America’s *Departments* of State:
Irregular and Regular Syndromes of Policy Making

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This article (1) sketches a general explanation for the growth of coordinative machinery and of irregular personnel in modern governments; (2) identifies both general and specific reasons for this phenomenon in the United States with special reference to foreign policy making; (3) identifies within the American foreign policy-making context the modal characteristics of irregular and regular syndromes of policy making, and the conjunction between personnel and institutional base; (4) traces the implications arising from these different policy syndromes; and (5) evaluates some proposals for improving the coherence and knowledge base of American foreign policy making. The problems of defining foreign policy authority, assuring an integrated perspective, and effectively using specialized expertise are best seen in terms of the larger problem of governance in Washington against which all proposals for reform must be abraded.

The United States possesses two foreign ministers within the same government: the one who heads the Department of State, and the one who is the assistant to the president for national security affairs. The former heads a classically contoured bureaucracy. Proximate to him are appointed officials, often with substantial foreign policy experience. At greater distance is a corps of professional foreign service officers (FSOs). Beneath the national security assistant, on the other hand, is a smaller professional staff of somewhat variable size (ranging in recent times from about three dozen to slightly over 50) whose members typically are drawn from universities, other agencies, and research institutes.

This latter group—the National Security Council staff—is the institutional embodiment of White House aspirations for imposing foreign policy coordination. Its “director,” the president’s assistant for national security affairs, in recent years has come to be seen as the president’s personal foreign policy spokesman as well as an influential molder, and sometime executor, of his policy choices. Though, at least publicly, the overt role of the president’s national security assistant has been diminished in the Reagan administration relative to the prominence it attained during the Nixon and Carter presidencies, a common perception is that, since the Kennedy administration, policy power has drifted steadily from the State Department to the president’s team of foreign policy advisers (Campbell, 1971; George, 1972a; Destler, 1972a, 1972b, 1980; Allison and Szanton, 1976). If perceptions govern, this alone may constitute sufficient evidence of such a drift. Beyond perception, however, there is unmistakable evidence of growth in the role of the national security assistant (who postdates the founding of the National Security Council itself), and in the size and character of the NSC staff. Since McGeorge Bundy’s incumbency, and especially because of the Kissinger and Brzezinski periods, the assistant to the president for national security affairs has become a visible public figure in his own right (Destler, 1980, pp. 84-85). In general, his role has evolved from one of coordinating clearance across departments to one of policy adviser. Similarly, the NSC staff itself has grown greatly, boosted especially during the Nixon administration. It is less and less composed of graying and grayish anonymous career foreign service officers, and more and more composed of foreign policy intellectuals and prospective high-fliers, many of whom are drawn from America’s leading universities.

I do not mean to imply that the presidential foreign policy apparatus and the State Department always or even usually clash, nor that they have wholly overlapping functions. Nonetheless, it is clear that the NSC, at least in form, is today something far beyond what it was in Truman’s time or in Eisenhower’s. To some degree Truman,
protecting what he believed to be his prerogatives, held the then-nascent National Security Council at arm's length as an advisory forum. Eisenhower, on the other hand, employed it frequently as a collegial body, one whose statutory members and staff were also, in some measure, representatives of their departments (Hammond, 1961; pp. 905-10; Falk, 1964, pp. 424-25). Since then, the role and character of the NSC staff, and especially that of the national security assistant, have mutated. This evolution into a role not originally envisioned for the NSC or the then special assistant (executive secretary in Truman's time) has notable consequences for policy making.

Even within the constricted sphere of executive forces on policy making, the foreign policy process involves a complex of actors and not merely a bilateral relationship between the NSC and the State Department. Although the State Department's position has been most eroded by the policy role of the NSC, neither it nor the NSC is a monolithic force. The national security assistant and the NSC staff are not the same actors, nor necessarily of common mind. Similar cautions are even more necessary to describe relationships between the secretary of state and the foreign service professionals of the State Department. A significant difference in intraorganizational relationships, however, is that the national security assistant to some extent selects his own staff, whereas the secretary of state has a department to manage and an established subculture that exists well below the level of those whom he selects. If the NSC staff is more nearly the creation of the national security assistant, the secretary of state, unless he divorces himself from the department, is more likely to be seen as its creation. This difference provides one of these actors with considerable strategic advantages in influencing the views and decisions of presidents.

As clearly as this somewhat ambiguous distinction permits, the NSC (and the national security assistant) and the State Department (though not necessarily the secretary) have come to embody, respectively, the differing commitments given to the roles of "irregulars" (those not bound to a career service) and of "regulars" (members of a career service) in the policy process. The correlation is quite far from unity, of course. There are mixes of personnel and outlooks within each organizational setting, but there are characterizationally different career lines and perspectives as well. Above all, each setting provides for different roles. The operational responsibilities of the State Department give it the advantages of detailed knowledge and experience, and the political disadvantage of lacking an integrated world view. The NSC, on the other hand, is less constrained by the existence of operational responsibilities, by distance between it and the president, or by the communications complications typical of large hierarchically structured organizations. Its sterling political assets, however, are offset in some measure by the disadvantages of removal from day-to-day detail and highly specialized expertise. The differences between these organizational settings, to be sure, are quite significant. The NSC is a fast track. In contrast, the State Department can be a ponderously slow escalator. One setting is oriented to solving problems, the other to raising them. One is more oriented to attaining a bottom line, the other to journeying down a bottomless pit. In sum, the presidential foreign policy apparatus largely exhibits the advantages and disadvantages of an organ that is staffed to some degree by irregulars, and which is not charged with line functions. The State Department, in the main, illustrates the advantages and disadvantages of a hierarchically structured organization responsible for implementation, and which, therefore, tends to have a regular's orientation.

My objectives in this article then are (1) to sketch a general explanation for the growth of both coordinative institutions and of "irregular" personnel in government; (2) to identify both general and specific reasons for this phenomenon in the United States with respect to the official foreign policy community, in particular the tendencies toward Executive Office centrism; (3) to identify, within the foreign policy context, modal characteristics of the irregular and regular syndromes of policy making, and in so doing, to discuss the conjunction between personnel and institutional base; (4) to trace the implications of these different policy syndromes; and (5) to evaluate some proposed solutions to the problem of both resolving foreign policy-making authority and of organizationally synergizing the "irregular" and "regular" syndromes in foreign policy making. Finally, I conclude by suggesting that the problem of defining foreign policy-making authority in American government is but an element of the larger problem of governance in Washington. Whatever specific palliatives emerge need to be fully grounded in these sobering facts.

The Quest for Policy Integration

The growth of coordinative institutions in modern governments and the growth in importance of irregular staffers in government are not the same thing, but they are traceable to the same sources, namely, the need to compensate for the inadequacies of traditional ministries in absorbing the policy agendas and perspectives of the central decision-making authority within the executive.
The massive expansion of policy agendas themselves—"overload," as Klein and Lewis (1977, p. 2) call this phenomenon—is the signal cause of efforts to overcome the parochialism of the ministries and their civil servants. Problems of assimilation clearly have multiplied as governments pursue more and more complex, frequently conflicting objectives (Rose, 1976a; Neustadt, 1954). The forms taken by these coordinative mechanisms have varied across both political systems and policy arenas. The extent to which they have been composed of irregulars has similarly varied.

