the description of functions was any responsibility for integrating economic with noneconomic facets of foreign policy decisions.”⁷ Furthermore, while the NSA was “encouraged” to invite economic advisors and secretaries to NSC/PC meetings, their attendance was not mandated. While Clinton intended to prioritize economic organizational changes and policies over NSC processes, it was thanks to Anthony Lake’s honest broker approach and his positive relationship with Clinton’s economic advisor Robert Rubin that the parallel systems, people, and processes coexisted.⁸ In addition to economic council measures, PDD-2 defined the NSC’s roles, the NSA’s responsibilities, and directed the expansion of the Council’s and the NSC Principles Committee (NSC/PC) statutory member list.⁹

⁵ There were two major schools of thought in the early 1990s concerning how to incorporate economic and domestic concerns into strategy and policy formulation. They can be understood as “incorporation” into the existing NSC, or creation of a “parallel” system *outside* of the NSC. Robert Reich (Clinton’s friend and secretary of labor) and the Commission on Government renewal, pushed for the adoption of a parallel system versus broadening the current NSC to concern domestic and international economic concerns. State Department officials and many others in government, however, argued to broaden NSC responsibilities. The president eventually chose to create the parallel NEC. Auger, “The National Security Council System After the Cold War”, 49-51.

⁶ Auger, “The National Security Council System After the Cold War”, 57.

⁷ Auger, “The National Security Council System After the Cold War”, 57.

⁸ PDD-2 only required the NSA to “inform (the Economic Advisor) of meetings and (invite them) to attend all those with international economic considerations.” After Rubin told Lake he wished to be more involved in NSC functions, Lake extended an open invite to Rubin. Auger, “The National Security Council System After the Cold War”, 54-58.

⁹ PDD-2 directed “The (NSC) shall be the principal forum for consideration of national security policy issues requiring presidential determination. The functions, membership and responsibilities ...(the) NSC shall advise and assist me in integrating all aspects of national security policy as it affects the (US) --

Clinton's NSC mirrored Bush's, with the inclusion of the NEC as a parallel committee to the NSC.¹⁰ Through PDD-2 the president retained the NSC/PC "as the senior interagency forum for consideration of policy issues affecting national security."¹¹ In the Eisenhower Administration, the NSC/PC's equivalent was the main Council body which the president chaired personally and met with on a weekly basis. In Clinton's NSC, the NSA chaired and convened the PC "as required." The president convened the main Council body far less frequently than the NSA convened the PC. The NSC Deputies Committee (NSC/DC) resembled a combination of Eisenhower's Planning Board and OCB. The DC focused on resolving policy disputes prior to NSC/PC discussion, and facilitating the interagency process during implementation and post-implementation phases. Another critical responsibility of the DC was *Crisis Management*, which would prove crucial in addressing the rising challenges of civil wars and the spread of global terrorism.¹²

domestic, foreign, military, intelligence and economic (in conjunction with the NEC). Along with its subordinate committees, the NSC shall be my principal means for coordinating Executive departments and agencies in the development and implementation of national security policy." It directed the "Director of Central Intelligence and the Chairman, (JCS), as statutory advisers to the NSC shall attend NSC meetings." It expanded statutory membership to "Secretary of the Treasury, U.S. Representative to the (UN), 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." The White House. 1993. *Presidential Decision Directive (PDD) -2*. Washington, D.C.: The White House. <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/pdd/pdd-2.pdf>.

¹⁰ Clinton cut the NSC Staff from 179-147 in 1993, but added three geographical offices. Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 55. Also of note, this figure does not show the NSC/PC and DC. Although the top deliberative bodies of the "NSC system" as defined by PDD-2, they are *not* considered committees on the "NSC Staff."

¹¹ PDD-2.

¹² Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 52-54.

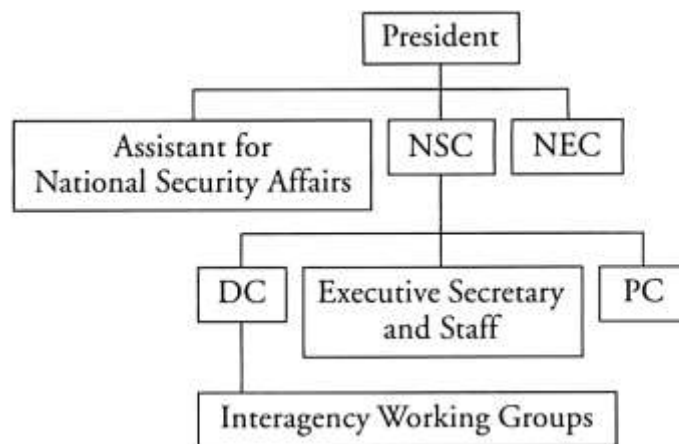


Figure 6 – President Clinton’s 1993 NSC System

Source: Cambone, Stephen A, Patrick J Garrity, and Alistair J.K Shepherd. 1998. *A New Structure for National Security Policy Planning*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C: Center for Strategic and International Studies: 149.

Clinton set the initial tone and culture for his NSC by seldom convening or chairing the Council. He directed that “(t)he NSC shall meet as required” rather than directing it meet regularly.¹³ Considering Clinton’s PDD-2 defined the NSC as “my principal means for coordinating executive departments and agencies in the development and implementation of national security policy,” one might think Clinton himself would wish to attend.¹⁴ Instead he directed that “Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs shall serve as Chair.”¹⁵ In Clinton’s administration, the NSA no longer sat *with* the president, but now *stood in* for the president. PDD-2 thus elevated the importance and broadened the roles and responsibilities of the NSA significantly beyond that of the “honest broker” model. Just as Cutler drove the success of Eisenhower’s NSC, Clinton’s NSC even more deeply depended on NSAs Anthony “Tony”

¹³ PDD-2 established the NSC Principals Committee (NSC/PC) as the main deliberative body of the council tasked to review, coordinate, and monitor the development and implementation of national security policy... (it would be) “a forum available for Cabinet-level officials to meet to discuss and resolve issues not requiring the president's participation” The NSA would chair NSC/PC meetings, which was attended by

¹⁴ PDD-2: 2.

¹⁵ PDD-2: 2-3. Auerswald, David. 2011. “The Evolution of The NSC Process”. In *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University: 34.

Lake (1993-1997) and Samuel “Sandy” Berger (1997-2001) to implement the president’s vision and drive the strategy process. Clinton charged these men and their NSC staff with not only managing the NSC process, but also supporting the NEC and Clinton’s Assistant for Economic Affairs.



Figure 7 – Clinton’s NSC Policy Process

Source: Author’s rendition based on process described in PDD-2.

PDD-2 not only made clear the president’s intent to stay removed from the NSC planning and deliberation processes, but also highlighted his insistence that economic considerations “in such areas as trade, banking, and environmental standards” were formally and consistently represented and considered when his Council made national security decisions.¹⁶ PDD-2 directed “(t)he Assistant to the President for Economic Policy shall be informed of meetings and be invited to attend all those with international economic considerations.”¹⁷ PDD-2 also provided the Cabinet secretaries with the latitude to miss meetings and instead send their deputies or even a “designee” of the PC or DC member. Taken as a whole, Clinton’s approach to the NSC, as stated in policy, was at best “hands-off” and at worst “laissez-faire.” The president’s approach set the

¹⁶ Best, Richard A. 2011. *CRS Report for Congress The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment*. <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RL30840.pdf>: 20.

¹⁷ PDD-2.

stage for not only considerable national security blind spots and foreign policy missteps, but also formidable challenges for the administration's NSAs.¹⁸

According to Ivo Daalder and I. M. Destler, Tony Lake believed in leaving the previous administration's system intact, at least for a short time, to test its compatibility with Clinton's approach and style.¹⁹ This plan seemed sensible considering the "corporate knowledge" that transfers into the new administration through both the people and the processes at work in the NSC Staff. It also showed Lake's respect for Bush and Scowcroft's system, as well as Lake's willingness to perform as a patient, honest broker for the existing people and processes. Over time, however, Lake realized his role of NSA must evolve to steer the NSC in the right direction in response to a lasting lack of leadership and guidance from President Clinton.

Lake Reluctantly Takes the Reins

Presidents often take office with little foreign policy experience. Kennedy, Johnson, Carter, Clinton, and George W. Bush all fall into this category. For inexperienced foreign policy leaders, the NSC system's function expands from a strategy body to a potential venue for presidential on-the-job education and learning. In such cases, the NSA might lean more heavily on the NSC/PC to make well-deliberated decisions. The NSA also can attempt to pull the president into the process to facilitate their education and bolster wider administration support for the NSC and its processes. Engaging the president performs two important functions: bolstering their interest and facilitating their national security and foreign policy learning. Tony Lake's efforts to

¹⁸ Clinton made his NSA a member of the NEC. Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 56.

¹⁹ Destler, I. M, and Ivo H Daalder. 2009. *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster: 213-214

engage, however, fell on deaf ears even as the Balkans, Haiti, Somalia, Northern Ireland, and other international crises intensified.²⁰ His greatest challenge became shaping a coherent national security strategy and responding to crises with a down-sized and marginalized NSC system disowned by a president whose lack of engagement literally and figuratively defined the NSC's strategic functionality.²¹

Lake's conceptualization of his role as NSA changed significantly during his tenure from 1993-1997. He stated in a 2007 interview:

My view of it actually changed over the course of that four years, which led to some tension with many colleagues. When I came in, my model was the British civil servant who stays in the background and is almost strictly honest broker and offers advice from time to time. That's what I tried to do for the first nine to ten months and it wasn't working. I had to be both honest broker and policy advocate.²²

While Lake admitted his change in approach to his NSA duties "led to some tension with his colleagues, he...was urged by General Colin Powell (Chairman, JCS), to 'be more assertive in his views.'"²³

According to transcripts from multiple interviews, Lake remained convinced the NSC should follow the mandate of the 1987 Tower Commission. In Lake's interpretation of the mandate, "as an independent advisor to the president, he must provide his own judgement" and that as "a creature of the president" and Clinton's disengagement, the NSA must impose a heavier hand to keep the NSC system functioning.²⁴ At the same time the Commission warned that "(t)o

²⁰ "Persistent efforts by Lake and Christopher to get the president to commit to weekly meetings with his foreign policy advisers were repeatedly rebuffed. Even Lake's daily morning briefing of the president was often shortened or canceled." Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 68.

²¹ Rothkopf, David J. 2006. *Running the World: The Inside Story of The National Security Council and The Architects of American Power*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs: 322-324.

²² Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 341.

²³ U.N. Ambassador Albright, Treasury Secretary Bentsen, and at times even President Clinton voiced their frustration with "later Lake's" approach to the policy and decision-making process. Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 341-343.

²⁴ The 1987 President's Special Review Board submitted the "Tower Commission Report" to President Reagan on February 26, 1987. The committee, chaired by John Tower and conducted with Ed Muskie and Brent Scowcroft, studied the NSC, its Staff, the NSA and their core functions. A large portion of the study

the extent that the (NSA) becomes a strong advocate for a particular point of view, his role as 'honest broker' may be compromised."²⁵ Lake's initial convictions dissuaded him from acting as anything more than an honest broker. He believed the NSA should not act as "counselor" or "agent" as President Nixon's NSA (and eventual Secretary of State) Henry Kissinger and President Carter's NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski had.²⁶ Politically and procedurally, Lake's insistence that he maintain a low profile was quickly challenged by the need to disseminate the administration's policy in response to the crisis erupting in Bosnia.²⁷

Lake entered the political sphere and public eye to fill the public relations void left by Clinton's and Secretary of State Warren Christopher's failure to publicly define and justify Balkans policy. Despite Lake convening the NSC/PC on a regular basis starting on 28 January 1993, the PC's failure stemmed from the central fact that the president refused to guide the PC in deciding the policy. In fact, President Clinton and VP Albert "Al" Gore did not attend an NSC/PC meeting until its third gathering on the subject on 5 February 1993.²⁸

analyzed the climate and culture within the NSC that facilitated the "Iran-Contra Affair." It sharply criticized the "operationalization" of the NSC and the NSA, and insisted that the NSA must remain at the center of the NSC system to ensure its effective, but limited, role in policy planning and implementation. Tower, John, Brent Scowcroft, and Edmund Muskie. 1987. "Report of The President's Special Review Board." *Hathitrust*. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31822004849717;view=1up;seq=5>.

²⁵ Tower, Scowcroft, Muskie, II-3. Inderfurth, Karl F., and Loch K. Johnson. 2004. *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press: 139.

²⁶ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 344.

