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**MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA**

**THESIS**

**TEAM OF ADVISORS: THE SOCIAL SCIENCE OF  
ADVICE IN HOMELAND AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

by

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March 2017

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**TEAM OF ADVISORS: THE SOCIAL SCIENCE OF ADVICE IN HOMELAND  
AND NATIONAL SECURITY**

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Homeland security and national security events of the 21st century require a fresh look at an important and often ignored facet of leadership that can be simply referred to as advice. Public leaders at all levels of government face increasing demands to make good decisions under the pressure and urgency of crisis circumstances. Advisors can provide the necessary guidance and support for executive decision makers. This thesis examines the relationship between advisors who support executive decision makers in the homeland security enterprise and national security domain, and the factors that influence effectiveness in the advice process. First, this thesis examines the viewpoints of current academic social science research. Second, a case study methodology is used to explore the experiences of practitioners who serve as both executive decision makers and advisors. Finally, the case-study analysis incorporates contemporary social science research to produce recommendations that can assist both public leaders and advisors in understanding the factors that lead to effectiveness.

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The events of September 11, 2001, in the United States ushered in an era of new challenges for public leaders at all levels of government. Threats at home intersect with the transnational threats faced abroad, as issues of homeland and national security become further interconnected. This is particularly true as the nation's homeland security landscape has expanded to encompass a portfolio of responsibilities associated with responses to catastrophic events and other risks. This evolution highlights the acceleration of complexities and interdependencies that unfold during decision-making, where responses to previously isolated events or circumstances now pose the potential for a cascade of unintended consequences. In the face of this evolving landscape, public leadership needs to rely on subject matter expertise and guidance under the pressure of high-stake demands and severe time constraints. Leaders are not required to face these decisions alone. Advisors and the mechanisms through which advice is offered to executive decision makers is an essential component of leadership in addressing an evolving crisis.

This thesis explores an often underappreciated component of public leadership: the role of advisors in providing advice to executive decision makers in the homeland and national security domains. What factors influence the effectiveness of advice in homeland and national security? Through an examination of this question, the perspectives of academics and practitioners are identified and merged, drawing relevant conclusions and offering recommendations to benefit both leaders and advisors.

First, an examination of current trends in social science literature is undertaken. This review explores why advice matters, the cognitive process for making decisions, the evolution of advice for public leaders, and a brief examination of contemporary crisis situations. Second, this thesis examines the viewpoints and experiences of prominent leaders holding homeland and national security responsibilities. A case study methodology is employed using a textual analysis of three published autobiographical memoirs as data. The case studies examine United States presidential cabinet-level

individuals who both receive advice as a leader in a governmental organization and offer advice to a chief executive.

The first case study focuses on former secretary of Homeland Security Tom Ridge and his 2009 publication *The Test of Our Times: America Under Siege... And How We Can Be Safe Again*.<sup>1</sup> The second case study centers on former secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates and his 2014 publication *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*.<sup>2</sup> The third case study examines former secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and her 2015 publication *Hard Choices*.<sup>3</sup>

From the academic perspective, the following conclusions are identified:

- Leaders need advisors. Advisors can help public leaders think through complexity and assist in both recognizing and mitigating the influence of bias and heuristics.
- Advice literature is leader-centric and not advisor-centric. This literature review recognizes that while there is ample guidance about the advice process available with a focus on the leader, there is less written about the advice process with a focus on the advisor.
- An understanding of crisis is critical for advisors in the homeland security and national security domains. Advisors who understand the evolution of crisis will benefit from a comprehension of the critical tasks associated with managing crisis.

Based on an analysis of the case studies, the following conclusions are identified as significant factors impacting the effectiveness of advisors:

- Strong trust relationships: The analysis demonstrates that all three case studies indicate trust relationships between chief executives and advisors are key components of effectiveness.
- Observation and adaptation to the chief executive: Examples in the case studies demonstrate the importance of learning the preferences of the chief executive and understanding how to interact and appeal to their particular style for absorbing information.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Ridge and Larry Bloom, *The Test of Our Times: America Under Siege... And How We Can Be Safe Again* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2009).

<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).

<sup>3</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014).

- Candid and straightforward advice: Frank and honest advice was evident as a significant factor in all three case studies.

In addition to the conclusions offered, this thesis merges the findings of both academic literature and practitioner perspective to further distill actionable guidance to benefit advisors and the public they serve. Recommendations are offered for advisors and public leaders, and a final recommendation is offered to benefit both advisors and leaders.

Recommendations for advisors include the following:

**Recommendation 1:** Advisors should strive for, value, and actively maintain a relationship of mutual trust with the leaders they support and advisors with whom they interact.

**Recommendation 2:** Advisors should observe and adapt to the chief executive and the environmental conditions in which they exist.

**Recommendation 3:** Advisors should understand, appreciate, and practice the nuances of candidate, frank and straightforward advice.

Recommendations for public leaders working with advisors include the following:

**Recommendation 1:** Public leaders should establish and cultivate a culture of advice.

**Recommendation 2:** Public leaders should cultivate a stronger understanding of crisis decision-making and the role advisors play in offering guidance.

Recommendation for both advisors and public leaders include the following:

**Recommendation 1:** Both advisors and public leaders should embrace the role of an advisor as a choice architect.

This thesis provides a small contribution to a growing dialog about the role of advisors who support public leaders. While by no means all-inclusive, the findings and recommendations offered seek to further enhance this working relationship and have broad applicability across all levels of government. Ultimately, this exploration aims to

better prepare future leaders and advisors to both understand and appreciate the factors that lead to effectiveness in giving and receiving advice.



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through a different lens. They may not be aware of the effect they have had on the many professionals who participate in this program. I know firsthand about the difference they make. Thank you. In addition, I offer a special thanks to Dr. Rodrigo Nieto-Gomez for sharing his perspective over a cup of coffee during my initial exploration of this topic. I would also like to thank my classmates in Cohort 1405/1406 for providing a variety of viewpoints to flavor our discussions and debates. This is an amazingly talented group of professionals, and I am honored to work alongside them in this program.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

### A. INHERENT CHALLENGES OF DECISION MAKING

The murmur of the audience gradually descends into silence as the black tie gala's program commences. Hundreds of well-dressed guests take their seats at tables with elegant, formal place settings. It is a full house. The chief executive, one of many dignitaries and celebrities in attendance, is seated at the dais on a stage adjacent to the night's other scheduled speakers. Unbeknownst to the hundreds of guests awaiting the evening's entertainment, something pivotal has happened. One of the most substantial decisions during the chief executive's leadership has just been set in motion. The decision could affect the safety and security of all in attendance.

The chief executive's decision followed weeks of analysis with a team of advisors, in the face of ballooning pressure and limited intelligence. While it may sound extraordinary, it is a scenario that any leader charged with public safety and national security responsibilities could face.

In this particular instance, the high-stakes scenario became one of the most significant homeland and national security events in recent years. It happened April 30, 2011. President Barack Obama was attending the annual White House Correspondents Association annual dinner.<sup>1</sup> The president had given approval to conduct a secret raid that would result in the death of America's number one terrorist target, Osama bin Laden.<sup>2</sup>

While it is often hard to draw comparisons between the level of decision making that takes place in a White House Situation Room and the more routine decisions faced by thousands of other public leaders at various levels of government each day, it is important to note that commonalities do exist. Chief executives at all levels are faced

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<sup>1</sup> C-SPAN, "2011 White House Correspondents' Dinner," April 20, 2011, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?299256-1/2011-white-house-correspondents-dinner>.

<sup>2</sup> John A. Gans Jr, "'This Is 50-50': Behind Obama's Decision to Kill Bin Laden," *The Atlantic*, October 10, 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/10/this-is-50-50-behind-obamas-decision-to-kill-bin-laden/263449/>.

with the responsibility and ownership for decisions made within their sphere of responsibility, and the choices they make may have significant and far-reaching impacts and potential consequences. Yet leaders do not often make these difficult decisions alone; they rely on the advice of others to make sense of information, examine potential outcomes, and arrive at a final determination. In the time since that particular night in April 2011, journalists, academics and historians have reviewed the advice offered to President Obama as he approved Operation Neptune Spear, authorizing a military action that resulted in the death of bin Laden. What has become apparent from an examination of this event is that President Obama was surrounded by a group of key advisors that provided guidance leading to his decision to take action.

Situations like this one provide a better understanding of presidential decision making. Political science scholars, presidential authorities, and leadership experts will continue to evaluate the chief executive's choices and how he arrived at his conclusion. Beyond an examination of the policy implications and intelligence gathering that supported President Obama's decision, there is another opportunity for analysis. It is a central aspect of the decision-making process that receives significantly less attention yet is experienced by leaders at all levels of responsibility: the process of giving and receiving advice under extraordinary pressure.

This thesis suggests that homeland security and national security events of the 21st century require a fresh look at the important and often-ignored facet of leadership that can be simply referred to as advice. To begin this dialog and study its role in contemporary public leadership, an evaluative examination of case studies is used to open this conversation. There is good precedent for examining case studies in other academic fields from which to derive leadership lessons. For example, researcher Jim Collins, well-known works such as *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* and *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... And Others Don't*, evaluates cases of leaders who found the right mix of characteristics to succeed when others did not.<sup>3</sup> Other

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<sup>3</sup> James C. Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don't* (New York: HarperBusiness, 2001); James C. Collins and Jerry I. Porras, *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies* (New York: HarperBusiness, 1997).

authors such as Walter Isaacson have embraced the case-study approach to retell the stories of significant thought leaders in the advancement of technology, as is the case in *The Innovators: How a Group of Inventors, Hackers, Geniuses, and Geeks Created the Digital Revolution*.<sup>4</sup> Students of military science look to David Cloud and Greg Jaffe's *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army*, which examines the strengths and challenges encountered by military leaders.<sup>5</sup> This thesis uses a similar approach, harnessing case study methodology to examine the process of giving and receiving advice for public leaders and identify commonalities.

What this research offers—and what makes it unique—is not that it offers advice on the broad topic of leadership, but rather it examines advice as a central subject of study for its relationship to leaders, and those who support the leader. First, this thesis delves into current trends in social science research that may help guide leaders and advisors in understanding the advice process. Second, this thesis uses a case study methodology to examine source material written by and about individuals who hold significant levels of responsibility in U.S. homeland and national security affairs to understand the viewpoint of practitioners who both receive advice and offer it to a chief executive. What makes each case study valuable is that these individuals serve a dual responsibility as the chief executive of a cabinet-level department and a senior advisor to a president, responsible for a specific area of expertise in the homeland and national security space. Each case study is examined on three specific dimensions: philosophies on advice, the characteristics of those who offer advice, and views or experiences on giving or receiving advice in an evolving crisis. From this examination, an analysis of the advisors' perspectives on counsel is distilled. Ultimately, this thesis blends the current understandings in social science with the observations of homeland and national security leaders to offer a new perspective on the process of giving and receiving advice for public leadership.

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<sup>4</sup> Walter Isaacson, *The Innovators* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> David Cloud and Greg Jaffe, *The Fourth Star: Four Generals and the Epic Struggle for the Future of the United States Army* (New York: Crown, 2009).

## **B. WHY HOMELAND SECURITY MATTERS**

The establishment of the homeland security enterprise within the United States created new challenges for executive decision makers at the federal, state and local levels of government. As described by Nadav Morag,

the subsequent inability to deal with large-scale disasters, such as that produced by Hurricane Katrina in late August of 2005, led to a broadening of the definition of homeland security to include large significant disasters, major public health emergencies, and other large-scale events that had the potential to endanger the citizenry, economy, rule of law, and the general functioning of government and society.<sup>6</sup>

With this expansion, comes increased complexity and interdependency among the systems that mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from catastrophic events or threats. Simply put: organizational leadership in this evolving environment demands a strategic approach and the appropriate support to manage such complexity. Advisors provide that support, and this explores how those advisors succeed.

## **C. PROBLEM STATEMENT**

At the center of the expansive homeland security enterprise is an intersection of competing priorities and differing strategies to achieve a mission that is both broad and dynamic. In the second decade of the 21st century, matters of homeland security and national security seemingly grow closer to one another, as transnational threats abroad increasingly influence events at home. Within this complex homeland security and national security environment, executive decision makers face a daunting burden to make decisions. In the face of growing attention and scrutiny by the public, government executives must embrace their responsibilities as competent administrators, thoughtful policy makers and sensitive stewards of public trust and monies, while also remaining constantly vigilant and ready to address the next crisis. Executive decision makers shoulder this potentially overwhelming responsibility; however, they must not do so alone and in a vacuum, devoid of subject matter expertise and appropriate guidance.

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<sup>6</sup> Nadav Morag, "Does Homeland Security Exist Outside the United States?," *Homeland Security Affairs*, 7 (September 2011): 1.

Advice and the mechanisms in which executive decision makers obtain and receive advice play pivotal roles in the management of complex situations.

In the post-9/11 era, there is an increasing body of crisis leadership literature to help guide leaders. Yet the role of those who provide advice in support of the leader, otherwise known as an advisor, is broad and often underexplored, particularly in contemporary examinations of the evolving homeland security space. Executive decision makers, whether he or she holds the office of mayor, governor or president of the United States, rely on formal and informal advisory arrangements to serve a number of functions.<sup>7</sup> Senior managers in government agencies, non-governmental organizations, or private sector corporations are both advisors and decision-makers. Emerging leaders in the homeland security and national security space must understand the need for expert counsel, particularly in the face of unfolding crisis events. This thesis evaluates the experiences of high-ranking practitioners with the viewpoints of academics in social science to derive a better understanding of what leads to effective advisors.

#### **D. RESEARCH QUESTION**

What factors influence the effectiveness of advisors in homeland security and national security?

This thesis consists of two research areas. The first is the analysis of social science research surrounding advice, particularly in the face of an evolving crisis. Second, this thesis examines case studies of prominent leaders with homeland security and national security responsibilities to scrutinize their experiences and perspectives as decision-makers who both receive advice and provide it to a chief executive. The thesis identifies the characteristics of giving and receiving advice as suggested in modern social science research and then cross references these characteristics with the experiences of practitioners. Ultimately, this exploration, particularly as it relates to crisis, aims to better prepare future leaders and advisors to understand and appreciate the factors that lead to effectiveness in giving and receiving advice.

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Fleischer, "Policy Advice and Institutional Politics: A Comparative Analysis of Germany and Britain," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Potsdam, 2012, 3.

Studying the advice process is not a new idea. There is ample literature that scrutinizes the role of advice with a focus on the client, such as the president of the United States. There is also abundant literature in the historical context regarding advice and the formal bureaucratic structures that provide advice within institutions. This thesis explores the qualitative aspects of advice from the perspective of the advisors, particularly in the face of crisis circumstances.

## **E. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This research uses academic and practitioner perspectives on the advice process supporting public leaders, otherwise referred to as executive decision makers. First, an examination of relevant academic literature explores why advice matters and how individuals make decisions. This analysis includes trends in cognition, the evolution of advice for public leaders, and a brief examination of contemporary crisis. Second, this thesis conducts a textual analysis of three case studies, written by homeland and national security cabinet-level officials. From these case studies, factors associated with effectiveness are identified through three dimensions: the philosophy and approach to the advice process, the people and key characteristics valued in advisors, and the advice processes used in addressing crisis. The perspectives of academics and practitioners are merged to offer a list of recommendations that can benefit both advisors and executive decision makers.



## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

To better understand the relationship between advisors and executive decision makers, this thesis explores relevant literature in the fields of psychology, social science, political science, and public administration as they relate to the advice process. The literature traverses four seemingly disparate areas of study; however, this thesis argues that each concept is foundational to understanding the advice process in a homeland and national security domain. First, the literature review explores why advice matters and the impact of escalating complexity. Second, an examination of current trends in cognitive understanding is explored in order to better understand how individuals make decisions. Third, the evolution of advice for public leaders is considered in both a historical and contemporary lens. Fourth, a brief examination of current thinking related to crisis is offered.

