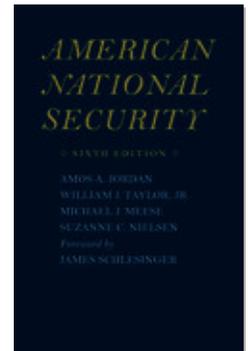




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4

Presidential Leadership and the Executive Branch

“The direction of war implies the direction of the common strength; and the power of directing and employing the common strength forms a usual and essential part in the definition of the executive authority.”¹ With these words, Alexander Hamilton described the crucial role of the president in national security affairs. An appreciation of this vital role was shared by all the founders of the United States, but it was counterbalanced by their determination to avoid investing in the president the “sole prerogative of making war and peace” exercised by the British monarch.² As a result, the Founding Fathers documented in the Constitution a system in which the president and Congress were given complementary, and at times naturally conflicting, roles in the national security process. To successfully implement initiatives in the national security arena, presidents need to make maximum use of their sources of authority while carefully managing constraints.

The Presidency and the Constitution

The Executive and Congress, Sharing Power. Under the Constitution, the president is the commander in chief of the Army and Navy, but the president has nothing to command unless Congress uses the power it possesses to raise and support armies and to support and maintain a navy. In addition, Congress is empowered to make rules for the governance and regulation of those forces. The president has the authority to make treaties and to appoint ambassadors and other public ministers, as well as members of his national security team, such as the secretaries of state and defense, the director of national intelligence, and the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS). Each of these actions, however, is subject to the “advice and consent” of the Senate.

The president is responsible to ensure that the laws are faithfully executed, and he or she has been vested with the “executive power” to this end. It is Congress, however, that is responsible to “make all laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into execution the foregoing powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States.”³ The Constitution gives the president substantial authority and initiative in foreign affairs. However, having given the president important powers to make and execute national security policy, the Founding Fathers were deliberate in granting Congress the power to declare war. As a consequence of these built-in dynamic tensions, the Constitution has presented to each president and Congress an “invitation to struggle for the privilege of directing American foreign policy.”⁴

A History of Increasing Presidential Prerogative. The outline of the national security process provided by the Constitution was quickly elaborated upon by the actual conduct of public affairs. In 1793, George Washington asserted the prerogative of the president to act unilaterally in time of foreign crisis by issuing, without congressional consultation, a neutrality proclamation in the renewed Franco-British war. Succeeding administrations continued to struggle with questions of presidential versus congressional prerogative. In 1812, President James Madison was unsuccessful in restraining congressional “war hawks” who helped precipitate war with England. On the other hand, in 1846, it was President James Polk who presented Congress with a *fait accompli* by placing American troops along the Rio Grande. The resulting clash of arms between U.S. and Mexican soldiers quickly led to a declaration of war.

Presidential prerogative in foreign affairs, claimed first by Washington and embellished by his successors, was a generally established concept at the time of the Lincoln administration. Abraham Lincoln greatly expanded the potential range of presidential action by invoking the notion of a *war power* as a derivative of the commander-in-chief clause of the Constitution. The growth of presidential power in the Civil War foreshadowed the relationship between national emergency and executive power. Time and again, the law of national self-preservation was used to justify placing extraordinary power in the hands of the president.⁵

Prior to World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt’s carefully orchestrated policy of aiding Great Britain and its allies once again revealed the power of the president to set national security policy unilaterally. Using executive agreements of dubious constitutionality to avoid confronting an uncertain and isolationist Congress, FDR increasingly bound the United States to the Allied cause. With the attack on Pearl Harbor, the power of the executive further expanded to confront the crisis of global war.

With the termination of World War II, the anticipated climate of peace under the aegis of a powerful international organization did not materialize; instead, the postwar years ushered in a period of continuing confrontation—the Cold War. An ideological conflict permeated the international environment and created a war of nerves stretched particularly taut by the specter of nuclear war. In these circumstances, too, crisis spurred the growth of executive prerogatives.

President Harry Truman led the United States into the Korean conflict in 1950 under the auspices of the United Nations (UN) without seeking a congressional declaration of war. Similarly, President John Kennedy escalated the small (less than one thousand personnel) military advisory effort in Vietnam, begun under President Dwight Eisenhower, into a sixteen-thousand-man effort that included not only advisers but helicopter transportation companies and other logistical elements.

Vietnam. In the mid-1960s, presidential initiative in foreign affairs brought the United States into an extended conflict in Vietnam. As the war dragged on, presidential prerogative in foreign affairs came under vigorous attack. The “imperial president” became the subject of congressional and popular opposition. Congressional opposition culminated in the passage of the War Powers Resolution, over President Richard Nixon’s veto, in July 1973. This measure set a sixty-day limit on the president’s power to wage war without Congressional authorization.⁶

The War Powers Resolution, however, has thus far not proved an important constraint on the president’s power to take the country to war. Presidents have repeatedly refused to embrace this legislation, and each of Nixon’s successors has called the act unconstitutional. Congress essentially played no role in President Ronald Reagan’s decisions to invade Grenada and place Marines in Lebanon in 1983, put mines in Nicaraguan harbors in 1984, bomb Libya in 1986, or escort re-flagged Kuwaiti ships in the Persian Gulf and engage in several battles with the Iranian Navy from mid-1987 through mid-1988. Nor did Congress play a meaningful part in the decisions of the country’s forty-first president, George H. W. Bush, to invade Panama in 1989.

The Gulf War in 1991. The inability of Congress to restrict the president’s war-making powers was amply demonstrated during the 1991 war in the Persian Gulf. After Iraq overran Kuwait in August 1990, George H. W. Bush decided to send American troops to Saudi Arabia to prevent Iraq from conquering that oil-rich desert kingdom. Nearly six months later, on January 8, 1991, Bush finally requested legislative approval to undertake military actions. However, by that time, the UN had already authorized military action, and the United States had over five hundred thousand troops in the area, about the same number as it deployed to Vietnam. Bush’s unilateral actions had brought the nation to a point where turning back was not a realistic option. Even a Congress controlled by an opposition party could not reject the president’s request without severely damaging U.S. credibility and image. After Congress approved his request, Bush said in a rare moment of candor, “I don’t think I need it.”⁷ Although many members of Congress were upset about Bush’s lack of consultation with them all during the fall and winter 1990, the success of Operation Desert Storm muted any public criticisms about a possible violation of the War Powers Resolution.

The lesson is clear: If the president is determined to use military force, the Congress may find it difficult to stop him. If the military operation is successful, as was Desert Storm, there will be few public complaints about abuse of executive

power. However, if the military conflict turns out poorly, like Vietnam or Lebanon, there will be outcries over the presidential abuse of power.

The World After the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001. The preeminence of the presidency in foreign affairs became even more evident after the 2001 terrorist attacks in the United States. In the immediate aftermath, Congress swiftly passed a joint resolution authorizing the president “to use all necessary and appropriate force against those nations, organizations, or persons he determined planned, authorized, committed, or aided the terrorist attacks that occurred on September 11, 2001, or harbored such organizations or persons.”⁸ Just weeks later, Congress passed the USA PATRIOT Act, which expanded the government’s ability to conduct surveillance on terrorist suspects. When the country’s forty-third president, George W. Bush, announced in October 2001 that the United States would use military force against Afghanistan to strike down al-Qa’ida terrorist camps supported by the ruling Taliban regime, he had strong congressional and public support for his actions.⁹ After the United States had been attacked, the need for strong executive leadership to guide the country in its fight against terrorism seemed self-evident.

This consensus on presidential primacy in foreign policy began to dissipate with the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003. George W. Bush quickly secured congressional support for military action. Internationally, the United States secured a UN Security Council resolution calling for “serious consequences” if Iraq did not comply with weapons inspections.¹⁰ But the Security Council could not reach agreement on a second resolution explicitly authorizing military force, and the United States waged war against Iraq in spring 2003 without official UN backing. Domestically, although Congress and the public initially supported the president, critics became more vocal as the difficulty of constructing a new regime in Iraq became evident.¹¹

Furthermore, five years after 9/11, resistance to some of the president’s policies in the broader struggle against international terrorist groups had developed in both the legislative and judicial branches. In 2005, Congress passed legislation—popularly known as the Detainee Treatment Act—that set guidelines for interrogating detainees and explicitly prohibited torture. In 2006, the Supreme Court ruled five to three (one justice abstained) in the landmark case *Hamdan v. Rumsfeld* that the president did not have the independent authority to establish military tribunals for detainees in the war on terror and declared that Congress must establish guidelines for these trials. Members of Congress, including senior leaders in George W. Bush’s own party, called for strict guidelines that would comply with international treaties signed after World War II. Congress ultimately passed legislation that appeared on the surface to comply with international law while also garnering White House approval, spurring critics to insist that the guidelines would be challenged in court. These conflicts raised many questions about whether the United States was witnessing a “new imperial presidency,” with presidential power exceeding constitutional boundaries to a degree unprecedented since the abuses of power in the Nixon era. An alternative interpretation held that the expansion of presidential power was due less to executive usurpation and more