²⁷ The crisis in the Balkans (formerly Yugoslavia), spanned both the Bush and Clinton administrations. During Clinton's campaign, he "had run for president attacking the first Bush administration's inaction in the former Yugoslavia." Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 363-364. As Dag Henriksen noted, two distinct camps held opinions about the root causes of the crises. The first camp, largely consisting of Canada, European countries, and some in the United States, "felt that the fighting constituted a civil war." The other camp, which dominated thinking in the Clinton administration, believed "Slobodan Milosevic, the Serbs, in alliance with the Federal Army of Yugoslavia, wanted to create a Greater Serbia." This "Serbian aggression" led to wars in Slovenia and Croatia, while fears increased that war would also spread to Kosovo after Bosnia (which it did). The members of the camp insisting that Serbian aggression drove the conflict insisted first on united western denouncement of Milosevic and his allies and military forces, followed by threatening the use of airpower. Henriksen, Dag. 2007. *NATO's Gamble*. 1st ed. Annapolis, Md.: Naval Institute Press: 92.

²⁸ Daalder, Ivo H. 2000. *Getting to Dayton*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press: 12-13.

Without a general strategic vision to outline policy, Lake, the NSC, the secretaries, and the White House Staff did not share a coherent message to relay to the American people, Congress, and the international community.

Against his better judgement, but forced by the absence of strategic messaging, Lake set out to advocate for the administration's policy over the next year, begrudgingly moving into the public sphere to outline "the 'strategy of enlargement' as 'the successor to a doctrine of containment.'"²⁹ The fact that Lake released the strategy via a State Department dispatch rather than in a presidential NSC/PDD speaks for itself. The Tower Commission's insistence that "(t)he Secretary of State has primarily been the president's spokesman on matters of national security and foreign affairs. To the extent that the (NSA) speaks publicly on these matters or speaks with foreign representatives, the result may be confusion as what is the president's policy" only added to Lake's reservations.³⁰ Despite this warning and counter to Lake's instincts, without the president clearly defining his policy and setting his administration on a specific course, Lake felt compelled to act.

This expanded role for the NSA put Lake and the NSC into the precarious position of "operationalizing" his role and the NSC's functions. Additionally, the situation pushed him into the diplomatic sphere during Bosnia policy negotiations, further risking institutional conflict between the Department of State and the NSC. Based on the Tower Commission recommendations and his appreciation for the honest-broker model, Lake remained deeply convinced that the NSA should stay out of the press and not compete with the Secretary of State during the foreign policy process. Over time, however, Lake realized that the success of not only President Clinton but also the strategy process

²⁹ Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 58.

³⁰ Tower, Scowcroft, Muskie, "Tower Commission Report" II-3.

demanded he expand his role to help coordinate and explain the administration's policies.³¹

As a sign of confirmation of Lake's concerns with the administration's public relations failures, David Gergen, the president's communications advisor, increased his attendance at NSC meetings in 1994 to ensure messaging consistency and congruency.³² While Lake understood the need to take an increased role in developing policy through the NSC process, he refused to engage in the politics of balancing campaign promises with practical policy. The Clinton Administration was not the first, nor the last, to struggle in reconciling practical policy development with campaign policy promises. As George Stephanopoulos stated:

...ours was a campaign that had put out comparatively few statements on foreign policy. Then we came into the White House and almost immediately we were hit with foreign policy problems...(the President) started out with a broken promise or a perceived broken promise on Haiti. Similarly, with Bosnia: very tough statements during the campaign and a lot of difficulty making good on them during the first several months of the administration. Same with China, where he had been very tough on Bush for being too close to the Chinese and then we had to pull back.³³

Similarly, Lake commented "the rhetoric that succeeds is the rhetoric of the shining city on the hill, morality, evil versus good, etc., whereas the realities call for pragmatism. Every president gets trapped in the difference."³⁴ The lack of a swift and decisive Bosnia policy process and outcome is perhaps the best example of Clinton's suffering this pitfall.

Clinton occasionally allowed domestic politics to cloud national security and foreign policy. The administration's considerable 1995 shift

³¹ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 344.

³² Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 58.

³³ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 319.

³⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 319.

in Bosnia policy exemplified this reality. Lake insisted the NSA and the NSC must remain non-partisan for the good of the NSC and the president. This conflict between politics and policy became a daily struggle with White House political advisors during his morning meetings with the president, where Lake was convinced that political influence too often obscured smart policy.³⁵ Although a significant portion of the commentary and analyses of Lake's role as NSA is sympathetic to the unique challenges imposed on him, in the fog of the policy-making process he nevertheless failed to execute two of his primary roles: to provide interagency coordination and policy implementation management.

This assessment of Lake's failure is confirmed by feedback from several administration officials. These officials indicated Lake and Berger neither led nor facilitated the interagency process critical to successful policy integration and implementation. In the opinion of many "interagency" scholars, and as the analysis in this thesis suggests, the NSC is both the center and top of the interagency process as an instrument directly responsible to the president and populated by the secretaries. In turn, the success of the NSC in executing strategy to form national security and foreign policies rests on the president and the secretaries. While the NSA can facilitate and support, he or she typically holds much less power over the priorities and the people than the president or the Cabinet secretaries.³⁶

During the Clinton Administration, staff downsizing, responsibility broadening, and the spreading of international crises all weighed on NSC staff and processes. In some cases, progress on policy papers "slowed to a crawl" as NSC staffers became overburdened and under-instructed when it came to policy prioritization. Several NSC regional and functional

³⁵ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 344-345.

³⁶ Chun, Clayton, and Frank Jones. 2008. "Learning to Play the Game: The National Security Policy-Making Process". In *Affairs of State*, 1st ed. Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute.

Interagency Working Groups (IWG) were forced to confront multiple crises during the first eighteen months of the administration. “The Office for Global Issues and Multilateral Affairs,” for example, had primary responsibility for policy coordination on Somalia, Haiti, and Rwanda during this period.”³⁷ Another overtasked, under-staffed, but critical IWG was designed to assess and plan for crises and more formidable challenges such as Bosnia. Initial personnel downsizing and expertise mismanagement threatened to cripple this IWG’s ability to confront the Bosnian policy challenge

Clinton’s efforts to keep his campaign promise to downsize the NSC staff began the cycle of undermining his interagency body and its lower-level IWGs. Officials noted the tendency for less experienced NSC staffers to chair these groups to fill vacancies left by the downsizing. While this personnel mismanagement indirectly undermined respect for the importance of the interagency process, it directly decreased the IWGs’ ability to make informed decisions on policy for the DC and PC. To exacerbate this dilemma, PCs failed to resolve the most important senior-level policy disagreements, instead pushing decisions back down to the DC and IWG levels which lacked the broader insights required to make strategically responsible judgments.³⁸ Considering this dysfunctional cycle, Clinton and Lake’s ineffective NSC stands as an example of how mismanaging the people, processes, and their interactions risk policy failures.

These missteps by the NSA in ensuring the NSC could effectively formulate policy rested not on the staffers, but on the shoulders of the president, Lake, Berger, and the secretaries in failing to recognize the flaws in the NSC system processes. The interagency process cannot fix flawed policy, but it can ensure the proper people are in place to manage

³⁷ Auger, “The National Security Council System After the Cold War”, 59.

³⁸ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 347.

progress and lead policy teams and prevent the perception of confusion and incompetence.³⁹ Considering these initial leadership and process flaws, this chapter next explores how Lake's perspective evolved, leading him to reshape the NSC's strategy and decision-making processes to salvage US policy in Bosnia from 1991-1995.

The NSC and NSA Roles on the Road to Dayton

As Jason DeParle of the *New York Times* wrote in August 1995, "There is a noose -- around Lake and the administration's foreign policy more generally -- and it can be summarized in two words: Bosnia policy."⁴⁰ Ivo H. Daalder, Clinton's Director of European Affairs on the NSC Staff noted, "U.S. policy was lurching, like a punch-drunk boxer, from one crisis to the next."⁴¹ These statements were indicative of the fact that perhaps the gravest example of the administration's NSC process mismanagement was the "IWG on Bosnia policy...(which) was characterized by several participants as 'group therapy'" rather than constructive strategy sessions.⁴² Correcting this dysfunction emerged as Lake's primary strategy challenge.

On January 22, 1993, President Clinton signed his first Presidential Review Directive (PRD-1), "U.S. Policy Regarding the Situation in the Former Yugoslavia." While the Bosnian demanded the president's personal attention to his process, Clinton resisted diving into the strategy process. The PRD established a date for the first NSC/PC meeting on 27 January to "prepare for" a "possible NSC meeting."⁴³ Upon Lake's invitation at the end of the third NSC/PC, the president and VP

³⁹ Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 73.

⁴⁰ DeParle, Jason. 1995. "The Man inside Bill Clinton's Foreign Policy". *Nytimes.Com*. <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/08/20/magazine/the-man-inside-bill-clinton-s-foreign-policy.html?pagewanted=print>.

⁴¹ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 90.

⁴² Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 347.

⁴³ The White House. 1993. *Presidential Review Directive (PRD) 1*. Washington, D.C.: The White House. <https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/prd/>.

Gore entered the room to deliver the president's charge: "If the United States doesn't act in situations like this, nothing will happen...failure to (act) would be to give up American leadership."⁴⁴ The president had made clear his concerns about the US not intervening, but unfortunately remained removed from the ensuing strategy process.

Lake immediately instituted a policy review process to answer Clinton's call. He met regularly with the NSC/PC, but the meetings resulted in no agreement on how the US should proceed. Despite this lack of agreement, Lake led the charge, using the NSC Staff, to drive the PC to draft the first Bosnia policy of "lift-and-strike" as early as February 1993. The policy intended to "lift" the existing arms embargo, and use airpower to "strike" Bosnia Serbs if they attacked Bosnian Muslims.⁴⁵ Even after the NSC/PC met frequently through April and agreed on "lift-and-strike," Clinton remained indecisive. For the administration, the continuously fruitless decision-making process not only perpetuated the NSC's inability to facilitate the interagency policy process, but also opened the door to congressional and media criticism due to the lack of a clear strategy.⁴⁶ The continued dysfunction in the strategy and decision-making process led Lake to change his approach and his role in the system.

Lake's convictions to "get ahead" of Bosnia were rooted in the administration's convictions outlined during the campaign. Lake remained convinced he could use the NSC to execute strategic planning and policy implementation rather than continue to muddle through crisis-response measures. Lake recognized the need to shape rather react to the unfolding crises, but knew that the NSC was failing at its functions to produce, staff, and recommend strategic policy to the

⁴⁴ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 8-9.

⁴⁵ "According to lift-and-strike, the United States would lift the arms embargo and launch air strikes against the Bosnian Serbs if they tried to take advantage of the situation before Bosnian Muslims forces were at full strength. Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 364.

⁴⁶ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 13-14.

president. State Department policy planner Stephen Flanagan noted, “in the first term there was an effort to delegate a lot of (the foreign policy process) to the State Department. In other words, the president really wasn’t out there that much.”⁴⁷ In the absence of presidential guidance for Lake and the NSC to take the lead in the strategy process, Lake proactively energized the NSC to begin grand strategic debate on the Bosnian crisis.

As a former State Department official under Kissinger, Lake understood the long-term benefits of diplomacy as well as the immediate pressure military force could bring to bear on foreign policy problems. Ambassador to the United Nations (UN), Madeleine Albright, agreed on the need to develop a cooperative diplomatic-military strategy. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Colin Powell, openly objected to any use of force.⁴⁸ With Clinton’s and Gore’s absence from the NSC/PC meetings, the principals were left to their own devices responding to each crisis in turn rather than being guided by presidentially established, grand strategic guidelines.⁴⁹ In late May it became apparent that the president would not support the “lift-and-strike” option and instead chose “containment” by sending 300 troops to assist UN peacekeeping forces sent to Bosnia.⁵⁰ As Lake’s frustration mounted, he chose direct and indirect approaches to resolve the stalemate within the administration.

⁴⁷ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 365.

⁴⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 322-325.

⁴⁹ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 346-347. Ivo Daalder described one seminal event for Lake, where the president showed signs of reservations after agreeing to the “lift-and-strike” strategy. “During a White House photo-op with U.S. troops returning from Somalia. Clinton pulled Aspin and Powell aside to tell them about a book he had been reading by Robert D. Kaplan called *Balkan Ghosts: A Journey through History*, which detailed the region’s history of violent ethnic conflict. Aspin was astonished. “Holy shit! He’s going south on lift and strike,” he thought. After returning to the Pentagon, Aspin called Lake and Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs Peter Tarnoff to warn them. “Guys, he’s going south on this policy. His heart isn’t in it. We have a serious problem here. We’re out there pushing a policy that the president’s not comfortable with.” Clinton was also possibly influenced by a recent *Wall Street Journal* article drawing parallels with Johnson and Vietnam. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 17.

