

The National Security Council and Synchronization for Multi-Domain Operations

A Monograph

by

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Abstract

The National Security Council and Synchronization for Multi-Domain Operations, by MAJ Jonathan J. Batt, US Army, 57 pages.

The National Security Council (NSC) is the locus of strategic policy planning for the United States, as it serves as the statutory strategic coordinating cell for the President. With the recent shift toward great power competition, consideration must be given to how the military and interagency integrate into policy at the strategic and operational levels of war. This study seeks to examine how the United States conducts strategic planning to understand the implications for the US effort in preparing for great power conflict and large scale combat operations.

Recommendations from this study include making structural improvements in the NSC system that establish the importance of strategic planning, policy evaluation, and talent management. To accomplish this, both legislative and executive measures should be implemented to support progressive change. The study concludes by offering that synchronizing strategy across the interagency is a complex problem with no perfect solution. Instead, incremental changes should be made to improve the system with continued study focused on refining the process given a changing environment.

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Acronyms

ADP	Army Doctrine Publication
ADRP	Army Doctrine Reference Publication
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CJCS	Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff
DOD	Department of Defense
DOS	Department of State
FM	Field Manual
GWOT	Global War on Terror
IA	Interagency
JCS	Joint Chiefs of Staff
JP	Joint Publication
JPME	Joint Professional Military Education
LSCO	Large-Scale Combat Operations
MDO	Multi-Domain Operations
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NDU	National Defense University
NME	National Military Establishment
NSC	National Security Council
NSS	National Security Strategy
OCB	Operations Coordinating Board

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Introduction

When the US undertakes military operations, the Armed Forces of the United States are only one component of a national-level effort involving all instruments of national power. Instilling unity of effort at the national level is necessarily a cooperative endeavor involving a number of USG departments and agencies. In certain operations, agencies of states, localities, or foreign countries may also be involved. The President establishes guidelines for civil-military integration and disseminates decisions and monitors execution through the NSC.

—*Joint Publication 1, Doctrine for the Armed Forces of the United States*

In 2017, the United States Army initiated a doctrinal shift in its organizational thinking on future conflict. Deviating from their recent experience fighting low-intensity conflicts, Army leadership asserted that preparing for large-scale combat operations (LSCO) against a peer-threat is the new paramount readiness priority. *FM 3-0: Operations*, described this problem as one in which “our nation’s adversaries seek to achieve their strategic aims, short of conflict, by the use of *layered stand-off* in the political, military and economic realms to separate the United States from our partners.”¹ This perspective on the threat of great power competition facing the United States and the ambitious paradigm shift underway to address it have raised numerous new questions within the military with respect to force employment at each level of war. Notably, while the military’s progress on understanding these challenges is contentious at-best, it is an area of thought that is largely unexplored in the interagency. This situation is untenable for the military, as the interagency is identified as a critical component in great power conflict and LSCO.² To effectively counter this problem, the United States must do more than transform its military—it must evolve how it approaches strategic planning throughout the whole of government.

¹ US Department of the Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), iii.

² James Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 5.

The purpose of this study is to survey how the United States conducts strategic planning to understand the implications for the military's effort in preparing for great power conflict. The 2018 US *National Defense Strategy* (NDS) states that “a long-term strategic competition requires the seamless integration of multiple elements of national power—diplomacy, information, economics, finance, intelligence, law enforcement, and military.”³ Correspondingly, the 2017 *National Security Strategy* (NSS) warns that:

Our diplomatic, intelligence, military, and economic agencies have not kept pace with the changes in the character of competition. America's military must be prepared to operate across a full spectrum of conflict, across multiple domains at once. To meet these challenges we must also upgrade our political and economic instruments to operate across these environments. Bureaucratic inertia is powerful. But so is the talent, creativity, and dedication of Americans. By aligning our public and private sector efforts we can field a Joint Force that is unmatched.⁴

Acknowledging these deficiencies is the first step in preparing for the real challenges of reforming to mitigate the current shortfalls, competing short of war, and dominating in LSCO. The fact that the current defense strategic decision-making process has been flawed since its inception is beyond dispute.⁵ Many have even gone as far as to call the current Global War on Terror (GWOT) “astrategic,” harkening back to the Vietnam-era saying that the “United States was not in Vietnam for ten years but rather for only one year, ten times over.”⁶ This strategic ineptitude precludes approaching even the most fundamental level of success in great power conflict which requires a steady strategic hand to steer a whole of government approach. Further,

³ Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 4.

⁴ Donald J. Trump, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, 2017), 28.

⁵ Amy Zegart, *Flawed By Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 9.

⁶ Hew Strachan, *The Direction of War: Contemporary Strategy in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 11; Edward Luttwak, “On the Need to Reform American Strategy,” in *Planning U.S. Security*, ed. Philip S. Kronenberg (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), 22.

the United States is currently assessed as “only marginally able” to succeed in major combat operations in great power conflict to secure its vital interests.⁷

As early as 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville noted the inherent challenges in long-term foreign policy and strategic management for democracies, yet reforming the national security decision-making process has been accomplished periodically in the United States with positive results.⁸ To be sure, the role of the statesman in leading US national security policy is paramount, especially in great power competition short of war. These statesmen must be educated with a thorough understanding of not just strategy, but also of managing the interagency bureaucracy. Strategic theorists such as Carl von Clausewitz and Liddell Hart repeatedly commented on the importance of understanding national security decision-making and strategy. Hart promoted the interrelatedness of politics and war noting that “the role of grand strategy—higher strategy—is to coordinate and direct all the resources of a nation, or band of nations, towards the attainment of the political object of the war—the goal defined by fundamental policy.”⁹ He, as countless others have since, asserted that political leaders are vital to the wider strategic war effort. Eliot Cohen wrote “when politicians abdicate their role in making those decisions, the nation has a problem.”¹⁰ Great statesmen lead their strategic policymaking process while enabling their operational agencies with synchronized guidance.¹¹

⁷ Dakota L. Wood ed., *2019 Index of U.S. Military Strength* (Washington, DC: Heritage Foundation, 2019), 7.

⁸ Amos A. Jordan, William J. Taylor, Jr., and Michael J. Mazarr, *American National Security, 5th ed.* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 49; Sam C. Sarkesian, John Allen Williams, and Stephen J. Cimbala. *US National Security: Policymakers, Processes & Politics* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), 49; Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, eds. Harvey Mansfield and Delba Winthrop (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 129-130, 218-219. Alexis de Tocqueville argued that the President and his external (foreign) policy machinery are inherently constrained by the democratic system relative to other forms of government. This point is further reinforced by James Madison in *Federalist #10* and later, more concisely, by Winston Churchill before the House of Commons.

⁹ B.H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy* (New York: Penguin, 1954), 322.

¹⁰ Eliot A. Cohen, *Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002), 14.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

For the President of the United States, the potentially greatest asset in leading strategic policymaking is the National Security Council (NSC). The NSC, theoretically, at least, is the locus of strategic policy planning for the United States, as it serves as the statutory strategic coordinating cell for the President. The NSC was established by the National Security Act of 1947. It was charged to “advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.”¹² The size and composition of the council has varied over time, based on the preferences of the sitting President, but there is little in the way of formal mandates outside of its core structure. This flexibility can provide the President significant capacity in coordinating his national security priorities, as many scholars have noted, he can expand the NSC staff as required to account for emergent concerns. Unfortunately, as recent research indicates, growing the size of NSC staff does not correlate with increased performance; several other critical factors are much more influential in the effectiveness of the process.¹³

The first objective in understanding how the United States conducts strategic planning with respect to great power conflict, is to understand the role of the NSC and the interagency process. Hew Strachan asserted that “strategy lies at the interface between operational capabilities and political objectives: it is the glue which binds each to the other and gives both sense. But it is even more than that: it is based on a recognition of the nature of war itself.”¹⁴ It is the NSC that

¹² *National Security Act of 1947*, Public Law 253. U.S. 61 Stat. 496 (1947), 2.

¹³ David Rothkopf, *National Insecurity: American Leadership in an Age of Fear* (New York: Public Affairs, 2016), 359; Jason Galui and Sean R. McMahon, “Personality and Process: An Analysis of National Security Decision-making.” Paper presented at ISSS-IS 2018 Conference, US Military Academy, November 2018, 4. The majority of authors point to historic cases studies and interviews with former NSC leaders that consistently assert the value of a “small” NSC staff.

¹⁴ Strachan, *The Direction of War*, 12.

facilitates the development of the political objectives that sets strategy on its course. The NSC then serves as the interface that supports interagency integration mentioned in the NSS, NDS, and agency manuals throughout the government.¹⁵ Therefore the NSC staff must be well-organized as well as educated on both strategic studies and the bureaucracy to staff the process as deliberative, inclusive, and just as possible.¹⁶ Inherent in any well-organized organization are quality relationships; these interagency relationships set the standard for those at subordinate echelons to emulate.¹⁷ While the details of these relationships are beyond the scope of this study, understanding the nature and processes present within the NSC that drive them is critical.

The second objective of this study is to conceptualize the theoretical dynamics within the NSC process to discern what traits are most influential to its success. As described by former National Security Advisor and retired Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft, success in the NSC process is the production of a set of options for the President that is inclusive of the interagency.¹⁸ Inclusivity, flexibility, and adaptability are critical to preventing interagency friction which can desynchronize subsequent efforts.¹⁹ Without an integrated interagency effort, lower level planning cannot be predictably accomplished, and often forces agencies to revert to reactive rather than proactive planning modes. When agencies are in a reactive posture to their own leadership, it is near-impossible to be effectively proactive against adversaries. With respect to

¹⁵ Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 5.

¹⁶ Vincent Auger, "The National Security Council System After the Cold War," in *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, eds. Karl Inderfurth and Loch Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 120; Galui and McMahon, "Personality and Process," 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 120.

¹⁸ George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Vintage Books, 1999), 35.

¹⁹ F. G. Hoffman, "U.S. Defense Policy and Strategy," in *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, ed. R. D. Hooker, Jr. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2016), 47.

the Department of Defense (DOD), strategic shaping operations are critically enabled by the interagency. If the DOD cannot rely on its interagency partners, then its operational planning efforts will be stymied. A catastrophic example of this type of failure across the interagency is evident in the handling of post-invasion Iraq.²⁰ This situation produces the antithesis of strategy, according to Hart, as the absence of an effective decision-making process produced greater conflict for the United States when it could have been avoided.

By gaining an appreciation for how the United States conducts strategic planning, the role of the NSC, and the key variables influencing the NSC process, it becomes clear that reforms are necessary to ensure the United States can continue to deter, prevent, and prepare for great power conflict. This study presents the argument for this assertion by first discussing the history of the NSC process and its adaptations in section two. Section three discusses the key theories and theorists that affect strategic decision-making. Section four explores existing recommendations for improving interagency effectiveness. And finally, the fifth section provides new recommendations for improvement in the NSC process. These sections progressively build on existing and new arguments for strategic reform in support of the hypothesis for this study: In order to provide strategic synchronization across the elements of national power and functional domains, the US government should adopt enhanced policy evaluation and personnel reforms into its national security policy system.