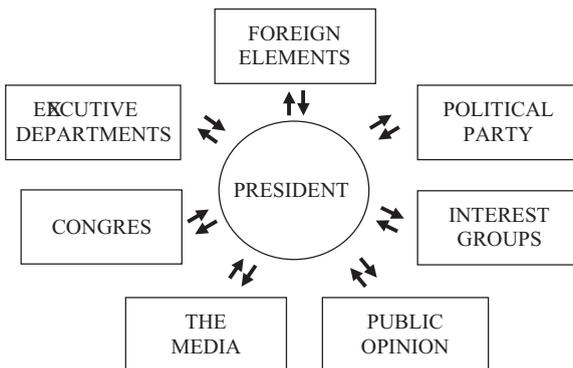
to congressional reluctance to challenge the president during times of crisis in foreign affairs.¹²

The President and National Security

The Roles of the President. The president plays multiple roles in the execution of the office. Not only is he or she chief of state, commander in chief of the armed forces, chief diplomat, principal initiator of legislation, and chief executor of laws, but the president also acts as party leader, national spokesperson, peace-keeper, manager of prosperity, and world leader.¹³ These roles tend to place the president at the center of national security policy making. The president as chief of state personifies the United States in its dealings with the world, and, through constitutional powers to appoint and receive ambassadors, the president is placed at the focal point of diplomatic activity. As commander in chief, he or she is positioned at the apex of a large and elaborate security apparatus. None of these roles can neatly be isolated from the other, and the president must satisfy the particular demands of each when confronting problems of national security. Moreover, in these various roles, the president must deal with a variety of entities, each with its own interests and viewpoints; these are shown in Figure 4.1.

Various trends have increased the prerogatives associated with the president's national security roles. These trends include: the increasing involvement of the United States in world affairs and an accompanying atmosphere of constant danger; the development of a national contingency system around the president to enable effective response to threats; enhancements in weapons technology that have increased the stakes in crisis management; and enhancements in communications technology that have accelerated the tempo of communication and response and have also made it easier for a president to intervene more deeply into operational matters. The national security process has become saturated with information, and it is the executive who largely controls the organizations capable of assimilating large volumes of data and the communication channels through which decisions

FIG. 4.1 Relationships between the President and the External Environment



based on that information can be relayed. Although vigorous presidents have always reached out to grasp the levers of government, recent trends have encouraged modern presidents to be especially activist.

Presidential National Security Functions. Despite the complexity of the president's roles, three major functions in the conduct of national security can be identified: resource allocation, policy planning, and the coordination and monitoring of operations.¹⁴ These are discussed below.

Resource Allocation. The maintenance of national security is expensive and requires a major commitment of resources each year in the president's budget. The budget is the main vehicle through which presidential priorities relating to resource use are communicated. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), discussed briefly in subsequent pages, is the principal instrument that the president uses in this allocation function.

Policy Planning. Policy planning involves the development of long-range designs, such as the Marshall Plan for the reconstruction of Europe after World War II, or ongoing efforts, such as the enlargement and evolution of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). It also includes less sweeping and shorter-term plans to advance U.S. interests and cope with emerging problems. The efforts of the George W. Bush administration to cope with Iran's nuclear capabilities and development may be an example of this type of plan. Generally, those engaged in policy planning seek to shape future events as well as prepare for contingencies. Historically, the focus of such planning has shifted among (or been shared by) the Department of State, the Department of Defense (DoD), and the president's national security assistant, who heads the National Security Council (NSC) staff. Unfortunately, this function, which is inherently hard conceptually and difficult to accomplish bureaucratically, has not often been done well.

Coordination and Monitoring of Operations. Coordination of operations requires overseeing the countless day-to-day foreign and defense policy actions of government organizations and officials so they remain consistent with and advance American policy. The associated monitoring function is designed to provide feedback to the executive branch to ensure that appropriate actions are being taken in light of policy guidance and to ensure awareness of new data or changing conditions or assumptions. In practice, the president has leaned on the Department of State or the national security assistant for the coordination and monitoring task.

The Institutionalized Presidency and National Security Affairs

The complexity, scope, and magnitude of these functions have given rise to the institutionalized presidency. The president, as an individual, has been augmented by staffs acting in the president's name. This institutionalized presidency, together

with certain executive departments, forms the principal means of developing, directing, and coordinating national security. The key elements of this collective executive are the White House Office, the NSC and staff, the DoS, the DoD, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and the OMB (see Figure 4.2). Since 2001, the Homeland Security Council and staff have also become key elements of the national security policy process (see Chapters 6 and 10 for a more detailed discussion of these new entities and their roles).

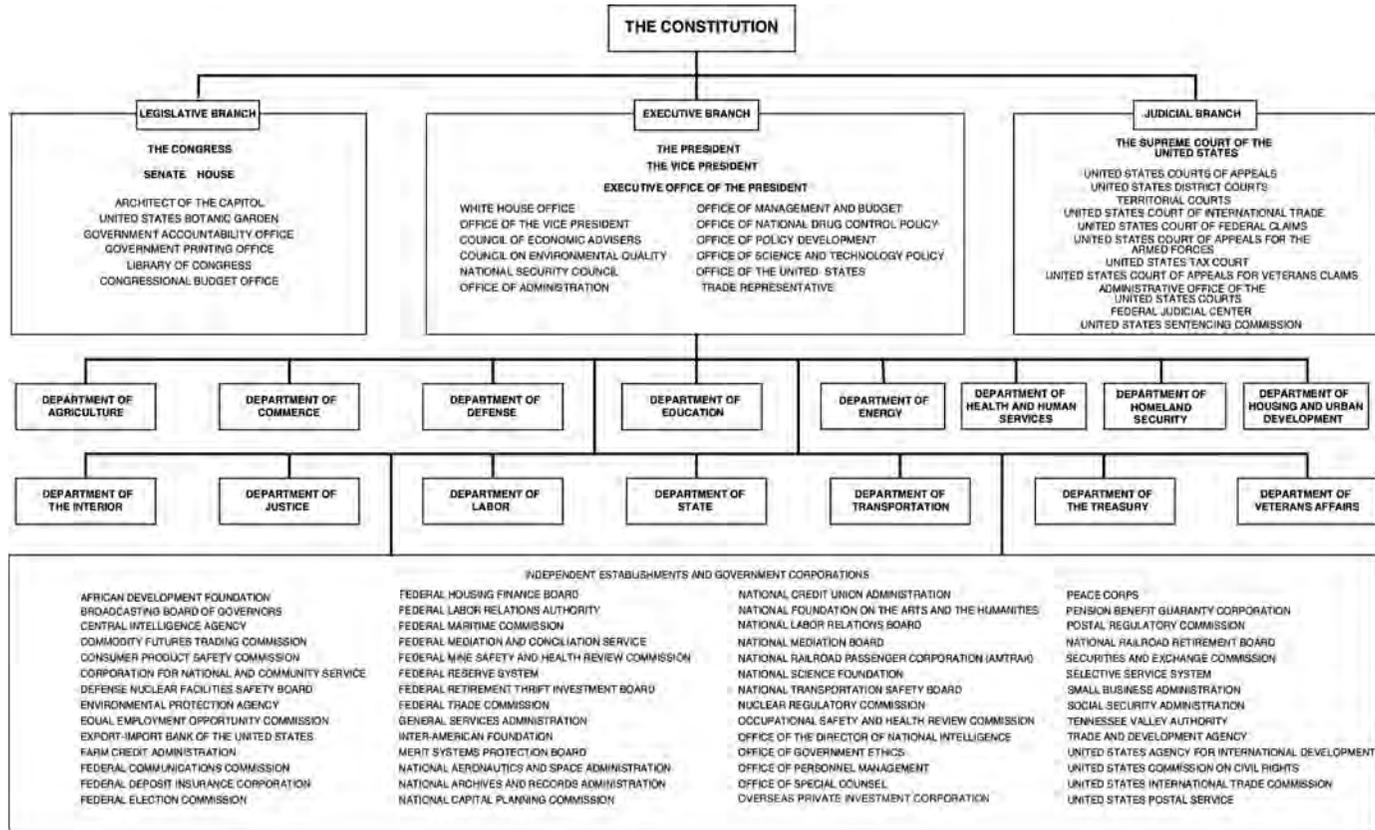
The White House Office. According to George Reedy, former press secretary to President Lyndon Johnson, “the life of the White House is the life of a court.”¹⁵ Extending the analogy, the White House staff members can be seen as the president’s courtiers. They are the personal and political assistants to the president. Without outside constituencies, they owe their status and position wholly to the person of the president. Accordingly, the organization and use of the White House staff is the function of a president’s personal style.