⁵⁰ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 352.

Despite the Tower Commission's warning for the NSA to avoid operationalization and international diplomacy, Lake's frustration with the president and the PC drove him to take a direct approach to salvage the administration's strategy. The first approach saw him embark on a secret diplomatic mission to Europe in July of 1993. In contrast to the Warren Christopher's "consultative" approach to diplomacy with European allies, Lake stressed the president's insistence that the lack of an allied effort might seriously undermine NATO's legitimacy. While the visit facilitated the agreement that force would need to be used, it also proved an instance where Lake undermined his "honest broker" position. As a result of his visit, he lost favor with his NSC/PC peers. It was also not the last time Lake would play diplomat. Lake leveraged the NSC to lead the strategy and policy process, and directed the interagency process through impromptu Council IWGs.⁵¹

Lake mobilized the NSC interagency multiple times during the Bosnia crisis. The first was immediately following PRD-1, beginning the series of PC meetings that resulted in indirect policy formulation. Upon Albright's return from Europe in January 1994, Lake initiated an internal NSC review. This review confirmed his and Albright's belief that US-led NATO action was necessary. Secretary of State Christopher, with a newly installed Secretary of Defense, William Perry, prepared the proposal for President Clinton for review on 4 February 1994. The shelling of the Sarajevo marketplace two days later by the Bosnian Serbs enraged Clinton, and bolstered Lake's efforts to convince the president to endorse the policy for proposal to NATO's North Atlantic Council.⁵² With efforts to secure international support for intervention pushing forward,

⁵¹ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 21-86.

⁵² The North Atlantic Council is the principal political decision-making body within NATO. It brings together high-level representatives of each member country to discuss policy or operational questions requiring collective decisions. In sum, it provides a forum for wide-ranging consultation between members on all issues affecting their peace and security. "North Atlantic Council (NAC)". 2017. NATO. http://www.nato.int/cps/sk/natohq/topics_49763.htm. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 21-24.

Lake and Berger accelerated their internal NSC strategy process inside its Bosnia IWG.

While the NSC worked diligently to formulate policy for the Council to consider, the principals and deputies continued to mishandle their roles and mismanage the strategy process. Sandy Vershbow, Lake's senior European aide, chaired the Bosnia IWG from 1994-1997. Vershbow and his team met daily to discuss unfolding events and policy options. The president grew steadily more impatient as tensions in Bosnian heightened and Secretary of State Christopher's attempts to sell European partners on "lift-and-strike" failed. Rather than shift to a deliberate, focused, and cooperative strategy process through the Council, "(t)he deputies and principals themselves began to micromanage the process, in effect becoming the action officers for Bosnia. As a result, (US) policy became largely tactical and reactive."⁵³ In one last attempt to salvage the NSC interagency process, Lake directed Vershbow and the IWG to draft a summary policy paper in February 1995. They delivered four distinct policy options to the DC and PC in March 1995: "Status Quo...Active Containment...A Quarantine of Bosnian Serbs...(and) Lift, Arm, Train, and Strike."⁵⁴ Lake and his team intended the paper to force the principals and the president to escape the "crisis management" trap in the service of a long-term, "Endgame Strategy."⁵⁵ During this evolution of NSC policy process and NSA engagement within the administration, Lake transitioned from "honest broker" to "advocate and diplomat," pleading the now agreed upon US "Endgame Strategy" to partners in Europe. Burke attributed Lake's efforts and the NSC's strategy as directly leading to the Dayton Accords in December 1995.⁵⁶

⁵³ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 86-87.

⁵⁴ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 87-89.

⁵⁵ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 101-106.

⁵⁶ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 353-354.

The Clinton NSC and Tony Lake's role as NSA can both be described as "evolutionary." With Lake and Berger's advice, the people, organizational design, and interagency processes they retained from the Bush Administration allowed a swift transition to respond to crises and mounting conflicts. The process President Clinton created and subsequently disengaged from, however, undermined his national security system. For Marcella, presidential mobilization of people and organizations, and presidential learning during the first few months in office represent two keys to a successful interagency process are. During his first term, Clinton not only "never finished staffing his first administration," but also failed to recognize his need to become versed in national security and foreign policy processes and policies.⁵⁷ The NSC serves not only as a venue for strategy but also as an opportunity to engage the appointed experts and study the policy process. Clinton's refusal to reform his relationship with his NSC during his first term arose as his greatest foreign policy failure and as the root cause of the administration's failure to embrace and leverage the NSC system. As Feaver explained in *Armed Servants*,

The administration's most powerful actor is, of course, the president himself. The more time he spends personally on an issue, the more the administration's position can prevail over intransigent bureaucratic actors...The president is the final buck-stopper in the cumbersome interagency process run by (NSC) staff. This presidential authority can be delegated and enhanced by a powerful NSC staff, or it can be hoarded and diminished by a weak staff. One of the most significant changes from the Bush administration to the Clinton administration was the dramatically lower profile given national security issues by President Clinton (at least in his first term).⁵⁸

⁵⁷ Marcella, Gabriel. 2008. *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*. 1st ed. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center: 20-21.

⁵⁸ Feaver, Peter. 2003. *Armed Servants*. 1st ed. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press: 209.

While President Clinton delegated responsibility for Bosnia policy-making to Lake, his principals, and the NSC, that delegation of authority did not abdicate his responsibility for guiding and ultimately deciding the policy.⁵⁹

Downsizing the NSC Staff before seeing it at work represented another organizational misstep for both Lake and Clinton. Driven by campaign promises to reduce staff by 25 percent, the NSC was set up for failure in the face of mounting crises.⁶⁰ As Auger asserted, Clinton's parallel NSC-NEC system required extensive presidential engagement to ensure success, however the president never intended or managed to engage with the NSC to bolster its processes and direct its members. Another direct result of Clinton's post-Cold War NSC reorganization created a situation where the people in the system simply could not cope with the multiple, complex policy challenges. Furthermore, both the president and Lake failed to disseminate formal guidance to the staff to enable them to prioritize tasks and projects.⁶¹ As a result, the NSC staff was forced to depend on their internal NSC leaders' actions to suggest priorities. Clinton failed to deliver strategic guidance on foreign policy challenges such as Bosnia and remained distant from his strategy process, which left Lake wholly focused on Bosnia and unable to shift to long-term national grand strategy in the NSC.

Tony Lake began his tenure as NSA fully believing that the "honest broker" was the necessary approach. Despite his belief, the Bosnian crisis and continued lack of presidential or principal strategic guidance exposed the insufficiency of that narrow role. Unlike Robert Cutler, Lake was forced to fight for the president's trust in the NSA and the NSC. Clinton initially did not make his trust in Lake clear to the administration, and the NSC's ability to stand as a respected strategy

⁵⁹ Feaver, *Armed Servants*, 209-210.

⁶⁰ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 346

⁶¹ Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War", 57-71.

forum accordingly suffered. The Council's dysfunction and the president's refusal to support Lake and the NSC strategy process almost drove Lake to resign in fall of 1994.⁶² The demands placed upon him by a disengaged president, combined with squabbling Cabinet secretaries, transformed Lake from honest broker to policy entrepreneur, advocate, and diplomat.⁶³ As Daalder pointed out, "(n)o one in the administration, least of all the president, was prepared to take full responsibility for the conflict given that the costs of doing so would involve spending political capital and other resources that Clinton needed to further the domestic policy agenda on which he was elected."⁶⁴

To fill this void and meet these demands, Lake frequently made use of the interagency process at Council meetings and more importantly through IWGs. While these forums performed far below the standards of Eisenhower's Planning Board and Project SOLARIUM, they preserved the interagency process. Lake transformed the NSC Staff into an internal policy formulation and strategy organization capable of not simply serving the NSA and the secretaries, but independently building thoughtful policy to support the president's national security strategy. At the same time, Lake evolved from honest broker to policy entrepreneur, managed to successfully perform both capacities to facilitate the strategy process within the NSC, and secured the president's open support for and trust in the NSA, the NSC and its processes. In this sense, Lake transformed not only his role, but also the president's appreciation of the NSC's strategy process that carried forward into his second term and Sandy Berger's tenure as NSA. For President George W. Bush and his

⁶² "Sandy" Vershbow, "NSC Senior Director for European Affairs" and chair of Lake and the NSC's Bosnia IWG, convinced Lake not to resign. Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 366.

⁶³ Ivo Daalder labeled Lake a successful policy entrepreneur in his conclusion to *The Road to Dayton*. Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 171-173. John W. Kingdon defined "policy entrepreneurs" as "advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea", "willing to invest their resources—time, energy, reputation, money—to promote a position." Kingdon, John W. 2011. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. 1st ed. New York [u.a.]: Longman: 122, 179.

⁶⁴ Daalder, *Getting to Dayton*, 18.

NSA Dr. Condoleezza Rice, even the nation's greatest national security crisis since Pearl Harbor could not bolster the NSA's authority and NSC's deserved role as centralized strategy body for the administration.



Chapter 4

Purpose, Personalities, and Strategic Paralysis

National security policy during the first term of the administration of George W. Bush was shaped by four intense and important personal and professional relationships—between the president and his vice president, the president and his national security advisor, the vice president and the secretary of defense, and the secretary of defense and the secretary of state—and by one pivotal moment, the morning of September 11, 2001.

David Rothkopf
Author, *Running the World*

Upon taking office in January 2001, President George W. Bush faced the same general geopolitical challenge that plagued the Clinton administration in the 1990s: attempting to define a strategic purpose and path for the US. Bush, like Clinton, came into office as a foreign policy novice, hoping to have his department secretaries, Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld and Secretary of State Colin Powell, manage the foreign policy process. His trusted advisor and NSA, Dr. Condoleezza Rice, not only expected to diligently serve as honest broker for her president, but also helped craft the administration's misguided grand strategic vision. Despite the confidence held by all the major administration players, 9/11, the War on Terror, and the Iraq War would insurmountably test their relationships, roles, and the NSC's ability to respond as Bush's central strategy body.¹ This chapter focuses its analysis on the Iraq War's domination of the NSC strategy and decision-making process, which led to the demise of the administration's grand strategy.²

¹ Rodman, Peter W. 2009. *Presidential Command: Power, Leadership, and the Making of Foreign Policy from Richard Nixon to George W. Bush*. 1st ed. New York: Alfred A. Knopf: 233.

² Brands, Hal. 2014. *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman To George W. Bush*. Grand Rapids, MI, United States: Cornell University Press: 171-173.

To determine the effectiveness of the Bush NSC system, this chapter aims to answer the following questions: How did the president initially organize and utilize the NSC, and how did NSA Rice's roles and responsibilities facilitate or prevent her engagement within the NSC system prior to 9/11? How did the various personalities within the administration, especially VP Cheney, influence the NSC's processes prior to 9/11? After 9/11 how did Bush change the NSC system to address the emergent "Global War on Terrorism" (GWOT) and the Iraq War? Finally, how did Secretary Rumsfeld continue to dominate the policy process, while bypassing and undermining the NSC system? The answers to these questions highlight a uniquely personality-driven and largely dysfunctional president-NSA-NSC decision making process in stark contrast to both the Eisenhower and Clinton models.

Bush and his administration's missteps began during his campaign. While Clinton overtly campaigned on a strategic shift from defense to economic and domestic policies, Bush not only delivered little grand strategic vision but also showed clear ignorance of foreign policy matters.³ He, instead, deferred both foreign policy and any semblance of grand strategic vision to "the Vulcans," a group led by Rice and Paul Wolfowitz (eventually Rumsfeld's deputy secretary of defense) including VP Richard "Dick" Cheney and Rumsfeld. This vision heralded back to these individuals' days in the George H. W. Bush administration, where "hegemonic statecraft" and the US-Soviet bipolar power struggle still dominated grand strategy and foreign policy. Military modernization, regime changes in North Korea and Iraq, the "spread of democracy," and rhetoric identifying Russia and China as competitors represented the dominant concepts of their vision.⁴ If George W. Bush disagreed with

³ Hal Brands, in *What Good is Grand Strategy*, delivers a full, in-depth, and impressive case study into the grand strategy and policy-making of the Bush administration during both terms in office. Brands: 146-151.