The more feeble the gravitational pull of directional authority in government, the more necessary it becomes to institutionalize coordinative functions. In Britain, the relatively strong pull of cabinet government, and the doctrine of ministerial responsibility, means that the interface of politics and policy often takes place within the ministries themselves. There, irregulars are usually planted directly in the ministries. In the Federal Republic of Germany, the gravitational pull of cabinet government is substantially weaker, and the activism of the Bundeskanzleramt (the Chancellery) is greater than that of the British Cabinet Office (Dyson, 1974, pp. 361-62). In the case of the United States where the gravitational pull of political forces is exceedingly weak, mechanisms to achieve policy integration abound not only in the Executive Office of the Presidency, but even throughout Congress. The development of these mechanisms throughout the EOP is particularly intriguing in view of the fact that the American line departments are already well saturated with officials whose political pedigrees have been carefully checked out. American administration, as is well known, is laden with irregulars at some depth beneath the cabinet secretary, yet even this has often been considered insufficient to attain presidential control and integration over policy (Nathan, 1975; Heclo, 1975).

This, of course, brings us to the central issue, which is whether the quest for policy integration, defined as comprehensive control over vital policy objectives, can accommodate expertise defined in terms of specialized knowledge. The dilemma, as Paul Hammond once observed, is this (1960, p. 910):

While the mind of one man may be the most effective instrument for devising diplomatic moves and strategic maneuvers and for infusing creative purpose, its product is bound to be insufficient to meet the needs of the vast organizational structures which are the instruments of foreign policy.

The growth of integrative machinery has brought to the fore officials who sometimes differ from their counterparts in the operating agencies. At least as important, though, is that they are provided substantial policy-influencing opportunities without equivalent operational responsibility. To the extent that "central" staff agencies have challenged more traditional bureaucratic sources of policy, they have merely reflected the perplexing problems that nearly all modern democratic governments face in both integrating and controlling policy objectives, and in rendering them politically acceptable.

From these more general observations, I wish to take up the special case of the National Security Council and the assistant to the president for national security affairs as a remarkable example of how the facilitating function evolved into far more heady activities. This evolution also starkly illustrates the advantage of a staff agency at the expense of the traditional operating agencies. Put another way, it reflects the advantages that "irregulars" often have over "regulars."

From Manager to Competing Secretary of State

From its inception in 1947, the National Security Council was designed to be a high-level policy review committee rather than a strictly staff operation (Sapin, 1967, p. 84). As a mechanism for arriving at major policy decisions, however, a support staff quickly emerged underneath the statutory membership of the NSC. Indeed, until the Eisenhower administration came into power in 1953, there was no overall coordinator who had immediate access to the president. In 1953, however, Eisenhower appointed a special assistant to the president for national security affairs whose responsibilities, among others, emailed playing an executive director's role with the NSC staff. An indication of how far the function of the president's national security assistant, and that of the NSC staff as well, has diverged from the original coordinating and facilitating function is the fact that it takes a monumental effort to recall who these presidential assistants were.³

³Campbell and Szabowski (1979) note, for instance, that senior officials in the Canadian central coordinating agencies differ from the main-line civil servants in the traditional line ministries in that they are more likely to have entered laterally rather than to have moved upward through the civil service system.

³From earliest to latest in the Eisenhower administration, they were Robert Cutler, Dillon Anderson, and Gordon Gray. During the Truman administration there were two executive secretaries of the NSC. Each, Sidney Souers and James Lay, reflected the "neutral competence" ideal.
Why has the national security assistant and the NSC staff moved from this relatively modest, if necessary, role to one which frequently has vied with the secretary of state and the State Department for foreign policy-making influence? At the outset of the Carter administration, for example, a sympathetic article referred to the NSC staff as the "other cabinet" (Berry and Kyle, 1977). There are numerous answers to this question, of course. At bottom, though, the "many" reasons are made particularly compelling by the peculiar political culture of Washington politics—an inheritance in part of extravagant institutional disaggregation.

It is true, of course, that whatever clout the national security assistant has exists only at the sufferance of the president (Art, 1973; Destler, 1977). Presidents can make or break the role of their national security assistants as policy advocates. They can minimize the visibility of their assistant; they can play down the substantive functions of the NSC staff relative to the State Department, for example. There are obvious manipulables in the relationship between America's "second State Department" and the White House, but the norms that have been established now seem firm in spite of the present and perhaps momentary diminution of the NSC role in the Reagan administration. The tendency to shift from central clearance to central direction has helped give the NSC apparatus and, above all, a policy-advocating national security assistant, an unusually important role. In the Reagan administration, Richard Allen has proclaimed his role model to be that of Eisenhower's anonymous special assistant, Gordon Gray. But Allen's own prior roles largely have been advocacy and advisory ones, rather than managerial or facilitative ones (Smith, 1981).

**Overload as an Explanation.** Understandably, the National Security Act of 1947 which set up the National Security Council was enacted at the beginning of America's postwar eminence as the leading Western power. The role of global power with far-reaching responsibilities produces a busy agenda, and the busier that agenda the more the management of policy and of advice becomes important. According to a relatively recent report prepared for the president, there have been at least 65 studies of the U.S. foreign policy machinery since 1951 (National Security Policy Integration, 1979, p. 49). This abundance of studies bears witness to the great diversity of actors with some share of the foreign policy pie, to continuing problems of coordination between them, and to their reputed lack of responsiveness to the president. How, under these circumstances, is a president to make decisions without some final filter that reduces unmanageable complexity to at least endurable perplexity?

Undoubtedly, in an age of instant communication, some of the present NSC apparatus would have had to have been invented if it not already exist. Working out statements with counterparts in the Elysée, the Chancellery, or 10 Downing Street before the principals are themselves engaged is the kind of task that may need to be located close to the head of government. However, the enhanced role of the national security assistant over the past two decades (Destler, 1980) makes it unlikely that these tasks are sufficient to satisfy policy drives created by recent organizational practices.

**Institutional and Organizational Explanations.** "Overload" explains the existence of coordinative mechanisms such as the NSC. It does not, however, explain the transformation of a once-anonymous role with a small staff to a prominent contender for policy-making power in foreign affairs.

Because government in Washington is as unplanned as the society it governs, criticisms of the foreign policy-making machinery overwhelmingly recommend organizational reforms (Campbell, 1971; Destler, 1972b; Allison and Szanton, 1976). As with virtually all governmental activity in the United States, fragmentation also characterizes the process of foreign policy decision making. Centrifugal tendencies begin at the top levels of American government, induced in part by the absence of effective mechanisms for cabinet decision making. Lack of clarity at the top molds bureaucratic tendencies below. Thus, while the problems of bureaucratic politics exist everywhere, they are made more obvious by unclear boundaries of authority, by the fractionation of power centers, and by the ready availability of the press as a resource in policy struggles. Contemporary Washington epitomizes these conditions. It is not difficult, therefore, to find targets for reform.