### A. WHY ADVICE MATTERS

Many academics see the world we live in today as one of escalating complexity. As described by David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone, advanced technology, globalization, intricate markets, and cultural changes are just a few factors contributing to the growing emphasis on complexity science and comprehension of complex systems.<sup>8</sup> As Snowden and Boone describe, complex systems involve numerous elements interacting in non-linear ways, when minor changes produce disproportionately significant consequences.<sup>9</sup> While an understanding of complexity science is rooted in the business management lexicon, it is relevant to public sector leaders. Complex systems describe the organizations—and often the environment—in which public leaders make decisions in the homeland security and national security space. For example, decisions about information sharing or response capacity can cause ripple effects within the systems that analyze and disseminate information or coordinate and manage various response resources.

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<sup>8</sup> David J. Snowden and Mary E. Boone “A Leader’s Framework for Decision Making,” *Harvard Business Review* (November 2007): 1–9.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

Beyond recognizing increases in complexity, decision-makers must also understand the risks associated with such complexity and their impact to decision making. Author Rebecca Costa argues that history is full of examples when the complexity of issues faced by society grows so large that humans fail to think their way out of those problems.<sup>10</sup> As she describes, “the uneven rate of change between slow evolution of human biology and the rapid rate at which societies advance naturally causes progress to come to a standstill.”<sup>11</sup> She contends that humans reach a particular point when problems exceed their ability to adequately analyze information, to effectively plan and innovate to solve these complex challenges. She describes the cognitive threshold, a point at which society and/or people will not think their way out of the problems they face.<sup>12</sup> While her description of cognitive threshold refers to society as a whole, her explanation captures a concept relevant to individuals: the idea that decision-makers may lack the capacity to address complex problems alone.

## **B. HOW LEADERS MAKE DECISIONS**

Before one can examine the advice process supporting executive decision makers, one must examine the process of how individuals make decisions, the cognitive system that supports decision making and the systematic bias that influences thinking.<sup>13</sup> Psychologists Keith Stanovich and Richard West first proposed the concept that thinking occurs in two systems.<sup>14</sup> Daniel Kahneman’s work focuses on how these two systems affect an individual’s ability to make decisions.<sup>15</sup> The automatic system, described as “System 1,” operates with limited or no sense of voluntary control. The reflective system, often called “System 2,” requires concentration and allocates attention to demanding and

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<sup>10</sup> Rebecca D. Costa, *The Watchman’s Rattle: A Radical New Theory of Collapse* (Philadelphia: Vanguard, 2010), 7.

<sup>11</sup> Costa, *The Watchman’s Rattle*, 6.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>13</sup> Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (New York: Penguin, 2009), 19.

<sup>14</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 20.

<sup>15</sup> Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, 20.

deliberate problem solving.<sup>16</sup> Together, these systems unconsciously drive our ability to analyze information and make conscious determinations.

Based on the work of Kahneman and Amos Tversky, psychologists now have a deeper understanding of human judgment and the various heuristics and biases that exist between the two systems.<sup>17</sup> Among the most recognized biases are anchoring, availability heuristic, representativeness, unrealistic optimism, loss aversion, status quo bias and framing.<sup>18</sup> Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein argue these heuristics demonstrate the use of seemingly sensible rules that can unknowingly influence decision-makers. Biases, often viewed by the individual as a simple rule of thumb, also demonstrate a glimpse of “busy people trying to cope in a complex world in which they cannot afford to think deeply about every choice they have to make.”<sup>19</sup> While these biases are subconscious and unavoidable, they cannot serve as a crutch to explain away quick, uninformed or poor decision making, particularly in the midst of the types of crisis public leaders face.

It is unreasonable to assume that any decision-maker will recognize the error of their own thinking when unsuspectingly and unfairly influenced by the previously identified heuristics. Yet leaders in homeland security and national security organizations do not have the luxury of risking flawed decision making. It is imperative that public leaders avoid falling victim to such bias, and therefore, minimize the risk exposure to unsound decision making.

While it is nearly impossible to completely eradicate the influence of biases and heuristics as described by Kahneman, leaders can take steps to reduce the risk of these subconscious influences while also increasing their capacity to manage complex problems. As Thaler and Sunstein describe, “Drawing on some well-established findings in social science, we show that in many cases, individuals make pretty bad decisions—decisions they would not have made if they had paid full attention and possessed

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 20–21.

<sup>17</sup> Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge*, 23; Amos Tversky and Daniel Kahneman. “Judgment Under Uncertainty: Heuristics and Biases,” *Science* 185 (1974): 1124–1131.

<sup>18</sup> Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge*, 22–39.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 37.

complete information, unlimited cognitive abilities, and complete self-control.”<sup>20</sup> Thaler and Sunstein promote a concept they call choice architecture, and they go on to explain that a choice architect “has the responsibility for organizing the context in which people make decisions.”<sup>21</sup> By this definition, this thesis argues that advisors who surround and support executive decision makers also serve as choice architects, responsible for providing context and organizing information for consumption by the executive decision maker.

The involvement of advisors also satisfies the recommendations of Costa, who explains recent research shows that superior solutions to difficult problems come from work in small groups, as opposed to the work of individuals (i.e., a leader making a decision alone). She advocates that “solutions to large, complex problems demand a convergence of many different areas of expertise” and that “no one person possesses enough talent in enough disciplines to tackle today’s systemic problems.”<sup>22</sup> Advisors not only help to filter a leader’s bias, but also exist to provide crucial input to addressing complex problems.

Some critics argue that advisors as choice architects unduly influence the decisions of the leaders they support. An opponent might suggest that such organizing of context amounts to manipulation and restricts the freedom of choice owed to the leader. However, Thaler and Sunstein refute this position, arguing it is not possible to avoid influencing people’s decisions. Quite simply, there is “no such thing as neutral design.”<sup>23</sup> Research conducted by Jennifer Lerner et al. highlights the unavoidable emotional bias that can unknowingly steer decision making, though their conclusions also support the use of choice architecture as a means to counter the unintended emotional response to decision making.<sup>24</sup> Research suggests that a reliance on others as a sounding board for

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>22</sup> Costa, *The Watchman’s Rattle*, 231.

<sup>23</sup> Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge*, 3.

<sup>24</sup> Jennifer S. Lerner et al., “Emotion and Decision Making,” *Annual Review of Psychology* 66, no. 1 (2015): 813–814, doi:[10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043](https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-psych-010213-115043).

ideas helps to limit the impact of emotional bias, further supporting the need for advisory arrangements to facilitate decision making.<sup>25</sup>

### C. THE EVOLUTION OF ADVICE FOR PUBLIC LEADERS

The literature on advice to leaders in government is extensive and as old as the existence of government itself. As David Weimer describes, “from Confucius to Niccolo Machiavelli, to numerous practitioners and scholars in more modern times, many have recognized that leaders, however intelligent, energetic, and powerful, must rely on advisors to govern effectively.”<sup>26</sup> Axioms and maxims about advice to rulers can be found throughout the study of political history and philosophy dating back to the Greek and Roman rulers. Yet the work of Machiavelli distinguishes itself from the governance advice of antiquity, previously built to support the idea of utopian societies and the virtuous connection between rulers, politics and ethical behavior.<sup>27</sup> Machiavelli’s work introduced realism, teaching of the different values in dealings between states versus one’s fellow citizens.<sup>28</sup> Regardless of how academics interpret the advice offered in Machiavelli’s most notable works *The Prince* and *The Discourses on the First Ten Books of Titus Livy*, his contributions highlight a shift in how advice regarding governance is given.<sup>29</sup> Rather than writing in terms of honorable and righteous pursuits in politics, Machiavelli’s works take on a pragmatic role for advice-giving, whether or not such a result was his original intent. Since then, academics have focused much attention on the challenges of offering advice to leaders when such input is unwanted or less than desirable, often referred to as “speaking truth to power.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Shankar Vedantam, “How Emotional Responses to Terrorism Shape Attitudes Toward Policies,” NPR, December 22, 2015, <http://www.npr.org/2015/12/22/460656763/how-emotional-responses-to-terrorism-shape-attitudes-toward-policies>.

<sup>26</sup> David L. Weimer, “Book Reviews,” review of *Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice*, by Arnold J. Meltsner, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 10, no. 1 (1991): 117–118.

<sup>27</sup> Robert P. Harrison, “What Can You Learn from Machiavelli?” *Yale Insights*, January 1, 2011.

<sup>28</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, Introduction to *The Prince*, ed. and trans. David Wootton (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1995), xxii.

<sup>29</sup> Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince, and The Discourses* (New York: Modern Library, 1950).

<sup>30</sup> Paul ’t Hart, Karen Tindall, and Christer Brown, “Crisis Leadership of the Bush Presidency: Advisory Capacity and Presidential Performance in the Acute Stages of the 9/11 and Katrina Crises,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2009): 476.

The modern era of advice literature has evolved since the time of Machiavelli to include numerous works focused on leadership and advice-giving for good governance. Many academics praise the work of Max Weber in developing a modern model for bureaucratic structure.<sup>31</sup> His writings explore ideal characteristics associated with emerging bureaucracies, from the mundane to the novel.<sup>32</sup> His turn-of-the-century work is largely credited with providing guiding principles familiar within today's bureaucratic structures, which are key fixtures of mechanisms that produce advice to decision-makers. The functions such as division of labor, hierarchical structures and professional staff within the modern bureaucracy are central components of advising executives in government today.<sup>33</sup>

In *Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice*, Arnold Meltsner advances a simple presentation of rules that he believes are central to leaders as they select advisors, absorb the advice given and react to it.<sup>34</sup> Meltsner's work has broad applicability for anyone in a leadership role, given that "the leader of all but the smallest organization is intimately involved with a team of advisors."<sup>35</sup> In addition to rules for selecting advisors, Meltsner also discusses the potential unpleasantness of firing advisors who do not serve the executive's (or in Meltsner's words, "ruler's") best interest, as he urges rulers to overcome the thorny topic and remove those that are disloyal or inept.<sup>36</sup> Meltsner's work is highly regarded for its readability and frankness with which it dispenses the suggested rules.<sup>37</sup> Meltsner also encourages rulers to exercise self-awareness and self-control in

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<sup>31</sup> James P. Pfiffner, "Presidential Decision Making: Rationality, Advisory Systems, and Personality," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 35, no. 2 (June 1, 2005): 219.

<sup>32</sup> Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, eds. H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 196–244.  
<https://archive.org/details/frommaxweberessa00webe>.

<sup>33</sup> Pfiffner, "Presidential Decision Making," 219.

<sup>34</sup> Arnold J. Meltsner, *Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).

<sup>35</sup> Marc Landy, "Book Reviews: American Politics," review of *Rules for Rulers: The Politics of Advice*, by Arnold J. Meltsner, *The American Political Science Review* 85 (1991): 295–296.

<sup>36</sup> Landy, "Book Reviews: American Politics," 296.

<sup>37</sup> Weimer, "Book Reviews," 118.

receiving advice.<sup>38</sup> He recommends that receiving advice means rulers engage in “calibration” and therefore consider the advice given in the context of its accuracy, timeliness, appropriateness and robustness.<sup>39</sup> This guidance helps rulers assess the advice instead of reacting to feelings or opinions regarding the advisor offering the advice.<sup>40</sup> Meltsner’s contribution is practical and simple in its application, providing public leadership with modern-day guidance to augment the more brash Machiavellian insights from several centuries earlier.

The most recent writings on advice within the academic domain of public administration are often focused on the bureaucratic and institutional channels that formulate policy decisions.<sup>41</sup> Julia Fleischer provides a detailed accounting of social science literature for what is commonly referred to within the political science discipline as “advisory arrangements.” As she describes, such arrangements account for policy advice to executive actors inside of a central government.<sup>42</sup> These arrangements describe channels that offer advice to political executives separate from, and often in competition with, the policy advice offered through the traditional bureaucratic process. As she further explains, “these advisory arrangements range from full-fledged line divisions for planning or general affairs to ministerial cabinets and advisory staffs at the organisational top-level of ministries, informal circles of personal aides as ‘kitchen cabinets,’ and individual special advisors.”<sup>43</sup> Her work demonstrates a detailed accounting of key social science studies conducted on the policy advice in government policy-making across both parliamentary systems and presidential systems of government as recent as 2012, when her paper was published.<sup>44</sup> She rightfully notes that only limited research is available

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<sup>38</sup> Landy, “Book Reviews: American Politics,” 296.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Hart, Tindall, and Brown, “Crisis Leadership of the Bush Presidency,” 476.

<sup>42</sup> Fleischer, “Policy Advice and Institutional Politics,” 3.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Fleischer, “Policy Advice and Institutional Politics,” 5.

regarding the influence of advisory arrangements and their interactions with ministerial bureaucracy, as most studies are focused on the client (executive).<sup>45</sup>

An example of a study focused on how advisory arrangements serve the specific needs of the client (or chief executive) is James Pfiffner's review of presidential decision making. Pfiffner offers a fairly comprehensive review of research into decision-making theory and the advisory systems supporting the president. As Pfiffner explains about advisory systems, "the assumption is that no one individual can hope to understand all of the ramifications of decisions facing the president and that staff structures are thus necessary but can help or hinder good decision making."<sup>46</sup> He goes on to provide insight regarding the advisory arrangements utilized by various U.S. presidents, including formalistic, competitive and collegial arrangements.<sup>47</sup> He further discusses the small group dynamics and different roles played by staff in support of the presidential decision making, from devil's advocate to neutral broker.<sup>48</sup> As Fleischer notes, the work of many presidential scholars, including Pfiffner, is built around the president and his specific preferences. This research leaves open the opportunity to better understand the dynamics associated with the advisor and how they perceive their role within the advisory arrangement.

#### **D. UNDERSTANDING CRISIS**

The disciplines of homeland security and national security share many areas of overlap; chief among them is their relationship to addressing evolving crises. Recent work on the subject of crisis leadership in political systems has advanced new approaches to strategic management of crisis events for governmental executives. While no singular academic definition exists for defining a crisis, one commonly cited description defines crisis as "a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a social system, which—under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances—

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>46</sup> Pfiffner, "Presidential Decision Making," 218.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 219–220.



necessitates making critical decisions.”<sup>49</sup> Arjen Boin et al. identified five critical tasks central to public leaders’ ability to manage crisis,<sup>50</sup> which are quoted as follows:

- **Sense making:** Policy makers must recognize from vague, ambivalent, and contradictory signals that something out of the ordinary is developing.<sup>51</sup>
- **Decision making:** Crises leave governments and public agencies with pressing issues to be addressed... Crises force governments and leaders to confront issues they do not face on a daily basis.<sup>52</sup>
- **Meaning making:** When they (leaders) have made sense of the events and have arrived at some sort of situational appraisal and made strategic policy choices, leaders must get others to accept their definition of the situation. They must impute ‘meaning’ to the unfolding crisis in such a way that their efforts to manage it are enhanced.<sup>53</sup>
- **Terminating:** Crisis termination is twofold. It is about shifting back from emergency to routine. At the strategic level, it also requires rendering account for what has happened and gaining acceptance for this account.<sup>54</sup>
- **Learning:** Political and organizational lesson drawing.<sup>55</sup>

From a psychological perspective, each of the five tasks associated with crisis presents a potentially overwhelming circumstance that must be navigated by a public leader, exposing the leader to the previously discussed risk of cognitive threshold. Boin and his colleagues argue that crisis often marks a phase of disorder, when policy makers experience “a serious threat to the basic structures or the fundamental values and norms of a system, which under time pressure and highly uncertain circumstances necessitates making vital decisions.”<sup>56</sup> Many would agree that homeland security organizations are

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<sup>49</sup> Uriel Rosenthal, Michael T. Charles and Paul ‘t Hart, “The World of Crises and Crisis Management” In *Coping with Crises: The Management of Disasters, Riots, and Terrorism*, ed. Uriel Rosenthal, M. T. Charles, and Paul ‘t Hart. (Springfield, IL: Charles C. Thomas, 1989), 10.