²⁰ Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 345; Bartholomew Sparrow, *The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security* (New York: Public Affairs, 2015), 536. The de-Ba'athification initiative was not thoroughly vetted in the interagency process or approved by the Joint Staff, CIA, or State Department leading to the devastating policy announcement. Joel D. Rayburn and Frank K. Sobchak, eds., *The U.S. Army in the Iraq War – Volume 1: Invasion – Insurgency – Civil War, 2003-2006* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2019), 111, 133-134.

History of the NSC

Throughout history, mixtures of maneuver and firepower have contended on a thousand battlefields. Maneuver has generally been the less costly course; but firepower has always been the surer course, and has demanded merely an outright superiority in means. But even in the face of superior firepower and superior resources, maneuver in all its forms—tactical, operational, theater-strategic and developmental, as well as the highest maneuver of grand strategy—has always done better than an outright comparison of forces would reveal and often has prevailed.

—Edward Luttwak, *Planning U.S. Security*

Creation and Early Development

This section surveys the existing literature on NSC reforms to achieve an optimized national security decision-making process, history of the NSC, and the legislative and executive actions that have shaped strategic policy planning. Existing scholarship in this area is largely focused on the size and efficiency of the NSC policy process. There is a gap in the literature on the effects of the NSC on whole of government operations below the strategic level. Often, the whole of government issue is addressed at the strategic level with discussions on agencies filibustering initiatives or being excluded from the process.²¹ While the NSC certainly should not be involved with direction at the operational level of war, it clearly serves to enable campaigns and operations across the national security apparatus. Since the NSC is outside the Department of Defense (DOD) and does not direct military operations itself, there is also a gap in understanding on how strategic policy translates to operational objectives. These gaps and the absence of a structural mechanism to mitigate them are the subject of this study. This study examines the adaptation of the council over time and how its current structure facilitates long-range synchronization of strategy in support of multi-domain operations against near-peer competitors. As previously noted, establishing synchronized strategy, the highest form of maneuver, is critical

²¹ Robert Pope, *US Interagency Regional Foreign Policy Implementation: A Survey of Current Practice and an Analysis of Options for Improvement* (Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2014), 57.

for large scale combat operations (LSCO) and operational level planning in each of the joint phases.

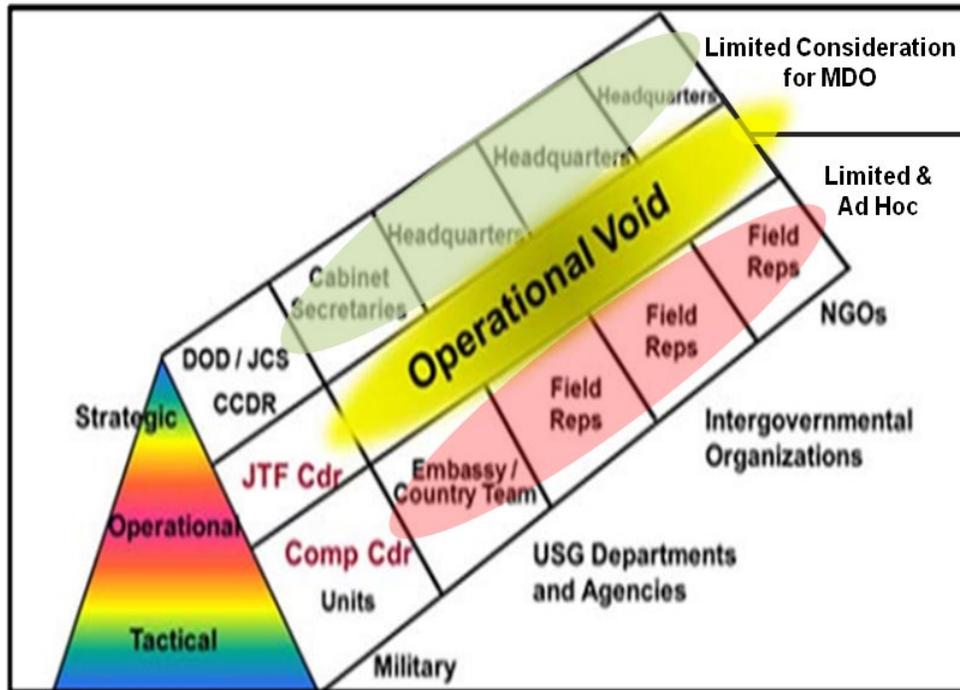


Figure 1. Interagency Coordination Void at the Operational Level. Joint Staff, J-7, “Interorganizational Cooperation” (Suffolk, VA: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 5. The base graphic appears in the J-7 Focus Paper with the “Limited Consideration for MDO” and “Limited and Ad Hoc” notes added by the author.

The National Security Council evolved out of the legislative and bureaucratic struggle to resolve structural strategic planning deficiencies identified during World War II.²² Despite the identified need for reform, stakeholders from the military departments (the DOD did not yet exist), Congress, and the White House each sought measures that focused more on maximizing their relative influence, rather than maximizing national security preparedness.²³ This is unsurprising, as it is in line with the view of sociological institutionalists whom argue that

²² Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 340. Additionally, the Standing Liaison Committee and State-War-Navy Coordinating Committee were previously established to coordinate defense policy in a similar fashion as the later-proposed NSC. Due to lack of enabling legislation, staff, parochial attitudes, and general obscurity, they failed to gain legitimacy.

²³ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 56-57; Christopher Shoemaker, *The NSC Staff: Counseling the Council* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1991), 8-9.

“organizations often adopt a new institutional practice, not because it enhances the means-ends efficiency of the organization but because it enhances the social legitimacy of the organization or its participants.”²⁴ The result produced legislation that failed to satisfy any of the stakeholders in Congress or the executive branch but still succeeded in laying the foundation for the modern national security decision-making process. The National Security Act of 1947 became this foundation.

The National Security Act formally established the NSC, Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and made other modifications within the National Military Establishment (NME), such as the creation of an independent Air Force.²⁵ The legislation has been updated numerous times since its original passage, as major defense reform initiatives have sought to streamline or correct deficiencies in the NME, later renamed as the Department of Defense in the 1949 amendment. The 1949 amendment also established the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (CJCS). Other significant amendments were passed in 1953, 1958, and 1986.²⁶

Section 101 of the original act described the nature of the NSC “to advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the military services and the other departments and agencies of the Government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security.”²⁷ When amended in 1949, the reorganization removed the military service secretaries from their positions on the council, enhancing the position of Secretary of Defense and the relative strength of the

²⁴ Peter A. Hall, and Rosemary Taylor, “Political Science and the Three New Institutionalisms,” *Political Studies* 44, no. 5 (December 1996): 949.

²⁵ *National Security Act of 1947*, Public Law 253. U.S. 61 Stat. 496 (1947).

²⁶ Robert Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power: A Critical Examination of the U.S. National Security System* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2015), 300-303; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 78-85.

²⁷ *National Security Act of 1947*, Public Law 253. U.S. 61 Stat. 496 (1947), 2.

Secretary of State. Despite his advocacy of such a reform in his campaign, President Harry Truman's participation in the NSC process was tepid at first.²⁸ His direct participation in the council increased over time, especially after the 1949 reorganization and outbreak of the Korean War.²⁹

Upon taking office in 1953, President Dwight Eisenhower began transforming the NSC staff into an efficient coordinating system, akin to the staffing processes used by the US Army. This initiative was headed by Robert Cutler. Cutler's recommended "policy hill" process became the framework for the NSC staff and secured him the position as first Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (APNSA) on March 23, 1953.³⁰ Eisenhower along with Cutler continued to improve on the NSC structure, personnel, and process. Following the recommendations of the Jackson committee for national security policy, they established the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB) to coordinate the implementation of policy.³¹ The operation of the OCB was established by Executive Order 10483 and four years later refined by Executive Orders 10700, formally moving the OCB under the NSC.³² As initially tasked in EO 10483, the OCB would:

Advise with the agencies concerned as to:

- (a) their detailed operational planning responsibilities respecting such policy,
- (b) the coordination of the interdepartmental aspects of the detailed operational plans developed by the agencies to carry out such policy,

²⁸ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 56.

²⁹ In his first three years with the NSC system, President Truman attended 10 of 55 NSC meetings. Following the reorganization and outbreak of the Korean War, Truman attended 64 of 71 NSC meetings. US Department of State, Office of the Historian, "History of the National Security Council, 1947-1997," accessed October 12, 2018, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/nsc/history.html>.

³⁰ John Prados, *Keepers of the Keys: A History of the National Security Council from Truman to Bush* (New York: William Morrow, 1991), 63; Peter Shinkle, *Ike's Mystery Man: The Secret Lives of Robert Cutler* (Hanover, NH: Steerforth Press, 2018), 108-109; Robert Cutler, *No Time for Rest* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1966), 299-300. Cutler developed the Policy Hill process as "the Chief Executive's best protection against pressure for *ex parte* decisions, against special pleading, imprecise guidance, and suppression of conflicting views."

³¹ Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 64.

³² *Ibid.*, 65.

- (c) the timely and coordinated execution of such policy and plans, and
- (d) the execution of each security action or project so that it shall make Its full contribution to the attainment of national security objectives and to the particular climate of opinion the United States is seeking to achieve in the world.³³

The OCB would also “initiate new proposals for action within the framework of national security policies in response to opportunity and changes in the situation.”³⁴ The organizational structure created by Eisenhower’s team institutionally separated the planning and synchronized execution of policy, preventing current operations from overwhelming future planning efforts.³⁵ This would be a key lesson learned by Staff Secretary General Andrew Goodpaster whom would take many lessons forward to influence the next generation of strategic leaders. Not without criticism, Eisenhower’s methodical staffing system, policy hill, and the OCB would not survive long beyond his tenure.

Stagnation within the NSC process followed the Eisenhower administration as President John Kennedy applied a more informal process to developing national security policy. Kennedy, relying on a smaller core group of trusted advisers, sought to avoid the lengthy policy hill-paper mill process of his predecessor.³⁶ Kennedy’s views were reinforced by Senator Jackson’s subcommittee for national policy machinery which in 1961 issued its final report. Key among these findings was that “the President should at all times have the help and protection of a small personal staff whose members work outside the system.”³⁷ While collegial, the Kennedy system did not promote long-term strategic synchronization and degraded the NSC process, potentially

³³ Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Executive Order 10483*, 3 C.F.R. (1953).

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ C. Richard Nelson, *The Life and Work of General Andrew J. Goodpaster* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 118, 289.