Despite repeated calls for its resuscitation, the cabinet is to the functioning of American government what the appendix is to human physiology. It's there, but no one is quite sure why.

\*This, of course, is a by-product of the presidential system. Ironically, the Eberstadt Report which set forth the rationale for the National Security Act and, thus, the NSC, apparently was motivated by a desire to create a high level British type cabinet committee. As Hammond notes (1960, p. 899): "The Eberstadt Report assumed that the proposed National Security Council could be a kind of war cabinet in which the responsibilities of the President could be vested. ... The premise arose ... out of an inclination to modify the Presidency as an institution."
Whatever initial presidential intentions may be, presidents soon learn that cabinet meetings are mainly for public relations benefits rather than for decision making. They also learn another lesson of particular importance in Washington, namely, that the probability of leaks to the press which may foreclose presidential options is geometrically expanded by the number of participants involved. Later I will discuss how an "information-leaky" environment, unique to Washington among world capitals, estranges presidents from their cabinet departments. For now it is useful merely to indicate that the extreme splintering of responsibilities means that presidents with innovative intentions will be desirous of centralizing in the White House that which is otherwise uncontrollable or unresponsive to them.

All leaders are apt to demand more responsiveness than they can or even ought to get. But American presidents crave responsiveness in part because so little is obviously available to them. Large organizations, and especially those that are highly professionalized, develop definable subcultures and resist intrusions from inexpert outsiders. Regardless of what it is that presidents order the first time, there is a strong tendency for them to be served fudge—or jelly, to employ the culinary metaphor used by President Kennedy. While this frustration is not peculiar to the foreign policy and national security agencies, foreign policy matters are often far more central to what it is a president, or a prime minister for that matter, must attend to (Rose, 1976b, pp. 255-56; 1980, pp. 35-38). Typically, too, there is less legislative direction of the foreign policy organs than of departments having primarily domestic responsibilities or impacts.

Among the agencies involved with foreign policy, moreover, the State Department largely deals with political analysis, impressionistic evidence, and judgment. Since politicians who become presidents are likely to defer to no one when it comes to making what are essentially political judgments, the vulnerability of the State Department becomes apparent. It is not only that the department moves slowly that frustrates presidents; it is often the message that it delivers that leads them to despair (Silberman, 1979).

In addition to its distance from the White House, a problem which to some extent affects all line departments, the culture and technology of the State Department are also factors in its organizational disadvantage. These factors interact with, indeed greatly exacerbate, its distance problem. The State Department is a regular organization par excellence with a highly developed professional subculture. The stock in trade of the regular foreign service officers, granted individual differences among them, is a large supply of cold water with which to dash ideas that emanate elsewhere or which challenge prevailing professional perspectives. In the words of one sympathetic observer:

The most useful service that a senior State Department official can perform in a policy-making role is to douse the facile enthusiasms of administration "activists" in the cold water of reality. But most of them bring so little energy and skill to this task that they merely project an image of negativism (Maechling, 1976, pp. 11-12).

Put somewhat more generally, "Political appointees seem to want to accomplish goals quickly while careerists opt to accomplish things carefully" (Murphy et al., 1978, p. 181).

As a citadel of foreign service professionalism, the State Department is an inhosпитable refuge for ideas and initiatives blown in from the cold. "It's all been tried before" is a refrain that may characterize the responses of professional bureaucrats whatever their substantive craft, but it is one that is at the heart of the department's perceived unresponsiveness.

Ironically, in this light, the professional subculture of the foreign service, as some have noted, ill prepares foreign service officers for the rough-and-tumble of bureaucratic politics (Destler, 1972b, pp. 164-66; Maechling, 1976, pp. 10-12; and even Silberman, 1979). Indeed, the recruitment of FSOs traditionally has made them America's closest facsimile of the British administrative class (Seidman, 1980, pp. 144-47). This is manifest also in operating style, a style characterized as one of "alert passivity" (Allison and Szanton, p. 126). While American bureaucrats in the domestic departments readily adopt the role of advocate to a far greater extent than their European peers (Aberbach, Putnam and Rockman, 1981, pp. 94-98), FSOs tend to be more like British bureaucrats, defusing programmatic advocacy so as to maintain the flexibility necessary to deal with the differing priorities imposed by new leaders. Unlike their colleagues in the domestic departments, officials in State lack domestic constituencies to help them weather episodic storms. In addition, the foreign service is oriented to serving abroad. The cost of this absorption is a lack of sophisticated political understanding of the policy-making machinery. In a system in which boundaries of authority are remarkably inexact, FSOs tend to lack both skills and bases for effective bureaucratic infighting—a considerable disadvantage.

As noted, the modal technology of the State Department is soft and impressionistic, and thus endlessly vulnerable. This helps to explain why the
State Department is especially apt to be victimized. For as a former department official comments:

New presidents and their staffs soon start to search for opportunities for leadership, areas in which to demonstrate that the President is on top of things and making policy. When this game is played, the loser is almost invariably the State Department and not, for example, the Pentagon. . . . To do more than scratch the surface of a few front page military issues would require a much larger White House staff than any President would want to contemplate. Foreign policy, on the other hand, is largely a matter of words, and the President and his staffers can step in at any time and put the words together themselves (Gelb, 1980, p. 35).

Once the staff has been constructed to oversee policy proposals, the next step toward advocacy seems nearly ineluctable unless the president is fully and unequivocally committed in combination to the secretary of state as the principal foreign policy maker and the State Department institutionally as the principal source of foreign policy advice—a combination that almost necessarily eliminates skilled policy entrepreneurs such as Henry Kissinger from the role. Why this combination of conditions is first unlikely to happen, but difficult to sustain if it does, is the question that needs to be addressed. To do so requires an exploration of the Washington political culture.

The Political Culture of Washington as an Explanation. To explain the transformation of the NSC from a central clearance mechanism and a long-range policy planning one to an active center of policy making requires a focus on institutional and organizational features such as those we have just discussed. Yet the peculiar climate that pervades government in Washington helps to explain these institutional and organizational operations. For the distinguishing characteristic of government in Washington is its near-indistinguishability from politics in Washington. While politics in the capitals of all democratic states mixes together a variety of interests—partisan, pressure-group, bureaucratic, regional, and so forth—the absence of party as a solvent magnifies the importance of other interests. Above all, the overtness of the bureaucratic power struggle is likely to be in inverse proportion to the intensity and clarity of the partisan struggle.

Confronted with singular responsibility and inconstant support, presidents are often driven to managerial aspirations over "their" branch of the government. Sooner or later they sense that at best they are confronted with inertia, at worst, opposition. Rarely can they rely consistently upon their party for support, especially if they are Democrats; rarely too can they assume that their cabinets are composed of officials who are not essentially departmental emissaries. Cabinet ministers everywhere, of course, are departmental ambassadors to the cabinet. All ministers find it convenient, if not necessary, at some time to promote departmental agendas pushed from below. The late R. H. S. Crossman's assertion that "the Minister is there to present the departmental case" is universally true (1972, p. 61), yet he also observes that an American cabinet is only that—an aggregation of departmental heads (p. 67).