<sup>50</sup> Arjen Boin et al., *The Politics of Crisis Management: Public Leadership under Public Pressure* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 10.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Boin et.al., *The Politics of Crisis Management*, 11.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 2.

responsible for decision making in the midst of the disorder described by Boin et al. Such crisis circumstances are not new to the 21st century, yet Boin and his colleagues argue the more nuanced understanding of contemporary crisis “emphasizes the unintended consequences of increased complexity.”<sup>57</sup> They claim that crisis consists of three common components: threat, uncertainty and urgency.<sup>58</sup> Each of these components contributes to the impossible conditions in which leaders must make decisions.<sup>59</sup> While crises are not unique to the increasingly complex environment in which we function today, they expose organizations and leaders to new problems, such as unintended consequences of their decisions. Boin and his colleagues point out leaders at the strategic level of organizations rarely experience the extreme urgency they may face in crisis, thus compressing even further the time horizon for decision making.<sup>60</sup> These factors further support the notion that complex problems, particularly those exacerbated by crisis circumstances like the various situations faced by homeland security and national security leaders, create circumstances and pressures that may very well exceed the cognitive threshold of decision-makers.

Each of the four previous areas contributes to a better understanding of the advice process for public leaders. First, those that give and/or receive advice should understand why advice for public leaders is important—and possibly more important today than ever before. Increases in complexity make problem solving exponentially more difficult, creating a potential for a cascade of unintended consequences with each decision a public leader must make. The risk of cognitive threshold can impede a public leader’s ability to navigate difficult decisions alone. Second, advisors and public leaders must understand the cognitive science of how individuals make decisions. Furthermore, they must also acknowledge the potential risks associated with hidden bias. Advisors play a role in identifying, recognizing and mitigating the risks inherent to subconsciously relying on heuristics. Third, advisors and public leaders benefit from an understanding of how the

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 3.

advice process for public leaders has evolved over time. It is valuable to note that much of the contemporary literature is structural in nature, focused on the advisory arrangements and channels that support leaders within bureaucratic institutions. This examination highlights an existing opportunity to move away from a client-specific focus on advice and move toward a better understanding of the characteristics associated with those providing advice. Finally, this literature review explored current thinking in the understanding of crisis. Decision making under the constraints and pressures of a crisis circumstance may be infrequent and even rare in other industries, but public leaders in the homeland and national security domains are exposed to potential crisis circumstances often. An understanding of crisis and the ability to work under the constraints of a crisis are relevant to advisors and leaders in the homeland and national security enterprises.

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### III. RESEARCH DESIGN—A PRACTITIONER PERSPECTIVE

The research design for this thesis consists of a case study method employing a textual analysis of existing published autobiographical memoirs as the data. In the literature review, an understanding of social science theory is used to examine scholarly research related to advising decision-makers. The research design seeks to assess the factors identified by practitioners in three case studies. The case studies involve United States government cabinet-level homeland and national security officials that recently published memoirs of their experiences during their time in office.

#### A. DISCUSSION OF CASE STUDIES

Through an examination of case studies, this thesis seeks to identify the factors that contribute to effectiveness in receiving and/or offering advice, with a particular emphasis on advice during crisis. The factors will be derived from the individuals in each case study, using their own experiences in their own words. Recently published memoirs will serve as the autobiographical data for each case study. While effectiveness is an undefined descriptor, the research uses the opinions and reflections within the case study and the context provided to determine if the factor is recognized as contributing to effectiveness and/or success in the eyes of the subject.

The case studies selected for this thesis are as follows:

**Case Study 1:** Tom Ridge and his 2009 publication *The Test of Our Times: America Under Siege... And How We Can Be Safe Again*.<sup>61</sup> Two former secretaries of Homeland Security published writings in the year 2009 (Secretary Ridge and Secretary Michael Chertoff).<sup>62</sup> They represent the most recent publications from a former secretary of Homeland Security at the time of this thesis. However, Secretary Ridge's memoir is selected for this case study over Secretary Chertoff's work because Ridge's publication is

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<sup>61</sup> Tom Ridge and Larry Bloom, *The Test of Our Times: America under Siege... And How We Can Be Safe Again* (New York: Thomas Dunne, 2009), 6–130.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Chertoff, *Homeland Security: Assessing the First Five Years* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

regarded as offering more personal insight, while Chertoff's book is a reflection of the policy substance associated with homeland security.<sup>63</sup> Ridge also offers unique perspective relative to both homeland and national security, having served as the first Homeland Security advisor and secretary of Homeland Security. Ridge served in a Republican presidential administration. He previously held elected offices as Governor of Pennsylvania and a member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

**Case Study 2:** Robert M. Gates and his 2014 publication *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War*.<sup>64</sup> Secretary Gates has served in a variety of national security roles, including as secretary of defense, director of national intelligence, deputy national security advisor and deputy director of central intelligence. His writing represents one of two recently published memoirs of a defense secretary. Leon Panetta's *Worthy Fights: a Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* was published in the fall of 2014, but Gates work is selected for this analysis.<sup>65</sup> Having served both a Republican and Democratic president, Gates is selected for this case study over Panetta, providing balance against the other two case studies. Gates is also the author of the 2016 *A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform from Fifty Years of Public Service*.<sup>66</sup> While the subject of Gates' more recent writing provides insight to many of the same topics examined in this thesis, *Duty* is selected based on its format as a traditional memoir specifically focused on his time as secretary.

**Case Study 3:** Hillary Rodham Clinton and her 2015 publication *Hard Choices*.<sup>67</sup> This represents the most recent publication by a former secretary of state at the time of this project. Secretary Clinton's memoir provides insight into a variety of contemporary

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<sup>63</sup> Stephanie Blum, "Same Priorities, Different Perspectives: Tom Ridge and Michael Chertoff on Homeland Security," *Homeland Security Affairs* 6 (January 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Robert M. Gates, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014), 7–122.

<sup>65</sup> Leon E. Panetta and Jim Newton, *Worthy Fights: A Memoir of Leadership in War and Peace* (New York: Penguin Press, 2014).

<sup>66</sup> Robert M. Gates, *A Passion for Leadership: Lessons on Change and Reform from Fifty Years of Public Service* (New York: Vintage, 2016).

<sup>67</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Hard Choices* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 25–185.

foreign affairs challenges and potential crises. Secretary Clinton previously served as a U.S. senator and as first lady of the United States.

Cabinet-level officials are selected for these case studies as they arguably represent the highest level of advisor in the bureaucratic structure of the U.S. federal government. Cabinet-level officials both give advice to the chief executive and also receive advice from a robust apparatus of lower-tier advisory arrangements. They are well positioned to offer insight into the advisory process, given their dual roles as advisors and public leaders. They also represent a segment of government leadership for which recent autobiographical information is more readily available. The intent is to use recent memoirs to represent a modern view of how advice is given and received in the face of the complex challenges evolving in the 21st century.

## **B. DISCUSSION OF ANALYSIS**

The research is designed to compare the factors identified by practitioners through the case studies against the recommendations found within the academic literature. The analysis shall derive the key factors influencing the effectiveness of the advice process observed from practical experience. This guidance serves two purposes:

1. Advisors currently working in an advisory capacity to an executive would benefit from using this framework to inform better practices for performing their advisory functions, and
2. Public leaders serving in executive decision making roles can better understand factors to help in the selection of their own advisory teams.

## **C. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

The focus of this research centers on the U.S. federal government system and the cabinet officials that support the president, as opposed to local or state government in the United States or parliamentary systems of governance outside of the United States. This is due, in part, to the availability of data and the ubiquity of issues faced at this level of homeland and national security. However, as Paul 't Hart, Karen Tindall and Christer Brown acknowledge, “the general concepts and conclusions regarding advisory configurations have relevance across other executive systems and are interesting areas for

further research.”<sup>68</sup> The analysis provided in this thesis seeks to have broad applicability for advisors and leaders at any level of government, regardless of the issues being addressed within the case studies.

The number of case studies used in this review was determined as a reasonable amount of source data to provide a diverse cross-section for comparison. The selected case studies represent participation in both post 9/11 presidential administrations and represent political parties as well as genders. The case studies were selected among the most recent publications of memoirs for each particular cabinet position. Memoirs were determined as the best opportunity to analyze the perspectives and insights of advisors in their own words, recognizing that a vulnerability of this approach is the potentially overly polished, guarded or heavily edited nature of such commentary. Cabinet officials were identified based on their bureaucratic responsibility as both an executive within a functional apparatus of government, but also a senior advisor to the chief executive of the United States. The case studies are limited to cabinet appointees and do not explore other positions within the homeland security or national security apparatus, although Secretaries Ridge and Gates previously served in those roles and draw upon those perspectives and experiences within their writings.

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<sup>68</sup> Hart, Tindall, and Brown, “Crisis Leadership of the Bush Presidency,” 480.



## **IV. CASE STUDY 1: TOM RIDGE, FORMER SECRETARY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY**

The first case study is the memoir written by Tom Ridge with Larry Bloom titled *The Test of Our Times: America Under Siege... and How We Can Be Safe Again*.<sup>69</sup> This text represents the first and only memoir written by Ridge as of this writing, as he reflects on his role in shaping the homeland security landscape in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Ridge, who previously served as governor of Pennsylvania before accepting President George W. Bush's offer to serve as the first director of the Office of Homeland Security, was appointed as the first secretary of Homeland Security when the department was formally established in 2003.<sup>70</sup> Ridge's book recounts in detail the experiences that shaped his views, transitioning from his role as a chief executive in state government and into a responsibility that served as a key driver in advising the president on a new strategy to protect against threats to the United States at home. The Ridge memoir provides a helpful canvass to delve deeper into the role of advice in the emerging discipline that has come to be known as homeland security.

Three notable dimensions are examined regarding Ridge's approach to the advice process. First, Ridge's view of the advice process can be viewed through his philosophy and approach to dealing with advice. Second, Ridge's experience can be explored based on the advisors upon whom he relied to support him. Third, Ridge's role in the advice process can be examined through the lens of the advice he offers a chief executive in facing an evolving crisis.

### **A. PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH**

Ridge's case study does not explicitly articulate his philosophy as it relates to advice, but an analysis of several different anecdotes provides meaningful clues to his viewpoint. To understand Ridge's overall philosophy and approach to the advice process,

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<sup>69</sup> The examples pertaining to Tom Ridge that are used in this case study are derived from this book.

<sup>70</sup> "Thomas J. Ridge, Homeland Security Secretary 2003–2005," *Department of Homeland Security*, accessed on February 6, 2017, <https://www.dhs.gov/thomas-j-ridge>.

particularly within the homeland security discipline, it is helpful to start with a brief examination of his personal introduction to this emerging enterprise. Ridge's vantage point is shaped through both his own experience as a governor facing a terrorist event within his own state and through his decision to leave the Governor's Office and become a senior advisor to the president. From this initial experience with addressing terrorism, Ridge gains a new appreciation for the role of advisors providing critical, timely information during an unfolding crisis.

His reflections start on September 11 and how he, as a state chief executive, works to comprehend the developing events in both New York City and within the borders of his very own state. Ridge begins by describing his own personal experience, away from the commonwealth's capitol that morning and back home in Erie for personal reasons.<sup>71</sup> Ridge receives the startling news of the first plane crashing into the World Trade Center by way of a state trooper assigned to his protective detail. Ridge describes the confusion and lack of comprehension that both he and his Chief of Staff Mark Campbell share in a phone conversation, attempting to make sense of the bizarre and startling occurrences. He pronounces his desire to consume information by explaining, "I've never considered myself a control freak, but I always crave information. I learned another expression for it later—situational awareness."<sup>72</sup> This memorable moment for Ridge seems seminal in shaping his view on the importance of information sharing during an unfolding crisis.

As Ridge describes his encounter with America's most significant terrorist event, he provides additional explanation about how he, as a state's chief executive, consumed information and attempted to comprehend its meaning. Ridge describes how his press secretary, Tim Reeves, first breaks the news that one of the hijacked planes had crashed in Pennsylvania.<sup>73</sup> It is interesting to note the limitations he faced in comprehending this circumstance during the unfolding uncertainty. This experience goes on to shape Ridge's viewpoint on the criticality of the information-sharing role in the advice process. With his

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<sup>71</sup> Ridge and Bloom, *The Test of Our Times*, Chapter 1.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

own advisory team back in Pennsylvania's capitol city of Harrisburg, Ridge expresses frustration at the inadequate information he receives, given that he is stranded hundreds of miles away from the support staff and aides that typically surround a governor. His transportation is restricted due to the nationwide ground-stop issued by the Federal Aviation Administration and therefore Ridge waits two hours for a state police helicopter to be granted permission to transport the governor back to the state capitol. Recounting this story helps shape Ridge's first-hand appreciation for the importance of timely information (or a lack thereof) and the necessity for a strong, ongoing and timely communication relationship to exist between an executive and his advisors, particularly in the face of uncertainty.

Amid the confusion that would emerge in the aftermath of 9/11, Ridge describes the new path his career takes as he is selected by the White House to coordinate and advise the president about homeland security efforts. The Ridge memoir offers insight into his own selection to serve in a new advisory responsibility to President Bush. This particular discussion further illustrates a second aspect important to Ridge's philosophy and approach to advice: trust and influence with the chief executive.

Ridge describes receiving the call from the president and the difficulty deciding to leave his role as governor. This decision is made even more challenging as he knows he will be taking ownership as an advisor in an emerging subject area where success will be hard to measure. As he explains, Ridge's own gubernatorial advisory staff seemed "incredulous, thinking I was making a big mistake."<sup>74</sup> They candidly express their concerns that such a position would come with little power but significant political risks. However, the president's pledge to Ridge is that this new position offers an effective footprint to influence decisions in the White House. He describes the assurance that this advisory role would maintain significant influence as the president pledged: "Your office will be right next to mine, and there will be complete access to me."<sup>75</sup> Ultimately, Ridge is compelled to accept this position based on these commitments, despite the uncertainty and warnings of his trusted staff. He joins the ranks of the president's senior advisory

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

team under the premise that his new role would have the necessary advisory influence in shaping significant homeland security decisions. Ridge appears to value access and influence to the chief executive as central to his approach to advice.

In addition to access and influence, Ridge also values a strong trust relationship in the advice process. Ridge believes his appointment is based on his leadership experience and personal trust relationship with the president. However, those same reasons provide ample fodder for critics who view his appointment with skepticism given his lack of subject matter expertise. In President Bush's announcement of this new appointment, the president states that he has appointed "a distinguished American to lead this effort, to strengthen American security: a military veteran, an effective governor, a true patriot, a trusted friend."<sup>76</sup> Ridge acknowledges critics who question his appointment and his qualifications. A *New York Times* article is quoted as saying that "this is the culmination of twenty-two years of friendship. Bush is looking for someone he trusts."<sup>77</sup> While the implication alludes to the political motivations imbedded in his appointment, it highlights the most significant factor in making this appointment in the eyes of President Bush: a strong trust relationship between an advisor and the chief executive.

A third aspect central to Ridge's philosophy and approach to the advice process is political savvy and acumen. Ridge discusses his own experience advising the president as to whether or not a new cabinet-level department is needed to fully execute the homeland security mission. As Ridge assumes this new advisory role focused on domestic security matters in the uncertainty following the September 11 attacks, he and his team become increasingly aware of the limitations faced by both their newly formed office and the national domestic security apparatus already in existence. This emerging concept of homeland security is as broad as it is diverse, covering everything from border controls to coordinating local, state and federal law enforcement efforts. As Ridge describes, there was a natural reaction to the events of 9/11 that included increased security processes,

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid. Ridge describes the *New York Times* article, which quoted the words of Al Nuri, editor of the political newsletter the *Pennsylvania Report*.

staffing and hardening of various critical infrastructure facilities. All of these efforts involve huge costs and commitments of resources. In the words of Ridge,

governors expected OHS (Office of Homeland Security) to pay. They were under the impression I had money to distribute. I had none. This was just one more illustration of the challenges we had as an office of influence rather than a center of authority.<sup>78</sup>

To make matters even more challenging, Ridge describes the existing territorial relationships between various stakeholders, including federal law enforcement, the Department of Defense and the National Security Council as a complicating factor. The bureaucracy was not well-structured to address the increased needs of this new homeland security enterprise. Ridge and his team would need to spearhead an effort to both secure the resources in a resource-constrained environment and push for the structural changes necessary to achieve the mission with which they were tasked.