⁴ Rothkopf, David J. 2006. *Running the World: The Inside Story of The National Security Council and The Architects of American Power*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs: 389-395.

these positions, he did not openly object too them during the campaign. Additionally, as this case study shows, he supported this vision and continued to defer to the Vulcans' foreign policy recommendations that led directly to the misguided Iraq War. Organizationally and procedurally, Rice and Bush shaped an NSC system and processes that reflected this shared but narrow grand strategic vision.

President Bush formally established his NSC system organization and process design with his approval of National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-1.⁵ In the second paragraph of NSPD-1, the president outlined the principles at the heart of his NSC system, including defense of the country, global advancement of US interests, and expansion of America's economic prosperity. He concluded by emphasizing the NSC system's central role in advising and assisting the president, considering all instruments of power during its policy process, and executing the interagency process to ensure strategy coordination and implementation.⁶

Bush retained the same organizational structure put in place during the Clinton Administration, although "in-name" he replaced the IWGs with six "regional" and eleven "functional" policy coordination committees (PCCs). This "regional-functional" organizational concept operated similarity to Clinton's IWGs and "directorates." Clinton, for example, implemented seven regional and thirteen functional directorates. The elimination of some administrative positions in the NSC Executive Staff and disbanding of three of Clinton's NSC directorates resulted in an approximately 30 percent cut in staff size. As did Clinton, Bush eventually realized the initial downsizing of his core policy-making

⁵ According to *NSPD-1*, the NSPDs "shall replace both Presidential Decision Directives and Presidential Review Directives as an instrument for communicating presidential decisions about the national security policies of the United States." The White House. 2001. *National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) -1*. Washington, D.C.: The White House: 1.

⁶ *NSPD-1*, 1-2.

body was a mistake, growing it back to 108 members and 14 functional PCCs by 2008.⁷

As the “day-to-day fora for interagency coordination of national security policy,” the PCCs were charged with topic analysis, policy formulation, and interagency implementation with regional scope or functional topics such as Human Rights, Counter-terrorism, and Transnational Economic Issues.⁸ They formed the practical base of the geopolitical-environment analysis and subsequent policy-formulation process. President Bush also kept the NEC intact, continued operating the NEC as a parallel system to the NSC, and insisted the two systems integrated and cooperated in their mandate to advise and assist the president.⁹ While at the outset Bush’s structural NSC changes remained relatively minor but carefully conceived, his initial attempts to reform the NSC’s culture appeared well-intentioned in theory but proved marginally effective in practice.

Bush appointed himself as the Chair of the Council, correcting a Clinton-era failure that significantly impeded the previous Council’s deliberations and decision-making effectiveness in developing and implementing strategy. In NSPD-1 the president did not establish a regular meeting schedule with his principals as Eisenhower had. President Bush also did not require that the president or the VP chair the NSC/PC meetings. The NSA convened and chaired PC meetings, where the Cabinet secretaries and administration leaders conducted much of the administration’s policy deliberations. While President Bush intended to chair Council meetings when he convened them, he effectively passed

⁷ Clinton’s NSC “rounded out” at 100 personnel in 2001. Marcella, Gabriel. 2008. *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*. 1st ed. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center: 8-13.

⁸ NSPD-1, 4-5.

⁹ NSPD-1, 2-5.

on the educational opportunity to engage his NSC/PC during the critical policy-formulation process.¹⁰



Figure 8 – Bush’s NSC System and Interagency Policy Process

Source: Author’s original work based on description provided by G. Marcella in Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security

NSPD-1 also directed the NSA to establish the PC agenda and meeting schedule, coordinating with the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy to build the agenda and gather policy papers. Ultimately, while Bush proposed he would “lead” his NSC, he delegated his foreign policy agenda and processes to his NSA and Deputy NSA, who chaired the Deputies Committee (NSC/DC) in-charge of crisis management and policy proposal vetting.¹¹ The NSA, once again placed at the center of the NSC system, was charged to shape the Council’s policy-making potential and drive its ability to execute the interagency and strategy processes. While George W. Bush retained the basic NSC structure established by his father and Brent Scowcroft, Rice failed in her initial attempts to meet the standards set before by men such as Cutler, Lake, and Scowcroft.

¹⁰ NSPD-1, 1-2.

¹¹ NSPD-1, 1-5.

Rice and the president were also convinced the NSC under Clinton and Berger "had gotten too big, too bloated, and too powerful" so she envisioned her NSC "to be a lot like Brent's (during George H. W. Bush's administration)."¹² Making the same mistake as Clinton and Lake did at the start of Clinton's first term, Bush and Rice downsized the NSC Staff 30 percent by eliminating its legislative affairs and communications offices.¹³ Just as Berger corrected course by growing the NSC for Clinton during his second term, the weight of emerging issues eventually proved too much for a less than 100-person strategy and policy staff.¹⁴ In time, Rice also discovered that President Bush's style, coupled with the intensely divisive relationships between principals, required her to not only revise and expand her role as NSA, but to also reconsider her policy convictions.

During Bush's electoral campaign, Rice published a *Foreign Affairs* article in January of 2000 entitled "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest." The article outlined her five principles for an incoming Republican administration.¹⁵ Criticizing the Clinton Administration's unclear priorities and strategic objectives, she aimed to be prescient and precise, writing "the absence of an articulated 'national interest' either produces a fertile ground for those wishing to withdraw from the world or

¹² Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 404-405: 132.

¹³ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 404.

¹⁴ Inderfurth, Karl F., and Loch K. Johnson. 2004. *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press.

¹⁵ M. Kent Bolton presented an in-depth analysis of Rice's five points in contrast with key administration decisions. Bolton, *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking After 9/11*, 143-144. Rice's points, as defined in her *Foreign Affairs* article, were 1. to ensure that America's military can deter war, project power, and fight in defense of its interests if deterrence fails. 2. to promote economic growth and political openness by extending free trade and a stable international monetary system to all committed to these principles, including in the western hemisphere...neglected as a vital area of U.S. national interest. 3. to renew strong and intimate relationships with allies who share American values and can thus share the burden of promoting peace, prosperity, and freedom. 4. to focus U.S. energies on comprehensive relationships with the big powers, particularly Russia and China, that can and will mold the character of the international political system. 5. to deal decisively with the threat of rogue regimes and hostile powers, which is increasingly taking the forms of the potential for terrorism and the development of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

creates a vacuum to be filled by parochial groups and transitory pressures.”¹⁶ Her five tasks centered on a policy refocused on America’s national interests, rather than international laws and norms. For Rice, global benefits would naturally result from the US implementing policies which aimed to achieve these interests. Regardless of the politics or validity of her points, Rice’s five principles represented a carefully conceived strategic vision for the nation and for the NSC. Whether known to her at the time or not, her strategic objectives stood in contrast to unilateral and interventionist principles and policies held by the conservative ideologues in the future administration led by Cheney and Rumsfeld whose ideas were eventually embraced by the president after 9/11.¹⁷

Intending to maintain the “honest broker” persona, Rice publicly announced in the *Washington Post* in 2001 that she would “be seen and heard far less than her predecessor.”¹⁸ Rice later recalled her initial intentions for her role as the NSA and the NSC’s more limited functions in policy planning. She envisioned the NSA’s obligations in the following way: the “first responsibility to be staff and counsel to president...the second most important responsibility is to make sure that when he wants to move in agenda in a particular direction that you can get...moved in the direction he wants to go...the third most important function is to coordinate the rest of the government...(he) has nobody else to do that but the NSC.”¹⁹ The main question remained whether her moderate strategic priorities, hopes to run an effective and efficient NSC,

¹⁶ Rice, Condoleezza. 2000. "Campaign 2000: Promoting the National Interest". *Foreignaffairs.Com*. <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/print/1110090>.

¹⁷ As Rothkopf noted, Rumsfeld is almost certainly the most influential defense secretary since McNamara, and no American VP has ever had anything approaching the power of Dick Cheney. Other than the president himself, VP Dick Cheney is ultimately seen by many as the engine that really drives the group dynamic, and that Cheney and Rumsfeld, working in conjunction, drove Bush’s inner circle in the directions they wanted to go. Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 395-399, 419-420.

¹⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 404.

¹⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 405.

and desire to perform in the “honest broker” role would survive the immense geopolitical challenges and personality conflict that lie ahead.

Rice’s first and most formidable challenge during the transition and in the early months of her role as NSA was the looming, but well-known, terror threat to the US. Other than her one-word mention of “terrorism” in the last of her five principles she outlined in her article, Rice’s mandate seemingly downplayed the known terrorist threat to US intelligence agencies during the Clinton Administration and briefed to the Bush team before and during the transition. As early as September 2000 and throughout 2001, intelligence representatives, including Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) George Tenet, Clinton NSA Sandy Berger, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) representatives, began passing intelligence to Bush’s team and stressing their concerns about transnational terrorism threat, specifically al Qaeda. Rice’s main challenge as NSA would be utilizing the NSC and its processes to reprioritize her, the administration’s, and most importantly the president’s top national security concerns.²⁰

Unfortunately for Rice, sweeping criticisms signaled a failure in her ability to properly and swiftly leverage the NSC and its people. Richard Clarke, acting counterterror chief within the NSC, had briefed and reported to the incoming administration on global terror threats, including al Qaeda.²¹ Clarke personally wrote Rice memos voicing his grave and, according to the 9/11 Commission report, well-founded concerns that al Qaeda posed a legitimate national security threat. Clinton’s NSA, Sandy Berger, confirmed and supported this position by sitting in on a January 2001 briefing Clarke delivered to NSA Rice. Soon

²⁰ Bolton, *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking After 9/11*, 144-149.

²¹ According to Daalder and Destler, Clarke was an invaluable but underutilized expert. In their words “Clarke turned the CSG into a counterterrorism bulwark, bringing together all of the key agencies in a concerted effort to prevent and, if necessary, respond to a terrorist attack, whether at home or abroad. ...Even if he ruffled quite a few feathers in the process, Clarke would get things done.” Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 246-248.

after Berger also met personally with Rice and stated, "the Bush Administration would spend more time on terrorism in general and al Qaeda in particular than on anything else."²² In Rice's defense, President Clinton made his concerns clear to Bush at the same time, and stated "I think you will find that by far your biggest threat is Bin Laden and the al Qaeda."²³ Despite the warnings, the president and Rice failed to act within the NSC system to elevate and emphasize her apparent concerns.

the authors of the 9/11 Commission concluded that Rice, her deputy Stephen Hadley, and Clarke as the lead of the NSC's counterterrorism security group (CSG) all recognized the gravity of the terror threat. Instead of engaging and leading her NSC interagency after taking the helm, however, Rice sidelined Clarke by positioning his CSG in the sub-deputy level of the NSC. Although Rice and Hadley agreed Clarke's CSG recommendations on Afghanistan, the Taliban, and al Qaeda warranted further review, she failed to press her NSC to develop and draft a formal NSPD for the PC and, more appropriately, the president to review with the Council. Despite the warnings, the 9/11 Commission noted Rice did not call an NSC/PC meeting to discuss transnational terrorism until 4 September 2001. VP Cheney instead had led earlier an *ad hoc* group, outside of the NSC structure, to further study weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and the threat to the homeland in May of 2001.²⁴

Rice's approach, and the president's and VP's responses, to the terror threat leading up to 9/11 revealed four key aspects of Rice's emergent role and her NSC's sidelining. First, Rice's hesitance to actively engage the NSC process to develop firm, actionable anti-terror policies confirmed her desire to remain first and foremost "assistant" to the president, and "neutral" PC broker rather than policy advisor. Second, it

²² Bolton, *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking After 9/11*, 144-145.

²³ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 249.

²⁴ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 428-430.

supported her belief that the NSC represented the president's staff rather than the White House's center for strategy and policy.²⁵ Third, the move by the president and the White House for Cheney to lead an *ad hoc* team signaled the president's intent to defer deliberation on even the most severe national security threats to Cheney. Fourth, the VP's role further cemented his central, if not top, role among the principals. These core characteristics of Bush's NSC system continued to negatively impact Rice's role, the administration's strategy processes, and ultimately the president's decisions in the wake of 9/11 leading up to the invasion of Iraq.

Marcella attributed the process malfunction to the tendency for Bush and his top advisors to quickly agree on policies in "top-level" decision-making meetings without considering alternatives. Cabinet secretaries' personalities within the PC and DC, and resultant interagency conflicts all led to PCC agency representatives "bypassing" the NSC system and processes. This interagency conflict between the departments' secretaries and their action officers tore apart the capacity of the NSC system to coordinate. These factors also undermined the NSA and Deputy NSA's oversight and control over the NSC system and interagency process, diminishing their ability to lead and the NSC's ability to productively function.²⁶ While the organizational structure represented the potential for successful NSC processes, the group and personality dynamics mentioned above seriously debilitated the NSC's process during Bush's first term.