The basic themes of American governmental institutions are distrust and disaggregation. Together, they fuel suspicion. Presidents often come to divide the world into "us" and "them," "They" typically cannot be relied upon. "They" will be seen as torpid, bureaucratically self-interested, and often uncommitted or skeptical of presidential initiatives. Above all, "they" will be seen as an uncontrollable source of hemorrhaging to the press.

Unmediated by any tradition of, or basis for, a cabinet team, distance defines "us" and "them." There are always winners and losers in executive politics everywhere, but the more ambiguous the boundaries of authority, the less clear the adjusting mechanisms by which the winners and losers are determined, and the more pervasive the involvement of the media in policy struggles (a largely American phenomenon), the more ferocious the struggle. Under these conditions, the department heads will tend to lose ground to the White House because whatever advantages in autonomy distance permits, the more obvious are the disadvantages in accessibility.

Washington is a capital as obviously open as Moscow is obviously closed. The intimate involvement of the prestige press in internece executive policy debates is legendary. Little remains confidential in Washington for very long, at least insofar as the exposure of confidentiality can assist any of the policy contestants. The lifelines connecting presidents to the cabinet departments are longer and perceived to be more porous than those that link presidents to the Executive Office. This perception undoubtedly is fortified by the belief that under most circumstances cabinet secretaries would as soon push their departmental perspectives or even their own special agendas than those of the White House. The secretary of state is not immune from this. Despite the "inner" role of the secretary of state (Cronin, 1975, pp. 190-92), to the extent that he is perceived within the White House as someone who presses the interests and perspectives of the foreign service regulars, he is apt to be written off as "the." The case of William Rogers is instructive in this regard, and even more so is that of
Cyrus Vance who began in office with strong presidential support for his power stakes.

Although one must beware of self-serving tales that dribble ex post facto to the prestige American press from disgruntled ex-officials, the evidence, however partial it may be, is that leaks to the press are more likely to be blamed on the cabinet departments than on the executive office staff itself. A report in the Washington Post, for instance, indicates that after President Carter severely chastised noncareer and career State Department officials in early 1979 for suspected press leaks regarding policy toward Iran, Secretary Vance pressed upon him the view that the State Department was being unfairly singled out as a source of leaks that were regularly occurring everywhere, especially from within the NSC staff. The president’s response, according to the report, was to meet with his national security assistant and several of his senior staff members and request them to smooth their relations with their counterparts at the State Department (Armstrong, 1980). To officials at State, the president threatened; to NSC officials, the president cajoled. “Us” versus “them,” in other words, was not unique to the Nixon administration (Aberbach and Rockman, 1976).

The isolation of presidents from their cabinet departments, the absence of a common point of meaningful political aggregation—all of this within the information-leaky environment peculiar to Washington among world capitals—is a ready stimulus to the “us” versus “them” outlook that commonly develops in the White House, and in the departments as well. Distance and distrust are promoted on both ends of the tether line connecting departments to the White House. Departmental frustrations are often exacerbated by presidential distrust of bureaucratic institutions in an antibureaucratic culture. American politicians who enter through the gates of the White House have neither learned to endure the frustrations that arise through a slow and steady apprenticeship in party politics such as is found in Britain, nor to appreciate by virtue of living in their midst the skills and qualities that professional civil servants bring to government.

Because it contains memory traces from the past, bureaucracy is the enemy of novelty. Memory imposes constraint, while presidents typically want to make their mark as innovators.4

Presidential frustrations derive, therefore, from the incapacity of large organizations to be immediately responsive to presidential wishes, and from the tendency of such organizations to protect their interests and core technologies from presidential intrusion. On the other hand, departmental frustrations arise when departments become the victims of imagined nonresponsive-ness to presidents, as related in a recently revised version of the trade, proposed by the Soviets during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis, of American Jupiter missile bases in Turkey for those installed by the Soviets in Cuba.5

Thus far, I have outlined generally why presidents in America tend toward White House centrism—that is, why they seek to build a policymaking apparatus around them rather than relying exclusively upon the cabinet departments. I have not attempted to explain exhaustively this drive toward centrism, nor its ebbs and flows across particular administrations. My concern is with the trend line rather than the perturbations within it. Some aspects of the drive toward centrism are undoubtedly largely idiosyncratic, having to do with particular presidential styles and personalities within administrations. There are some reasons too that are probably universal, for example, the growth of technological capacity for central control, and some that are speculative, for example, hypothesized imperatives of leaders to try to exert control over policy without comprehending the mechanics—to reach, in other words, a bottom line without much concern for the algorithm. Of the reasons I explicitly cite, however, one—the increased agenda of governments—can be found in all modern democracies, and has resulted in efforts to devise coordinative machinery. The other reasons I have identified are more system-specific, and are rooted in institutional and cultural considerations. A dispersed

4A recent study of organizational memory development among three EOP agencies, for example, finds that the NSC consistently has the least cross-administration continuity as measured by several indicators (Covington, 1981). The author of this report concludes that organizational continuity reflects presidential detachment, whereas lack of memory reflects intense presidential interest.

5As Barton J. Bernstein (1980, p. 103 n.) observes from his study of recently declassified materials regarding this episode:

A chief executive may often express preferences (not orders) for policies, and that he may sincerely reinterpret them as orders when his own inaction leaves him woefully unprepared in a crisis. In this way, a president can place blame on a subordinate, and other aides who listen to his charges tend to believe that the president actually issued an order, and not simply stated a wish or a hope.

For a general review of this incident, see Bernstein (1980), and also Hafner (1977).
policy universe generates needs for greater centristm. The weaker the pull of political gravity, the more the emphasis upon central staffing. Thus, according to one report, the load on central staff personnel in the EOP (at least during the Carter presidency) is immense when compared with staff counterparts in other nations (Campbell, 1980, p. 22). This apparently reflects White House obsessions for detailed policy control in an environment in which such control is as elusive as it is expected.

**Foreign Policy by Irregulars:**

**White House and Departmental Settings**

The conditions that make American presidents turn to staff at the White House rather than bureaucrats, or even their appointees in the departments, undoubtedly characterize all policy sectors. Departmental appointees who have strong links to the career subcultures within their departments are often viewed with suspicion at the White House. They will be seen as advocates of parochial interests. Officials at the White House want presidential objectives to be “rationally” managed. Officials in the departments, on the other hand, want “rational” policies as they define them. This difference in perspective exists everywhere, and is by no means a peculiar characteristic of White House-State Department relations. What is peculiar about this particular relationship, however, is the extent to which the foreign service regulars are cut adrift from other sources of support in the political system and within their own department. Unlike their counterparts in the domestic agencies, they have no statutory-based standards to apply, only their judgments and knowledge to rely on. Unlike analysts in the domestic agencies, and in other national security agencies such as the Defense Department and CIA, their “data” are contained in imprints rather than print-outs.

Thus, at least since Dean Acheson’s stewardship, most secretaries of state who wielded great influence (Dulles, Rusk under Johnson, and Kissinger) traveled light—in other words, without much departmental baggage. Strong secretaries often have been strong precisely because they ignored the department. When secretaries of state are perceived as representing departmental perspectives, they become especially vulnerable to competing sources of influence—most particularly from within the White House. Why?

