



# The NSC Staff: New Choices for a New Administration

by R.D. Hooker, Jr.

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Early in every new administration, the President and his national security team are inundated with studies offering advice on how to organize for national security. Many propose sweeping changes in the size, structure, and mission of the National Security Council (NSC) staff, the fulcrum of national security decisionmaking. However attractive superficially, organizational tinkering is unlikely to drive better performance. This paper argues that structure and process are less important than leadership and the quality of NSC staffing. No duty rises higher than the President's call to defend the Constitution and the people and territory it nourishes. That duty will be tested early and often. An NSC staff that is up to the task will play an enormous role in keeping the United States safe.<sup>1</sup>

## What Does the NSC Staff Do?

The NSC staff has four primary roles: to advise the President in the field of national security affairs, to manage and coordinate the interagency process in formulating national security policy, to broadly monitor policy execution, and to staff the President for national security meetings, trips, and events. Many assume that the NSC staff does, or should do, much more. But it is first and foremost the President's personal national security staff.<sup>2</sup> Other tasks—such as generating independent, whole of government national security policies and strategies, or conducting detailed, daily implementation oversight—would require a much larger staff and inevitably lead to ponderous, centralized, and ultimately dysfunctional behaviors that would prevent responsive support to the President. Long-range “strategic” planning is surely essential, but more properly belongs to the interagency as a whole, vetted by the Deputies and Principals Committees and approved by the full National Security Council.

The NSC's role as a process manager is not synonymous with policy advocacy. While the National Security Advisor (NSA) may and often will recommend a given course of action, a more critical function

is ensuring that all viewpoints are heard and objectively assessed, and that important issues are framed for decision. When allowed to become an operational entity (as occurred during the Iran-Contra affair) or to effectively preempt the Departments of State and Defense (as in the Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, and Jimmy Carter eras), the NSC staff has historically stumbled.<sup>3</sup> Properly focused and chartered, the NSC staff can empower and facilitate an interagency process that is otherwise cumbersome.

Over time, the NSC staff has become immersed in policy detail and in responding to urgent or crisis events, fed largely by a 24-hour news cycle. This in turn creates pressure for staff growth. The result is a diminished ability to conduct high-level, far-seeing policy work at the appropriate strategic level. A smaller NSC staff by definition is unable to immerse itself in detailed policy oversight and micromanagement, a compelling argument for reductions in future administrations.

In this regard, the NSC staff is not a line entity, statutorily empowered to give orders in its own name. And significantly, it should not be an interagency planning headquarters. It may forward Presidential guidance and direction through formal channels or an approved interagency body such as the Principals Committee. It cannot direct or demand. However, the NSC staff and its head, the National Security Advisor, enjoy two distinct advantages: access to the President, and the ability to set the policy agenda in national security affairs. Used judiciously, these represent real power.

## The National Security Advisor

The National Security Advisor (more formally styled “Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs”) acts principally as a direct advisor to the President and as the primary manager of the interagency process.<sup>4</sup> The NSA must have or develop a close relationship with the President based on mutual trust and confidence, free from the intervention of other White House political agents, and with direct



access.<sup>5</sup> Historians and scholars generally agree that, among competing examples, the pragmatism, collegiality, and quiet authority of Brent Scowcroft in the administration of George H.W. Bush represents a high standard that few others have achieved.<sup>6</sup> (Today's interagency system of Principals and Deputies Committees and interagency working groups dates from his tenure). Although having a strong and sturdy personality, Scowcroft shunned the limelight, taking his "honest broker" charter seriously and bringing clear focus, deep experience, and sound values to his high position. Scowcroft charted a middle course between egoism and desire for control on the one hand, and excessive collegiality and power-sharing on the other. Dominant personalities who seek to control outcomes, restricting cabinet officer access to the President and preventing open airing of interagency views, may well cause system failure. But weaker personalities who prize consensus above sound policy outcomes may also fail.