In recent history, FDR operated probably the most chaotic of staffs, but the chaos was purposeful: “FDR intended his administrative assistants to be eyes and ears and manpower for him, with no fixed contacts, clients, or involvements of their own to interfere when he had to redeploy them.”¹⁶ There was overlapping of assignments, lack of coordination, and often frustration on the part of the staff, but these factors served FDR well by presenting him competing sources of information and analysis that enabled him to develop and maintain his personal options. This freewheeling approach was somewhat curtailed by the advent of World War II, as sources of information became channeled through secrecy and censorship systems, and the focus of efforts turned to the operational concerns of global war.¹⁷

Eisenhower was at the opposite extreme. His staff was organized tightly around its chief of staff, initially Sherman Adams. With some exceptions, access to the president was through Adams, who was not hesitant to ask if a meeting was really necessary. Responsibilities were clearly defined, and there was a military aura of hierarchy, neatness, and order. In the 1960s, the Kennedy and Johnson administrations utilized a less formal staffing system, allowing a small staff concerned with national security more direct and frequent access to the president.

Under Nixon (1969) and Gerald Ford (1974), the White House staff was again organized along more structured lines. Jimmy Carter (1977) endeavored to establish a more informal advisory system, initially operating without a chief of staff, but he soon found that the increased demands upon the Oval Office necessitated some formal staffing procedures. Reagan (1981) employed a hierarchical staffing system in which he empowered cabinet secretaries and relied heavily on delegating authority to a close handful of aides who understood his intent. Though George H. W. Bush (1989) largely continued this model, he engaged more directly with his advisers in policy making, particularly in foreign affairs. Clinton (1993) faced some organizational difficulties in his first year in office, stemming largely from his reluctance to delegate authority to his chief of staff and other advisers, but he ultimately did develop more structured White House operations, albeit with more informality than seen in his immediate predecessors. The only chief executive

FIG. 4.2 The Government of the United States



08

Source: http://bensguide.gpo.gov/files/gov_chart.pdf

to hold a master of business administration, George W. Bush (2001) not surprisingly adopted a structured and hierarchical White House staffing system, consistent with a corporate management style.

The position of assistant to the president for National Security Affairs, popularly known today as the “national security advisor,” was created by Eisenhower in 1953.¹⁸ Eisenhower employed his special assistant primarily as a policy coordinator, but since the 1960s, the position has also assumed an advocacy role, serving as a significant post in the White House for foreign policy making. In each administration—as is typical of relationships in the White House—the role of the assistant to the president for national security affairs has been largely a function of the assistant’s personal relationship with the president and how the president wishes the office to be discharged. The role also has developed in conjunction with the evolution of the NSC staff, which the assistant heads.

Despite the similarities and differences in the functioning of the White House staff under different presidents, there have been some pronounced trends. The most obvious is growth. The entire Herbert Hoover presidency was staffed by three secretaries, a military and a naval aide, and twenty clerks. In contrast, approximately four hundred people work in the George W. Bush White House, plus another one hundred to one hundred fifty sent from other agencies on special assignments.¹⁹ The growth in numbers is a symptom, and some would argue a cause, of a centralization of decision making. In this regard, one should be mindful that centralization can cause a serious cleavage between policy makers and the instruments of policy. Another aspect of White House staff growth is the tendency for it to shield the president from the outside world. The life of the court can easily become one clouded by perceptions divorced from reality. Finally, as the NSC system has evolved and the position of the assistant directing its staff has strengthened, other White House office staffs have played ever-diminishing roles in national security matters.

National Security Council. The formalized coordination and policy-planning functions of the presidency in national security matters are located in the NSC, created by the National Security Act of 1947. The NSC inherited many of the functions that previously had been exercised by cabinet members in the State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee, itself an ad hoc product of World War II operations. As constituted in 1947, the NSC comprises the president, the vice president, the secretary of state, the secretary of defense, and the director of the Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization.²⁰ Because the latter office has long since been abolished, there are now only four statutory members. Additionally, the secretary of the treasury and the national security advisor regularly attend NSC meetings; the chief of staff to the president, counsel to the president, and assistant to the president for economic policy usually are invited to attend as well. The director of national intelligence and the chairman of the JCS serve as statutory advisors.²¹ (Since the term “NSC” tends to be used loosely to mean the NSC staff, rather than the Council itself, there is often public confusion about the NSC’s composition.)

Truman was instrumental in shaping the NSC to respond directly to the needs of the president rather than merely extending the interagency arrangements of the

State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee. One scholar notes that Truman's "adroit maneuvers scotched the scheme of those who wanted to assure defense domination of the National Security Council by housing it in the Pentagon . . . and by designating the Secretary of Defense as Chairman in the president's absence."²² In addition, the legislation that the Truman administration shepherded through the Congress to become the 1947 National Security Act provided for a separate staff to support the NSC and did not rely, as was previously done, on staff contributed from involved agencies. In this manner, Truman established the NSC as responsive to the president rather than to competing executive departments.

With the advent of the Eisenhower administration, the NSC system was restructured to reflect both the new president's style as well as his view of the world situation.²³ In keeping with his view of the importance of economic health to security, Eisenhower regularly invited his treasury secretary and budget director to attend NSC meetings. He attempted to systematize the decision-making process in line with his experience with military models of decision making and coordination. He used the NSC apparatus regularly in the belief that, as he later wrote:

the secret of a sound, satisfactory decision made on an emergency basis has always been that the responsible official has been "living with the problem" before it becomes acute. Failure to use, on a continuing basis, the NSC, or some similar advisory body, entails losing the capacity to make emergency decisions based on depth of understanding and perspective.²⁴

The passing of the torch from the Eisenhower to the Kennedy administration involved a distinct change in presidential outlook and operating style.²⁵ In regard to the NSC, this was reflected in a move to a more ad hoc system. At the heart of criticism of the Eisenhower system was the view that it impeded initiative and flexibility by subjecting proposals to overly formalized bureaucratic argument. Regarding the world as inherently dynamic, Kennedy hoped to shape a national security system capable of coping with rapid change. In lieu of the previous inter-agency focus, Kennedy built a strong staff in the White House, under his special assistant for national security affairs, to assist him in drawing advice from and coordinating operations of the various agencies involved with national security.

Further, Kennedy chose to immerse himself in the details of selected aspects of policy much more than his predecessor. Shortly after Kennedy took office, the CIA supported an invasion of Cuba at a location on the island known as the Bay of Pigs. The invasion failed after only a few days and was a lesson for Kennedy which he did not soon forget. He had relied on the experts and judgments of the preceding administration, and he remarked a year and a half later, "The advice of every member of the Executive Branch brought in to advise was unanimous—and the advice was wrong."²⁶ (Of course, his critics also point out that his last-minute intervention in canceling air support for the invasion force contributed to the fiasco.) Partly as a result of the Bay of Pigs, the president relied increasingly on his national security assistant to provide policy options. The full NSC met less frequently and tended to consider long-term questions that had already been extensively explored by ad hoc task forces. These interagency task forces dealt with

such specific problems of the early 1960s as Laos, Berlin, and the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

Although established to provide a coherent means of coping with the urgency of the atomic age, the formal NSC in practice was not the locus of crisis management. As demonstrated in the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy relied instead on a specially selected "Executive Committee" to bear the burden of deliberation and policy development. Consisting of the president's most trusted advisers and unfettered by the statutory membership requirements of the NSC (though many of those advisers did participate), it represented a continuation of Kennedy's more individualized approach to national security policy making.

With the assassination of Kennedy in November 1963, Johnson was thrust into the presidency. Although he was a master of congressional politics, he had limited experience in international affairs. This lack of background, as well as his desire to bring a sense of continuity to his administration, resulted in few immediate changes to the Kennedy NSC system. Central coordination and direction continued to be provided by the special assistant for national security affairs.²⁷

The emergence of the Vietnam conflict in the mid-1960s became the central drama and tragedy of Johnson's foreign policy legacy. Accepting the existing national security apparatus and—unlike Kennedy—lacking the inclination to go beyond his advisers to key points in the bureaucracy, Johnson narrowed the process of deliberation and decision to a few people. In July 1965, the decision to expand America's hitherto-limited commitment reportedly rested on the advice of a handful of people. The NSC and Congress were consulted only after the decision was made.²⁸ Other important national security decisions were made at the informal, largely unstructured discussions at the president's periodic "Tuesday lunches," which generally included only the NSC members and a few invited guests.

In March 1966, the Johnson administration decided to provide more structure to the NSC system. National Security Memorandum 341 established a permanent interdepartmental committee called the Senior Interdepartmental Group, headed by the undersecretary of state. Subordinate to this group, Interdepartmental Region Groups for each region of the world were created and chaired by regional assistant secretaries of state. In theory, policy planning and coordination of policy decisions would flow through these organizations and up to the NSC. In practice, Vietnam dominated presidential considerations, and Johnson was unwilling to employ his new system in dealing with Vietnam. As a consequence, the interdepartmental groups found themselves working largely on peripheral issues, while crucial decisions concerning Vietnam continued to be resolved by the president and a few advisers.