One must begin with the fact that foreign policy is a high-priority item. By its importance, its capacity to push other items on the agenda to a lesser place, foreign policy, though not equally appetizing to all presidents, becomes the main course of the presidential meal. The extent to which foreign policy is a focal point of attention, of course, depends on the extent to which any nation is deeply involved and committed as an actor in world affairs. And that, understandably, is related to a nation’s capacities for such involvement.

Crisis especially lend themselves to central direction. Foreign policy is often nothing but crises—either reacting to them or creating them. Filled with crisis and presumed to be of first-order importance, foreign affairs are, in fact, glamorous. Much more than apparently intractable or technically complex domestic problems, foreign affairs often seem to be contests of will—games against other players rather than games against nature.

In such games, regular bureaucrats are unlikely to be key players. Their instincts are to think small, to think incrementally, and to see the world in not highly manipulable terms. The glitzy that presidents often see in foreign policy is at odds with the cautious instincts of the professional service entrusted to deal with it. Unattached to specific operational responsibilities and accessible to the White House, the NSC can take on the qualities of a think-tank unencumbered by the more limited visions that flow from the State Department itself. Moreover, the NSC, like any staff organization, is far more readily adapted to the changing foreign policy themes of presidents than a line bureaucracy such as the State Department. State is, of course, highly adaptable to modulated swings in policy, but not to strong oscillations. Organizational memory and bureaucratic inertia preclude it from reinventing the world every four years.

This particular difference in settings—White House staff versus line bureaucracy—also implies a difference in styles of policy analysis. One setting is accessible to power, the other more remote. One is especially attractive to the ambitious and purposive, the other to the cautious and balanced. One setting is tailored for “in-and-outers” and “high-fliers” borrowed from other agencies, while the other is meant for “long-haulers.” One effect of this difference in settings is that even though the NSC staff is not overwhelmingly composed of academic figures, more NSC staffers are apt to be academics than their counterparts at state. For example, a study of senior foreign service officers indicates that fewer than 8 percent are Ph.D.s (Mennis, p. 71), while 58 percent of the NSC staff with which Zbigniew Brzezinski began were holders of the Ph.D. degree, as are 43 percent of the present staff. Such differences do not reflect merely ephemeral circumstance. The

*Compiled from data in Berry and Kyle (1977).*
Reagan NSC also represents a mixture of scholars and government career officers with Washington experience (Smith, 1981). And as Destler describes the NSC staff under Presidents Kennedy and Nixon: "The typical staff members were not too different from the Kennedy period—relatively young, mobile, aggressive men, combining substantial background in the substance of foreign affairs with primary allegiance to the White House" (1972b, p. 123).

In other words, there is a correlation between background and organizational setting even though it is quite far from perfect. Backgrounds, of course, are only frail indicators of differences in syndromes of policy thought, and such differences need not imply substantive disagreement. Nonetheless, the correlation implies that the White House miniature of the State Department is more innovative than the real one at Foggy Bottom, more aggressive, and also more enthusiastic for White House policy directions.

The NSC staff and the national security assistant, of course, may conflict (as may the regulars in the State Department and their noncareer superiors). There have been notable clashes in the past, especially in the immediate aftermath of the American incursion into Cambodia in 1970 during the Vietnam engagement. The national security assistant and the NSC staff are not necessarily in agreement upon substance, but their *forma mentis* are likely to differ from those of their State Department counterparts. If presidents are served amorphous goo from the State Department bureaucracy (which they often see as representing other nations' interests to Washington), they may be provided with clear-headed principles from their in-house foreign policy advisers. Concerned with direction and results, presidents are usually predisposed to cut through the rigidities of complex bureaucratic systems and the cautions of the foreign policy regulars. In this, of course, lies the potential for isolating policy advice from implementation. Going through the bureaucracy often means spinning wheels, but ignoring the bureaucracy poses the prospect of personalizing policy rather than institutionalizing it. In this latter course, there is, to be sure, less wheel-spinning but there is, at least in the long run, also more spinning of castles in the air.

Finally, the soft technology of foreign relations means that it is just precisely the kind of thing that politicians think they are better qualified for than anyone else (Merton, 1968, p. 265). A former noncareer ambassador writes, for instance: "The average American has a sounder instinctive grasp of the basic dynamics of foreign policy than he does of domestic macro-economics. . . . Common sense—the sum of personal experience—will take one further in the realm of foreign policy than in macro-economics" (Silberman, 1979, pp. 879-80). Because little seems mystical or technical about foreign policy to presidents, reliance upon cumbersome bureaucratic machinery seems unnecessary. In most instances, presidents like to be directly engaged with foreign policy because it is more glamorous and central to their historical ambitions, less dependent upon congressional approval, and because it activates their "head of state" role (and in the event of possible military involvement, their "commander-in-chief" one also). In contrast to the trench warfare and haggling involved with domestic policy formulation, foreign policy making tends to promote self-esteem and presidential prestige. With all of these possibilities, it is improbable, therefore, that presidents want the powers of foreign policy making to be distant from them. Usually, they want it close to them. Presidents need to legitimate White House centrism, then, by investing it in a flexible staff operation headed by an unattached foreign policy "expert." These specific reasons, encapsulated within the more general determinants already discussed, have led the White House Department of State to loom as a contender for policy-making influence with the "cabinet" Department of State.

**Irregular and Regular Syndromes**

In spite of the alluring differences implied by the personnel distinction between irregulars and regulars, neither end of this distinction is a monolith nor is it always generalizable in the same ways across policy sectors and political systems. One reason for this is that bureaucratic cultures reflect the character of the host political culture, as those who have contrasted British and American administrative styles have observed (Sayre, 1964). Both British senior civil servants and their American counterparts, for instance, are bureaucratic regulars, yet they differ substantially in the manner in which they confront their roles—a difference that results from the political ambience surrounding them. Especially in administrative systems where there is little tradition of rotating officials across departments, there may be sharp differences in the characteristics of regulars across various departments. In the United States where these departmental subcultures are quite firmly implanted (McGregor, 1974, pp. 24-26; Seidman, 1980, pp. 133-73; Aberbach and Rockman, 1976, pp. 466-67), there is a stylistic gap between the entrepreneurial subcultures often found in social and regulatory agencies and the foreign service subculture of neutral competence.

Similar differences exist amongst irregular personnel as well, and as previously noted, American administration is permeated with irregulars.
American elite civil servants' responsibilities began at a level of authority significantly below that of their British counterparts. Indeed, as defined earlier, the distinction between "irregular" and "regular" within departmental settings must be hierarchically related. Still, the appointed irregulars in the departments often have had prior experience in that department, 35 to 40 percent according to one estimate (Stanley et al., 1967, p. 41). The professional perspectives of their departments often have been assimilated by these officials, and at least in this respect it is possible to distinguish them from the corps of presidential policy advisers.