In selecting the National Security Advisor, Presidents should look for a seasoned national security professional who is able to interact with cabinet officers as an equal without dominating them or being unduly deferential. The NSA should have a comprehensive and practical understanding of the defense and foreign policy establishments and ideally will have worked in both (in general, academics, businessmen, and attorneys with weak backgrounds in the Pentagon and/or State Department have not excelled). A personal relationship with the President is a critical asset, but a decisive and selfless character, followed by competence and experience, are also key. A good choice will settle quickly into the role, function effectively and do so out of the spotlight, and endure.<sup>7</sup> Poor selections lead to high turnover or policy drift—both painful disabilities. Some Presidents have used their NSAs as public figures, deploying them on Sunday talk shows or as high-profile diplomats. Others have clearly relied on them for emotional support or as policy bludgeons. In the end, the President is free to

choose what role the NSA will play. But seven decades of history illuminate the many pitfalls.

The NSA's role is most challenging when principals disagree on solutions to major problems. At such times, the NSA may elevate a contentious issue to the President for decision, and for critical issues that is both important and needful. But the President's time is scarce, and publicly overruling a cabinet officer, though occasionally necessary, is never preferred. In most cases, principals and deputies can and should come to consensus on policy solutions that, while perhaps not optimal from an agency/department perspective, address the overall policy objective with a feasible and practical way ahead. The ability of the National Security Advisor to work behind the scenes to forge that consensus represents the true center of gravity of the interagency. An effective NSA should be measured by how well tough policy issues get solved—without constant Presidential intervention.

None of this is easy. As one expert has observed:

*Our expectations of National Security Advisors are altogether unrealistic. We want them to be master administrators who advance the multilayered interagency committee process in a timely, transparent, and comprehensive fashion. But we also want them to be foreign policy and national security maestros who combine a comprehensive appreciation of the international system and security environment with a wide range of subject matter expertise across an incredible array of multifarious complex problems that enables them to discreetly offer sagacious advice when circumstances, or the President, demand it. We also insist that Advisors have an exceptionally close personal relationship with the President, essentially serving as the President's alter ego on national security.<sup>8</sup>*

There is merit in this critique. The President's pick as NSA is clearly critical, but we need a system that does not demand more than we can reasonably expect.

In this regard, in recent years strong calls have been made for legislation making the NSA a Senate-confirmable position required to testify before Congress.<sup>9</sup> This would be a mistake on many levels. All Presidents need and deserve confidential advisors free to proffer their counsel and support in confidence. Dragging senior Presidential staff before Congress can fuel highly partisan disputes with no real improvement in government performance. Through many different venues, Presidents can be called out and even punished for poor performance by their NSAs.

## The Deputy National Security Advisor

The Deputy NSA (DNSA) is likewise a critical appointment. Also an assistant to the President (like the NSA), he or she will chair the Deputies Committee (DC), where most policy formulation takes place, and is usually chartered to look after the day-to-day operations of the NSC—in short, “to make the trains run on time.” (The Bill Clinton administration also installed an NSC Chief of Staff, while the Barack Obama White House combined the titles of NSC Chief of Staff and Executive Secretary.) The deputy should have both policy and leadership experience at a high level in the national security arena. Weak government experience will limit performance in this key position. Extensive interagency experience and a collegial but decisive demeanor are prerequisites. The George W. Bush administration also created a number of DNSAs for specific areas, such as regional affairs or promoting democracy, with deputy or special assistant to the President status; these ranked above NSC senior directors but below the “principal” DNSA. Some of these positions were continued under President Obama.

## The NSC Staff

Senior NSC staff officers usually hold White House “commissioned officer” rank as assistants, deputy assistants, or special assistants to the President. They receive official commissions signed by the President and other privileges, such as use of the White House mess. Senior directors are often, but not always, commissioned officers. They head NSC offices of 2 to 10 people and may come from government or private sector backgrounds. They are typically more experienced and perhaps more partisan, and will often stay for longer tours than detailed directors. Senior directors regularly attend Deputies Committees as direct participants and Principals Committees (PC) in support of the NSA. They may also chair senior interagency working groups (such as the Iraq Steering Group in the George W. Bush administration) below the deputies level. Depending on their responsibilities, senior directors may have significant exposure to the President.