Auerswald identified two major procedural changes from the Clinton Administration that represented severe challenges for the duration of Bush's presidency: the role of an incredibly empowered VP Cheney and the clear preference for military solutions to strategic

²⁵ Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor and Presidential Decision Making*. 1st ed. College Station: Texas A & M University Press: 238-244.

²⁶ Marcella, *Affairs of State*, 9-14.

problems presented by Secretary Rumsfeld and the Department of Defense.²⁷ A third contributing factor to the Bush Administration's missteps was a byproduct of Auerswald's two factors: the sidelining of both Secretary of State Colin Powell and the Department of State's diminishing role in the interagency process within the NSC.²⁸ These factors compounded to derail the NSC and interagency process for President Bush and NSA Rice.

As Richard Haass, who served Powell as director of policy planning from 2001-2003, stated "the process did not work nearly as well (as George H. W. Bush's NSC process)."²⁹ Haass, confirming Auerswald's assertion, attributed the dysfunction to a basic lack of consensus by the principals on the need to develop "moderate" rather than extreme military policies. In this vein, he highlighted the marginalization of the JCS and resultant loss of a voice to balance Secretary Rumsfeld's positions. This work addresses Rumsfeld's role in undermining the system in the final section of this chapter in the context of the Iraq War. In his assessment of the "pre-9/11" system, Haass attributed the administration's military-biased policy process to the rise of the VP and his personal staff in prominence within the NSC system and at the most important NSC meetings.³⁰

First, NSPD-1 appointed the VP to the PC as was the case in many previous administrations, but also as a statutory member to the Council chaired by the president. In the president's absence, the VP was the first alternate to chair the meeting, followed by the NSA.³¹ Considering that

²⁷ Auerswald, "The Evolution of The NSC Process", 45-46.

²⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 408.

²⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 407. Haass is "previously a former Special Assistant to President George H. W. Bush and senior director for Near East and South Asian affairs on the staff of the NSC." Haass is also serving in his fourteenth year as president, Council on Foreign Relations.
<http://www.cfr.org/experts/united-states-afghanistan-middle-east-and-north-africa/richard-n-haass/b3350>.

³⁰ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 407-408.

³¹ NSPD-1, 1-2.

before 9/11 the president seldom attended Council meetings and the PC meetings even less, Bush's absence within his NSC system and foreign policy process created a leadership void that Cheney readily filled. With his "own national security staff" in tow and ready with policy inputs at Council at PC meetings, Cheney frequently seized the opportunity to dominate policy debates.³² In contrast to previous administrations (and specifically Bush 41's), what had been two or three aides assisting the VP on policy issues grew into "a separate institution or bureaucracy... (a) mini-NSC staff."³³ This staff accompanied Cheney to virtually every significant meeting in the administration, or represented his policy views when he was absent. A prime example of the reach of Cheney's staff, and the central role of personalities in the Bush national security process, was the broad influence of Cheney's Chief of Staff, I. Lewis "Scooter" Libby.

Bob Woodward described Libby's broad influence emerging leading up to 9/11. He wrote "Libby had three formal titles. He was chief of staff to (VP) Cheney; he was also (NSA) to the (VP); and he was finally an assistant to President Bush. It was a trifecta of positions probably never before held by a single person. Scooter was a power center unto himself, and accordingly, a force multiplier for Cheney's agenda and views."³⁴ As author M. Kent Bolton asserted, these VP-empowerment and policy-domination trends arose in the George W. Bush Administration as a wholly new phenomenon since the conception and birth of the NSC system in 1947.³⁵ Richard Haass builds upon Bolton's assessment.

³² Bolton, M. Kent. 2008. *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking After 9/11*. 1st ed. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers: 152-153.

³³ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 407. As Daalder and Destler noted, Cheney's VP staff was larger than President Kennedy's entire NSC. Destler, I. M, and Ivo H Daalder. 2009. *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster: 253.

³⁴ Woodward, Bob. 2004. *Plan of Attack*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster: 48.

³⁵ Bolton, *U.S. National Security and Foreign Policymaking After 9/11*, 147.

He suggests Rumsfeld, Cheney, and Cheney's staff members such as Libby perpetuated a biased culture against more moderate approaches to foreign policy. These biases eventually seeped into the NSC staff itself, negatively affecting the policies presented by principals as well as those developed inside the NSC. The NSC representatives largely proposed and supported policies in line with the VP or DoD. This defunct process directly undermined the ability for the NSC to execute well-balanced, interagency strategy aimed to integrate all instruments of national power. This culture and cycle, as Haass described, continuously isolated Powell as a balancing force within the PC, and sidelined his State Department agents in the NSC policy process.³⁶ As Peter Rodman noted, "it was inevitable that the moderate views of the State Department, led as it was by a moderate who generally shared its institutional philosophy, would leave the institution out of sync with a conservative defense secretary and VP. What was not inevitable was the (persistent) feuds—and that the president would have such difficulty in managing them."³⁷ These emergent relationships and conflict within the administration prior to 9/11 set the stage for the continuing downward spiral of the NSC system and interagency policy-making process encountered after the crisis.

Just as Pearl Harbor "triggered" the drive to the National Security Act of 1947, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 redefined the conceptualization of national security, homeland defense, and the organization and processes of the NSC system.³⁸ Rothkopf noted how Bush and his Cabinet, like every other president, both shaped and were shaped by their reactions to the crises of their time.³⁹ This principle played out in the NSC system just as it did on the international stage. Prior to 9/11

³⁶ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 408.

³⁷ Rodman, *Presidential Command*, 240.

³⁸ Stuart, Douglas. 2008. "Constructing the Iron Cage: The 1947 National Security Act". In *Affairs of State*, 1st ed. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute: 60.

³⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, David J. 2006. *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and The Architects of American Power*. 1st ed. New York: Public Affairs: 390-392.

Bush called Council meetings infrequently and sporadically; after the attacks on the US they occurred almost daily and almost always with the president chairing the meeting either in person or via secure-video teleconference.⁴⁰ At times of intense debate about Iraq, Afghanistan, or counter-terror operations, the president or the VP sometimes convened and chaired the Council multiple times per day.⁴¹ The president not only increased the frequency of Council meetings, but he also expanded its formal structure to meet the emergent threats to the homeland and the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The first major organizational change in response to threats to the American homeland was the establishment of the Homeland Security Council (HSC) in October of 2001. The HSC operated as another parallel council, structurally akin to the NSC and NEC with a PC, DC, and PCCs. Through Homeland Security Presidential Directive (HSPD-1), the president charged the council to secure the homeland from terrorist threats, leveraging the interagency process at the Federal, State, and local levels to develop policies and coordinate implementation. Its mandate was uniquely domestic and interagency by nature.⁴² The president assigned the Assistant to the President for Homeland Security (HSA) to chair the HSC Principals Committee (HSC/PC). Most notably, HSPD-1 provided for optional attendance by the NSA.⁴³

⁴⁰ Whittaker, Alan, Frederick Smith, and Elizabeth McKune. 2008. "The National Security Policy Process: The NSC and Interagency System". In *Affairs of State*, 1st ed. Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute: 99-100.

⁴¹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 430.

⁴² "The membership was quite different, (than the NSC), emphasizing domestically focused agencies, such as Treasury, Health and Human Services, Transportation, the FBI, FEMA, etc." Auerswald, "The Evolution of The NSC Process", 45.

⁴³ HSC/PC statutory members included "the secretary of the treasury; the defense secretary; the attorney general; the secretary of health and human services; the secretary of transportation; the director of the office of management and budget...the assistant to the president and chief of staff; the director of central intelligence; the director of the federal bureau of investigation; the director of the federal emergency management agency; and the assistant to the president and chief of staff to the vice president." "HSPD-1: Organization and Operation of The Homeland Security Council". 2001. *Fas.Org*.
<https://fas.org/irp/offdocs/nsdp/hspd-1.htm>.

The creation of the HSA and the HSC allowed the NSA and the NSC to remain focused on other pressing national security issues such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and the growing GWOT. HSPD-1 also provided guidance for “cross-Council” coordination, stating “when global terrorism with domestic implications is on the agenda of the HSC/PC, the (HSA) and the (NSA) shall (determine the agenda, in consultation with the regular attendees, and shall ensure that all necessary papers are prepared) in concert.”⁴⁴ These steps allowed the NSA to stay apprised of pressing HSA matters, and provided the NSA the opportunity to offer the HSA advice on operating the HSC moving forward.

The creation of the Office of Homeland Security (OHS) in the White House, and the eventual establishment of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) through the 2002 Homeland Security Act, further solidified the institutional changes (and created more “cross-agency” power struggles) to the national security enterprise.⁴⁵ The DHS, and its Secretary Thomas “Tom” Ridge, immediately became a key player both in the GWOT and within the NSC system. At the same time, the NSC took its own measures to understand and engage in the emerging GWOT by establishing the Office for Combating Terrorism (directed by Deputy NSA), its work remained focus on the increasingly vexing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

To facilitate the interagency process for Iraq and Afghanistan, Bush created “two special interagency groups to coordinate the activities of the large commitments of U.S. military, reconstruction, and diplomatic contingents in Afghanistan and Iraq.”⁴⁶ These “sub-PCC” working groups, the Afghanistan Interagency Operations Group (AIOG) and the Iraq Policy and Operations Group (IPOG) both had dedicated staffs and reported to

⁴⁴ HSPD-1, 1-2.

⁴⁵ The DHS “stood-up” on 1 March 2003. Shiffman, Gary, and Jonathan Hoffman. 2011. “The Department of Homeland Security: Chief of Coordination”. In *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, 1st ed. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University: 203-205.

⁴⁶ Whittaker et al, “The National Security Policy Process”, 105-106.

the DC. The State Department's Coordinator for Afghanistan chaired the AIOG, while the "Deputy Assistant Secretary of State and a Senior NSC Director for Defense Policy" led the IPOG.⁴⁷

Both the AIOG and IPOG operated in the model of the IWG utilized by the Clinton Administration and his NSAs, and both aimed to utilize the interagency process to collectively plan and "wargame" policy options. They represented not only the NSC's organizational potential to rejuvenate the interagency and strategy process, but also the flexibility the NSC provided the president in formally establishing national security priorities. The president retained the authority to permanently install these temporary organizations into the formal NSC/PCC structure, and he would ultimately add three PCCs by the end of his second term and increase his NSC to 225 staff and 100 permanent NSC Staff policy positions.⁴⁸ To capitalize on these sweeping and immediate changes to the NSC system, would Rice embrace the expansion of her broker role and leverage her NSC to shape the administration's strategy and policy moving forward?

As Rodman explained, the answer to that question is "no." In his estimation, the Cheney-Rumsfeld cabal had solidified not only the seemingly unfettered support from President Bush, but also exacerbated the alienation of Secretary Powell, Rice, and the NSC.⁴⁹ Apparently

⁴⁷ Whittaker et al, "The National Security Policy Process", 105.

⁴⁸ Whittaker et al, "The National Security Policy Process", 98-106. As a point of clarity, permanent NSC Staff policy positions are often confused with the total number of individuals assigned to the NSC. The actual Staff policy positions typically number less than one-half of the total number of individuals assigned from agencies, departments, or simply assigned for administrative support. For example, in 2000 Clinton's NSC had 225 personnel, but only 100 permanently assigned Staff members. Worley, *The National Security Council: Recommendations for The New President*, 15.

⁴⁹ While many authors assert Rumsfeld simply "steam-rolled" the NSC strategy and policy formulation process, in *Presidential Command* Rodman provides an alternative perspective. Rodman, in the Defense Department office of the assistant secretary of international security affairs, operated under Douglas Feith, undersecretary of defense for policy. Rodman's team prepared policy papers and briefed Secretary Rumsfeld prior to NSC meetings, which representatives in the State Department and the NSC Staff felt gave Rumsfeld an "unfair" advantage in the Council. The author of this thesis contends that the lack of preparedness and assertiveness of the NSA, NSC and DoS created opportunities for Rumsfeld (and Cheney) to dominate the policy process.

without open discussion and debate in the NSC, Bush asked Rumsfeld to plan, via the DoD, for the invasion of Iraq. Bush subsequently informed Cheney and Rice of his decision, but did not inform Powell. Daalder and Destler rightfully emphasized that while this and any national security decision ultimately rests on the president's shoulders, its logical and strategic basis should remain grounded in the NSC strategy process. In their words, "there was time—plenty of time—to conduct a thorough review and in-depth examination of the situation, the requirements, and the consequences. The responsibility for doing so fell to Condoleezza Rice, the manager of the process."⁵⁰ Her continued inability to evolve into a policy entrepreneur and advisor to the president, as it did for Cheney in the pre-9/11 era, left the door open for Rumsfeld to use his influence over Bush to shape and drive multiple decisions – including the invasion and "reconstruction" of Iraq.