³⁶ David Austerwald, “The Evolution of the NSC Process,” in *The National Security Enterprise: Navigating the Labyrinth*, eds. Roger Z. George and Harvey Rishikof (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2011), 37.

³⁷ Karl Inderfurth and Loch Johnson, “Transformation,” in *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, eds. Karl Inderfurth and Loch Johnson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 63-65.

contributing to the Bay of Pigs invasion planning mistakes.³⁸ This practice of working ‘outside the system’ can be effective in limited application, but is likely to degrade the national security decision making process in extended use.

President Lyndon Johnson continued to reduce the prominence of the NSC system, also relying primarily on a close group of advisers rather than a formal process. His principal venue for considering national security policy resided in his Tuesday lunch group which essentially consisted of the NSC core group.³⁹ This forum promoted the close-hold debate that Johnson preferred but also created confusion between the different department staffs that were not privy to detailed notes from the meetings. The lunches also continued the weakening of the NSC staff process which suffered through two consecutive administrations of atrophy. Further, Walt Rostow whom replaced McGeorge Bundy was never formally appointed the position of National Security Advisor.⁴⁰ This demotion was symbolic of the larger power shift inside the NSC process, as the State Department assumed leadership of the senior interdepartmental group and the interdepartmental regional group. The elevation of President Richard Nixon (an eight-year veteran of Eisenhower’s NSC) and Henry Kissinger would partially remedy this trend.

Bringing order to national security planning and re-establishing the NSC system as a focal policymaking body were priorities for Nixon. As a tenet of his campaign, Nixon highlighted how inept use of the NSC had lead to missed opportunities in foreign relations. Kissinger sought to apply the best practices of previous administrations to find a position between Eisenhower’s rigidity and Johnson’s informality.⁴¹ In addition to the procedural process changes, Kissinger increased the size of the staff and redesigned the structure of the entire organization.

³⁸ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 64.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁴⁰ Austerwald, “The Evolution of the NSC Process,” 38; Prados, *Keepers of the Keys*, 267. Rostow and Bundy has been designated to less prestigious “Special Assistant” positions rather than the formal National Security Advisor position.

⁴¹ Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 67.

These measures produced a distinct system, which became known as the “Kissinger Apparatus.”⁴² Despite these deliberate reforms, the personalities of Nixon and Kissinger would become the driving factors in the national security decision-making process. Kissinger was famously ambitious and intelligent, developing a cadre of talent around him through which he could exert personal influence across the government, and in legacy through subsequent administrations.⁴³ Nixon also possessed a brilliant intellect but was more secretive and suspicious. He shared the same concern for leaks as Johnson (and likely all Presidents).⁴⁴ But instead of restructuring the system, Nixon and Kissinger continued to use the NSC staff, exclusive of members they distrusted. This modus operandi led to Kissinger’s unique appointment to both the National Security Advisor and Secretary of State positions concurrently.⁴⁵ This arrangement provided Kissinger a disproportionate amount of clout in the executive branch given the withdrawal of Nixon amid ongoing scandals. With the resignation of Nixon and arrival of Gerald Ford, some normalcy would return to the system, starting with the appointment of Lieutenant General Brent Scowcroft as National Security Advisor.

LTG Scowcroft came into the national security decision making process as a colonel when he was detailed to the White House as Military Assistant to the President.⁴⁶ He had been a diligent student of international relations, earning a master’s degree and a PhD in political science from Columbia University before teaching at the US Military Academy and Air Force Academy respectively.⁴⁷ Under mentorship from a litany of senior military and civilian leaders in both the

⁴² Inderfurth and Johnson, *Fateful Decisions*, 68.

⁴³ David Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of the American Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2005), 19-20.

⁴⁴ Auerswald, “The Evolution of the NSC Process,” 38-39.

⁴⁵ Secretary Kissinger served as both the Secretary of State and National Security Advisor from September 22, 1973 to November 3, 1975.

⁴⁶ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 78.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 33-54.

White House and Pentagon, he honed his understanding of the complex national security bureaucracy. With this understanding, he knew the National Security Advisor could best fulfill his duties as a civilian. Rather than remain in uniform, potentially constraining himself and drawing unusual political attention to the military, he chose to retire from uniformed service shortly after his appointment as the ninth National Security Advisor. Wise to the influence of Kissinger, Scowcroft sought to establish himself similarly to General Goodpaster— as an independent honest broker.⁴⁸ Scowcroft thought it most appropriate to serve as an honest broker for the process to ensure that the President received the greatest agency from his NSC system. This approach combined with numerous smaller organizational improvements, would set the standard for the modern NSC process that he would further refine in his later term as the National Security Advisor for President George H.W. Bush.⁴⁹

The Contemporary NSC

On 26 November 1989, then President-elect George H.W. Bush called Brent Scowcroft to his residence to ask a difficult question. The two had served together previously in numerous capacities and had become close friends. Bush, suspected that Scowcroft would prefer to serve in a cabinet capacity but knew that the best place for him would be to serve again as his National Security Advisor.⁵⁰ The team that President Bush assembled was remarkably experienced and professionally collegial. Already well-seasoned in the US bureaucracy, his team had a shared understanding of the NSC process they were following and how to make it work for them. This understanding is critical, allowing leaders to let the process serve them rather than having to drive the process, or worse, circumvent their own system as was noted in several of the previous administrations.

⁴⁸ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 181.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 268.

Another advantage of the Bush NSC was that it was the direct beneficiary of the Tower Commission report that focused on improving the NSC system. Following the Iran-Contra scandal, President Ronald Regan and Congress sought to understand how the NSC system had failed to produce responsible policy. The stated purpose of the commission was to conduct “a comprehensive study of the future role and procedures of the National Security Council staff in the development, coordination, oversight and conduct of foreign and national security policy.”⁵¹ Scowcroft was appointed to the commission to investigate these deficiencies along with former Senator John Tower and former Secretary of State Edmund Muskie. The hard lessons learned from this scandal in ethical conduct and NSC operations were well understood by not only the NSC staff (who saw their boss attempt suicide and colleague Colonel Oliver North criminally prosecuted), but also then-Vice-President Bush and General Colin Powell whom had partial or full knowledge of the activities.⁵²

The emerging NSC system from 1989 became universally known as the ‘Scowcroft Model’ for the NSC, known to some as the “gold standard.”⁵³ Despite its status as the benchmark for assessing National Security Advisors and their systems, it is not a system without flaw. Notably it lacked a long range planning process. Scowcroft himself commented on the utility of such a cell but noted that the concept failed in his system, suffering from indiscipline in management.⁵⁴

⁵¹ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 247.

⁵² Ibid., 249-260; President’s Special Review Board, *Report of the President’s Special Review Board* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1987), IV-1. The Tower Commission cited a “flawed process” and a “failure of responsibility” as issues to correct with respect to the NSC process. They also provided eight other specific recommendations in addition to their principal recommendation.

⁵³ Chester Crocker, Daniel Levin, David C. Miller, Jr., and Thomas R. Pickering, *A Foundational Proposal for the Next Administration* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, 2016), 6; Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 490.

⁵⁴ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 485; Brent Scowcroft, “The Role of the National Security Advisor,” Oral History Roundtables, October 25, 1999, 20-21.

National Security Planning During the Global War on Terror

The 9/11 attacks and Global War on Terror (GWOT) brought new challenges for President George W. Bush's administration as it attempted to understand the threat facing the nation in a deeply chaotic environment. While historians often note that seemingly new problems actually have historical, sometimes repeated precedent, the ambiguity of the threat at the time provided a challenge for those attempting to understand the situation. This crisis resulted in a broad expansion of efforts around the world, across emerging domains of conflict. President Bush struggled with the reinvigorated spectrum of simultaneous global challenges and focusing the expansive US military effort. Correspondingly, the size of the NSC staff grew to account for these emerging issue areas and response instruments.

In addition to the emerging trans-national challenges to US national security, personality issues within the NSC degraded the effectiveness of the Bush presidency from within. These personality issues undermined the NSC process with former colleagues and friends unable to find ways to work productively with one another. This rift extended from the Principals into the subordinate ranks, as the Vice President amassed a personal staff that rivaled the NSC staff. The situation became such an impediment that it led Secretary of State Colin Powell to remark to National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice "Why doesn't the President just square the circle? One of us needs to go."⁵⁵ With personality conflicts that could no longer be ignored after the 2004 election, Bush finally sought to mitigate this friction. By bringing in Robert Gates as Secretary of Defense, promoting Steven Hadley up to National Security Advisor (from his deputy position), and moving Condoleezza Rice to Secretary of State, a new dynamic was created which brought more fidelity to the NSC process. Additionally, Bush implemented a cell within the NSC

⁵⁵ Condoleezza Rice, *No Higher Honor: A Memoir of My Years in Washington* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2011), 22. In his question, Secretary Powell was referring to the NSC Principals.

to track the performance of policy implementation and execution.⁵⁶ By utilizing a separate cell to provide an unbiased assessment for NSC policies in execution, Bush mitigated the potential for staffers and advisers to provide more favorable judgments on projects with which they were involved. Taken together, these major changes provided a distinctly better NSC process for his second term.

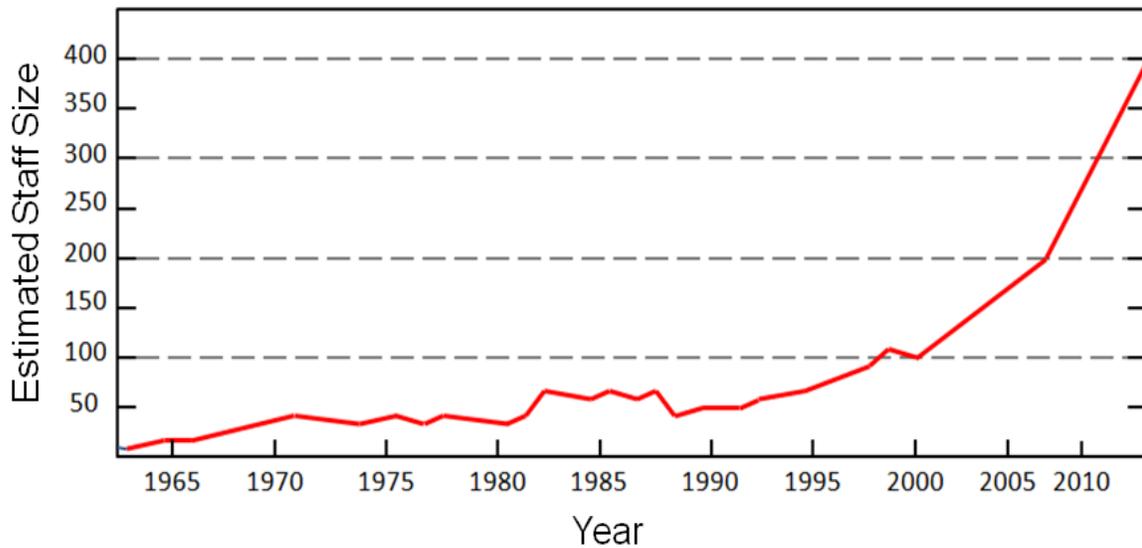


Figure 2. NSC Staff Size Estimates (1965-2015). Created by the author from Karen DeYoung, *How the Obama White House Runs Foreign Policy* and Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler, “A New NSC for a New Administration.”

The Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986

Following a series of notable military failures and an extensive legislative effort to improve the national security apparatus, the Goldwater-Nichols Act was signed by President Reagan on October 4, 1986. As stated in the introduction of the act, its purpose was:

- (1) to reorganize the Department of Defense and strengthen civilian authority in the Department;
- (2) to improve the military advice provided to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense;
- (3) to place clear responsibility on the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands for the accomplishment of missions assigned to those commands;

⁵⁶ Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 345.

- (4) to ensure that the authority of the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands is fully commensurate with the responsibility of those commanders for the accomplishment of missions assigned to their commands;
- (5) to increase attention to the formulation of strategy and to contingency planning;
- (6) to provide for more efficient use of defense resources;
- (7) to improve joint officer management policies; and
- (8) otherwise to enhance the effectiveness of military operations and improve the management and administration of the Department of Defense.⁵⁷

This landmark law significantly changed the strategic command structure of the military, organization, and personnel management for the services. Streamlining the chain of command structure from the combatant commands directly to the President removed several layers of bureaucracy and facilitated communication out to field commanders. Formalizing a Joint Professional Military Education (JPME) program also created a renewed focus on professional development for more senior positions of leadership. JPME centers such as the National Defense University and war colleges serve to educate officers from across the military as well as civilians from the interagency on the range of joint military and whole of government operations.⁵⁸ To support education in whole of government operations, the Deputy Commandant of the National War College has been a civilian diplomat since George Kennan was first appointed to that position in 1946.⁵⁹ Lastly, the Goldwater-Nichols Act designated the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS) as the principal military adviser to the National Security Council, attending meetings as required by the President.⁶⁰ With these changes fostering a renewed focus

⁵⁷ *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, Public Law 99-433, 100 Stat. 992 (1986), 3-4.

⁵⁸ "History," National Defense University, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://www.ndu.edu/About/History/>.

⁵⁹ "Mission and Vision," National War College, accessed December 15, 2018, <https://nwc.ndu.edu/About/Vision-Mission/>.

⁶⁰ *Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986*, Public Law 99-433, 100 Stat. 992 (1986), 15-21.

on military professionalism, administrations since 1986 have benefitted from increased quality of personnel and military support for national security initiatives.

Contemporary Doctrine

At the time of the Goldwater-Nichols Act, AirLand Battle doctrine was the prevailing conceptual understanding of how the military would fight. AirLand Battle was oriented towards great power conflict in Europe with a focus on large-scale maneuver. This doctrine would evolve as different warfighting domains matured, but eventually became marginalized when the military shifted focus to its critical counterinsurgency and low-intensity operations during the Global War on Terror (GWOT). The recent reduction of conventional forces operating in support of the GWOT has allowed the United States to once again evaluate its strategic situation and future threats. With the resurgence of great power conflict, the US military sought to improve its existing doctrinal view of war. The result of this initiative has been the Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) doctrine that places a renewed focus on leveraging interagency operations short of conflict. As discussed in the introduction, the MDO and large-scale combat operations (LSCO) conceptual understandings of war require a well-synchronized strategy for confronting peer adversaries. As witnessed during the 1980's in the Cold War, the need to prepare for LSCO is necessary but not sufficient to achieve the strategic ends, as direct-action conflict may not eventuate.

There are still notable structural gaps at the tactical level of war as the US military prepares for LSCO with its new MDO doctrine, but even more significant vulnerabilities lie at the operational and strategic levels. At the strategic level, JP 3-08 acknowledges that for domestic operations “USG departments and agencies aspire to a whole of government approach” but “for international operations, there is no similarly robust interagency framework with equivalent

statutory authorities or designated interagency roles and responsibilities.”⁶¹ As noted in Figure 1, the Joint Staff has acknowledged a void at the operational level for effective interagency coordination. The Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) concept was launched in 2000 to address this gap but is in limited use and scope within the Combatant Commands.⁶² JIACGs “complement the interagency coordination that takes place at the national strategic level through the DOD and the NSC. Members participate in planning and provide links back to their parent civilian departments and agencies to help synchronize combatant command operations with their efforts.”⁶³

The fact that the JIACGs are known to exist with limited scope and without formal interagency tasking authority, demonstrates the lack of a whole-hearted commitment to whole of government efforts at the operational level.⁶⁴ Several other organizational models have been introduced to resolve this dissonance but the JIACG remains the doctrinal solution to this problem despite its glaring deficiencies. While passable in the GWOT campaigns, this voluntary, incomplete, and anemic system is not compatible with the requirements of MDO. TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, *The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, provides an in depth discussion of context, tenets, conduct, and underlying assumptions of MDO. Interoperability with the interagency is a critical theme throughout the publication, with three of the ten key assumptions requiring interagency capabilities;

⁶¹ US Department of Defense, Joint Staff, *Joint Publication (JP) 3-08, Interorganizational Cooperation* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), I-6.

⁶² Neyla Arnas, Charles Barry, and Robert B. Oakley, *Harnessing the Interagency for Complex Operations* (Washington, DC: Center for Technology and National Security Policy, National Defense University, 2005), 9.

⁶³ US Joint Staff, *JP 3-08, Interorganizational Cooperation*, II-12.

⁶⁴ Robert Pope, *US Interagency Regional Foreign Policy Implementation*, 12-15.

Baseline Assumptions

[1.c.] Except for an immediate response to a national emergency, the Army will conduct operations as part of joint, interagency, and multinational teams.

Fundamental Assumptions

[2.a.] Adversaries will challenge U.S. interests by means and with ways below the threshold of armed conflict and short of what the U.S. considers war.

[2.f.] U.S. and partner government agencies, headquarters, and fielded forces will develop and sustain sufficient interoperability between Services, government agencies, and allies to conduct combined operations that deter and defeat adversaries.⁶⁵

Section Summary

Since its inception in 1947, the NSC has consistently adapted to serve the national decision-making preferences of the President. In this progression, both practitioners and legislators contributed to improving the system itself and its supporting agencies through measures such as the OCB, JIACGs, Goldwater-Nichols Act, and the Scowcroft honest broker model. Despite these positive advances, the national security system is still far from optimized, standing unprepared for future threats as described by the military. To further inform our understanding of the national security decision making process, the next chapter will introduce several concepts that significantly influence the success of the system. Consideration of principal-agent theory, bias, modern strategic concepts, and forecasting could lead to substantive reform measures to improve the NSC system and its outputs at the strategic and operational levels.

⁶⁵ US Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1, The U.S. Army in Multi-Domain Operations 2028*, A-1.

Relevant Theory

Self-exhaustion in war has killed more states than any foreign assailant.

—Liddell Hart, *Strategy*

Principal-Agent Theory and Agency Loss

The President of the United States faces a myriad of complex and chaotic challenges on a daily basis as he leads the strategic synchronization of national policy. The vast defense budget and federal workforce cannot shield him from these problems; in fact these luxuries themselves are two of the most consequential problems in his portfolio. As the principal officer in the federal government, the President must organize and direct his subordinate executive branch departments to implement his agenda. These large bureaucracies themselves may have developed identities over time that do not align with those of the current President's agenda. Given the impossibility of inspecting the actual workflow of the expansive federal bureaucracy toward directed policy goals while managing the daily business of the presidency, the President is forced to rely upon his cabinet secretaries and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to ensure cohesive performance. This situation is described in organizational theory as a principal-agent problem in which there is goal conflict between the principal (the President) and the agent (the executive branch departments and agencies) given a system in which the principal cannot easily verify performance.⁶⁶ Agency theory goes on to describe agency loss as the difference between the best possible outcome as directed by the principal and the inefficiency generated from deviations by the agents. Put into classic military science terms, agency loss is the friction and internal fog of war that frustrates the plans of leaders as they conduct their operations.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 47; Kathleen M. Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory: An Assessment and Review," *The Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 1 (January 1989): 58, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/258191>.

⁶⁷ Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119-120.

Presidents are certainly not the only leaders to suffer from agency loss, to be sure, each of their cabinet secretaries, undersecretaries, and assistant secretaries likely face similar resistance given the transitory nature of politically-appointed leaders in the large bureaucracy. Although not as effective as the inclusion of a dedicated coordination and planning cell such as the OCB, the Scowcroft NSC model serves as an inclusive interagency forum that increases understanding of problems through bottom-up refinement.⁶⁸ Maintaining a system in which the agents have faith that their perspective is considered is more likely to generate consensus and reduce agency loss, even if the final decision is not the preference of the agent. Further, consistently operating in this manner reduces the institutionalized frictions that are rooted in mistrust and misunderstanding of senior and adjacent organizations. These socialized organizational identities within each department must be carefully managed to bring them closer to alignment with the President.⁶⁹ Sheer force of will or circumvention of the process by the President are counterproductive actions to the long term success of the system; as Peter Senge reflected on leadership of systems, “the harder you push, the harder the system pushes back.”⁷⁰

Sound leadership is critical to reducing the principal-agent problem for the President. Effective leadership within the system is the mechanism for achieving the purpose of the President despite organizational identities, self-interest, and risk-aversion that induce friction. Given that the national security decision making process produces outcomes that are inherently uncertain and thus difficult to objectively assess, behavior-based ‘contracts’ would be the preferred arrangement according to agency theory. The NSC system and leadership are best

⁶⁸ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 488-489.

⁶⁹ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckman, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 138-140.

⁷⁰ Peter Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Practice of the Learning Organization* (New York: Doubleday, 2006), 58.

positioned to assess that ‘contract’ to verify that the interagency is acting harmoniously in this ill-structured problem set.

Modern Strategic Thought: Problem Framing, Bias, and Smartpower

Modern strategic thought has expanded well beyond the classic foundations established by canonical theorists such as Thucydides and Clausewitz, accounting for the new multi-domain strategic environment. Modern theorists continue to pay homage to historical strategists but have offered many new and useful lenses with which to examine contemporary strategic problems. Of use when examining strategic synchronization is problem framing, the study of bias in decision-making, and implementing ‘smart power.’