Most rank and file staff members are detailed from the Intelligence Community, State Department, the military, or other government agencies. They are paid by their home agencies and are normally assigned for 1 or 2 years. Additionally, a few staff members may come from the private sector and are paid from the NSC operating budget. Styled as “directors,” they are the action officers who perform most of the NSC’s day-to-day staff functions. Each must be qualified to hold extremely high-level clearances.

NSC directors are assigned large portfolios and are expected to work without detailed supervision in leading the interagency in their assigned areas. Many have significant government experience, outstanding records, and impressive graduate educations. As most are career government employees, they provide a somewhat less partisan environment and “feel” to the NSC in comparison to other White House offices. Directors lead interagency working groups and will often attend

Deputies Committees as backbenchers and subject matter experts. As a rule, directors have limited exposure to the President.

In general, the President is best served when NSC staff members are carefully screened for their intelligence, academic and professional qualifications, experience, and willingness to serve out of the limelight. The ability to work quickly and to a high standard under stress, to fit smoothly into an interagency team setting, and to operate comfortably around very senior government officials is needed. Stamina and imperturbability are highly prized.<sup>10</sup> In this regard, agency reluctance to offer up their best talent should be met head on. The President needs and deserves talent and quality and should get it.

More often than not (although there are occasional exceptions), hiring young, inexperienced, unseasoned NSC staffers—even with impressive academic credentials or connections to prominent figures—will backfire. Excessive ambition, personal agendas, and divided loyalties can only distract and disrupt complex and highly sensitive NSC machinery. The NSC staff is a place for grownups, committed to serve the Nation and the President. Only careful vetting and objective criteria will ensure an NSC staff that is up to the task.

## The Committee System

NSC staff members have often, though not always, chaired interagency working groups and may continue to do so in the next administration.<sup>11</sup> Standing working groups are usually established by Presidential directive early in an administration, with ad hoc groups set up by the Deputies Committee for more specific issues.<sup>12</sup> These groups are essential cogs in the policymaking process and, when well run, will generate most effective policy solutions. Sometimes co-chaired by a representative from the designated “lead” department or agency, depending on the issue, they may meet weekly or more often. NSC chairs work hard to ensure that group membership remains stable, that policy problems are well defined and scoped, that all useful views are considered,

and that working papers forwarded to deputies meet high standards for completeness, accuracy, and brevity.

Often, however, success is elusive. One reason is that the inter-agency is actually many interagencies. The Obama administration's campaign to counter the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant is an apposite example. Multiple working groups focused on Iran, Iraq, Syria, Turkey, Russia, intelligence, and counterterrorism collided in a *mélange* of competing interests and priorities, leaving deputies to sort out a bewildering set of opinions and recommendations. Effective integration and synchronization of multiple "lines of effort" (LoEs) foundered on a particularly remarkable example of bureaucratic disarray.<sup>13</sup> A more effective approach would be to constitute a steering group, composed of the LoE leads and led by an empowered Presidential special envoy, to coordinate LoE activities, track progress against approved performance metrics, and report regularly to deputies and principals. Key decisions would be framed for resolution by the NSC staff.

In theory, most of the heavy lifting should be done in the Deputies Committee, where the bulk of policy decisions are expected to be made. As envisioned, DCs would be staffed by department and agency number twos or number threes, meeting at regular intervals to consider working group recommendations and, where possible, make policy decisions without further reference to higher levels. Oversight of policy implementation was inherent in this charter.<sup>14</sup> For the most important policy issues, deputies are expected to shape issues for Presidential decision by refining working group products and clearly defining points of convergence and dissensus.