In the face of this landscape, Ridge and his team were required to advocate for both a new budget and a new governmental structure. Ridge and his own advisors were convinced a new border-centric security department would be necessary, one with authority and accountability of a cabinet-level department. Despite this desire, President Bush, his senior staff members, such as Chief of Staff Andrew Card, and other cabinet-level officials did not believe a separate department was a good idea. They believed Ridge's role was as an advisor whose sole responsibility was to the president, not to members of Congress. Ridge describes the requests to appear before Congress: "Indeed, the president prohibited my testimony, holding to the tenet that Oval Office advisors are not subject to congressional subpoena power under the theory of executive privilege and that if I were to go to the Hill, it would set a bad precedent."<sup>79</sup> The former secretary goes on to discuss the machinations of members of Congress as they sought to find ways to bring the activities of Ridge and his newly formed OHS further under congressional oversight. However, despite the president's reservations and the objections of other cabinet members, Ridge becomes increasingly passionate that such a vast array of

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 87.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 92.

responsibility—and spending—needed the appropriate department-level authority to accompany it. Ridge recognizes his position as an advisor, but also believes his role as a cabinet-level official can both continue to provide the advice the president requires while also meeting the administrative challenges such a vast responsibility demands. Ridge also realizes that changing and expanding his advisory capacity will require a deft, savvy navigation of relationships and lobbying to accomplish his objective.

Ridge acknowledges opposing advice from other cabinet officials and balances it against his own realization that a structural change is necessary. His advice is eventually embraced as he finds a way to convince the White House of a political inevitability that such a cabinet level organization is necessary. He also frames the move as a proactive step for the president instead of a reactive one taken in response to congressional efforts. Ridge’s lobbying, political acumen and frank guidance directly to the president appear to have made the difference. In the absence of stakeholder support and building consensus with other colleagues, Ridge believes an audience directly with the president is necessary, ensuring he can articulate his message directly to the chief executive. Ridge even acknowledges the frustration of other administration officials, including cabinet members, when they realized the move is final and will be announced publically without an opportunity to lobby against it.<sup>80</sup> Ridge achieves a significant milestone that he and his advisory team believe is both inevitable and necessary. He achieves this milestone through a deft and strategic maneuvering in providing advice. Using his political savvy and acumen, his goal is achieved.

Ridge’s anecdotes offer relevant guidance regarding his philosophy and approach to the advice process. These examples are small in number, but serve to demonstrate that Ridge’s advice philosophy is centered on notable key features, including maintaining a strong information-sharing relationship, access and influence in a relationship to a chief executive along with a strong trust relationship and savvy political instincts.

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 130.

## **B. PEOPLE AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

The second dimension from which the advice process can be viewed is through examining the characteristics of the advisors upon whom Ridge relied for advice. Despite his lack of background in terrorism studies or domestic and international security matters, Ridge makes quick work to identify the key support staff advisors he will surround himself with as they undertake the creation of a new staff office within the White House. His choices in establishing his own advisory team are telling. Ridge begins piecing together aides and managers that blend bureaucratic experience, political savvy, personal loyalty and interpersonal trust balanced against other key staff positions that may be best described as having deep subject matter expertise and bureaucratic experience.

Ridge's memoir highlights several of the early staff appointments who possess bureaucratic experience, political savvy, and demonstrate personal loyalty along with interpersonal trust. They include Mark Holman, a previous chief of staff to Ridge as governor, and Ashley Davis, a former Pennsylvania gubernatorial staff member that was already serving as deputy director of management administration in the White House.<sup>81</sup> The choice to recruit staff members with whom he had previously worked demonstrates the value given to these existing relationships.

While the personal loyalty and interpersonal trust were important for some staff positions, Ridge also blends experienced subject matter experts into his team. Throughout this memoir, Ridge credits other key staff members that provide invaluable guidance and influence on significant issues. A sample of such acknowledgments includes one to his Communications Director Susan K. Neely for her work in establishing what Ridge describes as "transparency and information sharing at a level previously unknown in Washington."<sup>82</sup> He also credits choices like Steve Abbot, a former accomplished naval officer and Rhodes Scholar, as an ideal choice to serve in the deputy role. As Ridge

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 72.

describes, Abbot was “highly organized, had a keen sense of how to identify and overcome obstacles, and was unflappable.”<sup>83</sup>

Ridge also acknowledges subject matter experts from the National Security Council who played a role in shaping significant policy and operational decisions. Among them were National Security Council staff member Richard Falkenrath, an accomplished academic that Ridge describes as “a rare public official who years before had foreseen the global threat of terrorism.”<sup>84</sup> Ridge credits Falkenrath with understanding the massive budgetary constraints that would be required of this new homeland security posture.<sup>85</sup> Ridge also acknowledges that some national security experts adamantly opposed the new Office of Homeland Security’s strategic direction. One such example is Lisa Gordon-Hagerty, the nuclear physics specialist who, as Ridge describes, believed strongly that it was not wise to separate issues of homeland security from the national security staff.<sup>86</sup>

While these names highlight a handful of the advisors and staff support positions on which Ridge relied, his descriptions within this memoir provide a glimpse into how he views his own advisory support team, particularly given his lack of expertise in addressing some of the topics assigned under his control. His advisory team blended familiar faces with whom he previously worked alongside with thoughtful and talented subject matter experts who could work well under pressure while also making significant contributions on sensitive policy and operational matters.

### **C. ADVICE PROCESS IN ADDRESSING CRISIS**

The third dimension from which the advice process is examined relates to advice in a crisis circumstance. In the days following the attacks of 9/11, Ridge ascends to his new post at a time of great fear and uncertainty. His first test of how his new advisory role is received by government counterparts and the public occurs on his very first day in

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 45.



office. The nation is facing a series of fatal anthrax events with thousands of bogus reports and responses. Ridge is thrust into the center of this crisis and is required to advise the president in the midst of this unfolding event.

Three days prior to officially starting his new responsibility as the Homeland Security advisor, Ridge was in a meeting at the White House regarding potential threats when the news of the first anthrax victim is made public. In the days that followed, a total of five people would die and 17 others would become infected from breathing in anthrax spores that were sent to media outlets and congressional offices by way of the mail system.<sup>87</sup> The event is as mysterious as it is frightening, given that the first anonymous letters arrives just seven days after September 11. From this event, Ridge walks through the evolutions of thought as White House staff, the media and the public grapple with understanding this threat, weeding through a lack of information and coping with an overwhelming sense of confusion. As Ridge describes, “what no one understood at that moment was that these conflicting messages would become a metaphor for a federal government facing an unprecedented situation, and that questions of credibility, turf, and the politics of terrorism would soon overtake Washington, adding to the confusion and anxiety that gripped the entire nation.”<sup>88</sup>

Two valuable insights regarding the advice process are derived from Ridge’s retelling of the anthrax crisis. First, Ridge offers a descriptive account of how he, as a new advisor within an existing advisory arrangement of senior cabinet officials, is immersed into the sense-making process as the president, relevant cabinet officials and senior advisors come to grips with the growing sense of panic across the country. Ridge is keenly aware of how the chief executive absorbs information and engages other advisors during discussion. Ridge describes how information is presented to the president in meetings with what he terms as the “usual cast of characters,” including Central Intelligence Agency Director George Tenet, Attorney General John Ashcroft and Federal

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<sup>87</sup> NPR, “Timeline: How The Anthrax Terror Unfolded,” February 15, 2011, <http://www.npr.org/2011/02/15/93170200/timeline-how-the-anthrax-terror-unfolded>.

<sup>88</sup> Ridge and Bloom, *The Test of Our Times*, 42.

Bureau of Investigation Director Robert Mueller.<sup>89</sup> Amid growing pressure, he observes the communication style of the president, noting the conversational nature of exchanges with other advisors. Ridge describes these exchanges as fluid and natural, yet concise without much small talk.<sup>90</sup> Ridge also observes the president as being highly engaged, asking very specific questions and often wading deep into the details. Ridge acknowledges this is a different version of the president than the one portrayed in the early days of his presidency. As Ridge describes, “these meetings proved otherwise. He asked hard questions, and frequently probed for more details. Criticism was rare, encouragement frequent, and engagement constant.”<sup>91</sup> Ridge’s comments demonstrate that he is observing and absorbing the features of his advisory relationship to the president, identifying the circumstances, context and level of detail expected by the chief executive. This is clearly a key component of Ridge’s observations about the advice process during crisis: advisors must observe how chief executives engage their team and understand how they absorb information.

The second insight offered in his retelling of events demonstrates his frustration with the territorialism he sees in dealing with a sensitive issue crossing different advisory disciplines. Ridge describes this tension as the “politics and turf that would intrude on the homeland security message.”<sup>92</sup> The unfolding crisis further exacerbates the lack of interagency cooperation and only emboldens the secretive nature of information sharing. Beyond the conflicting messages communicated to the public by various government entities, Ridge grows frustrated that this culture is adversely impacting his own credibility with the president and the public. He describes one example when he and other cabinet-level officials are not informed by law enforcement counterparts of the weaponized nature of the anthrax sent to Senator Tom Daschle’s office.<sup>93</sup> This gap and friction illustrates the information sharing challenge he faced in the sense-making process

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 43, 46.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 58.

of this crisis, further complicated by the pre-existing turf battles inherent in government. From this second example, it appears that Ridge firmly believes that open communication among and between advisors during an unfolding crisis event is central to effectiveness.

Ridge's memoir provides a thoughtful retelling of his own experiences and reflections during his time as both the homeland security advisor and as the secretary for a new cabinet-level department. The examples offered here are by no means inclusive of all of Ridge's insights on this subject; however, they provide a snapshot of various experiences that seem to shape Ridge's attitude, understanding and approach to both giving and receiving advice.

By looking at Ridge's philosophy and approach to advice, the people and key characteristics and his perspective of advice in the face of an evolving crisis, a few themes emerge. First, Ridge's philosophy of the advice process appears driven by an appreciation for timely situational awareness and a robust information sharing relationship with close advisors. With regard to the people and key characteristics, Ridge values a blend of advisors that bring experience, interpersonal trust and personal loyalty as well as other advisors that balance bureaucratic experience and subject matter expertise. As Ridge recounts his experience of the advice process in the midst of a crisis circumstance, he observes the president's interactions with other advisors, observing how he absorbs information during the sense-making and decision-making phases of crisis. Furthermore, Ridge demands open lines of communication among and between advisors during the unfolding crisis event.

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## **V. CASE STUDY 2: ROBERT M. GATES, FORMER SECRETARY OF DEFENSE**

Robert M. Gates' chronicle titled *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War* provides the most detailed accounting of experiences and perspective on the advice process of the three case studies used in this thesis. Gates offers a thorough reflection from his time serving as the secretary of defense from 2006 until 2011. Despite the numerous detailed examples available within this memoir, a small sample is selected for further consideration.

The Gates memoir is examined based on the three dimensions of philosophy and approach, people and key characteristics valued in advisors, and experiences in the advice process during crisis. First, Gates' philosophy and approach to advice is examined through the nuggets of wisdom and observation he offers reflecting on his experiences in overseeing the Department of Defense. Gates' views are shaped by the size the Department of Defense, recognized as "the largest and most complex organization on the planet, with some three million civilian and uniformed employees."<sup>94</sup> Second, the memoir offers a discussion of the individuals upon whom Gates relied to receive necessary guidance and advice in making decisions over the immense bureaucracy. The third critical dimension of the advice process within the Gates memoir is observing its use in addressing crisis, for which an example is analyzed in further detail.

### **A. PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH**

Gates offers a number of observations regarding what he values most in the advice process.<sup>95</sup> Three notable observations can be made from Gates' comments regarding his overall philosophy and approach to advice. First, Gates emphasizes the value of candor and frankness. This observation is illustrated when Gates reflects on his initial meeting with President George W. Bush, as the president offers Gates the role of secretary of defense. The president insists on candor in meeting with his senior advisors,

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<sup>94</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 21.

<sup>95</sup> The following examples are referenced in the Gates text.

and as Gates contemplates their interaction, he believes the president is extremely candid with him during this initial meeting.<sup>96</sup> Gates recounts this discussion held at President Bush’s ranch near Crawford, Texas. He states, “I left confident that if I became secretary, he would expect and want me to tell him exactly what I thought, and I knew I would have no trouble doing that.”<sup>97</sup> This observation is a significant factor in his acceptance of this position—that the president and Gates would embrace a shared philosophy of how to approach giving and receiving advice based on frank and candid discussion.

Gates knows well from his experience that with an open and candid relationship to the president, the secretary must be mindful of his role in serving “only at the pleasure of the President.”<sup>98</sup> He is forthright in describing the immense responsibility held by a secretary of defense, making life and death decisions both for the military abroad and at home. This is particularly true in the wake of 9/11, as the secretary is delegated the president’s authority to take down any commercial airliner perceived as a threat to the United States.<sup>99</sup> All of this responsibility, however, is dependent on the second aspect identified in the Gates case study regarding his philosophy and approach to advice: a strong trust relationship to the chief executive and his most senior advisors is essential. He explains that “to be successful, the secretary must build a strong relationship of mutual trust with him and also with the White House chief of staff and other senior executive staff members—and, most certainly with the director of the Office of Management and Budget.”<sup>100</sup> He goes on to describe that the role a secretary of defense chooses to play in the broader national security team has a direct impact on a president’s ability to succeed. His commentary highlights that frank and candid advice is directly linked to a strong relationship of mutual trust that must be shared between a chief executive and his senior advisors, as they both bare enormous responsibility and share that burden together.

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<sup>96</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 7–8.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*

The third notable observation regarding Gates’s philosophy and approach relates to being strategic and politically savvy with relationships in the advice process. Gates’s reflections on interactions within the administration demonstrate sensitivity to making choices that balance the numerous competing interests and diverse constituencies inside and outside of the Pentagon. As he further asserts, the secretary of defense “is constantly fighting on multiple fronts, and much of every day is spent developing strategies to win fights large and small—and deciding which fights to avoid or concede. The challenge was winning the fights that mattered while sustaining and even strengthening relationships, while reducing the number of enemies and maximizing the number of allies.”<sup>101</sup> In balancing a relationship built on trust with the president, Gates acknowledges the political savvy and relationship-building is central to both serving as an executive of a bureaucratic organization and a senior advisor to the chief executive.