The Nixon administration departed from the largely ad hoc arrangements of the Kennedy-Johnson years and returned in 1969 to a centralized system more akin to Eisenhower's. Nixon placed the national security machinery firmly in the White House under the control of the president's security assistant, Dr. Henry Kissinger. The focus of the new NSC staff effort was to develop rigorously a set of carefully considered options for presidential choice without engaging the president in the sometimes tumultuous deliberations leading up to those options.

Kissinger adapted the interagency arrangements of the Johnson administration by assigning issues to interdepartmental groups chaired by assistant secretaries of state. These groups were responsible for studying problems, formulating policy choices, and assessing various alternatives. A Senior Review Group was constituted at the undersecretary level, chaired by Kissinger, to deal with interdepartmental group recommendations. By this process, less important or uncontentious issues were decided at subordinate levels rather than being forwarded to the NSC. Although this approach allowed for the inclusion of the views of operating agencies, it lodged control squarely in the White House, where Nixon clearly wanted it.

The Nixon-Kissinger NSC structure was further complicated or “systematized” by the creation of various special groups subordinate to the NSC. For example, major issues centered on the Vietnam War were handled by a Vietnam Special Studies Group, while crisis planning was done by the Washington Special Actions Group. This evolution represented a further strengthening of the hand of the assistant for national security affairs and the dominance of the NSC staff over the Department of State. It is noteworthy that, since leaving office, Kissinger has decried this trend, recommending that a president should make the secretary of state “his principal adviser and ‘use’ the national security adviser primarily as a senior administrator and coordinator to make certain that each significant point of view is heard.”²⁹

In broad outlines Carter’s initial approach was to “streamline” his NSC staff but to entrust it with the same basic functions and powers as the Nixon-Ford staff. A number of NSC committees of the earlier era (which were really separate entities in name only) were collapsed into three basic committees: the Policy Review Committee, the Special Coordination Committee, and the familiar, assistant-secretary-level interdepartmental groups.

The organizational arrangements of the NSC system in the Carter administration initially led to an increase in the secretary of state’s power at the expense of the NSC adviser. Through his chairmanship of many of the substantive Policy Review Committees, Secretary of State Cyrus Vance at first was able to shape many of the fundamental policies of the Carter administration in such areas as human rights policy and arms transfers. As the focus shifted from policy making to implementation, the power of NSC adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski increased. Under Brzezinski’s direction, the Special Coordination Committee dealt with issues concerning arms control, covert actions, and crisis management. Management of the Iranian hostage crisis, which consumed much of the last year of the Carter presidency, was handled by Brzezinski and the NSC staff.

Reagan came to office determined to downgrade the role of the NSC and the assistant to the president for national security affairs. His first adviser for NSC affairs, Richard Allen, did not even report directly to him, and NSC management receded in visibility. Although reporting relationships were changed for Allen’s five successors (William Clark, Robert McFarlane, John Poindexter, Frank Carlucci, and Colin Powell), who reported directly to Reagan, up to the time of the misperceived, mismanaged Iran-Contra affair neither the NSC nor the assistant played a

dominant role in formulation of national security policy.³⁰ The secretaries of state and defense largely reigned supreme in their own areas of responsibility, with less direct involvement from the White House.³¹

Under George H. W. Bush, Reagan's successor, the assistant and the NSC once again became centers of policymaking power. Brent Scowcroft, Bush's NSC assistant who had held the post briefly under Ford, made himself chairman of a Principals Committee at the cabinet level. His own deputy, first Robert Gates and then Jonathan Howe, was placed in charge of the senior subcabinet interagency forum, the Deputies Committee, which reviewed and monitored the work of the NSC interagency process and made recommendations on the development and implementation of policy.

George H. W. Bush held few formal NSC meetings, preferring to rely on the Principals and Deputies Committees to formulate and implement long-range strategy. For example, in April 1989, it was the Deputies Committee that drafted the document that spelled out the Bush administration's policy toward Iraq. Bush preferred to handle crisis situations in selected ad hoc groups or in one-on-one meetings. For example, the August 4, 1990, meeting at Camp David to review military options after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait was attended by twelve people—the president, the vice president, the secretaries of state and defense (the NSC members), the NSC assistant, the chairman of the JCS and the director of central intelligence (the NSC advisers), the White House chief of staff and spokesman, the military commanders, an undersecretary of defense, and an NSC staff director. But in early October 1990, when Bush was trying to decide whether to let sanctions work or to adopt an offensive strategy, he met in the Oval Office with the secretary of defense, the chairman of the JCS, and the NSC assistant. His NSC committee system resembled that of the Nixon era in formality, while his own personal decision-making style resembled the informality of Kennedy. General Powell, the chairman of the JCS, has described Bush's NSC process as too relaxed and convivial, with no beginning, middle, or end.³²

When he took office in 1993, Clinton enlarged the membership of the NSC and included a much greater emphasis on economic issues in the formulation of national security policy. This was illustrated by the incorporation into the NSC of the secretary of the treasury and the assistant to the president for economic policy.³³ Still, the NSC retained emphasis on traditional national security issues as well. Clinton's first national security advisor, W. Anthony Lake, played a primarily behind-the-scenes role until the need to better explain Clinton's foreign policy led him to begin to accept more speaking engagements. Lake's successor in 1997, Samuel R. Berger (known as "Sandy" Berger), had been Lake's deputy since 1993.³⁴ As the national security advisor, Berger took a more active role in communicating the president's foreign policy, as well as developing support for the president's policies in Congress.³⁵

Clinton retained both the structure and functions of the Principals and Deputies Committees. The Deputies Committee consisted of cabinet deputies, as well as the vice chairman of the JCS and deputy director of the CIA. The interdepartmental groups, which had been called the Policy Coordinating Committees by his

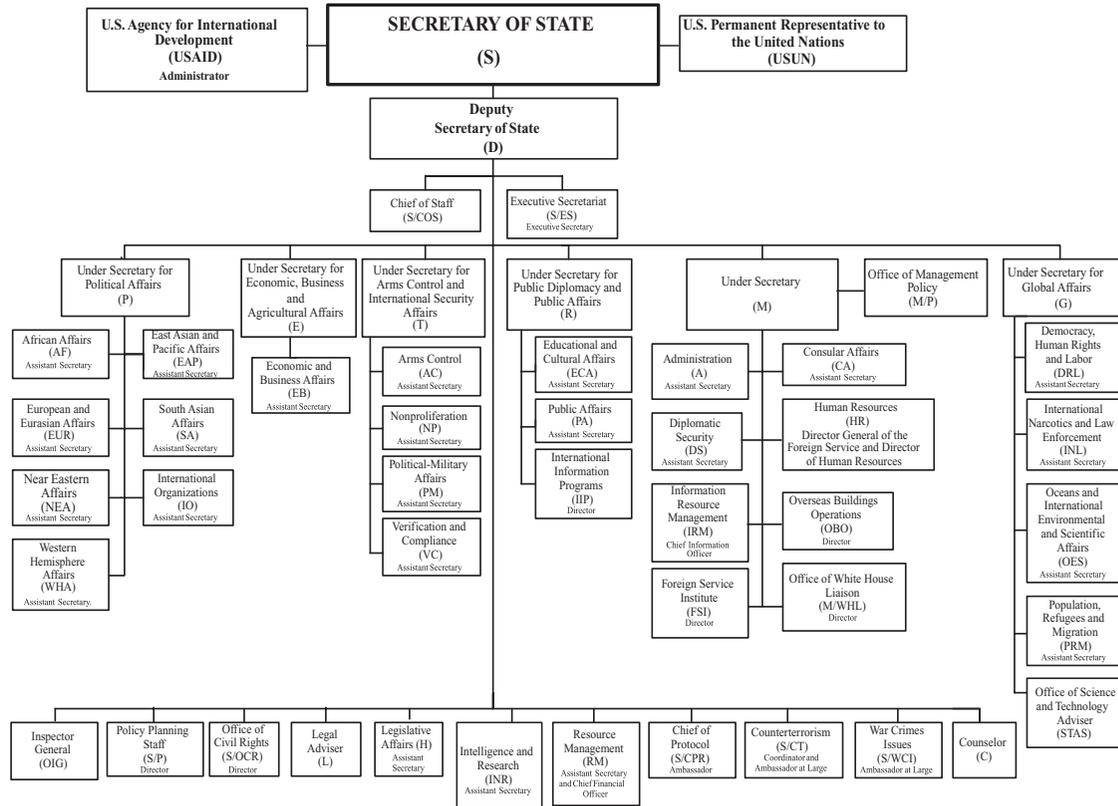
predecessor, were renamed Interagency Working Groups by Clinton in 1993. Under this structure, there were seven regional and six functional interagency working groups composed of assistant-secretary-level representatives from the appropriate agencies. One criticism of the Clinton administration's national security system was that it produced an ad hoc approach to national security policy by focusing on crisis management and proving to be ineffective at overall planning.³⁶

At the start of his first term in 2001, George W. Bush selected Dr. Condoleezza Rice to be his national security adviser. Rice was one of the president's closest foreign-policy advisers and family friends, which raised the visibility of her position tremendously. She was responsible for coordinating NSC meetings, but she faced competition for controlling foreign policy from several sources, including Vice President Richard B. Cheney and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld.³⁷ When Rice became secretary of state in Bush's second term, her successor as national security adviser, Stephen J. Hadley (previously Rice's deputy) maintained a less public face for his office and the NSC. The structure of Bush's NSC system did not change significantly from that of Clinton; most of the regional and functional bureaus remained essentially the same, with the names of some changed a bit. Bush did hold more formal NSC meetings than his recent predecessors, holding them daily for a period after the events of 9/11, and weekly thereafter.