Any good student of security studies, and many fields for that matter, will quickly realize that historically, leaders have often struggled to align their strategies to solve the problems they intended to solve. Reflexively, one might assume that this is the result of incompetent leadership, but in reality, the factors that contribute to this problem are much more understandable. At the strategic level, most of the problems that leaders face are dynamic ill-structured problems that have risen to higher levels because subordinate echelons themselves could not resolve them. These ill-structured problems are a subject of debate in many fields including public administration, business, and security studies.⁷¹ The US Army Design Methodology (ADM) doctrine provides the most detailed discussion of these problems and how military practitioners should approach them.⁷² Notably, these problems are contentious, require iterative reframing, and

⁷¹ Ill-structured or ‘wicked problems’ were first introduced in the public administration field through the journal *Policy Science* by Rittel and Webber (1973). *DA PAM 525-5-500* cites this article and structures its discussion on these problems in the same manner, while applying a military perspective.

⁷² US Department of the Army, *Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1: Army Design Methodology* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2015); US Department of the Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, The U.S. Army Commander’s Appreciation and Campaign Design* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2008).

may have best-solutions that change as the problem progresses longitudinally.⁷³ This approach acknowledges the reality of difficult problems and creates an environment in which mistakes are accepted and learned from, to make iterative progress. It is especially useful in the security studies realm given the interplay of adversary actions in reaching long-term policy goals. Without a process that structurally accounts for change, a strategy is linearly oriented; it is therefore vulnerable to strategic maneuver from an adversary with a more dynamic iterative approach to strategy.⁷⁴

	Well-Structured “Puzzle”	Medium-Structured “Structurally Complex Problem”	Ill-Structured “Wicked Problem”
Problem Structuring	The problem is self-evident. Structuring is trivial.	Professionals easily agree on its structure.	Professionals will have difficulty agreeing on problem structure and will have to agree on a shared starting hypothesis.
Solution Development	There is only one right solution. It may be difficult to find.	There may be more than one “right” answer. Professionals may disagree on the best solution. Desired end state can be agreed.	Professionals will disagree on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How the problem can be solved. • The most desirable end state. • Whether it can be attained.
Execution of Solution	Success requires learning to perfect technique.	Success requires learning to perfect technique and adjust solution.	Success requires learning to perfect technique, adjust solution, and refine problem framing.
Adaptive Iteration	No adaptive iteration required.	Adaptive iteration is required to find the best solution.	Adaptive iteration is required both to refine problem structure and to find the best solution.

Figure 3. Types of Problems and Solution Strategies. *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, The U.S. Army Commander’s Appreciation and Campaign Design*, 2008, 9.

Further complicating the policy effort to synchronize strategic solutions to complex problems are latent and sometimes overt biases from the interagency contributors. Aside from the biases derived from agency-perspectives, four other common forms of bias in the national security decision making are: hyper-partisanship, bias toward consensus, bias to action, and sunk

⁷³ US Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-5-500, The U.S. Army Commander’s Appreciation and Campaign Design*, 9.

⁷⁴ Philip Kronenberg, “The Need to Reform American Strategy,” in *Planning U.S. Security*, ed. Philip Kronenberg (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1981), 17.

cost bias.⁷⁵ Daniel Kahneman's book *Thinking Fast and Slow* is a staple on numerous senior leader reading lists for its' extensive examination of the bias issues that national security planners encounter. When planners on strategic level staffs fail to consider the role of bias and sub-optimal decision-making as a factor in strategy development, they will encounter significant friction as they work through successive iterations of strategy modification (if they even acknowledge that iterative updates are necessary). Kahneman provides cases studies throughout the book chronicling how experts have failed to accurately assess risks and apply good judgment based on a wide variety of cognitive factors.⁷⁶ These case studies are useful as they provide relatable experiences that remind planners how easy it is to fall victim to bias and how deliberate reflection can often just as easily allow planners to reframe the problem in a more objective manner.

The abovementioned *Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1: Army Design Methodology* contains an appendix focused on cognitive challenges in the planning process and notes five major bias types to consider: confirmation bias, status quo bias, sunk cost bias, sample size bias, and anchoring bias.⁷⁷ The appendix also discusses logical fallacies and other common thinking challenges such as groupthink, mirror imaging, and cultural contempt.⁷⁸ These cognitive frictions described here and in *Thinking Fast and Slow* should be given careful thought throughout the strategic, interagency, and operational planning systems. For example, in the transition to MDO in LSCO, leaders must carefully study the likely threats and their actual projected capabilities. Too often, leaders engage in mirror imaging of the enemy, painting them as a peer or near-peer

⁷⁵ Rothkopf, *National Insecurity*, 349; Rothkopf, *Running the World*, 458; Richard Betts, "Is Strategy an Illusion?" *International Security* 25, no. 2 (Fall, 2000): 43. "Compromise between opposing preferences is the key to success in politics but to failure in military strategy. Political leaders have the last word on strategy in a democracy, so they tend to resolve political debates about whether to use force massively or not at all by choosing military half-measures, which serve no strategic objectives at all."

⁷⁶ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011), 415-418.

⁷⁷ US Army, *Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1*, A-2.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, A-3.

when in fact they are not.⁷⁹ A frequently cited and misleading vignette promoting Russia as a peer threat is seen in the new *FM 3-0: Operations*.⁸⁰ In the vignette, a Russian multiple-launch rocket system is employed against a Ukrainian Army and border guard assembly area with devastating effects. While accurate, this vignette is used out of context and does not typify lethality in LSCO or peer conflict as the Ukrainian Army is not a peer to the Russian Army. This vignette is a red herring with respect to lethality in LSCO.⁸¹ As the military transitions to a focus on MDO in LSCO, planning must be grounded in logical, thoughtful analysis that avoids logical errors. Allowing this type of suboptimal thinking to become pervasive can severely undermine the integrity of the transition, create groupthink, and generate confusion in interagency collaboration.

Even with an understanding of how to think about problems, practitioners quickly identify the difficulty of combining various approaches to complex problems. Upon assuming office as Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates emphasized the importance of addressing strategic problems through non-military sources of power. He pointed to the insufficient budget of the State Department as a critical weakness in the inability of the United States to combine hard

⁷⁹ Defense Intelligence Agency, *Russia Military Power: Building a Military to Support Great Power Aspirations* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), 13; Defense Intelligence Agency, *China Military Power: Modernizing a Force to Fight and Win* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2018), 6. Both recent DIA reports on Russia and China note that they are progressing towards modernized world-class militaries but are not currently at that level of capability.

⁸⁰ While many senior leaders have used this example in lectures, Major General (Ret.) Robert Scales' 2016 article on the battle is one published example. He stated that "this is the first time since the beginning of the Cold War that an American war-fighting function has been bested by a foreign military." This statement is categorically misleading as the battle included no American fires assets whatsoever; the Russian artillery system may be able to outrange its comparable American system but the vignette provides absolutely no evidence to support the assertion that the fires warfighting function is currently "bested." Robert Scales, "While the U.S. Chased Political Correctness, Russia Chased the Edge on the Battlefield, 2016, accessed January 31, 2019, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/robert-h-scales-while-the-u-s-chased-political-correctness-russia-chased-the-edge-on-the-battlefield>.

⁸¹ US Army's *Army Techniques Publication 5-0.1* states that "the red herring fallacy is committed when an individual's attention is diverted with distracting information that is flashy, eye-catching, or not relevant to the topic at hand. A red herring may be used intentionally to divert the attention of the rest of the team from a flawed argument or it may be used inadvertently because of poor logic." (A-3)

power and soft power.⁸² With such an imbalance it is obvious why a bias emerges that foists problems upon the DOD that would best be led by a different agency or with greater involvement of the interagency network. Insufficient funding of non-DOD departments and agencies also contributes to the void or degradation of interagency capacity within the DOD as well. The effective combination of hard and soft power as Secretary Gates called for is described by Joseph Nye as ‘smart power.’⁸³

Joseph Nye is a well published power-theorist who has also served in leadership roles within the Department of State, DOD, and in the intelligence community as the chairman of the National Intelligence Committee. Nye coined the term ‘smart power’ in his 2011 book *The Future of Power*, which was the sixth book in a ten-year period discussing the use of national power. According to Nye, smart power is the “combination of the hard power of coercion and payment with the soft power of persuasion and attraction” into effective strategies.⁸⁴ While his previous books focused mostly on the use of soft power by a state to influence others, *Smart Power* goes beyond that to acknowledge the need to synchronize smart strategies “with rather than merely over” other states.⁸⁵ The application of hard power and soft power to create integrated smart power strategies across national governments must be firmly grounded in a robust interagency support network that can respond to shifts in conditions.⁸⁶

⁸² Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004), ix.

⁸³ Nye, *Soft Power*, x. Nye defines soft power as: “The ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country’s culture, political ideals, and policies.”

⁸⁴ Joseph Nye, *The Future of Power* (New York: Public Affairs, 2011), xiii, 23.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, xvii.

⁸⁶ In context, a “robust interagency support network” is cohesively supportive of the national policies rather than supportive of any one agency or department; National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2004), 401. The 9/11 Commission Report notes the importance of establishing a “smart government [that] would integrate all-sources of information to see the enemy as a whole.”

Smart power represents a holistic approach to understanding problems, framing them without bias toward any one instrument, and forming dynamic whole of government solutions. Smart power stands opposed to the historic paradigm often attributed to Helmuth von Moltke that politics has no place in war once war is initiated.⁸⁷ Richard Betts proposed that “the ideal sequence of policy, strategy, and operations is not sacrosanct. Rather, it should be conceived not as a sequence but as an organic interrelationship.”⁸⁸ This description evokes one to think of power as a network rather than a scale; not a choice between soft and hard power but a deliberate dynamic combination—smart power. Co-opting and attracting support can happen naturally but is best accomplished deliberately through synchronized policy. This requires expertise in understanding how elements such as technology can wield global influence across the spectrum of power and dimensions of operations. Betts offered that civilian and military leaders across the government should have compatible understandings of their role within the overarching strategy:

For strategy to bridge policy and operations, civilian and military professionals on either side of the divide need more empathy with the priorities and limitations that those on the other side face. If the professional military take on the main responsibility for bridging the gap, they trigger concern with military usurpation of political functions. If civilians take on more of the bridging function, they trigger resentment among the military about meddling, but this is a more manageable tension because all accept the principle of civilian supremacy. Civilians cannot do this responsibly, however, unless they acquire much more empirical knowledge of tactics, logistics, and operational doctrines than is normal for top-level staff these days.⁸⁹

Only with educated civilian and military leaders can the United States generate the effective smart power strategies necessary to succeed in multi-domain operations.

⁸⁷ Daniel J. Hughes, ed., *Moltke on the Art of War: Selected Writings* (New York: Random House, 1993), 36.