## **B. PEOPLE AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

Gates identifies the role that many of his staff played in offering advice during his time as secretary of defense, recognizing that his new bureaucratic organization included a number of competing interests and staff seeking to lend their perspective. Some of this unsolicited advice proves overwhelming. As he describes, “There were a large number of people eager to help me – some days too many.”<sup>102</sup> In assuming his new role, Gates relied heavily on a number of experienced staff to channel lower priority issues and people with less pressing business away from him, establishing a sensible structure and order for briefings. He acknowledges being at risk of drowning, were it not for the efforts of key staff such as Deputy Secretary Gordon England, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Pete Pace, and his Chief of Staff Robert Rangel.<sup>103</sup> Gates also reflects on what he considers one of the best decisions he would make during his time as secretary: deciding what subject matter experts and advisors would be included in his new team. He describes the advice of outsiders suggesting that he appoint a transition team to purge

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

former Secretary Rumsfeld's civilian team, expecting that he would undoubtedly make numerous changes. Gates goes against this prevailing opinion about the advisory structure stating, "I would walk into the Pentagon alone, without bringing a single assistant or even a secretary."<sup>104</sup> His decision was based on his observations elsewhere of the overwhelmingly negative impacts associated with an entirely new team of leadership and advisors arriving in a way that resembles a hostile corporate takeover: "In a time of war, I didn't have time to find new people, and we couldn't afford the luxury of on-the-job training for novices."<sup>105</sup> Gates's view is shaped by a belief that the existing team consists of capable professionals that need him to express confidence. Any examples of bad chemistry in his team would be addressed at a later point in time, as needed.<sup>106</sup> Gates bets on continuity and his own ability to work with the experienced civilian leadership staff to guide the policy needs of the organization, rather than a reliance that a sweeping change and a team of outsiders is necessary. This is also a notable decision given the departure of his predecessor, Donald Rumsfeld. It is widely speculated in the media and within the administration that a completely new leadership direction is needed. However, Gates believes the expertise of existing staff is too valuable and takes on the responsibility of implementing the change sought by the administration.

Gates credits one conversation as having a significant influence on how he approaches the job in working with his own advisors. John Hamre, a former deputy secretary of defense under President Bill Clinton, advises Gates to pay close attention to the decision-making process inside of the Pentagon. Gates paraphrases Hamre's suggestion, saying that the Pentagon is "like the old Roman arena—gladiators come before the emperor to battle and you decide who is the winner. Someone needs to make sure the process within the arena is fair, transparent and objective."<sup>107</sup> Hamre also recommends that Gates have advocates within his team that can be mindful of the tools and requirements needed today, as well as those needed for the future. This

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 21.



recommendation is a prescient one, as Gates discovers the culture of the Pentagon to be overwhelmingly future oriented and often overlooking the immediate needs of the troops in the field. Through Hamre's recommendation, Gates shapes his vision for how he intends to interact with key advisors including aides, staff and combatant commanders.

In reflecting on his strategy to handle advice from the military leadership, Gates draws upon his experience as president at Texas A&M University and as director of the CIA, where he dealt with subject matter experts like academic faculty and intelligence professionals. He explains that the cornerstones of dealing with advice from military professionals in his new role at the Pentagon would be to "approach decisions by seeking out their ideas and views, by giving them serious consideration, and by being open and transparent."<sup>108</sup> However, the most notable feature of his strategy is to ensure all players know the options being considered with regard to an issue, but that he would withhold sharing his own views until the decision making process was nearing completion.<sup>109</sup> Gates believes this level of candor is central to a strong working relationship with both civilian and military advisors and that being clear about his approach helps work through complex challenges and choices. As he describes, "In everything I did as Secretary, I sought the advice of others—though I did not always heed it—and depended upon others for effective implementation of my own decisions."<sup>110</sup>

Gates asserts the importance of listening to good arguments and being open minded to change. He explains that demonstrating partnerships, "within the framework of the chain of command," would help illustrate his expectations for frankness and encourage the military commander's best advice.<sup>111</sup> Gates also acknowledges the importance of symbolic gestures in an effort to both build trust and demonstrate respect for his team. He quotes author and political commentator George Will, describing "the stagecraft of statecraft" as an important approach to create tangible benefits within his

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<sup>108</sup> Gates, 86.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Gates, 87.

organization.<sup>112</sup> This attention to symbolic gestures is useful in demonstrating not only appreciation, but also recognition of roles and respect for the institutional history and culture. In his words, these gestures helped to reduce the number of leaks and the amount of “end runs to the Hill” as compared to his predecessors, a reference to military leadership pursuing their own political agenda separate from the secretary.<sup>113</sup> He also makes clear that his strategy of candor, institutional respect and openness is balanced by “demonstrating that I was willing to fire people when necessary.”<sup>114</sup> This point is salient and significant, particularly given his willingness to keep the senior advisory staff from his predecessor, refusing to make wholesale changes upon arrival.

In reviewing Gates’s view of advice through the people that advise him and their key characteristics, Gates is unique in adopting existing staff and advisory support wholesale, believing that a hostile takeover of new people poses too great a risk to both the mission and morale.<sup>115</sup> He relies on his own ability to manage the staff rather than introducing sweeping change. Yet Gates also communicates an important message that he can fire them if needed, ensuring they understand they work at his discretion, just as Gates understood in receiving his appointment from the president. Gates also highlights his strategy for interacting with experienced advisors that are both senior military commanders and seasoned subject matter experts. He believes that he must be open-minded to the new ideas brought forward by advisors, while also respecting the chain of command. He further asserts that he wishes to be transparent about the options under consideration, withholding his own judgment until a decision is nearing completion. Lastly, Gates places value on respecting the institutional culture. He believes that small gestures of respect help unify his staff and advisors around a single agenda, averting the dissention and end-runs that undermine the administration.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 22.

### C. ADVICE PROCESS IN ADDRESSING CRISIS

In looking at the advice process in the face of crisis circumstances, the Gates memoir provides numerous examples from which to draw upon, thanks in large part to Gates's detailed recollection of major events and decisions encountered during his time as secretary. There are no shortages of potential crises circumstances, some that are urgent while others slowly evolve, lacking the necessary attention required to address the underlying conditions causing the problem. At a strategic level, Gates and his team are facing two wars, both of which continue to grow less popular in the eyes of politicians and the public. Gates also serves through a wide range of events that could easily meet the definition of an evolving crisis circumstance. Examples include a very unpopular decision to extend troop deployments to 15 months in order to support the war efforts, a scandal that occurred at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, tension and a number of potentially catastrophic conflicts in the Middle East that risk escalation to armed conflict, a mishandling of a shipment of nuclear weapons that unintentionally could have signaled aggression to other world powers and several public relations mishaps involving combatant commanders.<sup>116</sup> For this analysis, the most revealing example of Gates' views toward the advice process in crisis involves the bureaucracy of the Pentagon and the struggle to obtain the necessary equipment for troops in the field. The story is an example of a slow moving crisis that demands attention when inaction is costing American troops their lives.

As Gates describes, one of the biggest challenges as both an advisor and senior decision-maker in his own bureaucratic institution is implementing change when the evidence warrants such a need. Gates describes the challenges in both Iraq and Afghanistan by explaining, "after initial successes in both countries, when the situation in both began to deteriorate, the president, his senior civilian advisors, and the senior military leaders had not recognized that most of the assumptions that underpinned early military planning had proven wrong, and no necessary adjustments had been made."<sup>117</sup> Gates seizes on this observation in driving arguably his proudest accomplishment during

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<sup>116</sup> All examples are referenced at various points in the Gates text.

<sup>117</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 115.

his tenure as secretary: cutting through an overly bureaucratic process and ensuring that troops in the field receive the necessary equipment to do their jobs as safely as possible.

Gates tells a compelling story of the Mine Resistant, Ambush-Protected Vehicle, (known by the acronym MRAP) and the remarkable ability of this vehicle to protect troops in the field. Yet his story is one of navigating bureaucratic obstacles within the Pentagon to ensure this tool was procured and delivered to troops in harm's way. As Gates describes, he was first made aware of the equipment's remarkable ability to protect troops when he read a press summary of a Tom Vanden Brook article in *USA Today* from April 19, 2007.<sup>118</sup> The article described the unique V-shaped hull of this vehicle that dramatically reduces deaths and injuries to troops from improvised explosive devices (IED).<sup>119</sup> By the end of 2006, IEDs account for nearly 80% of casualties incurred by U.S. soldiers.<sup>120</sup> Gates discovers the initial request for such vehicles dates back to 2003, yet only a small number were procured and deployed in the field, primarily to support explosive disposal teams. The Army actively sought replacements for the lightly protected Humvee, yet the MRAP was not considered a long-term replacement and therefore was not procured in any great quantity. This vehicle's ability to better protect troops was clear. In the words of Gates, "whatever the reason, there were hardly any MRAPS in Iraq when I was briefed in April of 2007. But I knew damn well that our troops were being burned and blown up in Humvees well before I became secretary and that had they been in MRAPs, many soldiers would have escaped injury or death."<sup>121</sup>

Gates' recounting of the MRAP story is a telling circumstance in the advice process during this crisis-type event. The recommendation of former Deputy Secretary of Defense Hamre proves salient, as Gates sees firsthand that senior advisors within the Pentagon were myopically focused on the future of the organization, paying little attention to the current state. The large and overwhelming bureaucracy created an

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<sup>118</sup> Tom Vanden Brook, "New Vehicles Protect Marines in 300 Attacks," *USA Today*, April 18, 2007, [http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-04-18-marines-new-vehicles\\_N.htm](http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/world/iraq/2007-04-18-marines-new-vehicles_N.htm).

<sup>119</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 119.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 122.

organizational culture sometimes unable to see clues to solving large problems. Gates explains,

the senior civilians who were my top deputies in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the undersecretaries, had a policy advisory role and direct authority only within their own areas of responsibility. The very size and structure of the department assured ponderousness, if not paralysis, because so many different organizations had to be involved in even the smallest decisions.<sup>122</sup>

This story illustrates how Gates identifies a significant weakness within his own advisory arrangement and that he demands changes, influencing how the Pentagon addresses complex issues going forward. In the face of an evolving crisis, Gates recognizes a weakness in his own advisory structure, that the culture of the Pentagon pushes advisors to be focused on the future and overlooking the needs of today. In the face of an evolving crisis, one where the signals are overlooked by others, Gates recognizes his role in challenging the conventional thinking to push for change.

From all three dimensions of the advice process, the Gates memoir offers concise reflections on his own experiences. With regard to his philosophy and approach, Gates emphasizes the importance of candid and frank discussion with the chief executive. He further highlights the importance of establishing a mutual trust relationship, one that emphasizes the shared ownership of responsibility between chief executives and advisors. He also believes the advice process requires being strategic and politically savvy in managing the issues that matter most and the relationships with others. In evaluating the people and characteristics, Gates trusts his own ability to manage civilian staff, choosing not to bring with him his own advisory team and instead believing in his own ability to hold staff accountable and fire them if necessary. For advice in crisis, Gates sees organizational culture as a risk. It should be noted that organizational culture differs from the institutional culture he previously credits. In this instance, organizational culture leads to myopic thinking where clues to an evolving crisis went unnoticed. Gates believes the chief executive must hold advisors accountable and push for change when necessary.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 116.

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## **VI. CASE STUDY 3: HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON, FORMER SECRETARY OF STATE**

Hillary Rodham Clinton's book *Hard Choices* serves as the third case study for this thesis.<sup>123</sup> This writing represents her second published memoir, having also written a 2003 memoir called *Living History*, focused on her time as first lady to the United States.<sup>124</sup> *Hard Choices* addresses Clinton's time as secretary of state, beginning with her campaign concession to Senator Obama during the 2008 presidential election and covering the events that transpired during her tenure as secretary until her resignation in 2013. *Hard Choices* is heavily focused on the policy issues and notable foreign affairs relationships that occurred during her time as secretary. However, buried within the policy analysis offered by Clinton are the notable comments and observations used to extrapolate her view on the advice process. It is a sampling of these comments that provides the data for the third and final case study.

Clinton's memoir is an ideal fit for the third case study, given its focus on the intersection of both homeland security and national security affairs. The Department of State represents the diplomatic link between the United States and other nations, providing a different yet complimentary angle from which to examine the advice process in the sphere of national security. As in the previous two case studies, a brief examination of the advice process is offered based on three components: Secretary Clinton's philosophy and approach to the advice process, examples of advisors Secretary Clinton highlights in her memoir and why, as well as a brief examination of how the secretary describes giving and receiving advice in the midst of evolving crisis.

### **A. PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH**

Throughout this memoir, Clinton offers views from which her perspective on the advice process is derived. Clinton's philosophy on the advice process can best be described as a balance of strategy and diplomacy. While her reflections on the overall

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<sup>123</sup> The following examples used in this case study are referenced in the Clinton text.

<sup>124</sup> Hillary Rodham Clinton, *Living History*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003).

advice process are not nearly as straightforward or candid in comparison to the Gates case study, her perspective is presented as an expression of her strategic approach to making decisions and advising the president on significant choices.

Clinton provides insight on her philosophy and approach to her role as secretary of state. As Clinton describes, “I have always believed that, even more than our military and economic power, America’s values are the greatest source of strength and security. This isn’t just idealism; it’s based on a clear-eyed evaluation of our strategic position.”<sup>125</sup> This statement is influential and underlies many of the anecdotes offered throughout this text, both pertaining to examples of the advice process as well as her approach to making decisions. The idea of a central strategic approach to decision making, one that believes American core values are the guiding principles for any diplomatic engagement, appears to be a central component of her view on giving and receiving advice. Her anecdotes often tie back to how America’s values guide significant decisions and how she frames problems when advising the president or other White House staff.

Clinton’s view on the advice process is also shaped by her approach to addressing challenges in the foreign policy landscape. She indicates that she devotes a significant amount of time to reflecting on the experiences of previous secretaries, the landscapes they faced and the ways in which they balanced security, continuity and change.<sup>126</sup> Clinton arrives at her preferred method for a decision-making doctrine through this reflection. She describes her methodology as one of “smart power,” where she seeks to embrace a fluid and dynamic mix of ideas and approaches to solve increasing complex problems.<sup>127</sup> She goes on to describe smart power as “choosing the right combination of tools—diplomatic, economic, military, political, legal and cultural—for each situation.”<sup>128</sup> Clinton describes the efforts of the past, the reliance on a formal relational architecture of institutions and alliances in order to manage international affairs, as sturdy yet dated and too inflexible to absorb and respond to the challenges facing the world

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<sup>125</sup> Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 77.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*



today and in the future. Through this lens, Clinton embraces an open and creative style of integrating associations to produce meaningful outcomes. From an advice standpoint, such statements support a view that traditional thinking will be inadequate to meet the changing needs of the modern world.

## **B. PEOPLE AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS**

Secretary Clinton's team of advisors reflects a diverse mix of individuals that share her strategic vision and use of the smart power methodology to address problems and offer advice. Clinton acknowledges that as secretary of state, a significant part of her responsibilities involves supporting the career service employees who make up the majority of the State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development. As she describes, "secretaries come and go every few years, but most of the people ... stay far longer."<sup>129</sup> She goes on to note that increases in demands on the employees, in the face of dwindling budgets, had left career professionals "eager for leadership that championed the work they did."<sup>130</sup> Clinton sought a dedicated team that demanded results and shared her values, particularly in supporting the broad work conducted across the entire State Department.

Clinton's team of advisors at the State Department included her counselor and Chief of Staff Cheryl Mills, someone who "talked fast and thought even faster; her intellect was like a sharp blade, slicing and dicing every problem she encountered."<sup>131</sup> She goes on to describe Mills as having "a huge heart, boundless loyalty, rock-solid integrity and a deep commitment to social justice."<sup>132</sup> In addition to being a trusted confidant, Clinton describes her primary role as managing the building and addressing the day to day bureaucracy of running the Department. She is also assigned as a principal liaison to the White House on various food, health and social justice issues.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

Clinton also discusses a controversy surrounding her preferred candidate as Chief of Protocol, the position that oversees foreign delegation visits and travels abroad with the president.<sup>133</sup> Clinton's experiences as first lady supported her personal view that Capricia Marshall, a former White House social secretary, would have the best understanding of the diplomacy associated with this sensitive role. However, Clinton and one of President Obama's top advisors were at odds, disagreeing over her selection. In the end, Clinton is able to adequately lobby the White House to look past what she viewed as a journey "from campaign rivals to respectful colleagues."<sup>134</sup> She describes the disagreement as one of rival political camps, each vying for their own appointee to take this role. In the end, President Obama's staff allows Secretary Clinton to make the appointment of Marshall, and she grew to be a trusted and respected part of the administration as her advice was central to the success of the administration's foreign engagements. As Clinton describes, "near the end of my tenure as Secretary, the President sent a farewell note to Cheryl, saying that we had grown from a 'team of rivals' into 'an unrivaled team.'" <sup>135</sup> For Clinton, her selection of what she perceived as a key advisory appointment was indicative of how the political lines from the previously contentious campaign could be overcome through the selection of talented and capable professionals in key advisory capacities.