Precise comparisons of administrative structures such as those of Britain and the United States are always perilous, but it would not be stretching matters excessively to say that Executive Office irregulars are somewhat akin to the high-fliers of the British civil service without the latter's attachments to the civil service system. Typically, they have less experience in government than their senior line counterparts. With the growth of the institutional presidency, however, the American system has displayed a penchant for mismatching titles of formal authority and possibilities for influencing policy. The high-fliers, therefore, often are better positioned to exert more policy influence in the American system than are the senior officials in the line departments. In the American system, proximity breeds possibilities.

Two very broad distinctions need to be made. One is that between personnel and their relation to career service channels. The other is between organizational settings—central staff versus line department. Further differentiations, of course, can be made within each of these categories. Table I illustrates the possible intersection of personnel career channels and their organizational settings. Although I have no measure of the relative influence of setting and career channel on policy thinking and behavior, it is likely that departmental appointees (cell B of Table 1) will be subject, with varying degrees of susceptibility, to the magnetic pull of their departments. Similarly, central staff officials with career backgrounds (cell C of Table 1), also with varying susceptibility, may be inclined to retain their career perspectives and be sensitive to their promotion opportunities—in short, to maximize their departmental interests even while serving in integrative staff structures. This problem reportedly plagued the NSC to some extent under Eisenhower (Falk, pp. 424-25). The distinction between cells A and D is obviously the purest. I assume here the probability of interactive effects between structure and personnel.

Beginning with a broad distinction between irregular staff and regular bureaucratic settings, Table 2 sketches some of the important respects in which these settings differ. These differences point to modal variations in function, in vantage point, in personnel, and in orientations to policy. In the analysis that follows, however, I start with differences between personnel, work back to settings, and then to forms of policy thinking.

How do irregulars differ from regulars? First, irregulars are more likely to be charged with coordinating functions (policy planning, for instance) than are regulars even when they are each engaged in departmental responsibilities. These functions provide the irregular with greater breadth and the capacity to see a more integrated policy picture, but one limited in depth. On the other hand, the regular is located so as to see detail but is less able or likely to see beyond it. These structural features also lead to different interpretations of rationality. The irregular is apt to define rationality as coherence from the vantage point of policy man-

Table 1. Career Channel and Organizational Setting Matrix

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Career Channel: Irregular Setting: Central Staff</th>
<th>Career Channel: Irregular Setting: Line Department</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Career Channel:</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regular Setting:</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>D</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Staff</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Line Department</td>
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Source: Created by the author.
agement. The regular, however, is apt to see rationality in terms of informed policy making.

Free of operational responsibilities, irregulars are apt to be conceptualizing and deductive (more "theoretical" or "ideological") in policy thinking than are foreign policy regulars. Intimate detailed knowledge possessed by the regular tends to induce skepticism toward ideas that are abstract and aesthetically interesting. As the regular sees him, the irregular is a simplifier with tendencies toward an excess of imagination and a scarcity of discriminating judgment. Irregulars are rarely lacking in expertise; but their possibilities for thought are bypassed from the immediacy of operational problems. Whether by role difference, by recruitment path, or by their interactive effects, the irregular is more disposed to theoretical thought than the regular. Theories are the precursors of activism for they simplify reality sufficiently to permit general, though not necessarily operational, plans of action. The inductivist that is more characteristic of the regulars leads them often toward perceiving complication; it leads them frequently to be skeptical about generalized schemes of action; often it leads them into paralysis. It is both the virtue and the liability of the regular's "hands-on" involvement that he will be predisposed to illustrate the invalidity of proposals and the assumptions they are based on than to advance alternative solutions. After all, it is normally the regular who has to live with the consequences of "rashness."

Ideas and skepticism, while polar intellectual traits, are nonetheless each valuable ones. Large bureaucracies are the wellspring of skepticism and the depressant of ideas. This bureaucratic characteristic flows from the inertia associated with established routines as well as from the concreteness of the regular official's world. Met daily, concreteness and detail induce awareness of complexity. It is this awareness of complexity that ironically is at the heart of the State Department's self-perception as a protector of real long-term interests (Gelb, 1980, p. 34).

Given their natural proclivities, regular bureaucrats are apt to be oriented to the long term within their specialized realms, and likely to be skeptical of overarching themes. This characteristic is not especially attractive to presidents whose "common-sense" approaches to foreign policy often coincide with what is also politically supportive. Being policy generalists, presidents tend to be impatient with "can't-doers," failing to understand or appreciate the skepticism of the foreign

Table 2. Differences between Irregular Central Staff Settings and Regular Bureaucratic Settings in Foreign Policy Making

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Irregular Staff Settings</th>
<th>Regular Bureaucratic Settings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Responsibilities</strong></td>
<td>Coordinating functions which provide breadth and integrative perspectives, and foster coherence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Location Relative to Decisional Authority</strong></td>
<td>Proximate to political authority, therefore perceived as &quot;Us&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of Personnel</strong></td>
<td>Irregulars and regular &quot;floaters&quot; with few organizational commitments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Typical Policy-Making Styles</strong></td>
<td>Activists, Theorists, Conceptualizers, Deductivists, &quot;Simplifiers&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Dominant Policy Implications</strong></td>
<td>Directive and thematic, initiatory and bold</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Resulting Policy Problems</strong></td>
<td>Superficiality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Created by the author.*
policy regulars. From the presidential vantage point, sober thoughts are mere fudge, and skepticism rarely accords with presidents' political needs. Unattached foreign policy "experts," on the other hand, can articulate ideas and push proposals unencumbered by bureaucratic constraints or operational responsibilities. This gives them an obvious advantage over those representing the particularizers in the foreign policy bureaucracy. As for the secretary of state, his advisory and policy-making roles will likely be as large as his distance from the department is great.

There are dangers in the detachment of policy advice and policy influence from operational responsibilities. The triumph of theory over fact is obviously troubling. If regulars, by their skepticism (and probably also their convenience) tend toward incrementalist thinking, it is also true that, at least in the short run, no one ever died of incrementalism. Still, the failure to produce and institutionalize policy integration can be a long-term carcinogenic agent. For politics contoured only by those with operational attachments are likely to suffer from deficiencies of imagination.

Proposed Solutions to the Integration Problem

The problems of generating integrated and informed policy are obviously apt to receive attention in inverse proportion to the power of the political tools for achieving it. By this standard, America's foreign policy machinery is beset with continuing difficulties. Proposals, official and unofficial, to remedy the foreign policy machinery of the United States abound. They tend to fall into three broad classifications: (1) those emphasizing the role of a strong State Department with a powerful secretarial and presidential direction; (2) those emphasizing the importance of multiple streams of information with a national security assistant playing the more traditional role of traffic manager rather than the one of advocate acquired over the last two decades; and (3) those emphasizing strengthened cabinet-level coordination and the interchange of officials beneath this level. My intent here is to highlight their particular perspectives and their uncertainties.

1. Strengthening the Secretary of State. This is not only a common proposal, but also one that seems most obviously apt to connect political strength to institutional capabilities. As Destler has put it:

The issue is not whether the Secretary or the President has primacy. Rather it is who—the Secretary or the National Security Assistant—should be the central foreign affairs official short of the President and acting as his "agent of coordination." If the President is known to rely primarily on the Secretary of State for leadership in foreign policy-making across the board, he should prove far more formidable than a "mere cabinet officer" (1972b, p. 359).