⁸⁸ Richard Betts, “Is Strategy an Illusion?” 38.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Forecasting

Strategic synchronization across the elements of national power and functional domains can best be approached through consistent assessment and collaboration across the interagency. As previously discussed, the enduring nature of most problems in the national security arena frustrates efforts to assess policy outcomes definitively. Policymakers must acknowledge that when engaging in any conflict, they must enter it accepting that it could become an enduring problem requiring sustained evaluation.⁹⁰ This problem can be mitigated to an extent through the employment of a planning cell that applies forecasting techniques to examine smaller parts of larger endemic challenges. Philip Tetlock and Dan Gardner described how forecasting or ‘superforecasting’ as they call it, takes a scientific approach to assessing future problems, producing a remarkably effective predictive capability. Their book *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* uses Philip Tetlock’s *Good Judgment Project* and the Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity’s (IARPA) forecasting competition from 2011 to 2015 as a case study for predictive analysis.

The *Good Judgment Project* asked that participants make initial informed estimates of specific situations and then use active open-mindedness to challenge their beliefs by seeking out diverse perspectives. They would then provide subsequent updates to their estimates with measured adjustments.⁹¹ What they did not want was for participants to use their intuition to provide discrete estimates based solely on their expert knowledge. Their study made several insightful observations about forecasting, including that “commitment to self-improvement [was] the strongest predictor of performance,” this commitment was roughly three times more effective

⁹⁰ T.X. Hammes, “The Future of Conflict,” in *Charting a Course: Strategic Choices for a New Administration*, ed. R. D. Hooker Jr. (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2016), 20.

⁹¹ Philip E. Tetlock and Dan Gardner, *Super Forecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction* (New York: Broadway Books, 2015), 126.

than the variable of intelligence, and the best forecasters were not experts therefore had less ego involved in assessing situations.⁹²

While the focus of their book is on the value of prediction for the intelligence community, they do note that the methodology is equally useful in the operational realm with respect to planning teams, or ‘superteams.’ Teams of analysts that are educated on forecasting are much more accurate than individual forecasters, as they help challenge beliefs and assumptions within the problem.⁹³ They argue that failing to continuously update planning assumptions directly led to the Bay of Pigs invasion debacle which contained errors that should have been detected at the time, with information possessed by the planners.⁹⁴ Colonel Brandon Tegtmeier expanded on the use of this methodology of analysis in his Army War College monograph *Getting it Right: Commanders’ Judgment, Decisions, and Accuracy*. In it he argued that forecasting principles have significant utility at the operational level for Joint Special Operations Task Forces and throughout the hierarchy of command.⁹⁵ Tegtmeier also agrees with Tetlock that forecasting is like strategy: “Learning to forecast requires trying to forecast. Reading books on forecasting is no substitute for the experience of the real thing.”⁹⁶

⁹² Ibid., 20, 163, 192.

⁹³ Ibid., 201.

⁹⁴ Tetlock and Gardner, *Super Forecasting*, 194-200.

⁹⁵ Brandon Tegtmeier, “Getting it Right: Commanders’ Judgment, Decisions, and Accuracy” (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College Press, 2017), 21.

⁹⁶ Tetlock and Gardner, *Super Forecasting*, 180.

Improving Interagency Effectiveness

This is our strategic weakness... an incapacity to implement.

--General (Ret.) John R. Allen, *A Foundational Proposal for the Next Administration*

Good structure does not guarantee success, but bad structure almost always overcomes good people and leads to poor results.

--Brent Scowcroft, *A Foundational Proposal for the Next Administration*

Improving synchronization in the interagency process at the operational level in support of multi-domain operations (MDO) in large scale combat operations (LSCO) will require solutions that address the future environment while mitigating predictable systemic deficiencies. The future environment will require cross-functional solutions within the existing national security decision-making structure. The National Security Council drives this process but is stymied by long-range planning deficiencies at the strategic and operational levels. The NSC process also suffers from agency loss in the decentralized implementation of strategic ends. Numerous alternative solutions have been proposed to centralize control of the interagency for critical strategic missions but these alternatives still face many of the same challenges that the current system confronts or lack the political clout that the President and his NSC principals inherently possess. Despite these challenges, the NSC, its staff, and the process have evolved continually over time and recent proposals for reform are appropriate given the evolution in complexity of the security environment.

Surveying the history of the NSC, military doctrine, and relevant literature on potential reform measures makes clear several areas for improvement. Four areas of focus for this study are: improving the strategic planning process, implementing security policy evaluation, developing national security professionals, and filling the interagency synchronization void at the operational level. These identified areas are not inclusive of all of the reform measures found in the literature but are representative of key themes identified in contemporary security studies. When viewed holistically, several competing tensions in reform proposals become apparent.

Often those writing about the NSC process will champion one of these ideas at the expense of others but this is a false choice. It is possible to grow the NSC staff while improving the structure. Additionally, it is possible to increase the degree of agency for the President while increasing inclusivity of the process. The key element in balancing these tensions is effective leadership at-echelon in the national security decision making process. Figure 4 below depicts the areas of focus for this study positioned relative to their most impactful reform tensions. It is important to understand that the depiction represents the reform tensions as they are commonly argued, but as previously stated, this study supports the viability of making improvements across the system rather than along only one element.

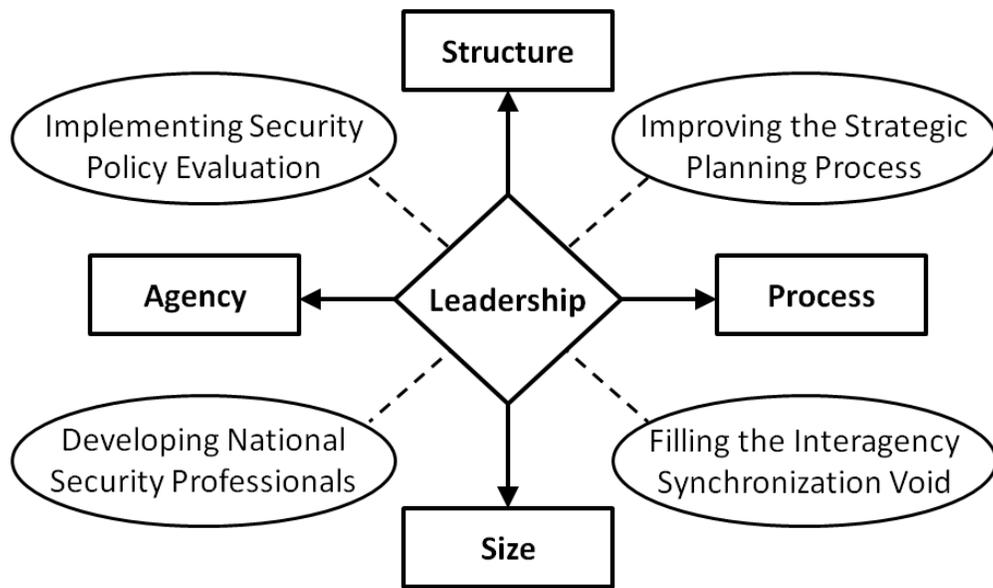


Figure 4. NSC Reform Tensions and Study Focuses. Created by the author.

The Importance of Strategic Planning and Design

Too often the desire for a defined endstate is a false hope.

—T.X. Hammes, *The Future of Conflict*

There exists no regular staff procedure for arriving at decisions; instead, ad hoc groups are formed as the need arises. No staff agency to monitor the carrying out of decisions is available. There is no focal point for long-range planning on an interagency basis. Without a central focus, foreign policy turns into a series of unrelated decisions.

—Nelson Rockefeller, *The NSC Staff*

The Scowcroft NSC model is designed to effectively promote the best process in elevating security policy to the President for consideration but it structurally lacks the capacity to conduct long range planning and synchronized design. To accomplish this, organizational change must occur that structurally and procedurally separates current operations from future operations. This concept is widely discussed as an ideal that has never been fully realized within the NSC despite President Eisenhower's early efforts to shape the NSC staff similar to a military general staff. Scowcroft also noted the utility of a strategic planning cell despite never implementing it.⁹⁷

The current interagency policy committees are not sufficient in their size or time available to accomplish both the day to day operations and long range planning.⁹⁸ By adding a dedicated planning cell with representation across the IA, the NSC becomes equipped with a team that is inherently diverse in perspective and capable of thinking about problems without many of the biases that plague planners whom are actively immersed in a problem.⁹⁹ This stand-off from problems under consideration allows planners to use design-thinking to better identify friendly bias and seek opportunities to

⁹⁷ Sparrow, *The Strategist*, 485. More recent Presidents have included a strategic planning committee within their NSC staff framework, but not of the scope proposed by this study.

⁹⁸ National Commission on Terrorist Attacks, *The 9/11 Commission Report*, 402.

⁹⁹ Kronenberg, *Planning U.S. Security*, 83-84. Planners are constrained by their habits of thought but as much as possible, they should strive to be apolitical technicians, above interest group politics, and non-advocating.

exploit the bias of adversaries; this type of planning can only be done through deliberate and synchronized efforts at each echelon.¹⁰⁰ Design-thinking also promotes the use of re-framing problems as adversaries react and work to undermine new US policies. This facilitates thinking of security planning on a Clausewitzian competition continuum, as it should be.¹⁰¹ Ambassador Ryan Crocker, et al. emphasized this in their 2016 Atlantic Council report:

Weakness in long term strategic planning for foreign and defense policy has been observed consistently during a number of past administrations. There is a Gresham's Law at work in which daily needs drive out longer-term strategic thinking and planning, just as operational control drives out the capacity and time to formulate clear and useful policy options. While the departments and agencies contain strategic planning functions (for example, the policy planning staff at the Department of State and strategy staff at the Office of the Secretary of Defense), there is no set structure within the NSC to bring both lessons learned and strategic planning functions together on a regular and continuing basis in response to presidential requests and national needs.¹⁰²

Creating a robust strategic planning cell within the NSC along the lines of Eisenhower's Planning Board is a necessary and logical requirement to get ahead of twenty-first century threats. The NSC staff must be able to facilitate strategic and operational level windows of superiority. In MDO this requires "degrading, disrupting, or otherwise manipulating a decision maker's understanding and decision cycle or influencing a formation's or population's will to establish favorable conditions."¹⁰³ Continual design-planning combined with forecasting techniques during

¹⁰⁰ Ian King, "What Do Cognitive Biases Mean for Deterrence?" accessed February 12, 2019. <https://thestrategybridge.org/the-bridge/2019/2/12/what-do-cognitive-biases-mean-for-deterrence>.

¹⁰¹ Stanley A. Renshon, "Psychological Sources of Good Judgment in Political Leaders: A Framework for Analysis," in *Good Judgment in Foreign Policy: Theory and Application*, edited by Stanley A. Renshon and Deborah Welch Larson (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 47. Renshon discusses the impact of making judgments when adversaries are deliberately attempting to undermine those decisions. This is representative of adversarial reactions to US policy on the strategic level.

¹⁰² Chester A Crocker, Daniel Levin, David C. Miller, Jr., and Thomas R. Pickering. *A Foundational Proposal for the Next Administration* (Washington, DC: The Atlantic Council, 2016), iii.