While Rice attempted to insert the NSC back into the strategy process after 9/11, Rumsfeld sternly resisted both indirectly and directly. On one hand, he often came to meetings unprepared when the NSC prepared policy papers for review. On the other hand, when he wanted to advocate for a specific policy on behalf of the DoD at the Council or PC meetings, he arrived well prepared to argue the DoD's view, especially on the Iraq War.⁵¹ In Daalder and Destler's words, "(Rumsfeld) ran roughshod over the process. He would come to meetings unprepared to make a decision or even to argue his department's position. Often, he would deliver a new paper to meetings and insist on an immediate decision, without allowing any of the other principals time to review the arguments. He gave his subordinates no flexibility in trying to find compromises in interagency meetings."⁵² As a senior administration official from George H. W. Bush's Administration commented, "People on

⁵⁰ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 271-272.

⁵¹ Rodman, *Presidential Command*, 242-244.

⁵² Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 273.

the NSC staff believe that the secretary of defense has four points of entry into the White House. He can go to Cond[oleeza] for the easy stuff; he can go to [White House Chief of Staff] Andy [Card] for the stuff that's a little tougher; to Cheney, if it's really difficult; and then, for the ace the hole, direct contact with the president if necessary. You just can't run a system like that and expect it to work."⁵³ For example, the debate over Guantanamo Bay detainees displayed Rumsfeld's contempt or, more generously, ambivalence toward Rice and the NSC.

In the opening months of 2004, at the president's request Rice sent a call out to convene the Council to discuss starting trials and processing terrorist suspects and detainees held at Guantanamo. After the decision to try the detainees at military tribunals, the prisoners had been formally turned over to the DoD and thus required coordination through Rumsfeld to begin trials. After finally agreeing to a meeting the president effectively ordered, Rumsfeld skipped the first three meetings altogether.⁵⁴ When he finally did attend the Council meeting with the president, Rumsfeld's lack of interest was clear.

As Rice delivered the key points of an NSC policy paper at the meeting, the president interrupted her to ask Rumsfeld his thoughts. He simply replied, "These are bad guys." The president then asked what Rumsfeld thought they should, to which the defense secretary bluntly responded, "I'm not a lawyer."⁵⁵ As Bob Woodward described, "The discussion drifted off and the decision was left hanging. Some of the backbenchers at the NSC meeting were astonished at the deference the president gave Rumsfeld. It was as if Rice and the NSC had one serious, formal process going on while the president and Rumsfeld had another one—informal, chatty and dominant."⁵⁶ This case represents just one

⁵³ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 414.

⁵⁴ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 273-274.

⁵⁵ Woodward, Bob. 2006. *State of Denial*. 1st ed. New York: Simon & Schuster: 275-276.

⁵⁶ Woodward, *State of Denial*, 276.

example of the widely-held belief that Rumsfeld did not care for constructive debate and discussion within the NSC system, and also signaled his underlying apathy toward the interagency process and a disrespect for Rice.⁵⁷ While in cases like these Rumsfeld indirectly or passively derailed debate, he did not shy away from overtly dominating policy discussion, even with the president.

In the immediate wake of 9/11, Rice worked with Bush to create a counterterrorism advisor to the president within the NSC. Rumsfeld insisted, in writing, such an advisor represented an attempt for the NSC to undermine the military chain of command and the JCS as the military advisor to the president. Ultimately, Rice and the president backed down and four-star General (Ret) Wayne Downing, a distinguished former US Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) Commander, resigned within months.⁵⁸ Rumsfeld's condemnation of Rice's efforts and the president's wishes to leverage the NSC made clear that he discounted its role in planning, coordination, or policy implementation if military forces were involved.

As the central national security and foreign policy body in the executive branch, the NSC was designed for just such a task. In addition, the president possessed the authority to do as he wished with his Council. Rumsfeld's argument proved myopic considering counterterrorism operations encompass much broader and longer-term processes and consequences than either "military-only" operations or advice coming from Rumsfeld and the JCS. It also revealed Rumsfeld's prioritization of the DoD's interests over the need to integrate and coordinate via the NSC to broaden and optimize policy options for the nation. Additionally, Rumsfeld undermined his own "must respect the military chain of command" argument in his most infamous strategic

⁵⁷ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 245-248.

⁵⁸ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 274-275.

misstep and sidestep of the NSC: supporting the decision to de-Baathify the Iraqi leadership by former foreign service officer, L. Paul Bremer III.⁵⁹

On 24 April 2003, Secretary Rumsfeld phoned Secretary Powell to recommend Paul Bremer as the Special Envoy to Iraq, a selection process Rumsfeld started within the walls of the Pentagon on 8 April 2003.⁶⁰ The “special envoy” role became prevalent in the Clinton Administration, where he assigned individuals to solve problems specific to a certain, region, nation, or conflict. Reporting to the president via the NSA, or even reporting directly to the president, these positions presented numerous process and policy pitfalls. They provide a venue for individuals outside of the interagency process to independently formulate and possibly implement foreign policies with strategic consequences.⁶¹ Exacerbating these concerns, Bremer’s resulted from Rumsfeld’s discussions “behind closed doors” with Bush and Cheney, rather than with the principals’ or even Powell and Rice. While Powell replied that he would think it over, he was not directly consulted again before the president made his decision to appoint Bremer on May 6.⁶² This “streamlined” selection process, conducted entirely outside of the interagency, principals, or even the Council setting, provided a disastrous precedent for Bremer to follow in Iraq.

As Rodman noted, the Bremer-Rumsfeld-Bush chain of command was an anomaly historically. As Bremer understood it he reported to

⁵⁹ Rothkopf described Bremer as “intelligent, highly capable, independent-minded and very conservative. Rumsfeld saw him as ideal—a former Foreign Service officer who would be open to the kind of working relationship and approaches Rumsfeld wished to advance. In the end, even in the White House, many saw him as either a captive of the DOD perspective or, in the words of one White House official who grumbled about policy freelancing by the Coalition Provisional Authority, he became a “kind of viceroy” who was very hard to control.” Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 414.

⁶⁰ Woodward noted “Bremer had strongly supported the decision to invade Iraq. He believed it was the only moral course, that the alleged WMD were an incontestable, imminent threat. In April, he later wrote, he’d been contacted by both Wolfowitz and Scooter Libby, asking if he’d be interested in taking over in postwar Iraq. Garner was never intended to be the permanent head of the reconstruction effort, they told him. They needed someone who knew diplomacy and politics. Woodward, 166-182.

⁶¹ Auerswald, “The Evolution of The NSC Process”, 43-48.

⁶² Woodward, *State of Denial*, 172-190.

Rumsfeld. However, by definition, as “special envoy” Bremer reported directly to Bush.⁶³ As discussed earlier in this chapter, Rumsfeld vehemently resisted Bush’s attempts to create an NSC counterterrorism advisor position, arguing that in no case should a position be created that might obstruct the military chain of command. In this case, Rumsfeld supported Bremer’s direct reporting to Bush as long as the secretary of defense remained in the direct “consultation” chain between Bremer and the president. As Bremer understood his appointment, he reported to Rumsfeld and not directly to the president.⁶⁴

Bremer’s formal appointment by the president, signed on 9 May, stated “‘reporting directly through the (secretary of defense).’ He was in charge of everyone except Rumsfeld and General Franks (Commander, US Central Command).”⁶⁵ That same day Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, Douglas Feith, notified Bremer he was sending the de-Baathification order forward to the Director of the DoD-led Office of Reconstruction and Humanitarian Assistance (ORHA), retired three-star general Jay Garner.⁶⁶ The order was one of many generated, debated, or decided outside of the NSC, interagency, or even a meeting between Bush and his principals which often happened in the Oval Office.⁶⁷ Even Bremer expressed reservations until he could get to Baghdad and talk it over with Garner in Iraq. After he arrived in Baghdad, however, Bremer made it clear to Garner that the policies he carried came from home, and he intended to implement them without debate.

⁶³ Rodman, *Presidential Command*, 263.

⁶⁴ Woodward identified even further confusion in December 2003, when Bremer still felt he should directly consult with and report to Rumsfeld on Iraq decisions. Rumsfeld apathetically replied, ‘Look...it’s clear to me that your reporting channel is now direct to the president and not through me. Condi has taken over political matters.’ Another point highlighting the confusion by all parties, Rice asked Rumsfeld to coordinate some Iraq matters with Bremer. Rumsfeld replied ‘No...he doesn’t work for me...He works for you.’ Rice and the Council was apparently neither consulted or even formally informed of this critical coordination decision. Woodward, 273-274.

⁶⁵ Woodward, *State of Denial*, 191.

⁶⁶ According to Feith it was Bremer who “pushed” both the order to disband the Iraqi Army and the de-Baathification order. Woodward, *State of Denial*, 104, 190-191.

⁶⁷ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 414.

The day after Bremer arrived in Iraq, 14 May, the de-Baathification order circulated among US leaders inside Iraq. While Garner and his colleagues in Iraq discussed eliminating Saddam loyalists and holdovers at the highest military and administrative positions (known as “gentle de-Baathification”), Bremer’s and the Pentagon’s policy cut far too “deep.” In Garner’s view and according to ORHA planning, the Iraqi Army remained *the* central power to enforce law and support security and stability operations in the country. Bremer’s proposition included the dismissal of 30,000-50,000 trained Iraqi troops and well-connected leaders critical to the rapid restoration of civil authority and infrastructure.

When Garner confronted Bremer about reconsidering, Bremer replied, “Absolutely not...those are my instructions and I intend to execute them.”⁶⁸ The order was amended to also disband the Ministry of the Interior that controlled the Iraqi police; an action that further exasperated Garner and ORHA. When Garner called Rumsfeld the defense secretary said “(t)his is not coming from this building,” he replied “(t)hat came from somewhere else,” insinuating the Oval Office, Cheney, or the NSC developed the plan that Rumsfeld’s or Feith’s teams in the Pentagon undoubtedly created.⁶⁹ According to Woodward’s sources, Deputy NSA Hadley and Powell both learned of the formal implementation of the army disbanding and de-Baathification orders when it was reported by the media. Neither Powell, nor Rice, nor the NSC staff “touched” the policies, despite the White House creating the Executive Steering Group, the Iraq Political-Military Cell, the Humanitarian/Reconstruction Group, and the White House Iraq Group aimed to manage the interagency policy process for the rebuilding the country.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Woodward, *State of Denial*, 193-194.

⁶⁹ Woodward, *State of Denial*, 194.

⁷⁰ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 432; Woodward, *State of Denial*, 193-194.

Even before 9/11 Rumsfeld made it clear he had no intention to engage in the president's NSC process or respect Rice's authority and capability as NSA. Bremer's appointment and placement on top of the military chain of command arose as a prime example of Rumsfeld's manipulation of the system. While there might be some truth in the contention Rumsfeld simply filled a void left by lack of NSA leadership and NSC policy production, his contempt for and domination of the NSC's processes repeatedly became clear to many inside the administration. Bremer's approach to Iraq and his contempt for the advice of the experts on the ground in Iraq at the time of his arrival reflected Rumsfeld's sense of superiority over both the system and the people executing strategy for the administration. Furthermore, Rumsfeld's and Bremer's refusal to reconsider their DoD-created policies neglected not only the basic premise of interagency strategy embodied in the NSC, but also any concern for the negative strategic implications their myopic missteps might create for the region and for America.

The principles the president outlined in *NSPD-1* suggest an intent to bolster the interagency process and the NSC's pivotal role in its execution. His and Rice's subsequent actions, however, were lacking in three ways that undermined the system: "downsizing the staff by almost a third...limiting the staff's core functions to staffing the president, pushing his policy priorities, and coordinating the rest of the government, (and) narrowing the NSC's policy focus...to the traditional concerns of managing relations with the great powers, bolstering alliances, and strengthening the U.S. military."⁷¹ One could rightly argue these tasks are the core responsibilities of the departments and secretaries.⁷² They do not satisfy the NSC charter to represent the central

⁷¹ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 260.