Clinton's memoir credits a number of other aides as essential players in her advice process. She identifies Jake Sullivan as a trusted advisor from her political campaign that would go on to serve as her deputy chief of staff for policy and later the director of policy planning. She describes Sullivan as someone with impeccable credentials, having served as a Rhodes Scholar, Supreme Court clerk and a Senate aide.<sup>136</sup> Sullivan appears as a central figure throughout many of the stories in Clinton's memoir, indicating his principal role in helping address a number of high profile events and challenges throughout Clinton's tenure.

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 26–27.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 28.

Clinton also speaks highly of Lissa Muscatine, a former White House speechwriter that would reprise this role for Clinton at the State Department. Clinton's reflections on Muscatine speak to the criticality of the rhetoric in the diplomacy process, as many of the anecdotes Clinton shares throughout the memoir focus on how Clinton sought to strike the proper tone in a speech or to send a firm message in a public appearance.

Clinton also praises her longtime aide and Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations Huma Abedin along with Director of Scheduling Lona Valmoro for the key roles they play in selecting and coordinating visits and stops by the secretary across the world.<sup>137</sup> This responsibility goes well beyond a simple balancing of invitations and trip logistics; visits by a sitting Secretary of State represent key diplomatic engagements and messaging; therefore, each stop must be carefully selected and managed. As Clinton would describe, executing her vision meant that she would “get out beyond the Foreign Ministries and palaces and meet with citizens, especially community activists and volunteers; journalists; students and professors; business, labor, and religious leaders, the civil society that helps hold governments accountable and drives social change.”<sup>138</sup>

While Clinton emphasizes the importance of capable, trusted and loyal staff to hold staff support advisory positions, Clinton sought a different approach to high-profile envoys designated to address significant diplomatic challenges. Instead of relying on loyalists for these posts, Clinton sought out highly regarded professionals some may have viewed as rivals for her own position. As many observers critiqued, the use of envoys as advisors for targeted missions, particularly diplomats with significant foreign policy experience, could have overshadowed her role and influence as secretary of state.<sup>139</sup> However, Clinton's perspective is that “appointing people who were qualified to serve as Secretary themselves enhanced my reach and the administration's credibility.”<sup>140</sup> For these special responsibilities, Clinton taps Richard Holbrooke to be the special

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 45–46.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

representative for Afghanistan and Pakistan and former Senator George Mitchell to represent her interests in the Middle East. Clinton describes these two envoys were extreme opposites in terms of personality and approach. Clinton goes on to state that “George was Holbrooke’s opposite, as buttoned up as Richard was wide open, but he had a wealth of experience and expertise.”<sup>141</sup> With regard to Holbrooke, Clinton describes him as “a force of nature who was widely viewed as the premier diplomat of our generation.”<sup>142</sup> He previously served as United Nations Ambassador and was instrumental in brokering peace in the Balkans during the 1990s.<sup>143</sup>

Clinton also describes Holbrooke’s relentless and aggressive style as difficult to get used to, often at odds with young White House aides. She states, “Holbrooke’s old-school style of diplomacy—that mix of improvisation, flattery, and bluster that had outmaneuvered Milosevic – was a bad fit in a White House that was intent on running an orderly policy process with as little drama as possible.”<sup>144</sup> Regardless of his sometimes difficult approach, Clinton believes that Holbrooke was a significant asset in the advice process, particularly in addressing sensitive decisions about resource deployments and troop surges. Despite his untimely death in December of 2010, his influence was indelible and his successors, first Frank Ruggiero and then retired Ambassador Marc Grossman, carried on the mission. Demonstrating yet another unique personality, Clinton describes Ruggiero as “a dramatic departure from his predecessor, but he brought uncommon skill and subtlety to the job.”<sup>145</sup> While the use of special envoys by presidents and secretaries of state is not a new or novel practice, its use in this instance represented a potential weakening of influence for Secretary Clinton. Yet, in adopting a team-of-rivals-style approach, Clinton valued empowering would-be competitors over the risks of diminishing her own influence.

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 151.

### C. ADVICE PROCESS IN ADDRESSING CRISIS

*Hard Choices* is filled with stories portraying the diplomatic engagements that shape U.S. foreign policy from 2009 until 2013. For the purpose of examining the advice process in crisis, two examples are studied. Both illustrate advice that is both received and given under the parameters and constraints of a crisis circumstance.

While it is true that a majority of crisis events at the executive level of U.S. government rarely require urgent action, there are instances where the constraints of time shape the outcome and the collective decision-making capacity of the secretary. To overcome the risks associated with making significant decisions in limited time, she relies upon the input of her team as they worked to make sense of circumstances and make a decision. One example of a diplomatic crisis involves a Chinese dissident seeking American assistance on the eve of a Strategic and Economic Summit being held in Beijing.<sup>146</sup> In April of 2012, a blind human rights activist in China named Chen Guangcheng escaped his house arrest in Shandong province and was being sought by the Chinese security service. Chen, as he was known, was widely recognized in China as the “barefoot lawyer,” a poor villager turned activist advocating against human rights abuses experienced by other rural poor.<sup>147</sup> Chen was sentenced to prison and then kept beyond his incarceration under house arrest, cut off from the outside world, in what was widely viewed as a miscarriage of justice.<sup>148</sup> After making his escape and traveling a great distance to Beijing, Chen reached out to an American foreign service officer at the American Embassy to request assistance.

The timing of the event placed Secretary Clinton and Treasury Secretary Tim Geithner in a difficult position, as they were merely days away from attending a summit in Beijing that was a year in the making. As Clinton describes,

It appeared that I had to decide between protecting one man, albeit a highly sympathetic and symbolic figure, and protecting our relationship with China. On one side of the scale were America’s core values and our

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 74–90.

<sup>147</sup> Clinton, 75.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid.

status as a beacon of freedom and opportunity; on the other were many of our most urgent security and economic priorities.<sup>149</sup>

As the event unfolded, Clinton's team at the Beijing Embassy advised her that Chen's safety was in danger. Chen's mobility was limited because of his blindness, and therefore, a decision on whether or not to extend refuge in the U.S. Embassy was needed within the hour.<sup>150</sup> Secretary Clinton communicated with her key advisory staff, including Sullivan, Mills, Deputy Secretary Bill Burns and subject matter experts like Kurt Campbell, to consider the options and risks associated with offering temporary asylum to Chen.<sup>151</sup> The decision was one with implications far beyond one man, as it severely inhibited a sensitive relationship between the U.S. and China. In pulling together her team, Clinton explains that "in the end, it wasn't a close call," and the decision to rendezvous and assist Chen is a necessity.<sup>152</sup> Clinton explains that the credibility of the United States, after decades of talk regarding human rights in China, is now on the line and that "if we didn't help Chen, it would undermine our position everywhere."<sup>153</sup> Clinton's embrace of advice through a strategic approach, one that is deeply rooted in a commitment to American values, helps her and her advisors arrive at a decision that is clear to her team, despite the potential consequences and blowback.

While Clinton's team arrived at a consensus decision based on a strategic view of American diplomatic values, Clinton explains that White House aides were more skeptical. They were concerned about the risk of damage to America's relationship with China, particularly at a time of heightened tension between the two countries, as each nation worked to address disputes over such significant issues as access to the South China Sea and economic policy.<sup>154</sup> However, Clinton makes clear that no one in the White House wanted to be responsible for leaving Chen to his fate and, therefore, supported Secretary Clinton's decision. Clinton's advisory team shared her vision and

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 75, 77.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid., 78.

commitment to a value-driven approach in decision making. While this circumstance occurred under the unique pressure of a compressed timeline associated with a significant evolving crisis, her advisory structure worked as a team to arrive at a recommendation. In the days ahead, Clinton's advisory team performed a delicate diplomatic exercise with the Chinese, using patience, diplomacy and open communication to obtain a mutually agreed upon outcome. Chen received necessary medical attention; he and his family were then granted visas to the United States, where Chen goes on to study law at New York University.

Clinton's advisory team worked tirelessly to support her vision, helping lay the foundation for Clinton to negotiate directly with her Chinese counterpart. Despite the rhetoric and criticism swirling in the media inside of both countries, Clinton's advisors created an environment where negotiations could thrive and both parties could ensure that the economic summit would continue, not falling victim to this unexpected crisis-event.

Beyond an examination of how Secretary Clinton interacted with her own advisors, Clinton's memoir also provides insight into how she perceives her role as an advisor to President Obama. Numerous examples exist throughout this writing, but the decision-making process leading to a raid on Osama bin Laden's compound in Abbottabad, Pakistan, on May 1, 2011 provides a window from which her advisory capacity may best be examined.<sup>155</sup>

Clinton describes the evolution of this decision from her vantage point as America's chief diplomat. To fully comprehend the complexity of this decision, one must first understand the events leading up to this decision within the Obama administration. Throughout the summer and fall of 2009, President Obama's cabinet and other senior advisors engaged in a months-long assessment of the U.S. military's strength in Afghanistan.<sup>156</sup> This process was one of the first major military decisions needed by the new Obama administration and requires the president's team to wrestle with the idea of adding troops to a war in which Barack Obama had campaigned to end during the

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 179–185.

<sup>156</sup> Peter Baker, "How Obama Came to Plan for 'Surge' in Afghanistan," *New York Times*, December 5, 2009, <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/12/06/world/asia/06reconstruct.html>.

election cycle. Throughout this difficult process, the new administration eventually arrived at a decision to add troops, known as the surge. This surge meant an extended commitment in Afghanistan and a need for a stronger reliance on Pakistan to both support and supply the troops, as well as to take military action in the Pakistani tribal areas where Taliban and al Qaeda fighters were thought to be hiding.

It is under these circumstances and amid this troop surge that CIA Director Leon Panetta asked to meet privately over lunch with Secretary Clinton in March of 2011. As Clinton recalls, Panetta stated “we’ve got a lead.”<sup>157</sup> Clinton describes Panetta’s words as “tracking the best lead they’d had in years about the possible whereabouts of Osama bin Laden.”<sup>158</sup> The CIA had slowly and privately begun looping in high-ranking administration officials, starting with the White House and relevant cabinet members as they continued to collect intelligence. However, the caveat to this information is the requirement for the highest order of secrecy—no one beyond the Secretary could know, not even her highest ranking staff. As Clinton recalls, it was incredibly difficult to interact with her trusted internal team at the State Department, who she could not tell or even hint at what was happening. Clinton states, “It has been more than twenty years since I’ve been able to do much of anything without at least a dozen people noticing, but with a little misdirection, I pulled it off.”<sup>159</sup> Clinton explains that a small group of the most senior White House aides, CIA and Pentagon officials, including Secretary Gates and his special operations commanders, began meeting multiple times at the White House, further examining the intelligence surrounding this “high-value target” identified in this mysterious compound.<sup>160</sup>

The group listened and debated information provided by intelligence experts. Some of those experts had a high level of confidence this high value target was bin Laden while others were less certain.<sup>161</sup> Clinton believes the hesitation is stronger from those

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<sup>157</sup> Clinton, *Hard Choices*, 179.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*



who experienced the intelligence failures associated with the belief that former Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction. This previous event serves as a cautionary tale when evaluating facts versus probability in the intelligence process. In assessing the advice process, Clinton describes how the group debates the options, with the president immediately taking a joint raid with the Pakistanis off the table. The option was eliminated at Clinton's urging, as she did not believe they could be trusted. The team agreed that bombing the compound would raise risks for collateral damage and could inhibit the ability to confirm whether he had been there. The only viable option appeared to be a raid by Special Operations forces, if the President agreed the intelligence was accurate and reliable. Clinton shares how Secretary of Defense Gates and Vice President Joe Biden were skeptical, understanding that the potential fallout from the Pakistanis could jeopardize military operations elsewhere. They also pointed to the failure of Operation Eagle Claw in 1980, when eight military members died in the Iranian desert as a result of a collision in route to rescue U.S. hostages.<sup>162</sup>

This decision illustrates how a president's cabinet and highest ranking advisors examine a significant decision with extremely high-risk consequences. However, as Clinton explains, "I respected Bob and Joe's concerns about the risks of a raid, but I came to the conclusion that the intelligence was convincing and the risks were outweighed by the benefits of success."<sup>163</sup>

The president convened the group one final time on April 28, 2011 to obtain final recommendations from his senior-most team of advisors. Each participant was asked to state their position. Clinton, speaking from her perspective as both the chief diplomat for the United States and as a senior voice in the advisory process, describes the what she conveyed during the meeting:

So I methodically laid out the case, including the potential damage to our relationship with Pakistan and the risks of a blown operation. But, I concluded, the chance to get bin Laden was worth it. As I had experienced firsthand, our relationship with Pakistan was strictly transactional, based

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

on mutual interest, not trust. It would survive. I thought we should go for it.<sup>164</sup>

Clinton goes on to state that divisions of opinions on the raid still existed at the end of this meeting, but the president knew it was his decision to make. In the end, Operation Neptune Spear, as the raid would be known, went forward. Osama bin Laden was killed during this operation, bringing to a close one of the most significant manhunts in American history.

This example represents an important moment when a senior cabinet official truly plays the role of an advisor in a high stakes and highly sensitive crisis circumstance. Due to the clandestine nature of this decision, Clinton did not have the luxury of her own advisory apparatus that would typically be available to address or reflect upon tough decisions. Clinton describes that “these were difficult and emotional issues. Unlike most matters I handled as Secretary of State, because of the extreme secrecy of this case there was no trusted advisor I could turn to or expert I could call.”<sup>165</sup> But in reflecting back on her role as an advisor on one of the most sensitive and high-risk decisions of the Obama presidency, Clinton credits her observation of the president’s evaluative style and her understanding of how best he receives information. As she explains, “the President and I are both lawyers, and I had learned over time how to appeal to his highly analytical mind.”<sup>166</sup> By no means does Clinton take credit for swaying the president’s final decision, but her ability to lay out her argument in a way in which the president would best absorb her position creates the conditions for her advice to be well received. It likely contributed to the successful outcome.

The Clinton case study illustrates the advice process through the lens of diplomatic relationships and the different set of stresses and risks associated with it. With regard to Clinton’s philosophy and approach, the advice process has a direct correlation to diplomacy and requires a smart power approach that is versatile, using a variety of different tools for a variety of different situations. Clinton’s philosophy also recognizes

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 181

<sup>166</sup> Ibid., 182.

that institutions lack flexibility to solve challenges in an evolving world. Advice must balance respect for institutions while also encouraging new thinking whenever possible. For people and the key characteristics of advisors, Clinton relies on loyalists with whom she holds a strong trust relationship, yet she also recognizes that sensitive high profile advisory positions demand established, accomplished equals to extend her own diplomatic reach. In evaluating her experiences with advice in crisis, Clinton emphasizes that advice and tough decisions must be rooted in a strategic vision and understanding of core values. Clinton also emphasizes the importance of making strong arguments that appeal to the specific style and preferences of the chief executive.

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## **VII. CASE STUDY FINDINGS**

The previous three case studies explore each memoir on three dimensions: 1) an overall view of their philosophy and approach to the advice process; 2) the people and key characteristics they valued in the advisors with whom they surrounded themselves; and 3) an evaluation of how they participated or experienced the advice process during an evolving crisis circumstance. Through an analysis of the material and sample anecdotes selected for discussion within each case study, some commonalities and differences emerge regarding their opinions and experiences. By examining each case study in comparison to one another on these three identified dimensions, a useful framework of recommendations emerges, as depicted in Table 1.