¹⁰³ US Army, *TRADOC Pamphlet 525-3-1*, C-10.

the competition continuum critically enables operational echelons to create these windows. This same concept should be applied across the elements of national power as discussed by Joseph Nye, to create multiple dilemmas for adversaries across the elements of national power and functional domains. A planning effort of this scope can only occur within the NSC staff.

Security Policy Evaluation

Speaking to the media about government deliberations is treasonous when it involves national security.

—H.R. McMaster, *The National Security Council at 70*

All organizations, even those maintaining high levels of confidence and good faith, are in environments that have institutionalized the rationalized rituals of inspection and evaluation. And inspection and evaluation can uncover events and deviations that undermine legitimacy. So institutionalized organizations minimize and ceremonialize inspection and evaluation.

— John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, *Institutionalized Organizations*

One of the most striking issues in assessing the national security decision making process is that there is no structural mechanism for deliberately conducting independent policy evaluation. Policy evaluation is currently done within the NSC staff and is subject to significant bureaucratic frictions and bias. Given the political, bureaucratic, and unstructured nature of this system, it is easy to see how the Presidents' ability to understand the progress of his directives can become distorted. This is at the heart of the previously discussed principal-agent problem. Without a reliable agent to provide impartial policy evaluation, Presidents cannot verify the behaviors or outcomes, allowing their agents the opportunity to pursue their own disparate goals. Another side-effect of this arrangement is whistleblowing to the media to address grievances that actors within the system feel are not being adequately resolved.¹⁰⁴ Additionally, organization

¹⁰⁴ Eisenhardt, "Agency Theory," 59.

theory proposes that organizations that do not conduct impartial self-inspection generally succumb to institutional myths of efficiency.¹⁰⁵

A solution to this issue is to add a cell within the NSC staff that conducts independent policy evaluation and serves as an ombudsman for the members of the interagency to discreetly address grievances within the process for adjudication or improvement. This outlet provides an alternative to civil servants that want to correct a perceived issue without going to the media with sensitive matters. Figure 6 below depicts a refined policy process with the strategic planning and policy evaluation functions layered on top of the status quo process. Due to the political and sensitive nature of the issues such a cell would be charged to assess, this cell would need to be staffed with experienced, trusted agents. The product of their work would be to promote re-framing of problems for the staff committees, raise bureaucratic frictions to the Deputies for resolution, or raise sensitive issues to the Principals for adjudication.

¹⁰⁵ John W. Meyer and Brian Rowan, "Institutionalized Organizations: Formal Structure as Myth and Ceremony," *American Journal of Sociology* 83, no. 2 (September 1977), 340.

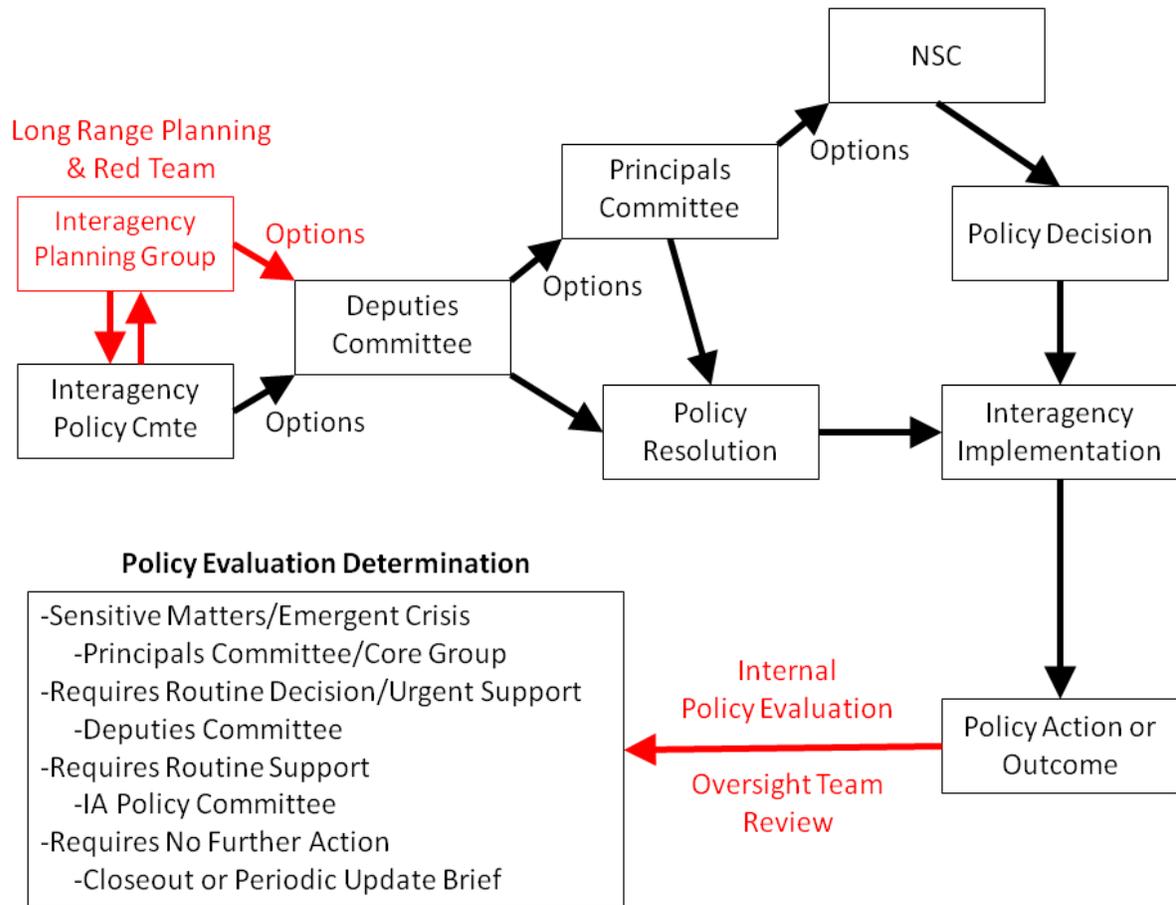


Figure 6. Modified NSC Process. Created by the author; elements in red are recommended additions (Interagency Planning Group and Internal Policy Evaluation Team).

Conducting policy evaluation in this fashion promotes the continued refinement of issues in the competition and conflict space, completing the necessary feedback loop for the design re-framing process.¹⁰⁶ While creating such a structure may have unrecognized perverse incentives within the system, a judicious approach from seasoned personnel within the cell should mitigate many more issues than it creates.¹⁰⁷ Other opponents may argue that changing the structure of the system may not actually change the way it functionally operates. This is true, but structures have symbolic importance and these relationships affect behaviors and the social realities of those

¹⁰⁶ T.X. Hammes, “The Future of Conflict,” 18.

¹⁰⁷ William G. Ouchi, “The Relationship Between Organizational Structure and Organizational Control,” *Administrative Science Quarterly* 22, no. 1 (March 1977), 4-5.

within the system. In this proposed system, staffers will ideally be encouraged to do more constructive thinking and evaluation than they did in a system without institutional strategic planning and policy evaluation. As with any organizational change, leaders within the organization are critical to supportive implementation that supports short-term wins to anchor the change in such a way that reinforces subordinates' faith in the system.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ A change of the proposed scope would need deliberate implementation and support, ideally using a change-model such as John Kotter's Eight Steps for Leading Change found in *Leading Change* (1996).

Talent Management: Good People Still Matter

Systems are important, but ultimately the policy is the outcome of a decision made by one individual, influenced by the personalities with which he chooses to surround himself. This suggests that good national security decision-making is fundamentally about building the right team.

— Jason Galui and Sean McMahon, *Personality and Process*

The real dilemma is the more people you can bring in, the better – the more expertise you can bring in and bring to bear on a problem, the better, because it gives you different perspectives. It allows you to understand better the tools that you can bring to bear to help solve problems.

— H.R. McMaster, *The National Security Council at 70*

The prevailing attitude regarding the NSC staff in national security reform literature is that a smaller staff is better. The most commonly cited concerns over a large staff are the potential for staffers to act outside their authority; loss of control over planning efforts; and the potential for the staff to become operational, as with the Iran-Contra affair. These are valid concerns, grounded in historical experience, but can be actively mitigated through measures aside from simply keeping a small staff. As posited earlier, effective leadership within the NSC chain can eliminate each of these common concerns. Put bluntly, the argument that the NSC staff is better when it is smaller and that it has become “too large to control effectively,” is overly simplistic and abdicates leaders from their responsibilities.¹⁰⁹ This argument can be seen as something as a scapegoat for leaders of the past whose lapses in leadership may have caused these issues.

It is important to remember that leadership is not a trait designated for only those at the top of organizations. Given the nature of the NSC staff as the strategic-synchronizer of the US national security system, understanding how to implement policy, or lead, should be a prerequisite to service on the staff. Leading organizations is a challenge that even experienced

¹⁰⁹ Harlan Ullman, *Anatomy of Failure: Why America Loses Every War It Starts* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2017), 234.

professionals struggle to accomplish. Leading systems of organizations is exponentially more challenging. Organizational theory categorizes leading in systems, such as the interagency, as “collaborative leadership” and requires a deep understanding of both leadership and the systems one is operating within.¹¹⁰

Leading across the interagency is very similar to leading in a joint organization, though probably more difficult. To address similar deficiencies in the military’s ability to synchronize, Congress mandated that the US military maintain a deliberate professional military education system that comports with the Goldwater-Nichols Act. Many reforms have called for new Goldwater-Nichols-type legislation for the interagency.¹¹¹ A strategic professional education program that complements the ongoing efforts of the National Defense University (NDU) and Foreign Service Institute (FSI) could significantly reduce the civilian-military divide that has long plagued strategic planning.¹¹² Developing a more robust cadre of civilian personnel in the interagency that understands how to lead in government and synchronize strategy could have a revolutionary impact on the character and processes in national security decision making.¹¹³ Interim efforts to mitigate this shortfall can be seen frequently in National Defense Authorization Acts and even as recently as the August 2018 Amendment to the *National Security Act of 1947*.

¹¹⁰ Montgomery Van Wart, “Lessons from Leadership Theory and the Contemporary Challenges of Leaders,” *Public Administration Review* 73, no. 4, (July/August 2013): 553-565, <https://doi.org/10.1111/puar.12069>.

¹¹¹ Worley, *Orchestrating the Instruments of Power*, 303.

¹¹² Ullman, *Anatomy of Failure*, 125.

¹¹³ Don M. Snider, *The National Security Strategy: Documenting Strategic Vision* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 1995), 19.