In practice, the effectiveness of the Deputies Committee has been hampered over time by too frequent meetings addressing lower priority issues with both an expansion and a dilution of committee membership. At the height of the Iraq war in 2007, for example, DCs on Iraq were held weekly or even more often. The senior Pentagon officials

present were often the deputy assistant secretary of defense for the Middle East and the two-star vice director for strategy, plans and policy—far below the deputy or undersecretary of defense and four-star Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs originally envisioned. Over time, offices and agencies represented in the Deputies Committee have ballooned.<sup>15</sup> These trends replicate, to a lesser extent, the “multiple inter-agencies” problem faced at the working group level, with DCs composed of sometimes different personalities meeting more and more often to consider more and more issues. “True” deputies simply lack the time to devote to endless sessions in the White House Situation Room, pondering less important issues, when their primary job is to run their departments and agencies. As a consequence, modern DCs are somewhat less able to focus on broad policy development and strategic guidance than before. Driven “into the weeds,” the Deputies Committee today lacks the influence and impact of former times.

The composition of NSCs and PCs is more stable but has also expanded over time (the routine addition of the Ambassador to the United Nations is an example). At this level the pathologies described above are more muted. Principals meet more often than they once did, a feature of the 24-hour news cycle and modern information flows, but as before, all national security issues that really matter come before them. As the most senior executives in government, their time is precious and their responsibilities many. Meetings of the National Security Council and Principals Committee are most effective when subordinate committees have done their work well; when principals are asked to adjudicate those decisions that only they can make; when meetings are executed crisply and efficiently to preserve senior leader time; and when the President is given the information needed to make effective decisions in a timely manner. The NSC staff can play a central role in managing all of these requirements to best effect.

## Size and Structure

Time has seen progressive growth in the NSC staff from fewer than 20 in the Dwight Eisenhower administration to more than 400 under Obama. The George W. Bush NSC staff had approximately 260 personnel assigned (including about 60 administrative and support staff), organized into 20 offices. Regional offices (East Asia, South and Central Asia, Western Hemisphere, and Europe [including Russia]) were grouped under one DNSA for Regional Affairs, except for the Office for Iraq and Afghanistan, under its own DNSA. (Near East and North Africa were also split out, under the DNSA for Democracy, Human Rights, and International Organizations). Functional offices included Strategic Planning, Defense, Combating Terrorism, Intelligence, Counter-Proliferation, International Economics, Legal, Communications, and Legislative. Support offices were the Executive Secretary, Systems, Records, Administration, and the White House Situation Room. A separate Homeland Security Council was also established following 9/11 (later merged back into the NSC staff under Obama). Under President Obama, the NSC staff (for a time relabeled as the “National Security Staff”) reorganized its regional groupings, added cyber, climate change, and development directorates, and assumed a more pronounced and intrusive oversight role as it expanded in size.<sup>16</sup>

An incoming administration may look at some restructuring of regional or functional responsibilities, but a radical reorganization will likely do more harm than good.<sup>17</sup> In some administrations, offices were created with cross-cutting responsibilities that invited conflict and competition. (The Office of Global and Multilateral Affairs in the Clinton administration is an example.) Without a very limited and clearly defined charter, such offices will tend to stray across the policy landscape, often leading to in-fighting and intramural clashes. A new administration should think long and carefully before moving in this direction.



Historically, the NSC staff has been quite small compared to the staffs of major agencies and departments, and for good reason. Though limited in its ability to exercise detailed planning and oversight functions, the NSC staff should be agile, outcome-oriented, and appropriately focused on support to the President and executive policies. Growing the staff to replicate functions found elsewhere is a standard, even formulaic recommendation by think tanks and academics. But a lean, responsive, high-performing NSC staff has stood the test of time in both Republican and Democratic administrations. Creating more bureaucracy will not improve efficiency.

Some appreciation of the role of the Office of the Vice President (OVP) is essential to understanding NSC staff functions. As a statutory member of the NSC, the Vice President is of course a central figure. Beginning with the Clinton administration, the Vice President's role in national security affairs has become steadily more pronounced. The OVP is represented in all DCs and PCs, and the Vice President's national security advisor and national security staff participate in all meaningful deliberations. Depending on the issue and on key personalities and their relationships with other principals, the OVP can play a constructive or obstructive role in national security deliberations. Importantly, the Vice President enjoys direct access to the President and may often conduct closed-door policy deliberations without other principals in the room. Vice Presidents Dick Cheney and Joseph Biden in particular have exercised this influence. What seems clear is that the OVP's position, power, and sway inside the NSC system are not likely to diminish. Ideally, however, the OVP should not become a rival or alternate NSC staff with its own policy agenda separate from the President's.