The Department of State. Since its creation in 1789 under its first secretary, Thomas Jefferson, the Department of State has been the customary operational arm of the U.S. government in the conduct of foreign affairs. The department performs two basic functions: It represents the interests of the United States and its citizens in relations with foreign countries, and it serves as a principal source of advice to the president on all aspects of foreign affairs—including national security policy (see Figure 4.3).³⁸

A member of the cabinet, the secretary of state is traditionally the president's principal adviser on foreign policy, although this tradition has waned somewhat since the 1960s with the emergence of a succession of powerful presidential assistants for national security affairs. In all cases, the secretary's role is the result of his or her own talents, the personal relationship between him or her and the president, and the president's propensity to become directly involved in foreign policy. The more a president desires to become involved in foreign policy, the more difficult it is for the secretary of state to take initiatives and conduct his or her office. Because presidents normally anticipate their own policymaking tendencies in selecting secretaries, much of the criticism of a "weak" secretary of state should be directed at activist presidents. Nixon's choice in 1969 of William Rogers as secretary of state and his systematic bypassing, even humiliation, of the secretary is an eloquent case in point.³⁹ On the other hand, such presidents as Reagan, who wished to delegate day-to-day activities of the foreign-policy process and downgrade the NSC's management role, appointed strong secretaries of state, such as Alexander Haig, former White House chief of staff and NATO commander, and George Shultz, who had served in earlier administrations as secretary of labor, secretary of the treasury, and director of OMB before accepting the state post in 1983.

FIG. 4.3 United States Department of State



Source: www.state.gov/documents/organization/8792.pdf



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By contrast with Reagan's approach, his successor, George H. W. Bush, wanted to focus heavily on certain areas of foreign policy. He therefore appointed a close friend and confidant, James Baker, to handle the areas where he did not focus. Thus, the president personally managed the Gulf War deployment and execution, while Baker followed up the victory by arranging a Mideast peace conference in Madrid in 1991. In some ways, Bush was his own secretary of state, while Baker functioned as his close and powerful deputy.⁴⁰

The combination of a "weak" secretary of state and a president who prefers to focus on the domestic agenda—such as Warren Christopher in Clinton's first term—can produce a foreign policy whose notable successes become associated with key subordinates. From Richard Holbrooke and the negotiation of the Dayton Peace Awards to the predominant role of Special Envoy Dennis Ross in the Middle East peace process, the first Clinton administration will likely be remembered for several distinct foreign policy personalities.

Under Clinton's successor, George W. Bush, the position of secretary of state varied in authority from his first to second terms in office. Bush's first secretary of state, Powell, came to the office with a distinguished military record capped by service as the chairman of the JCS. Powell had also received special permission from Congress to serve during his military career as Reagan's national security adviser and thus had built expertise in the political realm as well. Yet Powell as secretary of state was continually stymied by the president's more powerful allies, notably Cheney and Rumsfeld. Powell was reportedly also regularly at odds with his White House counterpart, national security adviser Rice. For example, Powell was unable to persuade the president to give more time for arms inspections before waging war against Iraq in 2003.⁴¹ When Rice became secretary of state in Bush's second term, she appeared to have a more prominent role than Powell in foreign policy, thereby demonstrating once again the importance of individual relationships with the president.

Presidential-secretarial dynamics aside, the secretary of state faces a complex task in managing the internal workings of his or her bureaucracy. The Department of State is broadly organized along two lines: geographic-regional responsibilities and functional responsibilities. Special "desks" within the regional bureaus monitor the more detailed actions and interactions of specific countries within the purview of a regional assistant secretary. An alternative view of international dynamics is provided by the functional organizations, such as the Bureau of Military Affairs. These functional bureaus present analysis that cuts across strictly geographic lines and sometimes across analyses arising out of the regional desks as well.

The nature and structure of the department presents any secretary of state with a complex managerial and coordination problem. The desk system of organization in the department, in which deeply grounded experts on each country or functional problem funnel their analyses and recommendations to the various assistant secretaries, provides the needed expertise, but it can also generate parochial responses to policy problems. This in turn can lead to striking contrasts in the nature of advice received by the secretary (a good example might be the advice provided

by Arabists versus experts on Israel). As a consequence, the secretary of state is often forced to sort out contradictory recommendations while shepherding a fragmented organization through the policy process. For those observers of public affairs who long for quick and efficient solutions to difficult problems (and who often think that the world is more malleable than it is), the Department of State is a source of constant frustration. Owing in part to the department's lack of a natural constituency within the United States and in part to the public's belief that American interests and policies can and should always prevail, this frustration is often translated into vigorous and often mistaken widespread criticism of its role.⁴²

Presidential displeasure with the Department of State seems to be a recurring and nonpartisan reaction. In general, presidential complaints about the State Department have centered around six issues: (1) quality of staff work in terms of analysis; (2) slowness with which the State Department responds to requests and problems; (3) resistance to change and new approaches; (4) inadequacy in carrying out presidential decisions; (5) failure to lead in foreign affairs; and (6) the feeling that leadership at the State Department does not have control of its own department.⁴³ These misgivings about the State Department—though in many cases exaggerated—have often led activist presidents and activist secretaries to bypass the institution and pursue largely individual initiatives in foreign affairs.

For example, Baker—who had served as the undersecretary of commerce, White House chief of staff, and secretary of the treasury before becoming George H. W. Bush's secretary of state in 1989—brought in a group of outsiders with relatively little foreign policy experience to most key positions and often ignored career foreign service officers.

The appropriate employment of the Department of State in the national security process has long been a problem for presidents and secretaries. Periodic attempts have been made to harness the expertise in the context of policy planning, such as Secretary of State George Marshall's creation in 1947 of the Policy Planning Staff, with Ambassador George Kennan as its head.⁴⁴ The Policy Planning Staff was designed to focus planning on current issues and to anticipate future contingencies. Yet that staff and its successor organization, the Policy Planning Council, have invariably fallen short of expectations. Mid- and long-range planning for a complex and untidy world is intrinsically difficult, and it requires exceptionally talented people who are sensitive to the purposes and limits of policy and who can draw clear linkages among policy realms and between policies and programs. Such talents, however, are always in short supply. If the people who possess them are kept sufficiently close to genuine issues so their planning is relevant to the real world, then they are constantly drawn into short-range, operational planning and policy advice. In short, if the planners are talented and their subject timely, they tend to be diverted; if they are not, they tend to be ignored. Operational demands ("putting out fires") and the inherent tension between useful specificity and diplomatic generality have made the exercise of policy planning in the Department of State a perennial problem. This situation has tended to shift much of the weight of policy planning to the NSC staff and the DoD.

There is one area in which the Department of State has largely maintained its hegemony: namely, the daily conduct of American policy in foreign countries. The department's mandate to coordinate all American activities in foreign lands was strongly reaffirmed by Eisenhower in his (and subsequent presidents') endorsement of the "country team" concept. This approach places the American ambassador in charge of all American programs within the country to which he or she is accredited. (The mandate does not extend to American military forces in the field, though it does apply to military assistance teams and defense attachés.) The country team represents an important attempt to unify the implementation of American national security policy within each foreign country under the direction of the ambassador.⁴⁵ Succeeding administrations have continued to endorse this concept, but there is a continual tendency by departments other than the State Department to fight it.