Table 1. Case Study Comparison

<b>ADVICE PROCESS: CASE STUDY MATRIX</b>			
	<b>Philosophy and Approach to the Advice Process</b>	<b>People and Key Characteristics</b>	<b>Advice Process in Crisis</b>
<b>Case Study #1: Tom Ridge</b>	Appreciates the importance of timely situational awareness and robust information sharing.	Relies on a mix of trusted advisors and subject matter experts.	Observes the way a chief executive absorbs information and interacts with other advisors in the sense-making and decision-making phases of crisis.
	Values a strong trust relationship, access and influence in a relationship to a chief executive.	Ensures trusted confidants are in key positions but also balanced with senior, experienced subject matter experts.	Demands open lines of communications between advisors during unfolding crisis events.
	Relies on savvy political instincts to address difficult challenges and navigate bureaucracy.		
<b>Case Study #2: Robert Gates</b>	Emphasizes the criticality of candid discussion with frank and forward advice.	Values continuity and relies on his own ability to work with the experienced civilian leadership staff, rather than sweeping changes and a team of outsiders	Sees organizational culture as a risk that inhibits advisors from recognizing the signs of crisis.
	Emphasizes the importance of establishing a mutual trust relationship with the chief executive and other advisors.	Entertains new ideas by being open-minded within the framework of the chain of command, transparent about choices, and withholds his own views until the decision-making process nears completion.	Wary of organizational paralysis in an advice process mired in bureaucracy and advocates that chief executives must push for change to challenge conventional thinking.
	Believes one must be strategic about priorities and politically savvy in managing relationships.	Pays close attention to the small gestures that demonstrate respect for institutional culture and can motivate staff.	
<b>Case Study #3: Hillary Clinton</b>	Applies a variety of tools to a variety of circumstances.	Relies on key loyalists with whom she already holds a strong trust relationship	Emphasizes that advice must be rooted in a clear strategic vision and understanding of values.
	Recognizes that institutions lack the flexibility to solve challenges in an evolving world.	Balances loyalists on staff with accomplished equals in key advisory roles in a team-of-rivals styled approach.	Adapts a strong argument and appeal to the style of the chief executive.
	Balances respect for institutions but encourages new ways of thinking whenever possible.		

**A. PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH TO THE ADVICE PROCESS**

For the first case study, Secretary Tom Ridge’s reflections highlight an advice philosophy deeply rooted in his professional experiences as an elected official, having previously served as a member of Congress and as a chief executive in state government. His observations on the advice process are less pronounced than the other case studies as he devotes much of his memoir to recounting the behind-the-scenes events that transpired and shaped his personal experiences. Yet within this recollection are a number of observations from which the dimensions of the advice process are viewed.

From an evaluation of the anecdotes highlighted in this case study, Ridge's own experience in the unfolding events of 9/11 emphasize his appreciation for advisors that provide timely information and emphasize a strong, open communication and information sharing relationship, recognizing his own thirst for answers in the face of uncertainty and limited access to staff. Ridge's advice philosophy also values a strong trust relationship between the advisor and a chief executive, highlighting this feature as a cardinal reason for his own selection to advise President Bush. Ridge further emphasizes access to the chief executive as a central motivation when he accepts the role, acknowledging that a direct audience to the chief executive is required for him to achieve success as an advisor.

A third key strength illustrated in the Ridge examples regarding his philosophy on advice relates to political savvy and instincts. It is his political acumen and ability to work within the bureaucratic institutions of the federal government that make a difference as he works to influence the president's actions. This is illustrated in his efforts to establish DHS as a cabinet-level department against the wishes of other advisors. Ridge works within the established advisory structure as often as possible, but also makes difficult and potentially unpopular choices to go outside of that system to accomplish a stated goal, as is the case in his example of directly lobbying President Bush. While occasionally frustrated with the bureaucracy, he also excels at working within it, placing high value on his ability to navigate the system to achieve meaningful outcomes. His narrative explores the labyrinth of interpersonal relationships he is required to navigate in order to establish credibility for his new responsibilities in the emerging homeland security discipline. He invests significant energy into examining the political nuances of working in the executive branch of government, first as an advisor responsible only to the president and then as a cabinet level official balancing the interests and demands of congressional inquiries and budgetary challenges. Navigating the political climate heavily influences his efforts, in part due to his unfamiliarity and uncertainty associated with serving in a completely new position. He relies heavily on his political instincts, something with which he has honed throughout his career. When selecting an approach to providing advice, it appears that Ridge weighs the political implications of his actions

against the value and need of the intended outcome all due to his strong political acumen that defines his effectiveness in advising President Bush.

In evaluating Case Study 2, Gates provides significant depth in his description of the advice process. Gates believes firmly in the concept that an advisor serves at the pleasure of the executive; nevertheless, he recognizes this relationship demands the exchange of frank, straightforward advice. His recommendation for balancing the nuances in this advisor/advisee relationship is built on a climate of open, candid discussion. He emphasizes the criticality of mutual trust with the executive and also highlights the importance of establishing this culture early on in the relationship. Gates further asserts that the environment of mutual trust must extend beyond the chief executive and exist with other senior advisors, citing that success as a role player on the larger advisory team will directly impact the ability for the president to succeed. Gates focuses on the importance of sustaining and even strengthening relationships through political savvy.

Gates also highlights the guidance of former Deputy Secretary of Defense John Hamre as shaping his overall philosophy. Hamre recommended Gates pay close attention to the decision-making process within his organization, ensuring the advocacy and decision-making process is as fair and objective as possible.<sup>167</sup> Gates heeded Hamre's warning that advocates not become so future oriented that they fail to meet the needs of the present, which turns out to be one of the biggest weaknesses he observes within the Department of Defense. Such a critique is also rooted in the existing advice process of the organization as advisors are contributing to this lack of vision, failing to meet the needs of current troops in the field.

Another key feature of Gates's philosophy draws upon a leadership lesson that has a direct link to empowering advisors. Gates notes the importance of symbolic gestures in dealing with key staff. He recognizes that tangible benefits exist to demonstrating appreciation or acknowledging the roles of advisors, particularly as it relates to institutional culture. This is a key observation, as Gates believes something as

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<sup>167</sup> Gates, *Duty*, 21.



simple a symbolic gesture helps to reduce what he describes as end-runs or leaks. He believes these gestures dampen the interests of potential dissenters when they attempt to spearhead a separate political agenda.

For Case Study 3, Secretary Clinton's perspective on the advice process is more nuanced and less explicit in directly describing her views on the advice process. However, Clinton explains the view of her overall strategy in how she approaches her responsibilities as secretary of state. Her commentary applies to how she views solving problems and receiving advice. For the purposes of this analysis, Clinton's view of the advice process is derived from an understanding of the American strategic position in foreign affairs. Clinton identifies strongly with the concept of smart power whereby a variety of tools are applied based on the situation. Clinton also gives much credit to an open and integrated approach to solving problems, recognizing that institutions of the past may lack the flexibility needed to address challenges in an evolving modern world. Her policy approach is described in significant detail. It can be argued that this approach applies beyond the formation of policy positions and extends to her overall philosophy for the inner-workings of a bureaucracy. That bureaucracy includes the advisory arrangements responsible for giving and receiving advice while also balancing respect for established institutions and encouraging new ways of creative thinking to solve complex problems.

## **B. PEOPLE AND KEY CHARACTERISTICS VALUED IN ADVISORS**

For the second dimension of the advice process, this thesis looks at each of the case studies and the notable people who provide advice within the case studies. While not all inclusive, the individuals illustrate examples of the advisors and staff support responsible for providing advice. The purpose is to gain a better understanding of the team that surrounds each cabinet secretary and what qualities are recognized and valued as contributors to effectiveness.

In the case of Ridge, value is placed on selecting an advisory team that balances familiarity along with subject matter expertise. He makes a point to seek out staff with whom he has previously worked, but who also hold significant bureaucratic experience.

He balances these appointments of loyalty and familiarity by surrounding himself with other national security experts. Ridge's approach to this staffing arrangement ensures that he can rely on trusted, loyal colleagues with whom he has previously worked while also ensuring that subject matter experts play a prominent role, given his lack of familiarity in the disciplines of national and homeland security.

In the case of Gates, the approach to staffing emphasizes the circumstances under which he is appointed (in the midst of two wars). He chooses to accept nearly all of the existing staff that served the previous secretary of defense, and credits this choice as a key decision in his success, despite the political momentum desperately seeking staffing changes in the Defense Department. Gates feels strongly this decision ensured continuity within the organization without inflicting harm to the Department's overall morale. To balance this approach, Gates believes that staff must understand that they serve at his discretion and that he has control to replace them if necessary.

In the case of Secretary Clinton, emphasis for staffing is placed on key advisors, including a number of loyalists with whom she previously worked with in the White House and her own political campaign. However, Clinton adopts a different approach when it comes to senior diplomats for the most sensitive targeted missions, choosing to recruit special envoys with credentials that rivaled her own. Clinton explains that many observers questioned this decision, seeing them as potential competition to her as Secretary. However, Clinton embraces this team-of-rivals approach, believing that empowering would-be competitors strengthens the advice process and her ability to address complex challenges.

### **C. ADVICE PROCESS IN ADDRESSING CRISIS**

Ridge recalls the confusion and misinformation that dominated the anthrax crisis of 2001. Ridge, a new advisor inside an existing advisory and decision-making apparatus, is left to struggle managing information flow and issues of credibility that results from territorialism and lacking cooperation. He uses the sense-making task of an evolving crisis to both hone his own vision for what must change within the advisory culture and to also develop a longer-term strategic vision for the role of his new position in a

president's cabinet. Ridge offers brief reflection on the personal qualities demonstrated by the president during briefings with advisors, and it is clear these engagements were useful in understanding how to both communicate with the president and advocate for decisions he felt were critical. Ridge's memoir ultimately highlights the need for open lines of communication and the risks associated with a failure to communicate during crisis decision making.

The Gates case study offers insight into advice during crisis through the retelling of how the Department of Defense eventually addresses the high casualty rate associated with improvised explosive devices in Iraq. Gates highlights that the organization's culture was myopically focused on future operations, so much so that advocates were failing to bring the needs of the current operations to the forefront. Gates recognizes that the massive bureaucracy of the Pentagon creates a near-paralysis when it comes to decisions that crossed over different areas of responsibility. Subject matter experts surrounding him as the secretary were far too focused on their individual sphere of responsibility and missed the signals indicating they were in the midst of an evolving crisis. Gates, heeding the previous advice of John Hamre, recognizes the need to push hard for a change of direction with regard to the equipment being purchased. Gates credits this action with a significant decrease in casualties. From an advice perspective, this example illustrates a risk within large organizations: the existing culture, compounded by the massive weight of a large bureaucracy, can be a contributing factor to organizational paralysis, inhibiting advisors' abilities to recognize the signs of crisis. Gates understood that his role as the leader was to challenge advisors to look beyond conventional thinking when necessary.

The Clinton case study provides two strong examples of advice during crisis for the purpose of this thesis. In addressing an evolving diplomatic crisis between the United States and China, Clinton relies heavily on her staff to make quick assessments and recommend action that could have far-reaching consequences. But her anecdotes illustrate a belief that America's strategic position is the central-most important factor in the advice process and that advice be linked back to a strategic position.

The Clinton case study offers an even more dramatic example from which the advice process is viewed by looking closely at the decision-making process to undertake

the Osama bin Laden raid. For this analysis, Clinton's own words are used to unpack her role in advising the president. The key takeaways from the Clinton text highlight how her advice, rooted in America's strategic objectives, advocates against the involvement of the Pakistanis as a potential partner to conduct a joint raid. Clinton argues that the American-Pakistani relationship was strictly transactional and that exposing the whereabouts of bin Laden to the Pakistanis would risk the entire operation. She believes the long-term relationship between the two countries would have been sustained despite their exclusion, a belief rooted in her strategic approach to offering advice. Clinton also takes a strong role in laying out the case for why accepting such risks by undertaking this covert mission would be worthwhile.

Clinton's retelling of this seminal event in American history is instructive for this thesis project. Clinton dives deeply into her position and thought process, highlighting the efforts she undertook to navigate these difficult and emotionally charged issues while also shaping her argument by recognizing the president's evaluative style. In switching gears from a cabinet secretary to a presidential advisor, Clinton lays out an argument based on what she has learned about the president's preferred style of receiving information. As previously mentioned and described in her memoir, "I had learned over time how to appeal to his highly analytical mind." The most meaningful takeaway from this particular anecdote is Clinton's emphasis on adapting to the preference and information consumption style of the president, ensuring that her advocacy is understood and absorbed in the most appropriate way.

#### **D. CRITICAL ANALYSIS**

These findings offer a small sample of lessons learned from the case study analysis previously presented. It is important to note some potential flaws and criticism associated with these findings. First, as was noted earlier in the research methodology, there are some inherent challenges associated with using memoirs as case studies. The commentary provided in each case study represents the subject's views and is not necessarily an objective vantage point from which to make an assessment. However, as the research question seeks to examine what factors influence effectiveness, this thesis

argues that the words of the subjects in each case study represent an adequate judge of effectiveness from a first person viewpoint.

A second potential criticism is regarding the anecdotes selected for analysis. Each case study offered a wide variety of stories for examination; however, a small number were identified based on relevance to the three dimensions used in the analysis and due to the availability of reflection from each case study subject. For example, while Robert Gate's memoir covers his time as Secretary of Defense for both President Bush and President Obama, the analysis uses case studies drawn from his time working for President Bush. This is primarily due to the nature of his commentary in the text and its usefulness for analysis, given the first portion of the book offers more insight into his decision-making philosophy and process.

Despite these potential criticisms, the findings of this thesis attempt to provide insight into the factors associated with effectiveness in both giving and receiving advice. These findings are used to illustrate common points identified through analysis of the case studies and to synthesize these points as conclusions and recommendations, which are addressed in the next two chapters.

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## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

This thesis unfolded as opportunity to examine the role of advisors in effectively supporting executive decision makers within the homeland and national security domains. The exploration began with a simple question: What are the factors that influence the effectiveness of advisors in homeland security and national security? Motivated by an appreciation for an increasingly complex society, homeland and national security leaders are the central focus of this writing, particularly given the significance of their decisions and the ubiquity of crisis in this area of responsibility.

While the discussion of advice is as old as the written word, this thesis opens the door to a new dialog for academics and practitioners about the features of advice, the process of giving and receiving advice, and the role of advisors in addressing 21st century crisis. So what has changed during the past two decades? What makes advice in today's environment different from other times in history? The findings of this thesis attempt to put these observations into focus.

### A. THE ADVICE PROCESS FROM AN ACADEMIC PERSPECTIVE

First, this thesis examines the advice process from an academic perspective. The conclusions of this review are addressed in the following sections.

#### 1. Leaders Need Advisors

This thesis explores literature spanning several academic disciplines in an attempt to understand why advice and advisors matter, particularly in the homeland and national security disciplines. The author concludes that the role of advisors is growing more important in an increasingly complex 21st century world. Advances in technology and globalization demonstrate an increasingly interdependent society. Yet as Rebecca Costa argues, a failure to manage such complexity, or a belief that individuals can do so alone, will undoubtedly lead to failures as society neglects to effectively address evolving challenges.<sup>168</sup> Individuals addressing problems alone risk reaching their cognitive

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<sup>168</sup> Costa, *The Watchman's Rattle*, 7.

threshold, described by Costa as a point at when individual fails to think through complex problems.<sup>169</sup>

The literature review also articulates that an individual's hidden bias can subconsciously influence decisions, allowing individuals to rely heavily on flawed heuristics that can expose one to potentially ineffective decision making. Advisors can help public leaders think through complexity and assist in both recognizing and mitigating the influence of bias and heuristics. While by no means a comprehensive solution, this thesis argues that advisors do aid executive decision makers to lessen the exposure to such bias that may unduly influence the outcome of decision making.