### The Interagency Process

The interagency is slow, often unfocused, easy to obstruct, and obsessed with consensus. All too often, participants will defend agency positions in the certain knowledge that good policy solutions are

thereby prevented. A certain amount of inefficiency is accepted in the interests of comity and the widest possible “buy-in.” Nevertheless, a “lowest common denominator” solution—what former Secretary of State Dean Acheson described as “agreement by exhaustion”—is seldom optimal.<sup>18</sup>

In some administrations, interagency groups (even at high levels) were chaired by departments and agencies. This should be avoided.<sup>19</sup> As honest brokers and process managers, NSC representatives should chair all levels, with designated lead agencies as co-chairs. In this way, the President’s policies can be consistently and uniformly applied and enforced, and narrow departmental agendas prevented from dominating the policy process.

A common refrain these days is that “the interagency is broken.” Particularly in academic circles, the NSC staff is criticized for a perceived inability to properly lead the interagency to timely and effective policy outcomes. Critics have called for a stronger, larger, restructured, or more empowered NSC staff to break through the bureaucracy and overcome departmental resistance and foot-dragging.<sup>20</sup> These views reflect a fundamental misunderstanding of how the interagency actually works.

In most instances, frustration with “the interagency” is actually frustration over an inability to achieve a specific desired policy result. The NSC staff can be fairly criticized if it fails to “tee up” pressing policy issues for deputies or principals consideration; if it fails to ensure that realistic courses of action are brought forward; if it fails to provoke objective discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of each; or if it fails to follow up on overarching policy execution by holding agencies responsible for performance. But lack of support by one or more key principals—the most common reason a proposed policy fails—is not a process flaw. Rather, it is government in action. When the NSC staff functions properly in its role as process manager, concurring and dissenting opinions are passed up quickly, honestly, and

objectively to an appropriate level for decision. Issues are not routinely returned to committee, rescheduled, deferred, or ignored. Appropriate senior leaders attend on time, pre-briefed and ready to discuss and vote; in-lieu-of juniors are not permitted because they do not have the standing to represent agency positions. Ad hoc decision groups that exclude key players and keep no written records are banned. Intentional leaks of classified information, intended to influence policy outcomes, are not tolerated. All this takes firm leadership that drives toward effective policy without alienating key interagency leaders.

Frustration with interagency performance can lead to calls for a stronger NSC staff. Investing the NSC with policy dominance—that is, the power to determine policy outcomes regardless of departmental views—carries weighty risks. It will invariably “operationalize” the White House, with potentially harmful results. It deprives the President of a free flow of valuable agency expertise and perspective. It can lead to a “slash and burn” approach to policy that destroys interagency cooperation and encourages bureaucratic insurgency.

A word about Presidential special envoys may be in order here. These have proliferated in recent administrations, probably because the President and senior White House officials feel better able to control them as “direct reports.” Their appointments also signal particular Presidential attention and emphasis.<sup>21</sup> Still, special envoys typically lack staff, funding, and terms of reference to enable them to overcome or challenge cabinet officers and the departments they manage. On the whole, and with a few exceptions, their performance has not been impressive. Much like convening a Presidential task force to “study” a particular issue, special envoys may generate light but not much heat. Using them as “workarounds” is not likely to materially improve the performance of the interagency process.

If the organizational process is not the problem, what is it? In a word, it is execution. While the inherent weaknesses of government by committee cannot be completely overcome, the interagency process

can be made to function better. The solution will not be found by rearranging the deck chairs.