⁷² "Armitage, who was deputy secretary of state during Bush's first term, reportedly described Rice's NSC as 'dysfunctional...the NSC is not performing its traditional role, as adjudicator between agencies' during the preparations for Iraq and other crises." Criticizing her management of the NSC as undisciplined and uncoordinated, Armitage, Powell, and others felt that the president was not being well prepared for the

interagency and executive branch strategy and policy body. They represent mistakes future administrations must avoid.

Bush's NSC and Rice's performance as NSA highlighted painful truths in the NSC system: immediate downsizing of the staff and foresight into its functions seldom "survive first contact with the enemy," which includes a major policy crisis. Also, the "honest broker" role is a point of departure at best, even unhelpful to the strategy process when the "honest" broker becomes "neutral."⁷³ Rice's faith in the sufficiency and necessity of the honest broker role left her blind to the fact that it was neither sufficient nor necessary. Cheney's assertiveness and Rumsfeld's dominance in the strategy process sidelined both Rice and Powell, while the Defense Department's planning initiatives overshadowed the NSC's value. Also, her role as neutral, rather than honest, broker within the council undermined Powell's complementary views on the invasion and the conduct on the Iraq war. She had the trust and the attention of the president, but felt asserting herself inside the NSC system and in-front of other principals was outside her role. According to Burke, Rice did occasionally propose or defend a certain policy during private meetings with Bush.⁷⁴

The NSA must immediately be prepared, even during the transition, to adapt both the NSC's tasks and the NSA's role to account for the president's shortfalls in foreign policy and strategy expertise. While Rice stated she wanted her NSC to operate "like Brent's," George W. Bush was not the foreign affairs expert his father was. Additionally, the strategic principles Cheney, Rumsfeld, and Rice embraced and pursued under George H. W. Bush would not satisfy the demands of the international environment facing them in Bush's first term. The NSA,

foreign policy upheaval that has taken place during his tenure in office. Members of the 9/11 Commission privately used similar language.'" Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 436.

⁷³ Dueck, Colin. 2014. "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review". *Orbis* 58 (1): 15-38. doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2013.11.007, 35-36.

⁷⁴ Burke, *Honest Broker?*, 244-251.

NSC, and foreign policy priorities are never formulaic enough to repeat exactly. Rice failed to adapt to several challenges, including the need to challenge Cheney and Rumsfeld either directly or indirectly.⁷⁵

Some contend Rice could and should have leveraged her access to the president to bolster Cheney and Rumsfeld's support for the NSC, and to temper Bush's ideological policy convictions.⁷⁶ On the other hand, Cheney and Rumsfeld's access to and influence on Bush created an almost insurmountable challenge. Even in the face of such personality challenges, presenting multiple, balanced policy remains a core task for the NSA. Rice had the access to the president just as Cheney and Rumsfeld did, however she chose not to leverage that access to bolster the integrity of the interagency strategy process. An NSA's core task remains to ensure that the president is provided with a system to conduct balanced strategy in the service of deliberate and effective foreign policy, no matter what the cost. Some argue Rice never really tried to be the honest broker and level the playing field for the principals, especially to bring Powell back into the fold. Perhaps Rice's own words are most telling as she stated "(i)t's not me exercising influence over him. I'm internalizing (President Bush's) world."⁷⁷ Unfortunately, this lack of objectivity spelled the failure of the NSC's ability to drive the strategy process, and diminished Rice's potential as honest broker, policy entrepreneur, or the administration's leader of the interagency system. President Bush, however, needed his NSA to play all those roles whether he realized it at the time or not.

Rice expected to replicate Brent Scowcroft's NSC process and role as honest broker. Unfortunately for her, George W. Bush was not the statemen his father was, and 9/11 drove an unforeseeable change in the strategic landscape. Her conviction to stay in that role only, coupled with

⁷⁵ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 261.

⁷⁶ Rodman, *Presidential Command*, 248.

⁷⁷ Daalder and Destler, *In the Shadow of The Oval Office*, 276.

the policy process dominance by Cheney and Rumsfeld, prevented her from shifting to an entrepreneur-advisor role. She also proved hesitant to leverage the NSC staff to conduct deliberate planning, policy production, or implementation and post-implementation analysis critical to the interagency process. The NSC thus lacked the leadership and advocacy to function as the heart of the administration's grand strategy process.

For George W. Bush and Rice, Cheney and Rumsfeld continued to dominate the strategy and decision-making processes with tacit approval from the president. Bush failed to make clear to his VP and secretaries that her role as NSA represented his authority as the president and that the NSC strategy process would drive foreign policy production.⁷⁸ These factors left Rice and the NSC largely marginalized and ineffective during Bush's first term. Unlike Lake's efforts to raise the administration's respect for the NSC's planning efforts and policy recommendations, Rice did not improve either the PCC's value nor her role in the NSC strategy process. Although she may have been presenting the president with Powell and others' alternative views, her taking a more assertive role in PC meetings may have proven much more beneficial to the NSC system, her reputation among her peers, and administration's strategy processes and policy options.⁷⁹

Rice's shortcomings as NSA left the departments, secretaries, and informal groups counseling the president to formulate, decide, and implement disjointed Iraq War policies. The result, as Hal Brands noted, was a reactive process resulting in ill-conceived policies which "followed a kind of zigzag pattern" reminiscent of Clinton's "crisis-response" Bosnia policy.⁸⁰ This chapter illuminated these strategic failures by mapping the

⁷⁸ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 392-394.

⁷⁹ Dueck, "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review", 36.

⁸⁰ Brands, Hal. 2014. *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman to George W. Bush*. Grand Rapids, MI, United States: Cornell University Press: 174-175.

discontinuities between President Bush, his dysfunctional NSC system and processes, and NSA Rice's and the administration's inability to effectively utilize the NSC to solve national security and foreign policy challenges regarding the Iraq War



CONCLUSIONS

The National Security Council and all of its processes, they're the center of gravity for making foreign policy. And when it's out of whack, the policy is going to be out of whack. (I)t starts with the personnel and it starts with the process.

Anthony Blinken
President Obama Deputy NSA and Deputy Secretary of State
CNN Interview with Fareed Zakaria, 18 February 2017

To paraphrase the phrase from the Clinton campaign, 'It's the president, stupid.'

Samuel "Sandy" Berger
President Clinton's NSA, 1997-2001
"A Forum on The Role of National Security Advisor"
21 April 2001

America's enduring and immediate requirement for deliberate, iterative, interagency strategy processes has not waned over time. This work highlighted the president-NSA-NSC roles and relationships within their unique NSC systems and historical contexts. It also uncovered the inherent conflict between administrations' grand strategic intentions and their requirement to respond to increasingly complex national security crises. The enduring truth that the US will encounter multiple, unforeseen foreign-policy challenges emphasizes the need for a flexible, interagency approach to NSC structure, NSA roles, and presidential involvement.¹ At the same time, coherent grand strategy demands that administrations do not lose sight of long-term, strategic priorities and policies.² If US leaders intend to retain and bolster the nation's position of strategic advantage in global affairs, presidents and NSAs will need NSC systems and processes that can deliberately develop grand strategy *and* respond to crises via the interagency. Considering the critical need

¹ Marcella, Gabriel. 2008. *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*. 1st ed. Ft. Belvoir: Defense Technical Information Center: 7-17.

² Hoffman, F.G., and Ryan Neuhard. 2016. "Avoiding Strategic Inertia: Enabling the National Security Council". *Orbis* 60 (2): 217-236. doi:10.1016/j.orbis.2016.01.003.

to balance these two tasks, the remainder of this work highlights lessons from its case studies and additional expert analyses to guide presidents and NSAs in determining the NSC's organizational design and the appropriate role of the NSA. Lastly and most importantly, this section highlights the need for the president to trust and empower their NSA, while assuming an active role in NSC processes to benefit their foreign policy decision-making.

The president's and NSA's path to NSC success begins during the campaign. While the initial process of shaping the NSC organization and processes often starts with the advice of principals, agents, or committees, it always concludes with the president deciding how to structure the system.³ Eisenhower saw growth and institutionalization of the NSC system as an advantage to his "New Look" grand strategic approach and the president's need for deliberate decision-making processes. He and Cutler made clear during the campaign their intention to expand and the engage the NSC system more effectively than Truman, and thus retained the ability to design and adapt the system as they saw fit. In contrast, Clinton and Bush allowed campaign rhetoric focused on downsizing the NSC to overshadow the reality of expanding national security demands and unforeseen foreign policy challenges.

Perhaps due to their lack of foreign policy inexperience, both Clinton and George W. Bush fell victim to multiple dilemmas that undermined their NSC strategy and decision-making systems. First, the "problem depletion" dilemma drove them and some of their advisors to insist the post-Cold War geopolitical landscape suggested a decrease in frequency or severity of foreign policy challenges.⁴ In reality, geopolitical trends and previous administrations' experiences signaled the opposite. George H. W. Bush's numerous foreign policy challenges (including the

³ Ripley, Randall, and James Lindsay. 1997. "Continuity and Change After the Cold War". In *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 1st ed. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh: 316-318.

⁴ Randall and Lindsay, *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 4-7.

ongoing crisis in the Balkans discussed at length in Chapter 3) should have revealed to Clinton the need for a robust and active NSC. In the same vein, Clinton's NSC mismanagement should have provided George W. Bush lessons on the dangers of downsizing the NSC, disengaging the strategy and foreign policy process, failing to provide the principals with strategic guidance, and not openly stating support for the NSA's authority and the NSC's procedural prescience. Despite these cues from preceding administrations, both Clinton and George W. Bush committed remarkably similar campaign and first-term mistakes.

Both candidates limited their policy process options, diminished their NSA's authority, and marginalized the NSC's role by insisting on downsizing the NSC during the campaign. These case studies lead to the first two recommendations for future presidential candidates and NSAs in-waiting: ***refrain from suggesting NSC downsizing during campaigns***. This recommendation provides presidents and NSAs the latitude to determine NSC staff size to reflect the emergent challenges that lay ahead, independent of political constraints and campaign promises. The Clinton and Bush NSCs quickly found themselves swamped in Bosnia, 9/11, and Iraq crisis-response which overwhelmed the deliberate grand strategy process. Still, both presidents remained convinced that the secretaries would work the policies out cooperatively. Their campaign decisions to downsize the NSCs, coupled with their willingness to relinquish control over the policy process, led to their losing control of the strategy process and becoming too far removed from their foreign policy systems that required their engagement and guidance.

Considering these mistakes, this work also recommends presidents ***resist downsizing the NSC staff until new White House, NSA, NSC, and department positions are filled and prepared for organizational or procedural changes, and retain their strategy***

and interagency processes within the NSC.⁵ When applied in conjunction with the recommendation to refrain from suggesting NSC downsizing during campaigns, these measures provide organizational stability for the people managing the foreign policy process while retaining the flexibility to later reshape the system if required.

This recommendation is not intended to remove the possibility of downsizing the NSC or changing foreign policy processes after the president and principals determine their preferred methods to coordinate policy. The president and NSA ultimately reserve the right and responsibility to determine the requisite number of personnel to perform key NSC tasks, how best to energize the interagency, and how to manage roles and responsibilities for the departments and the NSC within the strategy process. This measure simply suggests incoming administrations should observe the people and the process in action before making significant changes to their NSC. This step is especially critical when the incoming president or principals do not have experience managing such a complex decision-making and interagency policy implementation process.

The recommendation also echoes both Lake's and Rice's intentions to retain the previous administration's effective policy processes as they took control of their systems. Unfortunately, their (and their presidents') campaign rhetoric restricted their latitude in preserving NSC processes in place as they assumed control of their NSCs. As seen in both the Clinton and Bush cases, they downsized the NSC Staff to keep campaign promises and then were confronted by increasing national security challenges their systems could not effectively handle. Ultimately, after Lake, Rice, and their NSA successors faced significant difficulties leveraging their undermanned NSCs, they eventually increased manning in their NSC staffs to respond to mounting foreign policy challenges.

⁵ Worley, *The National Security Council: Recommendations for The New President*, 6-7.

Campaign rhetoric not only directly indicated presidential intent to decrease the NSC's role, it also indirectly signaled their desire to operate "Cabinet-centered" decision-making systems that further stressed presidential control over the foreign policy processes.⁶

Retaining strategy responsibility and authority within the Executive Branch serves multiple functions. First it provides expectation management and stability for the NSC Staff in the early days of the administration. It ensures dedicated, experienced policy professionals remain responsible for the strategy process during what can often be slow and rough transitions for new administrations. Transitioning to a new administration can bring unexpected Congressional delays in Cabinet secretary, assistant secretary, and undersecretary position approvals critical to departmental and interagency functions. If a Cabinet-centric approach is immediately implemented, the in-transition departments might prove unable to satisfy policy formulation, coordination, and implementation demands. At the same time, if the incoming president expects the departments to lead strategy and interagency processes and thus downsizes the NSC, the staff would be unable to supplement the departments' efforts.