## **2. Existing Advice Literature Is Leader-Centric and Not Advisor-Centric**

This literature review recognizes that while there is ample guidance about the advice process available with a focus on the leader, there is less written about the advice process with a focus on the advisor. This thesis contributes to this advisor-centric dialog by offering additional insight as recommendations.

In the face of this increasingly complex world, the role of advisors as a central component of a leadership theory is underexplored. Scholars have long examined the role of advice over time, but the advice process that supports contemporary leaders and how those advisors provide this advice has received less focus. Arnold Meltsner's examination of advice in *Rules for Rulers* is salient, but stands in as one of very few offerings for public leaders on the topic. Furthermore, Meltsner's work does not benefit from advances in social science with which we have access today. Some of this lacking dialog may be due in part to the seemingly vague description of an advisor. While absent the specificity of a particular job title, the features of an advisor are prevalent in a wide range of responsibilities. Further narrowing the scope of an advisor to a specific title limits the broad and far-reaching implications of studying the advice process.

Historical works, such as Machiavelli's *The Prince*, and more modern writings such as Meltsner's *Rules for Rulers* provide insight into the advice process. However,

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<sup>169</sup> Ibid.



their focus remains directly centered on the leader. In both works, the author plays the role of an advisor in his writing, lending perspective and guidance to a reader, who is presumed to be an executive in their own right. This perspective, although valuable, leaves a glaring gap in the academic literature. Since advisors exist to guide leaders, who then offers guidance on how best to offer someone else advice? This thesis argues the wide-ranging domain of leadership literature benefits from a new way of thinking about advice with an advisor-centric perspective and will address this further in the recommendations section.

As highlighted by Barbara Kellerman in her work *The End of Leadership*, the study of leadership has evolved over time and even exists today as a cottage industry whereby corporate leadership programs are marketed as solutions to leadership development.<sup>170</sup> While much of the modern era of leadership literature has focused on the leader as an individual, Kellerman asserts that 21st century leadership theory is shifting the focus to the follower and the importance of good followership. As she explains:

Part of the problem is with mistaken assumptions. We think leadership is static—it is not... we think of context as being of secondary or even tertiary importance—which is wrong-headed. We think leader-centrally—that being a leader is better and more important than being a follower. Wrong again.<sup>171</sup>

In applying Kellerman's explanation, anyone who is not the leader is by default a follower. Advisors therefore would meet this definition. However, this thesis embraces the role of an advisor as a uniquely positioned follower, one that can and should offer meaningful guidance to leaders, particularly in the face of increasing complexity. This research supports the assertion that moving away from a leader-centric approach and toward one that embraces followership is warranted, particularly followers that are uniquely positioned to provide advice to leaders with executive decision-making responsibilities.

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<sup>170</sup> Barbara Kellerman, *The End of Leadership* (New York: Harper Business, 2012).

<sup>171</sup> Kellerman, *The End of Leadership*, xx.

### **3. An Understanding of Crisis Is Critical for Advisors in the Homeland and National Security Domains**

Advances in technology and the previously identified increases to interdependency highlight the need for new strategic approaches to managing crisis events. The pressures, constraints, lack of complete information and overall uncertainty associated with crises create significant challenges for leaders to navigate. Advisors who understand the evolution of crisis will benefit from a comprehension of the five critical tasks associated with managing crisis. Advisors would be well served to focus on the sense-making and decision-making tasks as their influence can be both meaningful and significant.

#### **B. THE ADVICE PROCESS FROM A PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE**

This work applies case study methodology to examine the perspective of practitioners who both give and receive advice. The selected case studies focused on cabinet-level officials with homeland and national security responsibilities who served as both the public leader of a bureaucratic governmental organization and also an advisor to a chief executive. Additional insight regarding the advice process is gleaned from analyzing relevant anecdotes expressed in each individual's own words. The case study review uses three dimensions: philosophy and approach to the advice process; the people and key characteristics associated with the advice process; and the advice process during an evolving crisis circumstance.

Based on this analysis and the findings identified in Chapter VII, the following conclusions regarding the advice process are significant factors impacting effectiveness:

- **Strong trust relationships:** The analysis demonstrates that all three case studies indicate trust relationships between chief executives and advisors are key components of effectiveness. The Ridge and Gates case studies demonstrate this aspect as central to their overall philosophy and approach to the advice process. Gates further asserts that strong trust relationships with and among other advisors is a contributing factor. For the Clinton case study, this feature was more noticeable in the people and characteristics of advisors with whom she worked closely.
- **Observation and adaptation to the chief executive:** Examples in both the Ridge and Clinton case studies demonstrate the importance of learning

the preferences of the chief executive and understanding how to interact and appeal to their particular style for absorbing information.

- **Candid and straightforward advice:** This aspect was most prominent in the Gates case study, but was identifiable within the Ridge case study as well. For Ridge, frank and honest advice manifested itself as direct access to the president when seeking to make his case for a cabinet-level department. While the Clinton text did not directly identify this factor, it was a significant aspect of the anecdote regarding the bin Laden raid, when Clinton provides this honest, candid advice on a very difficult, sensitive issue.

These conclusions are offered as the most salient observations based on the findings previously discussed.

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## IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to the conclusions offered in the previous chapter, this thesis attempts to further distill these conclusions with actionable guidance to benefit advisors and the public leaders they serve. These recommendations are not intended to provide a complete or comprehensive solution to ensure effectiveness and guarantee a successful advisor/advisee relationship; however, they do seek to contribute to addressing the previously identified gap in this discourse: providing advisor-centric advice to advisors. Recommendations are framed as advisor-centric but offered specifically for those who serve as advisors and public leaders who seek to ensure an effective relationship with advisors. There is also a recommendation to benefit advisors and public leaders jointly. Finally, recommendations for future study are offered to assist researchers interested to further explore this particular subject area.

### A. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ADVISORS

- **Recommendation 1:** Advisors should strive for, value, and actively maintain a relationship of mutual trust with the leaders they support and advisors with whom they interact.

The findings of the case study analysis highlight that a strong relationship of trust is a valuable component for an effective and successful relationship between a leader and an advisor. There was also enough evidence offered in case studies to suggest that trust relationships with other advisors is also advantageous, as was recommended by the Gates case study. While the idea of establishing trust with the executive seems like an obvious conclusion, it is interesting to note that examples of this trust relationship were prevalent with both long time loyalists and individuals with whom the advisor and executive were not well acquainted, as was the case with subject matter experts advising Ridge, the entire staff supporting Gates, or even the special envoys appointed by Clinton. In all cases, it appears that competency and adherence to the leader's established expectations were key features in effectiveness.

- **Recommendation 2:** Advisors should observe and adapt to the chief executive and the environmental conditions in which they exist.

As indicated in the findings section, a central component to the advice process is providing feedback in a manner in which it may best be absorbed by the executive decision maker. Observing, absorbing and adapting your own presentation style to that of the executive is not only advantageous, but essential to effectiveness. This recommendation also encompasses a certain amount of flexibility. The advisor has a responsibility to comprehend the preferences and expectations of the executive, but they also must become keenly aware of how the executive prefers to consume information, when they are open to absorbing an opposing viewpoint and how to frame an issue or decision so the executive may comprehend its complexity and address it at the most appropriate time and place. Advisors are most effective when they take time to observe, learn from and appeal to the analytical preferences of the leader. This may be the most valuable point an advisor can derive from this recommendation, that offering advice to an executive decision maker is far from a one-size-fits-all approach.

- **Recommendation 3:** Advisors should understand, appreciate, and practice the nuances of candid, frank and straightforward advice.

The case studies also highlighted the value of candid and honest advice; however, it is important to note that this alone is unlikely to lead to the effective and meaningful relationship an advisor seeks to cultivate. Honest and candid dialog is important, but in order to be effective, it must reflect the existence of the previous two recommendations (trust and adaptation).

Arguably the provision of honest, straightforward advice is the most important objective an advisor can pursue. It is the essence of being an advisor—someone who seeks to provide effective guidance and can speak “truth to power.” However, if an advisor lacks a meaningful trust relationship and fails to observe and adapt to the stylistic preferences or environmental conditions that exist, then any open, honest and candid input will not only be lost, but potentially misunderstood, misinterpreted or completely ignored. The provision of forthright information can often include numerous external factors, selecting the appropriate time and place, the appropriate audience and the

appropriate language. This thesis does not presume to study all of those conditions nor will it attempt to prescribe a specific solution, other than to suggest those conditions likely require significant experience and sensitivity on the part of the advisor and additional study.

## **B. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PUBLIC LEADERS WORKING WITH ADVISORS**

For the chief executive, there are key takeaways, as well.

- **Recommendation 1:** Public leaders should establish and cultivate a culture of advice.

The case studies illuminate the importance of establishing a culture of advice that is understood and embraced within the organization and amongst all advisors. This culture often includes clear expectations, particularly when it comes to frank and candid input. It is possible to cultivate an advice environment that respects the chain of command while also enables speaking truth to power. Candid and honest input is the cornerstone of sound advice and public leaders should embrace and endorse these objectives. However, executives should be clear about expectations and communicate them often. As noted in the findings section, the trust relationship is a mutual one and must exist for both the executive and the advisor.

- **Recommendation 2:** Public leaders should cultivate a stronger understanding of crisis decision making and the role advisors play in offering guidance.

This recommendation is rooted in the research of Boin et al., as they offer ample insight into the tasks associated with addressing crises. Advisors can offer valuable guidance and support in addressing the five critical tasks to manage crises events. This thesis argues for special attention paid to the sense-making and decision-making tasks and the role advisors play to support them during these critical phases.

### C. RECOMMENDATION FOR BOTH ADVISORS AND PUBLIC LEADERS

- **Recommendation 1:** Both advisors and public leaders should embrace the role of an advisor as a choice architect.

The most meaningful recommendation this thesis can offer is to suggest a new way of viewing the role of advisors who serve public leaders. Behavioral scientist and economist Richard Thaler and his research colleague Cass Sunstein argue that choice architecture, or “nudges,” are a pervasive part of how people make choices in their daily lives.<sup>172</sup> This thesis suggests that advisors and the leaders they support should embrace the role of advisors in providing a similar architecture for senior decision-makers. Simply put: advisors are choice architects responsible for creating the appropriate environment for leaders to make decisions.

This position is suggested by understanding Costa’s argument about complexity, that no one person can expect to solve increasingly complex problems alone. It is further supported through an understanding of crisis, when the sense-making and decision-making phases demand making determinations about a circumstance from weak and potentially unclear signals or incomplete information and further must appropriately sequence the decisions necessary to address the crisis under constraints of time.

The argument that advisors serve as choice architects is also rooted in an analysis of the case studies. Ridge acknowledges his reliance on a mix subject matter experts and personal aides to grasp the appropriate information needed to address evolving crisis in the anthrax event. Gates prominently recognizes his reliance on staff advisors to channel lower priority issues and ensure his focus would remain on the more pressing matters requiring attention. While Gates acknowledges this strategy would run risks, his leadership as the executive serves as an appropriate check and balance to the choice architects who may have failed to see the signs of an evolving crisis. Clinton describes a reliance on key staff to manage the day-to-day bureaucracy, make key choices about the diplomacy process and even guide sensitive negotiations. She played the role of a choice architect of sorts to the president, appealing to his analytical style during the decision to

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<sup>172</sup> Thaler and Sunstein, *Nudge*, 255.



launch the raid against Osama bin Laden. In a subtle way, Clinton's work to address the relationship with Pakistan helped frame the risk analysis from a political perspective.

Leaders simply do not have the time to manage and prioritize the myriad issues they face each day alone. They must empower the work of choice architects, with the appropriate checks and balances applied by the executive to structure the environments and agendas of the issues and decisions they face. Embracing advisors as choice architects and the advice process as a form of choice architecture goes beyond the one-dimensional definition of setting an agenda or serving as a gatekeeper to the executive. Choice architects are responsible for creating the environment and conditions for decision making. Thaler and Sunstein describe examples of small nudges to encourage better behavior through product placement or policy implementation. The same can be said for advisors, who must go beyond simply stating a position or advocating for a one-sided opinion. Advisors as choice architects are responsible for understanding the environmental conditions that lead to good decision making on the part of the executive and must work to identify or create the appropriate environmental factors when the executive can best receive, comprehend and synthesize the information needed to make good choices.

The challenge with choice architecture is a cynical view. Cynics would argue such a responsibility may be viewed as manipulative, exerting an undue influence over the decisions of the executive. This viewpoint may also identify choice architects as usurping control or exposing executives to potential abuses of power by lower tier staff. Yet, as is argued by Thaler and Sunstein, it is impossible to make choices free of the influence and bias of others. Choice architecture acknowledges the influence of others and advocates that through an open understanding and embrace of this relationship, both the leader and advisor can be clear to establish parameters and expectations that meet the needs of the leader. By adhering to this recommendation and embracing the role advisors play in serving as choice architects, both the advisor and executive decision maker can operate in the advisory relationship free of cynicism.

#### **D. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE STUDY**

This thesis provides a small contribution to a valuable dialog about the role of advisors and the need for leaders to value the team of advisors that support them. Furthermore, there is a distinct need to shift some of the leadership studies away from a leader-centric focus and toward a more robust advisor-centric examination of advisory arrangements within bureaucratic organizations. While this thesis makes the case for the value of leaders teaming up with advisors, future areas of research could explore the dynamics of group interaction and communication among and between advisors and the advisory arrangements, formal and informal, that may help or hurt the advice process. Future studies would benefit from a more robust examination of the advice process at different levels of government and whether or how such differences may influence recommendations for advisors.

Lastly, there is ample opportunity to expand the topic of crisis management and its impact on advisors and the outcomes of decisions. The topic of crises management, particularly in the homeland security, national security and public safety domains, is and will continue to be of significant interest to both academics and practitioners. Yet the way crises occur will likely continue to change as technology and interdependencies continue to evolve within and across societies. Both leaders and advisors will benefit from a better understanding of and appreciation for these conditions.

#### **E. CLOSING COMMENTS**

At the conclusion of the Correspondent's Association Dinner on Saturday, April 30, 2011, President Obama offered a final round of handshakes to the guests seated on the dais and then departed. Attendees were thanked by the emcee, and the mood shifted from a disciplined and attentive to a noisy and celebratory. Less than 24 hours later, President Obama would make another appearance before an audience; however, this one would be nationally televised and one of much greater significance.

On the evening of Sunday, May 1, the president announced a message of closure to a nearly decade-long manhunt for the mastermind behind the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. President Obama explained, "Tonight, I can report to the American

people and to the world that the United States has conducted an operation that killed Osama bin Laden, the leader of al Qaeda, and a terrorist who's responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent men, women, and children."<sup>173</sup> Obama's remarks continued, as he described the outcome of the raid and the process by which he arrived at authorizing such action. His description included a small, yet notable reference:

I met repeatedly with my national security team as we developed more information about the possibility that we had located bin Laden hiding within a compound deep inside of Pakistan. And finally, last week, I determined that we had enough intelligence to take action, and authorized an operation to get Osama bin Laden and bring him to justice.

The president's comment, though relatively discrete, highlights the role that advisors played in debating the merits of the information and action.

Earlier that same day and long before the public announcement, President Obama and his advisors gathered in the Situation Room at the White House. The meeting was called to monitor the activity on the ground as U.S. Special Forces carried out the raid in Abbottabad, Pakistan, targeting the suspected compound believed to be home to Osama bin Laden. Though the ultimate decision for authorizing the raid rested on the shoulders of President Obama, he was not without the input, guidance, debate and support of others in arriving at this decision.

Though public leaders at different levels of government rarely face decisions of this scale and complexity, public leadership at all levels of government share one significant feature in common with this example. Public leaders are ultimately responsible for making these important decisions; however, they do not do so alone or without the support and guidance of a team of advisors.

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<sup>173</sup> Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Osama Bin Laden," *The White House*, accessed February 4, 2017, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/blog/2011/05/02/osama-bin-laden-dead>.

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