The traditional system of interagency working groups and Deputies and Principals Committees is sound. What is unsound is the common practice of putting consensus above performance. In the final analysis, the interagency can function effectively when all know that a seat at the table confers a vote, but not a veto. Anything else leads to paralysis. In this, the role of the NSA is critical; here, he or she must be supported by the President. When one vote can stop a major, badly needed policy adjustment, the system breaks down. Presidential leadership, judiciously brought into play when most needed, is the key.

If this general thesis—that leadership and performance are more important than structure and process—is correct, then the President’s selection of cabinet officers and senior staff is supremely important. Many variables come into play. The President may have political debts that must be paid. Geographic, ethnic, and gender diversity must be considered. Close personal relationships may enter the equation. But above all, character and competence must take precedence. Candidates who were outstandingly successful academics, lawyers, businessmen, or legislators, for example, may lack deep experience in the executive branch and founder when named to head large executive departments.<sup>22</sup>

How well the President’s national security team members interact with each other is just as important. Even the best NSC staff cannot overcome fratricidal strife between cabinet officers or senior White House officials. Recent history is rife with examples of major NSC personalities who could not or would not cooperate, greatly impairing performance.<sup>23</sup> Even highly qualified, exceptional leaders can be poor choices if they are unable to serve as loyal and collegial teammates or are unwilling to place national interests ahead of departmental ones. In many cases these proclivities can be known well in advance, and they should be considered in all high-level personnel selections. Few

Presidential decisions will matter more than who sits across the table at NSC meetings.

## Conclusion

How well the NSC staff performs will be crucial in determining the new administration's success in keeping America safe. It is no place for oversized egos, partisan bomb throwers, ambitious juniors, overbearing seniors, or policy "tourists" who lack the interest and persistence to work key issues across months and even years. Here, competence, character, collegiality, and selfless service are the keys to the kingdom. The specifics of internal structure are not particularly important. Talent and leadership, as well as a proper appreciation for roles and responsibilities, are. It will always be the President's prerogative to mold and use the NSC staff as needed. But we have plenty to go on in assessing a high-performing NSC staff. As with most endeavors, the chances for success greatly improve when we take advantage of the successes and failures of our predecessors.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>A note on terminology: though the term *NSC* is often used to denote the National Security Council staff—that is, the body that supports the President and National Security Advisor—the term is properly used to mean the body chartered in the 1947 National Security Act as amended. The National Security Council’s statutory members include the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense, with the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and Director of Central Intelligence (later the Director of National Intelligence) serving as statutory advisors. (The Secretary of Energy was added to the NSC by legislation in 2007.) Other officials attend meetings of the NSC as directed by the President. See Paul D. Miller, “The Contemporary Presidency: Organizing the National Security Council,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (September 2013), 593.

<sup>2</sup>Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 79. Importantly, the NSC staff does not support the NSC *per se* but rather the President and NSA.

<sup>3</sup>See Karl F. Inderfurth and Loch K. Johnson, *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85–95.

<sup>4</sup>Alan G. Whittaker et al., *The National Security Policy Process: The National Security Council and Interagency System* (Washington, DC: National Defense University, August 15, 2011), 27.

<sup>5</sup>Kevin Marsh, “The Contemporary Presidency: The Administrator as Outsider: James Jones as National Security Advisor,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (December 2014), 831.

<sup>6</sup>“The NSC system Brent Scowcroft ran for President Bush is widely held up as the gold standard.” See Mark Wilcox, “The National Security Council Deputies Committee: Engine of the Policy Process,” *Interagency Journal* 5, no. 1 (Winter 2014), 23.

<sup>7</sup>The Reagan administration saw six different NSAs. This turnover contributed to any number of national security miscues and mishaps. See Richard Best, Jr., *The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment*, RL30840 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 28, 2011), 18.

<sup>8</sup>Christopher J. Lamb, “National Security Reform,” in *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, ed. R.D. Hooker, Jr. (Washington, DC: NDU Press, forthcoming).

<sup>9</sup>For example, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Congressman William Thornberry offered this change as an amendment to the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act.

<sup>10</sup>Whittaker, 41.