The Cabinet-centric approach to foreign policy-making, delegating policy planning and responsibilities to the departments and the secretaries, carries multiple negative consequences.⁷ As seen in the Chapter 3, this system often results in secretaries bringing widely

⁶ In a 1988 *Foreign Policy* article titled "The NSC's Midlife Crisis," Zbigniew Brzezinski (President Carter's NSA) proposed a framework for NSC systems based on "secretarial" and "presidential" models. The "secretarial" model placed foreign policy responsibility within the State Department and in the hands of secretary of state. The "presidential" kept the foreign policy process and authority inside the White House to be decided between the president and the NSA. Powell, Colin. 2004. "The NSC Advisor: Process Manager and More". In *Fateful Decisions*, 1st ed. New York: Oxford: 158.

⁷ The model Worley describes differs from Brzezinski's "secretarial" model. Brzezinski's 1988 model reflected the DoS's occasionally dominant role over the NSA and the DoD in foreign policy debate. Worley's model suggests that *any* department or principal might bring policy options to the table. Worley's model is more descriptive of the Clinton and Bush case studies in this work, whereby Albright as UN Ambassador dominated the Bosnian debate and Defense Secretary Rumsfeld dominated Iraq policy proposals. Worley, *The National Security Council: Recommendations for The New President*, 6-7.

disparate policies that lead to deadlock during debate. As reflected in Chapter 4, it may result in policies which reflect departmental or principals' interests rather than more balanced, grand strategies employing multiple IOPs and working toward a long-term, shared national interest.⁸ The result is a three-fold problem: 1) the NSC staff is left to bear the burden of integrating these policies before PC, DC, and Council consideration; 2) policy debate at all levels within the NSC system demands bridging of possibly incompatible department policies; and, 3) the NSA and the president may be forced to intervene to refocus strategy debate on shared goals and to ensure cooperation between principals and deputies.⁹ Even if the president, the NSA, and the NSC proved capable at meeting these demands, one might ask whether the NSC requires a central, strategic-planning and implementation group to refocus on grand strategy rather than crisis response.¹⁰

After examining the Clinton and Bush case studies (Chapters 3 and 4), simply downsizing or marginalizing the NSC due to its inability to execute grand strategy is short-sighted. Despite arguments from administration officials and department secretaries chastising the centralization a strong NSC represents, its role as the presidentially and congressionally charged venue to execute the national strategy process remains valid.¹¹ At the same time, the increasingly complex international security environment and multiple ongoing wars will continue to strain the NSC system and test its ability to balance grand strategy with crisis response.¹² To alleviate these problems, the president and the NSA must revise the NSC structure to rebalance the NSC's efforts to refocus on long-term, grand strategy. In the service of reprioritizing strategic

⁸ Hoffman and Neuhard, "Avoiding Strategic Inertia", 222-223.

⁹ Worley, *The National Security Council: Recommendations for The New President*, 6-7.

¹⁰ Hoffman and Neuhard, "Avoiding Strategic Inertia", 223.

¹¹ Miller, Paul D. 2013. "The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's". *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43 (3): 592-606. doi:10.1111/psq.12047: 596-597.

¹² Hoffman and Neuhard, "Avoiding Strategic Inertia", 219-220.

planning within the NSC while at the same time soliciting cooperation support from the departments, this thesis argues for ***the reestablishment of a strategic Planning Board focused solely on long-term, national strategy. The board should be composed of members sourced from NSC statutory departments and agencies, personally selected by department secretaries, and approved by the NSA and the president.*** In 2005, NSA Rice attempted to reestablish a strategic planning body with the Strategic Planning and Institutional Reform (SPIR) directorate in the NSC, comprised of three personnel. According to an Obama Administration member of the SPIR, it devolved into “a speech writing shop, without the clout to bring senior administration officials to the table for longer-term strategy discussions.”¹³ This body was created by the NSA, placed within the NSC, and populated by permanent staff members alienated from the agencies. Those cautious of bureaucratic and departmental influence might see placing such a group solely within the NSC as an advantage. This assumption, however, runs counter to the Eisenhower-Cutler Planning Board model designed in 1953 and espoused by multiple scholars over the past 20 years.¹⁴

The Eisenhower-Cutler Planning Board, chaired by the NSA, consisted of the “assistant secretaries for planning of each of the governmental bodies represented in the NSC.”¹⁵ Each member was personally recommended by the secretaries and approved by the president. If they were not assistant secretaries, upon approval they were appointed that position. The appointment thus carried not only the approval of the president, the NSA, and the appointee’s secretary, but also enough weight within their department or agency to garner respect

¹³ Miller, "The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's", 596.

¹⁴ Miller, "The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's", 597-600.

¹⁵ Greenstein, Fred I., and Richard H. Immerman. 2000. "Effective National Security Advising: Recovering the Eisenhower Legacy". *Political Science Quarterly* 115 (3): 335-345. doi:10.2307/2658121: 342.

and foster cooperation. After their appointment, the roles of the appointees were limited to working with the Planning Board and cooperating with their agencies on internal strategic planning efforts.

In the opinion of proponents of the Cutler-Eisenhower Planning Board, bringing departmental expertise to the NSC planning table and providing extra-departmental subject-matter knowledge to strategists working within their respective departments proved mutually beneficial to grand strategic planning.¹⁶ The emphasis on the presidential-NSA-secretary approval process and the resultant authority for Planning Board members is paramount to appointees' ability to remain segregated from crisis-response activities that have crippled the DC's ability to strategically plan. Additionally, DC members' central role remains crisis-management. Their inability to dedicate time to NSC strategic planning because of their task as crisis-managers demands reestablishing and protecting a dedicated, long-term, strategic-planning body to compliment the current crisis-management-centric NSC we know today.¹⁷ The solution to the NSC's identity crisis and organizational shortfalls might lay in the Planning Board example set by Cutler and Eisenhower who institutionalized the Council in 1953.

With open support from the president, a strategically restructured NSC and an empowered NSA potentially provide a system and an agent designed and directed to alleviate bureaucratic challenges and facilitate the national grand strategy process.¹⁸ With such a revised system in place, the forth recommendation of this thesis aims to help presidents poise their NSAs for success as they embark on the strategy process. When executed effectively, the entire strategy and interagency process begins with the president delivering strategic vision, setting national security priorities, and appointing and entrusting his NSA and his

¹⁶ Miller, "The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's", 598.

¹⁷ Miller, "The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council: I Like Ike's", 597-602.

¹⁸ Hoffman and Neuhard, "Avoiding Strategic Inertia", 220-221.

principals to establish and carry out the policy process. Paramount to any presidential action, ***the president must establish, disseminate, and emphasize their strategic vision to guide grand strategy and foreign policy processes.***¹⁹ The president, more than any other variable in the foreign-policy “equation,” ultimately determines the focus and effectiveness of the people, the process, and the policy.²⁰ As Bert Rockman stated, “Presidents who do not send clear and consistent signals send confusing ones by default.”²¹ This step determines the administration’s ability to start and sustain the grand strategy process by setting long-term national interests (ends), determining available IOP options (ways), and setting policy priorities (means) for strategists.²² Setting the presidential strategic vision not only alleviates confusion on behalf of the NSA, principals, deputies, and NSC Staff, but also minimizes the risk of standstill in the overall strategy process.

Eisenhower made clear on the campaign his “New Look” grand-strategic focus, and proactively engaged his Council to remain focused on multi-IOP policy with Project SOLARIUM. In the service of this strategic principle, Cutler insisted the NSC staff reanalyze and redraft 162/2 to reflect more balanced, economically responsible strategy. Clinton, whether due to “problem depletion,” general lack of interest in foreign policy, or his preoccupation with domestic affairs, failed to establish, support, and reinforce a foreign policy agenda his principals could work toward.²³ Bush failed in the same right, leaving the definition of his grand strategic and foreign policy priorities to the Cheney, Rumsfeld, Wolfowitz, and Rice (as shown in her 2000 *Foreign Affairs* article

¹⁹ Ripley and Lindsay, *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 317.

²⁰ Rockman, Bert. 1998. “The Presidency and Bureaucratic Change After the Cold War”. In *U.S. Foreign Policy After the Cold War*, 1st ed. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University: 21-23.

²¹ Rockman, “The Presidency and Bureaucratic Change After the Cold War”, 40.

²² Brands, Hal. 2014. *What Good Is Grand Strategy? Power and Purpose in American Statecraft from Harry S. Truman To George W. Bush*. Grand Rapids, MI, United States: Cornell University Press: 195-197.

²³ Rockman, “The Presidency and Bureaucratic Change After the Cold War”, 29-31.

discussed in Chapter Three).²⁴ Not establishing a coherent, congruent, and well developed grand strategy left the Clinton and Bush NSCs vulnerable to dominance by the departments. Additionally, their inability to openly exhibit trust and confidence in their NSAs left them struggling to establish equal footing with the secretaries.

Eisenhower espoused Sid Souers' principles by appointing a trusted confidant in Robert Cutler to manage his strategy processes.²⁵ During his first tenure as Eisenhower's Special Assistant, Cutler embodied the "honest broker" persona nearly every prospective NSA has openly acclaimed upon appointment and aspired to emulate.²⁶ While Cutler insisted the special assistant support the president's policy processes as a fair and balanced coordinator of the "Policy Hill" process, his evolution during his tenure points to the final recommendations in this work.²⁷ While the honest broker model represents a fair and balanced method to manage strategy and policy processes, **any role of the NSA is based on presidential trust in and overt support of the NSA as presidential agent.** Additionally, as the case studies in this work indicate, **the NSA often must depart from the honest broker role and evolve into policy entrepreneur.** As Dueck asserted, the honest broker and policy entrepreneur roles are not mutually exclusive,

²⁴ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy*, 147-149.

²⁵ Crabb, Cecil, and Kevin Mulcahy. 2004. "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making". In *Fateful Decisions*, 1st ed., New York: Oxford University. The author's recognized Souers as the "model of political rectitude and administrative restraint, was extremely sensitive, even deferential, with regard to the position of the State Department...(based on) President Truman's high personal regard for his secretaries of state and defense and realized that Truman preferred the 'classical model' of State Department dominance of foreign affairs." 163-164.

²⁶ Burke, John P. 2009. *Honest Broker? The National Security Advisor And Presidential Decision Making*. 1st ed. College Station: Texas A & M University Press: 4-5.

²⁷ "As a coordinator, the ANSA facilitates the making of policy but does not initiate it. He is, instead, responsible for defining policy options for the NSC to consider. He also manages the flow of ideas, information, policies, and programs involved in national security. Crabb and Mulcahy, "The Lesson of The Iran-Contra Affair for National Security Policy Making", 165.

and at times are both necessary to fully provide the services the process requires of the NSA.²⁸

In contrast to the Eisenhower-Cutler relationship, Tony Lake lacked Clinton's full trust and open support. After constantly and carefully engaging the president in their personal meetings, as policy entrepreneur Lake earned the president's trust and eventually convinced Clinton to support Lake and the NSC's "Endgame Strategy" for the Balkans.²⁹ While Bush deeply trusted Rice, she failed to expand her insufficient role as honest broker and allowed her NSC's dysfunctional strategy process to continue. The Clinton and Bush examples provide valuable lessons on how explicit and implicit lack of trust in the NSA and the NSC's processes can stifle the administration's ability to leverage its central, grand-strategy system.

Regardless of the president's and their principals' expectations, emergent domestic, geopolitical, and national security challenges will challenge the NSC's people and processes to evolve. This fact demands that the principals, the NSA, and most importantly the president must deliberately learn and adapt to not only the external environment but more importantly to one another.³⁰ Their long-term focus on national security strategy should drive their restructuring of processes and roles, rather than rapidly responding to short-term crises and threats. Looking back on the last 70 years, perhaps our best lessons are that there is no substitute for long-term, grand strategy, and that despite our best intentions and best institutions, grand strategy remains an endless endeavor.³¹

²⁸ Dueck, "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review", 34-36.

²⁹ Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 366-369.

³⁰ Dueck. "The Role of The National Security Advisor and the 2006 Iraq Strategy Review", 36.

³¹ Brands, *What Good is Grand Strategy*, 190-198.

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