A strengthened secretary of state, however, must have the confidence of the president, and this, in turn, requires a strengthened State Department which means, in Destler's view, a lessened diplomatic role for the secretary and a more forceful policy advocate and organizational management role. What Destler has in mind by the latter, however, is essentially a State Department so transformed that it would be a more coherent tool of presidential direction. In other words, an important element of Destler's proposed reforms is to do unto the State Department that which often has been tried in domestic departments: politicize it. Again, in his words:

There will remain an inevitable tension between the interests and predispositions of Foreign Service officers and those of Presidents. So no Secretary of State who did not build a strong "political" component into the State Department could hope to satisfy a President bent on controlling the foreign affairs bureaucracy (1972b, p. 288).

Although it does not do full justice to Destler's arguments to say that coherence from the president's standpoint is the exclusive value with which he is concerned, his prescriptions move in the direction of making it the primary one. The potential trap, as Alexander George has noted, is that managerial rationality would come to displace substantive rationality, a likely probability if the State Department is to be politicized, if in essence it is to become a larger, deeper NSC (1972b, pp. 2811-83).

In this guise, a strengthened secretary of state necessitates a weaker national security assistant, indeed, a virtual elimination of the position. A strong secretary of state with a close relationship to the chief executive, Destler claims, has been the best check on the role of the national security assistant as a central policy advocate. But, as he also notes, the very existence of the assistant in the White House makes it difficult to generate that close relationship (1980, pp. 86-87).

The responsiveness of the State Department, of course, is also dependent upon a president knowing his own mind. Presidents differ in this regard, but it is not immediately clear how consistent they can be concerning policy directions to what, after all, are mostly reactive opportunities and necessities. Thematic agreement may be conducive to operational agreement, but it can be no more than that. Alternatively, overarching clarity in foreign policy may simply be dogmatism.

A more likely possibility, one that may be symbolized by personalities such as Alexander Haig
and Henry Kissinger, is that of the entrepreneurial secretary of state who cuts a demanding figure in his own right. The entrepreneurship, however, may well come at the cost of organizational debilitation. While the relationship between Alexander Haig, the State Department, and the White House remains to be developed as of this writing, Kissinger, as secretary of state, was both a policy advocate and presidential spokesman, but in spirit he never left the White House in these roles. Nor, in fact, had he physically left it until late 1975. A secretary who draws nourishment from the Department's professional foreign service roots, however, is apt to find himself, sooner or later, designated as one of "them." This, at least since Dean Acheson, has largely been the case.

In any event, the problem lingers of generating political coherence (organizational rationality) in such manner as to effectively utilize substantive rationality (derived from specialized sub-units). A politicized State Department, one suspects, would be more coherent and responsive. But could it then effectively contribute to informed policy making?

2. Encouraging Multiple Advocacy. As proposed by Alexander George (1972a), the organizational strategy of multiple advocacy assumes the virtues of local rationality. In spirit, it is to foreign policy formulation an application of Chairman Mao's "Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign. It makes a virtue of what is a necessary vice, the multiplicity of perspectives generated by the division of labor which bureaucratic sprawl leaves in its wake. George's interesting suggestion is to return to the basic concept of the old special assistant's role as a managerial custodian, a facilitator of varying perspectives so that the president may avail himself of the full play of diversity surrounding him. In its new form, the assistant would be constrained from playing the role of policy advocate, or from presenting foreign policy views to the public. His facilitating role would be greatly expanded, and in that presumably would lie his status. To some extent, this super-custodian presumably would be something akin to the director of the Office of Management and Budget, but without the capacity to pass judgment upon departmental requests—in other words, largely powerless. I am not the first to point out that in Washington those with status but without power quickly become worked around rather than through.

We may question, too, the assumption that presidents, or leaders of other large organizations, for that matter, are thirsting for information, diversity, and knowledge. Mao, after all, quickly came to disown the "Hundred Flowers Bloom" campaign. Facts, information, knowledge are great legitimizers of action. Not surprisingly, leaders often find it best to screen them selectively. A reasonable hypothesis is that the longer presidents (leaders in general) have been in power and thus the more prior commitments they have established and defenses they have constructed around them, the more likely it is that their tolerance for diversity declines. Even if at first presidents are predisposed to hunt facts, in the end facts are more likely to haunt presidents. Removed from electoral concerns, presidential interests in policy, per se, are often suspect (recall Nixon's response to Haldeman's request for policy direction on propping up the Italian lira), but whatever interests they do have also are apt to diminish as their term wears on and as more decisions become responses rather than initiatives. None of this perhaps would be so important were it not for the fact that George insists that presidents must assume a magistrate's role; otherwise, diversity becomes hyperpluralist babble. For without this particular role assumption, the rich flow of information and analysis likely would reinforce local rationality. Coherence and direction would famish.

The assumption that foreign policy contestants ought essentially to emulate lawyers in an American litigation proceeding by pressing their "interested" rendition of the "facts" before a disinterested presidential magistrate is curious. Being that presidents are neither disinterested themselves, nor unlimited in their attention spans, it is more likely that the chief magistrate will be the president's national security assistant. There is, in short, little incentive for the president to cope with detailed arguments, and none for the assistant to shy away from policy advocacy. As interesting as they are, proposals for functional changes that do not account for the costs to, and incentives of, the actors involved are more nearly prayers.

3. Strengthening the Cabinet and Rotating Officials. In Presidential Power, Richard Neustadt quotes a White House aide to President Eisenhower as saying, "If some of these Cabinet members would just take time out to stop and ask themselves, 'What would I want if I were President?', they wouldn't give him all the trouble he's been having" (1980, p. 31). The reasons for this estrangement are well known. And the underlying assumption about it, namely, that role alteration diminishes parochialness, is taken as the point of origin for its alleviation. To alleviate this condition, a two-pronged strategy has been advanced (Allison and Szanton, 1976, pp. 78-80; Allison, 1980). The strategy requires a dash of something a bit new and something old.

What is somewhat new is the recommendation
that NSC staffers be continually rotated between the agencies and the White House so as to mold together agency and White House perspectives among individuals. The model for this suggestion is that of the British civil service generalist. As matters stand, of course, a substantial portion of the NSC staff previously served in another agency (State, Defense, and CIA, in that order) either indirectly or directly before arriving at the NSC. Estimates from the 1977 list show that nearly 40 percent had such experience (as compiled Berry and Kyle, 1977), and to define things more narrowly, Destler (1972b, p. 249) indicates that as of April 1971 almost half of the NSC staff had some prior experience either in the State Department or the military services. Thus it is not that many of these officials are lacking experience in the agencies (though it should be kept in mind that over 60 percent of the 1977 staff had no prior agency experience), but rather that for most of them, present roles are likely to be especially compelling. Recombinant socialization does not necessarily mean intellectual integration. In the face of a highly centrifugal structure of government, knowing how it looks from "there" may be merely a tactical advantage in the struggle to influence policy rather than a basis for policy integration. For such proposals to work, structures that provide for collectively responsible points of decision making are essential.