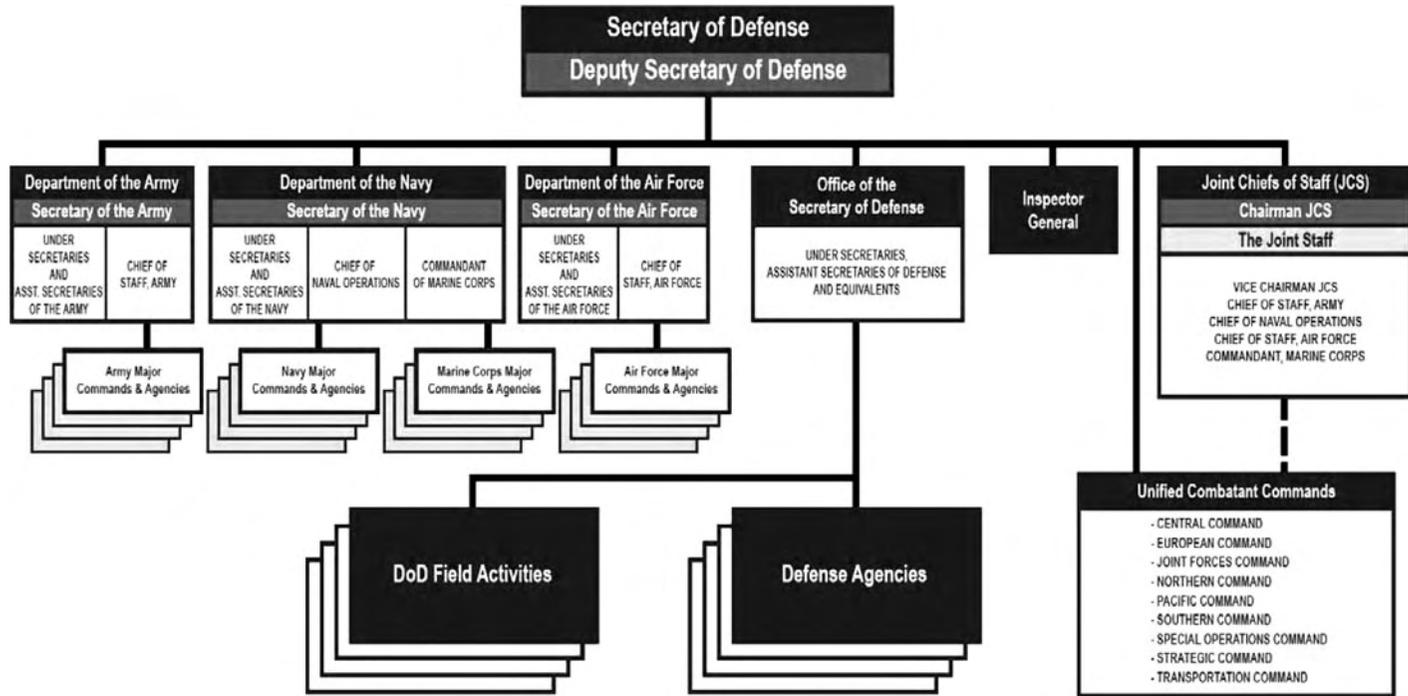
The Department of Defense. The DoD is the president's principal arm in the execution of national defense policy. Composed of the three military departments (Army, Navy, and Air Force), the JCS and the associated joint staff, ten regional and functional commands (e.g., European Command and Special Operations Command), and numerous defense agencies with responsibility to provide services across the entire department (e.g., the Defense Intelligence Agency), the department provides the military instrument essential to credible policies (see Figure 4.4).

As originally created in 1947, the position of the secretary of defense was that of a weak coordinator. In the course of a series of defense reorganization acts, the latest of which was enacted in 1986, the secretary's role has been greatly strengthened and the department centralized to improve the efficiency and responsiveness of the military instrument. The essentials of the secretary's role, as they have evolved, have been described as follows:

Foreign policy, military strategy, defense budgets and the choice of major weapons and forces are all closely related matters of basic national security policy and the principal task of the Secretary of Defense is personally to grasp the strategic issues and provide active leadership to develop a defense program that sensibly relates all these factors. In short, his main job is to shape the defense program in the national interest. In particular, it is his job to decide what forces are needed.⁴⁶

During Robert McNamara's tenure as secretary (1961–1968), secretarial control was extended throughout the DoD by the application of systems analysis techniques to generate and justify military programs. The thrust of McNamara's approach was to steer the nature of debate in the DoD on strategy and forces away from the intangibles of military judgment toward quantitative, management-oriented analyses in which civilian officials could dominate. Although the effects of the McNamara revolution have endured in considerable measure, subsequent secretaries have tended to turn more to military professionals in the department for expertise and advice. Indeed, during the tenure of Caspar Weinberger (1981–1987), the military professionals largely regained a position of preeminence in the department.

FIG. 4.4 The Department of Defense.



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Source: Performance and Accountability Report, Department of Defense, Fiscal Year 2006, available in the Joint Electronic Library, [www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/par/fy2006/Entire_Document_\(7.8_MB\).pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/comptroller/par/fy2006/Entire_Document_(7.8_MB).pdf).

Note: The addition of Africa Command in 2007 has increased the number of unified combatant commands.

Though the formal hierarchy is clear, the relative influence of the civilian leadership of the Pentagon vis-à-vis its most senior uniformed leaders has varied over time. During the 1990s, some observers were concerned about what they saw as the inappropriate assertiveness of uniformed members of the military on policy issues. By contrast, George W. Bush's first defense secretary, Rumsfeld, was dominant in shaping the president's defense policies and was known for having a directive and demanding leadership style toward military subordinates. Though the relationship varies, a key challenge—ensuring democratically appropriate and strategically effective civil-military relationships in which professional military leaders provide senior civilian policy makers with the best possible expert advice—will remain.

The president exercises his or her constitutional authority as commander in chief of the armed forces directly through the secretary of defense to the commanders of the ten unified combatant commands. In strict legal terms, the chairman of the JCS and the JCS as a body are not in the chain of command; in practice, defense secretaries generally involve the chiefs, drawing on their professional advice on policy and operational means to implement presidential directives. Although the normal flow of advice from the chiefs goes up through the chairman and the secretary of defense, the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act explicitly gives the individual members of the JCS a statutory right to provide advice directly to the president. This provision was designed to assuage opponents to reorganization who feared that independent military opinion would be stifled by a partisan secretary of defense or a dominant chairman.⁴⁷

As the “hinge” between the highest civilian authorities and the uniformed military, the members of the JCS have two distinct roles in the DoD. In one, corporately, they are advisers to the president, the NSC, and the secretary of defense with the chairman designated as the principal military advisor. In the other, individually, they are the leaders of their respective services. As a corporate body, the JCS includes not only the Army and Air Force chiefs of staff, the chief of Naval operations, and the commandant of the Marine Corps, but also the chairman and vice chairman of the JCS. The chairman or the vice chairman represents the JCS at meetings of the NSC and in other interagency forums. Although the president leans on the chiefs for military advice, the president also depends on them for supporting opinions when undertaking politically controversial national security policy initiatives. Such support has often been crucial. A further discussion of the role of the uniformed military in the national security process is in Chapter 8.

The Central Intelligence Agency. The CIA was established under the National Security Act of 1947, with responsibility for the overall coordination and integration of the intelligence efforts of various governmental groups engaged in national security matters. Its director was named an adviser to the NSC. The CIA inherited many functions of the wartime Office of Strategic Services, including gathering and analyzing information and conducting covert operations.

Prior to America's entry into World War II, the gathering of intelligence was not institutionalized in any one agency but was incidental to the activities of

several agencies, notably the State Department and the Army and Navy attachés. The climate of opinion was such that intelligence activities were looked down upon. Henry Stimson, as secretary of state in the Hoover administration, dismissed the “spying” business with the maxim that “gentlemen do not read other gentlemen’s mail.”⁴⁸ However, the ravages of global war and the threat of communism obscured the gentlemanly distinctions of an earlier age. Beginning in 1947, the CIA became a powerful force in the twilight battles of the Cold War.

Through the 1950s and 1960s, the CIA played a major role and amassed considerable power within the government. As the dimensions and stakes of the Cold War expanded, so did the CIA. Moreover, the agency enjoyed unusual autonomy. From 1947 until 1977, the CIA was the only federal agency exempt from openly defending its budget and subjecting its activities to congressional oversight. Funds for the CIA were disguised in the defense budget, rendering outside assessment of program effectiveness impossible. The CIA was also strengthened by its primacy in intelligence gathering and analysis. Information is power, in government as elsewhere. As a result of long-term assignments to specific areas, the CIA’s agents in the field, as well as its analysts at home, produced relatively high-quality work.⁴⁹

Since its inception, the CIA has also been involved in covert operations. In Iran in 1953 and in Guatemala in 1954, for example, the CIA sponsored coups that overthrew existing regimes. In the Bay of Pigs in 1961, the CIA was the agent of an unsuccessful attempt to remove Castro from power. Such episodes of clandestine warfare, combined with CIA activity in Chile during the overthrow of Salvador Allende and a few instances of improper actions by its personnel at home, convinced a number of critics that the CIA’s scope and power should be curtailed. Some members of Congress and the public were prepared to sacrifice operational effectiveness to whittle down the CIA’s power. The fact that the Cold War was presumably replaced by détente and intervention by retrenchment in the early 1970s reinforced this tendency to downgrade the CIA.