Fill the Operational Void

The previously discussed issues in strategic planning have direct impacts on the operational level, and while they are necessary for successful interagency collaboration, they are not sufficient. The Joint Interagency Coordination Group (JIACG) or one of its numerous proposed variants must also be fully staffed with requisite tasking authorities to execute integrated policy. The intensity of multi-domain operations in large-scale combat operations will not permit the status quo style of consensus-building through low-level field representatives. Without empowered liaisons at the operational level that can reliably procure and synchronize resources from their agencies, this model will become completely irrelevant during major combat operations. This will doom US efforts to the same operational interagency incoherence that it has experienced in contemporary operations.

Maintaining the status quo further compounds agency loss in implementation of strategic policy, as there are no empowered interagency proponents at the operational level to facilitate proper tactical execution. This agency loss additionally manifests in the inability to reframe operational level interagency problems to mitigate emergent challenges without having to refer all the way up to strategic leaders for guidance.¹¹⁴ This situation also precludes successful long-range operational planning and interagency forecasting that can shape conditions in a theater. While manning these organizations will have real costs, the anticipated benefit derived from the associated efficiencies should be expected to considerably offset these costs. Maintaining standing JIACGs can prevent the kind of chaotic ad hocery that characterized post-invasion

¹¹⁴ Zalmay Khalilzad, *The Envoy: From Kabul to the White House, My Journey Through a Turbulent World* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2016), 267-268, 313-317. Ambassador Khalilzad provides unique insight into his challenges in Iraq and Afghanistan attempting to facilitate operational level actions without requisite autonomy. While US embassies provide a useful capacity as a source of interagency coordination in countries, even a reasonably well-empowered ambassador faced critique from the Iraq PM Nuri al-Maliki for consistent delays in seeking policy authorization that resulted in missed windows for action.

Afghanistan and Iraq that could be argued cost the US trillions of dollars.¹¹⁵ Institutionalizing this practice while cooperation between the military and the interagency is relatively strong, is important to maintaining the lessons learned in effective collaboration over the last 17 years.¹¹⁶ The JIACGs will not be perfect in filling the operational void described in the Joint Staff J7's focus paper but given the complexity of interagency coordination at the operational level, there is likely no perfect model. It must be resourced with personnel that understand how to make the interagency work and are empowered to do so beyond a mere advisory role.

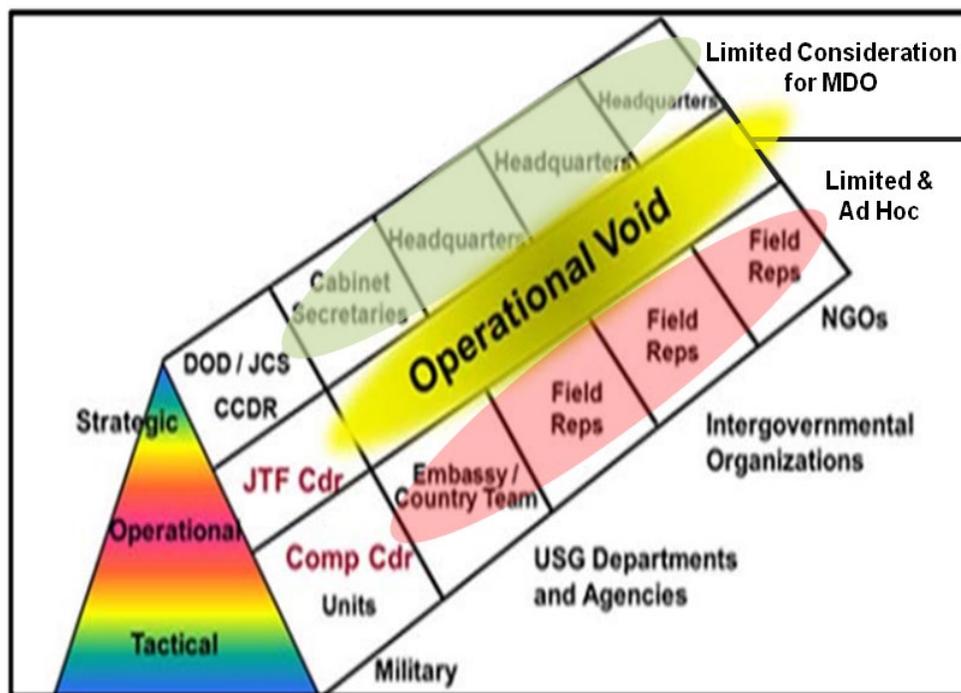


Figure 7. Interagency Coordination Void at the Operational Level. Joint Staff, J-7, “Interorganizational Cooperation” (Suffolk, VA: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), 5.

¹¹⁵ Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, 173-175. Ambassador Khalilzad describes the arrival and early efforts of Ambassador Paul Bremer as a reversal of previous policy decisions that resulted in the mass de-baathification plan. He characterized the lack of continuity and oversight as a failure on the part of NSC principals. This scenario could also be used as a case study for how a “mission manager” approach as described by Christopher Lamb in “National Security Reform,” performed in real-world execution; Tommy Franks, *American Soldier*, (New York: Harper Collins, 2004), 441. General Franks recalled his attitude toward the interagency in war planning as “you pay attention to the day after and I’ll pay attention to the day of.” This attitude of separate planning efforts that blatantly shirks responsibility for integrated Joint-IA coordination cannot be tolerated.

¹¹⁶ James C. McArthur, et al., “Interorganizational Cooperation III of III: The Joint Force Perspective,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 81 (April 2016), 138.

Conclusion and Recommendations

If we cannot get it right in DC, it does not get better on the ground.

—Mark Kimmitt, *The US Army and the Interagency Process*

This study sought to examine the role of the National Security Council (NSC) in synchronizing strategy for the United States. Literature and existing policy supports the hypothesis that in order to provide strategic synchronization across the elements of national power and functional domains, the US government should adopt enhanced policy evaluation and personnel reforms into its national security policy system. Implementing a new Goldwater-Nichols for the interagency would likely mitigate many issues with developing strategy that integrates the interagency with the Department of Defense (DOD). These issues have plagued the United States in managing the continuum of conflict even prior to the inception of the NSC, but they can be overcome. Making structural improvements in the NSC system that establish the importance of strategic planning, policy evaluation, and talent management can fundamentally shift how the process operates. While it has become common to argue against operationalizing the NSC to avoid issues such as Iran-Contra, it is possible this position has become dogmatic and served to create dysfunction between the strategic and operational levels.¹¹⁷ This study supports increased structured interaction between the strategic and operational levels to provide feedback in the policy design process.

The historical alternative to implementing formal reforms is for Presidents to become frustrated with the process and create ad hoc informal policy groups. These ad hoc groups have traditionally provided Presidents the confidentiality they desired, but also exacerbated biases and undermined aspects of their national security decision making process by inciting “bureaucratic warfare.”¹¹⁸ This study supports codifying several reforms through legislation and executive

¹¹⁷ Khalilzad, *The Envoy*, 314.

¹¹⁸ William W. Newmann, *Managing National Security Policy: The President and the Process* (Pittsburg, PA: University of Pittsburg Press, 2003), 13, 212.

action, but cautions against focusing on over-formalizing the system.¹¹⁹ The proposed reforms are consistent with long-standing proposals and seek to make incremental progress rather than a sweeping overhaul. As the US military prepares for large-scale combat operations, small modifications are more likely to produce a system that is more complementary of the existing national security system than is a larger overhaul which could create new and unknown weaknesses.

The Legislative Approach: A New Goldwater-Nichols

The return of great power competition following the strategic mishandling of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan creates a policy opportunity to implement new personnel reform measures that complement the new strategic approach. Legislation is appropriate to support the enhanced strategic professional education for career civil servants. This education pathway should be structured in a manner that mirrors and complements the education of career military professionals with whom they will work alongside. Maintaining a complementary education program promotes a common understanding and language across the government; a common joint and interagency lexicon should be mandated. The same level of emphasis on talent management, and civilian workforce expertise in the 2018 National Defense Strategy should be applied across the interagency.¹²⁰

Requisite Executive Leadership

The majority of the reform program rightly belongs in the executive department as the principal of the NSC staff is the President. The National Security Advisor should codify robust strategic planning and policy evaluation working groups into the NSC staff under a separate deputy through a National Security Presidential Memorandum. By compartmentalizing these

¹¹⁹ Lawrence Korb, “On Making The System Work,” in *Planning U.S. Security*, ed. Philip S. Kronenberg (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1991), 143-145.

¹²⁰ Mattis, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America*, 8.

working groups under a new deputy, they are protected from being pulled into the daily operations and afforded the ability to reflect on issues they are tasked to plan or assess. Supporting the strategic planning effort, more robust joint interagency coordinating groups (JIACGs) should form the foundation for operational planning. These organizations must be fully manned on a continuous basis with empowered agency representatives that are products of civilian professional education and can drive action within their home-agency.

Future Research: The Interagency as a Wicked Problem

In 1995, Robert Behn published *Big Questions of Public Management* to inspire debate among public management scholars. Behn identified three major questions and several derivative questions for his field to debate, focused around micromanagement, motivation, and measurement.¹²¹ The security studies field would benefit from such a debate that focuses on the remaining challenges with interagency and achieving whole of government efforts. When examining Behn's questions with respect to this study, clear connections emerge with respect to agency (motivation), process management (micromanagement), and policy evaluation (measurement). This is no coincidence, the study of public management and security studies go hand-in-hand; as previously posited, one must understand the bureaucracy and its management before mastering the national security machinery. Ultimately, the military profession benefits from the critical examination of the US national security structures and how to effectively stimulate the processes to generate responsive outcomes for military operations—"modest improvements may yield surprising gains. This is [the] hope."¹²²

¹²¹ Robert D. Behn, "The Big Questions of Public Management," *Public Administration Review* 55, no. 4 (July/August 1995): 313-324.

¹²² President's Special Review Board, *Report of the President's Special Review Board*, V-7.

Appendix A: Chronology

March 3, 1947	National Security Act of 1947 introduced in Congress
July 26, 1947	Act signed into law by President Harry S. Truman
September 17, 1947	James Forrestal confirmed as first Secretary of Defense
September 18, 1947	National Security Act of 1947 takes effect
August 10, 1949	National Security Act of 1947 amended
March 23, 1953	Robert Cutler appointed as first APNSA by President Eisenhower
September 2, 1953	Executive Order 10483—Establishes the Operations Coordinating Board (OCB)
February 25, 1957	Executive Order 10700—Reorganizes the OCB under the NSC
August 6, 1958	Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958
January 20, 1961	McGeorge Bundy becomes first NSA in its new form
February 19, 1961	OCB abolished by President Kennedy
November 15, 1961	Jackson Subcommittee hearings on National Policy Machinery
November 3, 1975 – January 20, 1977	Scowcroft NSC I (President Ford)
November 3, 1986	Iran-Contra affair exposed
October 4, 1986	Goldwater–Nichols Act signed by President Ronald Reagan
February 27, 1987	Tower Commission Report published
January 20, 1989 – January 20, 1993	Scowcroft NSC II (President George Bush)

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