Thus, the other part of this recommended strategy is to create an Executive Committee of Cabinet Officials (ExCab) to provide ongoing high-level policy review. "A body like ExCab," Graham Allison claims, "would yield most of the advantages of the collegial participation of major department heads while avoiding the unwieldiness of the full cabinet" (1980, p. 46). ExCab, however, as even its promoter willingly admits, is not an altogether new idea. The Nixon administration after all, had proposed a set of "super cabinet" departments and, failing congressional approval, then created by executive fiat an informal set of "super-secretaries." Though Nixon's political demise brought this operation into formal disrepair, it is unfair to pass judgment upon it, since its creation only shortly preceded Nixon's calamitous, if protracted, fall from grace. To be sure, there are a number of operational problems that this approach does not automatically avoid. There is first the question of who is in and who is out. Only in a cabinet of nonentities of the sort Nixon tried to create for his second administration is it likely that department secretaries would accede to more powerful presences. Secondly, while the Ex-Cab proposal potentially permits diversity to flow with decisional responsibility, many of the difficulties presidents have in dealing with the full cabinet also arise even with a reduced foreign policy-focused cabinet. It is not merely the presence of diversity within the executive that distresses presidents, for that evidently is a condition affecting top leaders everywhere to some degree. Rather, it is the ease with which opposition or losing forces within the executive can go to Capitol Hill or the press, usually reaching the former by means of the latter. It is difficult for collegial government, however reduced the number of relevant actors, to flourish under such conditions. Any proposal to reform the organizational apparatus of American foreign policy making needs to be sensitive to this problem. Though the possible, but as yet unknown, impact of organizational reforms should not be disconnected, these neither alter fundamentally the institutional framework of largely antagonistic forces in Washington nor the culture of openness that both sustains and reinforces this adversarial framework.

Conclusion

Presidents ultimately determine foreign policy. Whatever system of advice and decision making exists can exist only with the president's approval. It is within the range of presidential discretion to permit the national security assistant to become a leading contestant for foreign policy influence. Similarly, it is within the scope of presidential judgment to permit the national security assistant to appear as the chief foreign policy representative for their administrations. Nixon and Carter did permit these things; indeed, they encouraged them, though for different reasons. Thus far, the Reagan model (if there is one) has resulted in decreased visibility for the national security assistant. The NSC professional staff, however, is no smaller than it was during the Carter administration, and at least one report indicates a more direct White House staff involvement monitoring operations through the NSC machinery (Evans and Novak, 1981). Additionally, somewhat reminiscent of Nixon's "administrative presidency" model, a loyal operative has been slipped into the deputy secretary's role at State. In the last 14 months of the Ford administration, the role of the national security assistant and, to a modest degree, that of the NSC veered closer to the Eisenhower model of a dominant secretary of state and a "neutral competent" national security assistant (Brent Scowcroft). The reason for this, however, now seems clear. Ford's secretary of state, Henry Kissinger, was his leading foreign policy spokes-

7The Carter NSC figures are essentially reversed under Reagan. Among the present NSC staff, roughly 60 percent have had prior government experience, and 40 percent have not.
man and leading foreign policy maker, yet not really his foreign minister. To be both, foreign minister (representing departmental perspectives) and leading foreign policy maker has within it increasingly the seeds of an insoluble role conflict.

Presidents vary, of course, in their ideas as to how foreign policy making ought to be organized, what they want from it, and how much weight is given at least at the outset to the values of harmony and diversity. The difficulty lies in isolating which aspects of their variability will lead to a heightened emphasis upon staff irregulars, and how they will be used. Similar results, as the disparate cases of Nixon and Carter indicate, may flow from different organizational modes. While each held widely different models of the policy-shaping process in foreign affairs, each also further enlarged the role of the NSC as a policy mechanism. Early on, Nixon seemed to prefer policy to be shaped at the White House, and as much as possible to skirt around the bureaucracy. Carter's organization, on the other hand, seemed to exaggerate Alexander George's ideal of multiple advocacy except, quite importantly, that Zbigniew Brzezinski was meant to be an advocate and not just a mediator. Different intentions seem to have produced fairly similar results—a highly visible national security assistant and a "competing" State Department.

The variability of presidents notwithstanding, the overall thrust since Eisenhower seems fairly clear: more White House centrism in foreign policy making, and an enlarged NSC role. Presidential variability tells us a lot about form—the particular uses made of the NSC mechanism and of the national security assistant—but it does not tell us why the NSC today looks so different from the NSC of 25 years ago, nor does it tell us why the national security assistant has so often been a primary policy maker. While the water has both risen and receded, the watermark is a good bit higher now than it was then.

To explain this trend toward centrism, and thus the importance of policy irregulars, my analysis focuses upon a theory of government—a theme somewhat broader than its specific target. The proposals for reconstituting America's foreign policy mechanisms that have been examined here certainly represent a more precise approach. Yet, government and politics in Washington, and the open culture that surrounds it, represent the limits against which these various proposals bump. From the hyperpoliticized ambience of American government the role needs of foreign policy contestants are shaped. Institutional fragmentation and weak parties not only beget one another, they also promote a level of bureaucratic politics of unusual intensity—grist for the mill of a highly inquisitive press.

No wonder presidents find their political and policy needs better served from within the White House. From this vantage point, the departments sooner or later are perceived as representing or pursuing interests that are not those of the president. This is especially so for the State Department because it is frequently seen as representing interests of other countries. With virtually no domestic constituencies and reflecting a subculture that, much like the British civil service, emphasizes "neutral competence" and balance, the foreign service regulars in the State Department are singularly disadvantaged. The steamy adversarial climate of Washington's executive politics does not nourish such values. The White House (and often department heads) are anxious for "movement," and unresponsive to "let's wait a moment." In the long run, the danger in any such setting is that the tools of central clearance will metamorphose into mechanisms for central dominance.

In sum, the reasons why America has a competing State Department turn out to be both exquisitely complex and yet remarkably simple. Its simplicity lies in the structure of antagonistic forces given form by the American Constitution. Its complexities lie in the conditions—the importance of foreign policy, the role of the media, the burgeoning of policy intellectuals—that have since ripened.

The problem of reconciling "the persistent dilemmas of unity and diversity" (Fenno, p. 339) remains to be solved as much in the foreign policy sphere as in the domestic one, especially as the distinction between these arenas erodes. In unity lies strategic direction and clarity, but also the dangers of a monocled vision. In diversity lies sensitivity to implementation and to nuance, but also the dangers of producing least common denominators. Ironically, during the Eisenhower presidency when the NSC performed most nearly like a cabinet committee producing consensus from diversity, it was criticized for the ambiguities remaining in its products (Destler, 1977, pp. 152-53). If not a fudge factory, it was at least a fudge shop.

Each president to some extent will develop mechanisms that suit him best. Among other things, the policy system established will reflect the idiosyncracies of interpersonal chemistry. Each, though, has inherited an in-house foreign policy apparatus defined in the last 20 years more by how it has been used than by its original statutory rationale. How that apparatus will evolve cannot be foretold with preciseness. But how and why it has evolved from its inception to its present state is a saga that should be of as much interest to students of American government as to those of foreign policy.
References