In due course it became apparent to many that the downgrading of the CIA in the early 1970s went too far. When the Carter administration found itself caught off guard in 1979 by the seizure of the American embassy in Teheran and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it began the process of revitalizing the CIA. Subsequently, during the Reagan administration, the CIA played a major role in American efforts to destabilize the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. These activities, plus the agency’s role in the Iran-Contra affair, again led to congressional and public criticism and a drop in public trust in the latter 1980s. By the early 1990s, the imposition of strict internal controls did much to restore public confidence and agency morale.

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union undermined one principal purpose of the CIA. In response, the agency has attempted to deal with the new environment by adjusting its mission. For example, in the early 1990s, the CIA began to intensify its economic intelligence activities, to coordinate U.S. and foreign intelligence on global terrorism, and to integrate intelligence and law enforcement activities against narcotics producers and

traffickers. However, its inability to predict major events, such as the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and the terrorist attacks of 9/11, again damaged its credibility.

The role of the CIA is further complicated by the creation of the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Based on recommendations from the 9/11 Commission, Congress and George W. Bush approved the Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004. This law authorized the creation of a Director of National Intelligence (DNI) to coordinate the efforts of more than a dozen independent federal intelligence agencies, such as the CIA, the National Security Agency, and the Defense Intelligence Agency. The role of this official and his or her relationships with existing intelligence agencies continue to evolve.⁵⁰ More detailed attention is given to the role of intelligence in Chapter 7.

Office of Management and Budget. Questions of strategy and national security have their dollars-and-cents counterparts. With his defense budget, the president structures the priorities of national defense. In the creation of this budget and in the daily oversight of executive operations, the OMB plays a crucial role. As Theodore Sorensen remarks, “Any president, in short, must always be setting priorities and measuring costs. The official most often likely to loom largest in his thinking when he makes a key decision is not the Secretary of State or the Secretary of Defense but the Director of the Budget.”⁵¹

As presidents have sought to extend their control over an expanding bureaucracy, OMB has become an effective instrument of influence. OMB personnel establish, under presidential guidance, departmental budget obligations and spending ceilings within which departments must plan. Budgets from the departments, including the DoD, are routinely subjected to OMB review prior to presidential approval and submission to Congress to ensure that they are in accordance with the president’s priorities. This process helps restrain the special relationships that tend to proliferate between executive bureaus and congressional committees. In addition, as part of its management responsibilities, the OMB exercises a continuing oversight role over ongoing federal programs. This, too, enhances its position within the executive branch.⁵²

Still, the ability of the OMB (and of the executive branch in general) to manage spending has long been at odds with congressional control of the purse strings and the penchant of members of Congress to add items to spending bills designed to satisfy lobbyists or constituents in their home districts. These incentives shape the perennial conflict between OMB and Congress over defense spending.

The Nature of Presidential Power

Central to the Constitution’s design was the concept that no institution should hold an unchallenged position of dominance in all aspects of the conduct of public affairs. This constitutional precept and the consequent governmental framework fundamentally shape the president’s ability to influence the behavior of institutions,

people, and the overall environment of governmental activity. Richard Neustadt has succinctly and insightfully described this system as one “not of separation of power but of separated institutions sharing powers.”⁵³ The president, as a result, sits in a position where many actors require his help in achieving their objectives. By the same token, the president is also dependent on other actors to accomplish his own purposes. As discussed in the opening paragraphs of this chapter, this interactive process is clearly illustrated by the dynamic and historic tension between the president and Congress.

In the context of our system of government, presidential power is generally the power of persuasion. Teddy Roosevelt called the presidency a “bully pulpit”; FDR said it was a “place of moral leadership.”⁵⁴ More prosaically, Neustadt noted that presidential power rests in the ability to induce others to “believe that what he [the president] wants of them is what their own appraisal of their own responsibilities requires them to do in their own interests, not his.” At the heart of the process of persuasion is bargaining. As Neustadt emphasizes, “power is persuasion and persuasion becomes bargaining.”⁵⁵

All too often, the give and take of the bargaining system is obscured by the symbols of power and authority that surround the presidency. The president commands attention in the media by virtue of his office. He enjoys the prestige of being chief of state, as well as the head of government. He has at his disposal a wide spectrum of rewards and a significant number of penalties. These potential points of advantage in the bargaining process should not, however, be confused with presidential power, which actually rests on the ability to wield these instruments in a manner that persuades other people that cooperation advances their own interests.

The bargaining advantages accrued by a president come not only from political acumen and public relations and persuasive skills but also from an ability to do the following: (1) develop and articulate an overall policy framework and strategy that give coherence to his actions; (2) choose able subordinates and weld them into an effective team; and (3) establish a pattern of successful leadership in important matters that will encourage those who are neutral to cooperate and those who would oppose to await a more favorable time. Establishing a pattern of success is partly a matter of good fortune (but, as Machiavelli observed, a successful leader grasps good fortune and uses it), but it is also a matter of readiness to sort out priorities and make hard decisions.

One example of a president who was highly successful in foreign policy was George H. W. Bush. This success so frustrated his opponents that they criticized him not for failing in foreign policy, but for paying too much attention to it. His success was due largely to his foreign-policy background (ambassador to the UN, envoy to China, and director of central intelligence), his personal contacts with world leaders (developed during his eight years as vice president), and the ability and loyalty of his foreign-policy team. During 1990 and 1991, Bush successfully led a thirty-state coalition (and obtained UN approval) in imposing sanctions and then winning a decisive war to evict Iraq from Kuwait. Bush also had success presiding over the end of the Cold War, facilitating the peace process in the Middle

East, preserving most favored nation trading status for China, and receiving trade concessions from the Japanese.

The only person who truly can view an issue from a presidential perspective is the president; all others' views are colored by their own responsibilities. To protect and advance presidential power, the president cannot squander time and influence. He or she must carefully weigh choices so they contribute to presidential influence on issues deemed critical to the administration and to the nation. The president must anticipate major issues early and seek out their crucial elements. When the matter is an important one, the president cannot hesitate to invest reputation and prestige, for they are important elements in the equation of power. As evidenced by Nixon's inability to lead the nation after the Watergate scandal, even the soundest policies and most adroit bargaining can be doomed if the president is suffering from a negative image.

On the other hand, reputation and prestige have acted as a buffer for many presidents in the face of controversy. Weinberger's 1987 departure as secretary of defense was widely viewed as a protest against Reagan's softening of his attitude toward the threat of Soviet Communist expansionism. The political impact of Weinberger's action, even among the right wing of the Republican Party, was muted by Reagan's longstanding reputation as a virulent anticommunist, and Reagan was able to get the Senate to ratify the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Agreement in the spring of 1988.

Constraints on Presidential Power

Although the president sits astride important action channels, presidential power is constantly challenged and tempered. The dynamic tension between the president and Congress is only the most dramatic of the checks on presidential action. (This tension is further discussed in Chapter 5 on the role of Congress.) Among the other important countervailing forces are public opinion, interest groups, the impact of past policies and programs, the responsiveness of the executive bureaucracy, and the views, interests, and expected reactions of other nations.

Yet even with constitutional and political checks on executive power, presidents still wield greater influence in foreign and national security affairs than in domestic policy. In 1966, political scientist Aaron Wildavsky declared that the United States had "two presidencies," one with limited constraints in national security and foreign affairs and one with more active checks and balances from Congress, public opinion, and other actors in domestic policy.⁵⁶ Wildavsky's thesis prompted many critiques, particularly in the post-Cold War era, about the difficulty of measuring checks on presidential power, as well as the challenge of separating foreign from domestic policy. Nevertheless, the expansion of presidential power in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks suggests the continuing relevance of Wildavsky's analysis.

Public Opinion. As introduced above, the president can use the "bully pulpit" to advantage. However, public opinion can still be a constraint. Effective presidential

leadership can tolerate short-term reverses in public acceptance, but over time a president must have a favorable popular consensus behind his policies. The demise of Johnson's "Great Society" under the burden of the Vietnam War's unpopularity, the resignation of Nixon in the wake of Watergate, and the weakened ability of Reagan to set budget priorities and establish trade policies after the Iran-Contra scandal offer three striking examples of this phenomenon.

Because public opinion is a vital factor in maintaining and projecting presidential influence, it is also a subject for focused presidential attention. In discussing his approach to press relations, Johnson revealed his view of the nature of the process:

There's only one sure way of getting favorable stories from reporters and that is to keep their daily bread—the information, the stories, the plans, and the details they need for their work—in your own hands, so that you can give it out when and to whom you want. Even then nothing's guaranteed, but at least you've got a chance to bargain.⁵⁷

In addition to underscoring the motif of bargaining as a means of presidential leadership, Johnson's remarks are suggestive of the complex nature of public opinion formation. Public opinion is seldom a spontaneous expression of the people's will. It is a reaction to selective information provided by institutions and individuals, often with contradictory purposes. Moreover, the public is frequently highly differentiated. The views of opinion leaders or the "attentive public" are often at variance with those of the mass public. Which "public's" opinion counts will differ with circumstances, but the president cannot long ignore the ability of the media to raise and to frame issues.