<sup>11</sup>Nomenclature changes from one administration to the next; past terminology has included *Interdepartmental Groups*, *Interagency Groups*, *Interagency Working Groups*, *Policy Coordinating Committees*, and *Interagency Policy Committees*.

<sup>12</sup>See, for example, National Security Presidential Directive 1, “Organization of the National Security Council System,” February 13, 2001, available at <[www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/~media/GWBL/Files/Digitized%20Content/2014-0390-F/t030-021-012-nspd1-2-20140390f.ashx](http://www.georgewbushlibrary.smu.edu/~media/GWBL/Files/Digitized%20Content/2014-0390-F/t030-021-012-nspd1-2-20140390f.ashx)>.

<sup>13</sup>“Inadequate unity of effort plagues every level of this war, and it will cripple the coalition unless it is remedied. At the highest level, no single synchronizer of U.S. government efforts has been named. U.S. government departments or agencies are designated the leads for one of the nine lines of effort, but there is no daily orchestration of the campaign in a whole-of-government or whole-of-coalition sense.” See Linda Robinson, *An Assessment of the Counter-ISIL Campaign* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, August 2015), 4.

<sup>14</sup>The origin of the Deputies Committee can be found in a supplement to President George H.W. Bush’s National Security Directive 1, issued on October 25, 1989, and authored by National Security Advisor Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft.

<sup>15</sup>Originally, representation in the Deputies and Principals committees was restricted to those departments and agencies represented on the NSC by statute, with others attending by invitation based on the agenda. Over time, for reasons of influence and prestige, occasional attendance hardened into more or less permanent representation for many offices. Modern DCs and PCs may see multiple White House offices represented, for example, a practice uncommon in the late 1980s.

<sup>16</sup>“The National Security Council has increasingly micromanaged military operations and centralized decision making within the staff of the National Security Council.” See Deliberations of the Senate Armed Services Committee, *The Congressional Record* 162, no. 78 (May 17, 2016), H2677.

<sup>17</sup>See Robert Worley, *The National Security Council: Recommendations for the New President* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 7.

<sup>18</sup>Cited in Inderfurth, 43.

<sup>19</sup>This was a key finding of the Tower Commission, appointed to look into the Iran-Contra scandal and recommend improvements to NSC operations. Best, 19.

<sup>20</sup>See Jack A. LeCuyer, *A National Security Staff for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, December 2012).

<sup>21</sup>David Auerswald, “The Evolution of the NSC Process,” in *The National Security Enterprise*, ed. Roger George and Harvey Rishikof (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 48.

<sup>22</sup>There are many examples. Louis Johnson, Charles Wilson, Robert McNamara, Les Aspin, Anthony Lake, and Chuck Hagel could be cited, among others. At the other end of the spectrum, Colin Powell, Robert Gates, Leon Panetta, and Brent Scowcroft stand out as deeply experienced and effective NSC leaders and practitioners.

<sup>23</sup>The rivalry between Alexander Haig and Caspar Weinberger in the first Reagan administration is a clear case. A more recent example is the role played by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld and Vice President Dick Cheney in the George W. Bush administration, which effectively sidelined the NSC staff and more broadly the interagency process. Rumsfeld’s rivalry with General Colin Powell has been well documented and largely blunted the effectiveness of Powell, otherwise considered an exceptional Secretary of State. Worley, 31.



## About the Author

Dr. R.D. Hooker, Jr., is The Theodore Roosevelt Chair in National Security Affairs and Director of the Institute for National Strategic Studies at the National Defense University. He previously served as Director for Defense, National Security Council (NSC) Arms Control and Defense Directorate, and Director for Coalition Affairs, NSC Office for Iraq and Afghanistan. As a member of the Senior Executive Service, Dr. Hooker served as Deputy Commandant and Dean of the NATO Defense College in Rome. He is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations, International Institute of Strategic Studies, and Foreign Policy Research Institute. A former White House Fellow, he previously taught at the United States Military Academy at West Point and held the Chief of Staff of the Army Chair at the National War College in Washington, DC.