In the realm of national security affairs, the president has a substantial initial advantage in the formation of public opinion. External crises tend to have a cohesive effect on opinion. In addition, the executive frequently dominates the channels of information. This was vividly demonstrated during the Persian Gulf War in January and February 1991. The president and his key advisers decided to manage the flow of information in such a way that the president and the military appeared flawless in their execution of Operation Desert Storm. Unlike Vietnam, where reporters were allowed to roam freely, reporters were confined to escorted pools, and the Pentagon placed sharp restrictions on when and how they could talk to the troops. Two results were that George H. W. Bush's popularity and public support for the war climbed dramatically. In the fall of 1990, less than half the population supported the war, and the president's approval rating was below 50%. On the eve of the war, support had risen to 62%; once hostilities began, support for the war and the president climbed above 90%. This support remained high even after subsequent analysis showed that Bush's policies and the military execution were not entirely flawless. The initial impression about the president's decisiveness and the military's success remained the predominant factor in shaping public opinion about the Persian Gulf War.⁵⁸

Adverse opinion becomes crucial when it is expressed in the electoral process. In spite of growing dissension within the nation, Johnson "survived" the Vietnam debate until Eugene McCarthy's near victory in the 1968 New Hampshire primary

translated opinion into adverse votes. Similarly, Carter's perceived weaknesses in dealing with the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the taking of American hostages at the Iranian embassy, coupled with his delay in rebuilding America's military strength, proved to be fatal to his reelection effort. To political leaders, including the president, the electoral process is the most forceful and attention-getting expression of popular opinion.

Public opinion provides a barometer of popular feeling. For a beleaguered president, however, the need is more often for a compass than a barometer. Public opinion polls report general reactions but seldom provide a president with clear policy direction. Moreover, public opinion generally lags behind the problem. FDR's struggle to awaken an indifferent or negative America to the dangers prior to World War II is a case in point. The ability to both interpret public opinion and to influence it has proven to be a difficult yet essential presidential art.

Interest Groups. Another form of public opinion, expressed in a more concerted and organized manner, is the pressure exerted by interest groups. Since the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the resulting drop in public interest in foreign affairs, domestic interest groups have become even more powerful and effective. This has been especially true for ethnic interest groups, such as those representing Jewish, Greek, Armenian, Irish, Cuban-American, and East European communities.⁵⁹ All have influenced U.S. foreign and security policy to varying degrees. Examples include the Irish-American influence on U.S. policies and actions with respect to Northern Ireland (and the adverse effects to U.S.–United Kingdom relations during the first Clinton administration) and Greek opposition to the sale of U.S. military equipment to Turkey.

Other types of interest groups also affect U.S. national security policy and decision making by the president and Congress. The business community played a significant role throughout the 1990s in keeping the U.S. “engaged” with China by lobbying for permanent normal trade relations. Business interests were also very vocal in their support of expanding trade opportunities around the world. By contrast, an alliance among labor unions, environmentalists, and other interest groups was the deciding factor in the congressional failure to approve “fast track” trade negotiating authority for the president in the fall of 1997, despite the intense interest of the business groups that had rallied on its behalf.

Past Policies and Programs. As each president assumes office, the rhetoric of autumn campaigning takes on a different perspective. The responsibilities of the presidency, including the continuing programs and initiatives of a previous chief executive, now belong to the new officeholder. An example of this situation is the Bay of Pigs invasion in 1961. Kennedy inherited from Eisenhower a small army of Cubans poised in Guatemala for a strike against the Castro regime. With planning in its final stages and with Eisenhower's previous endorsement, Kennedy pondered the decision to proceed with the assault. Some would have interpreted cancellation as an admission that Castro was too powerful and too popular to be

overthrown; others would see cancellation as a sign of presidential weakness and a disavowal of the “free” Cubans.⁶⁰ On a practical level, Kennedy was confronted with the problem of disarming and disbanding a sizable and fanatical military force should he opt for cancellation. He chose to let the Cubans strike but resisted recommendations that crucially needed, planned air support be provided. The results were disastrous. The invaders were routed, Fidel Castro’s prestige was enhanced, and the image of the United States was tarnished. Kennedy’s mishandling of his dubious inheritance was a serious blow to his young administration.

As the foregoing indicates, policy is not created in a vacuum; rather, each new decision must be made within the context of already existing decisions and commitments. Powerful among these legacies are the budget decisions of previous administrations. This is especially true with regard to the development of weapons, for the military procurement process is characterized by long lead times. A new president is often unable to influence the types and amounts of weapons available to conduct military operations—availability that may shape overall strategy during his term of office.

Lack of Bureaucratic Responsiveness. Presidents often find their ability to execute or even influence national security policy diminished by their inevitable reliance on the bureaucracy for the implementation of policy decisions. The expansion of the executive bureaucracy has been in many respects a two-edged sword. Presidents derive from this expanded bureaucracy greater access to and control over information, as well as the ability to develop and analyze a broader range of policy options. However, executive decisions are necessarily implemented through the bureaucracy, and its growth serves to widen the gap between policy making at the top and implementation at the grassroots level. Within that gap, the occasion often arises for presidential decisions to be delayed, amended, or even nullified.

Though senior agency officials are generally appointed by the president, the federal bureaucracy is largely staffed at middle and lower levels by career civil servants who may not fully share the president’s perspectives on national security affairs. Experienced bureaucrats often learn to influence the policymaking process by manipulating the number and range of policy options developed for consideration, by drafting implementation instructions that blunt the impact of a particular policy, or by delaying the implementation of a policy to the point that it becomes “overtaken by events.” Oftentimes, bureaucratic “leaks” develop that alert the media, and thereby the public, to particularly controversial policies under consideration before they can be implemented.

One need not always invoke mischievous motives, however, to explain how the executive bureaucracy can act as a constraint on presidential power. To receive the careful analysis and consideration that they deserve, major policy initiatives are circulated, or “staffed,” among the various agencies of the bureaucracy with an interest in the ultimate policy outcome. Again, due to the increased size of the bureaucracy, this staff coordination can be a time-consuming process. Although clearly possessing the means to bypass much of this process, presidents who

attempt to short-circuit the full consideration of policy initiatives do so at the risk of an incomplete or inaccurate understanding of the implications of their actions. In short, presidents are often constrained in implementing major policies by the time required to study and analyze, as well as implement, such initiatives.

In many respects, the president's role in national security policy making is the most fluid and least predictable of all the major actors' in the decision-making process. In both a constitutional and an institutional sense, the president is the focal point of the national security policy process. But more than most participants in that process, the president has wide latitude in defining his or her role. Patterns of presidential involvement have varied according to the style and experience of various presidents. Always subject to important constraints, some presidents have chosen to become personally enmeshed in the details of policy making and implementation. Others have chosen a more passive role, while delegating broad responsibilities to their cabinet and other senior officials. Given the nature of presidential authority and power, however, even the most passive chief executives of recent decades have occupied pivotal positions in the national security process.

Interests of Other Nations. Both in traditional foreign policy matters and also in what might initially appear to be domestic matters—such as environmental issues—the president must take into account the views of other nations' leaders. As interdependence deepens in the years to come, this constraint on presidential freedom of action will clearly grow in importance. Examples of this factor can be deduced or found in Chapters 18 to 25, which deal with regional and transnational issues.

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Constitution divide responsibility between the president and Congress in foreign affairs?
2. How has the War Powers Resolution of 1973 shaped presidential decision making on the employment of U.S. military forces?
3. How have changes in technology influenced the scope of presidential prerogative in national security policy?
4. The evolution of the national security policymaking process reflects a generally expanding role for the assistant to the president for national security affairs (popularly known as the national security adviser). What factors have contributed to this trend? Is this trend irreversible?
5. What factors have tended to hinder the role of the Department of State in the formation of national security policy?
6. How have the agencies created by the National Security Act of 1947—including the CIA, the DoD, the JCS, and the NSC—evolved from their inception into the twenty-first century?
7. What is the function of the OMB in national security?
8. Has the expansion of presidential power in the twenty-first century resulted in an imperial presidency? Why or why not?
9. How have the 9/11 terrorist attacks on U.S. soil affected presidential power in national security affairs?

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- The National Security Council, www.whitehouse.gov/nsc
- The Office of Management and Budget, www.whitehouse.gov/omb
- The Peter S. Kalikow Center for the Study of the American Presidency, Hofstra University, www.hofstra.edu/academics/colleges/hclas/prssty
- The U.S. Department of Defense, www.defenselink.mil
- The U.S. Department of State, www.state.gov
- The White House National Security Policy, www.whitehouse.gov/infocus/nationalsecurity