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The National Security Council: Background and Issues for Congress

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Summary

On February 4, 2021, President Joseph R. Biden signed National Security Memorandum (NSM)-2, *Renewing the National Security Council System*. In it, the Biden Administration articulates how it intends to manage and coordinate national security issues among relevant departments and agencies. This report offers a brief historical overview of the formation of the National Security Council (NSC), clarifies the terms and structures associated with it, and provides a table of the NSC's current composition.

Contents

Introduction 1
Pre-NSC Coordination Methods 1
The Need for Interdepartmental Coordination 1
Past Modes of Policy Coordination 2
The Creation of the NSC 4
Introduction 4
Proposals 4
Congressional Consideration 5
The NSC as Created in 1947 6
How Does the National Security Council Function? 7
Other Named NSC Positions 8
NSC Functions: Theory vs. Practice 9
NSC Reform? 9
NSC Executive and Congressional Liaison 10
Conclusion 11

Tables

Table A-1. NSC Membership in Presidential Administrations, as Established by Presidential Directive 13
Table A-2. NSC Principals Committee (PC) Membership in Prior Presidential Administrations, as Established by Presidential Directive 20

Appendixes

Appendix A. Comparative Charts of Individuals Named as Members or Attendees of NSC and/or PC Meetings 12
Appendix B. As Established in National Security Memorandum-2, "Memorandum on Renewing the National Security Council System," February 4, 2021, National Security Advisers, 1953-Present 25

Contacts

Author Information 26

Introduction[1]

The National Security Council (NSC) was established by statute in 1947 to create an interdepartmental body to advise the President on matters of national security. More specifically, the NSC was created to integrate domestic, foreign, and military policies related to national security, and to facilitate cooperation among the military services and other government departments and agencies in matters of national security. Currently, statutory members of the NSC are the President, the Vice President, the Secretary of State, the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of Energy and the Secretary of the Treasury. Other senior officials participate in NSC deliberations at the President's request. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of National Intelligence are statutory advisers.

The President clearly holds final decisionmaking authority in the executive branch. Over the years, however, the NSC staff has emerged as a major factor in the formulation (and at times in the implementation) of national security policy. Similarly, the head of the NSC staff, the National Security Adviser, has played an important, and occasionally highly public, role in policymaking. This report summarizes the evolution of the NSC from its creation to the present.[2]

The organization and influence of the NSC have varied significantly from one Administration to another, ranging from highly structured and formal systems to loose-knit teams of experts. Although it is universally acknowledged that the NSC staff should be organized to meet the particular goals and work habits of an incumbent President, the history of the NSC provides ample examples of the advantages and disadvantages of different types of policymaking structures.

Congress enacted the statute creating the NSC and has altered the character of its membership over the years. Congress annually appropriates funds for its activities, but Congress does not, routinely, receive testimony on substantive matters from the National Security Adviser or from NSC staff. Proposals to require Senate confirmation of the Security Adviser have been discussed but not adopted.

Pre-NSC Coordination Methods

The Need for Interdepartmental Coordination

Successful national security policymaking is based on careful analysis of the international situation, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, military, and morale factors. Based on a comprehensive assessment, effective government leaders attempt to attain their goals by selecting the most appropriate instrument of policy, whether it is military, diplomatic, economic, based on the intelligence services, or a combination of more than one. Although this approach has been an ideal throughout the history of international relations, prior to World War II, U.S. Presidents focused primarily on domestic matters and lacked organizational support to integrate national security policies. They relied instead on ad hoc arrangements and informal groups of advisers. However, in the early 1940s, the complexities of global war and the need to work together with

[1] The author is indebted to Richard Best, former Congressional Research Service Specialist in National Defense, whose report, "The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment," forms the basis of the historical material contained within this piece.

[2] For a more in-depth treatment of this evolution, see CRS Report RL30840, *The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment*, by Richard A. Best Jr.

allies led to more structured processes of national security decisionmaking to ensure that the efforts of the State, War, and Navy Departments were focused on the same objectives. There was an increasingly apparent need for an organizational entity to support the President in looking at multiple factors, military and diplomatic, that had to be faced during wartime and in the early postwar months, when crucial decisions had to be made regarding the future of Germany and Japan and many other countries.

In the postwar years, the United States' continuing worldwide responsibilities involved active diplomacy, sizable military forces, and sophisticated intelligence agencies, in addition to economic assistance in various forms. In response to these evolving responsibilities, the United States established organizational mechanisms to analyze the international environment, identify priorities, and recommend appropriate policy options. Four decades later, the end of the Cold War saw the emergence of new international concerns, including transnational threats such as international terrorism and drug trafficking, that have continued to require the coordination of various departments and agencies concerned with national security policies.

Past Modes of Policy Coordination

Coordinative mechanisms to implement policy are largely creations of the executive branch, but they directly influence choices that Congress may be called upon to support and fund. Congress thus takes interest in the processes by which policies and the roles of various participants are determined. Poor coordination of national security policy can result in calls for Congress to take actions that have major costs, both international and domestic, but an uncertain outcome. Effective coordination, on the other hand, can help achieve policy goals with minimal losses while providing the opportunity to devote material resources to other needs.

Until the 20th century, most U.S. policy coordination centered on the President, who was virtually the sole means of such coordination. The Constitution designates the President as Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces (Article II, Section 2) and grants him broad powers in the areas of foreign affairs (Article II, Section 2), powers that have expanded considerably in the 20th century. Given limited U.S. foreign involvements for the first 100 or so years under the Constitution, the small size of the Armed Forces, the relative geographic isolation of the nation, and the absence of any proximate threat, the President, or his executive agents in the Cabinet, provided a sufficient coordinative base.

However, the advent of World War I, which represented a modern, complex military effort involving broad domestic and international coordination, forced new demands on the system that the President alone could not meet. In 1916, the Council of National Defense was established by statute (the Army Appropriation Act of 1916). It reflected proposals that went back to 1911 and consisted of the Secretaries of War, Navy, Interior, Agriculture, Commerce and Labor. The statute allowed the President to appoint an advisory commission of outside specialists to aid the council.[3] The Council of National Defense was intended as an economic mobilization coordinating group, as reflected by its membership, which excluded the Secretary of State. His inclusion would have given the council a much wider coordinative scope. Furthermore, the authorizing statute essentially limited the council's role to economic mobilization issues. The Council of National Defense was disbanded in 1921, but it set a precedent for coordinative efforts that would be needed in World War II.

[3] Paul Y. Hammond, "The National Security Council as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination: An Interpretation and Appraisal," *American Political Science Review*, December, 1960, p. 899; U.S. Bureau of the Budget, *The United States at War* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1946), p. 2.

The President remained the sole national security coordinator until 1938, when the prewar crisis began to build in intensity, presenting numerous and wide-ranging threats to the inadequately armed United States. The State Department, in reaction to reports of Axis activities in Latin America, proposed that interdepartmental conferences be held with War and Navy Department representatives. In April 1938, Secretary of State Cordell Hull, in a letter to President Franklin Roosevelt, formally proposed the creation of a standing committee made up of the second-ranking officers of the three departments, for purposes of liaison and coordination. The President approved this idea, and the Standing Liaison Committee, or Liaison Committee as it was also called, was established, the members being the Under Secretary of State, the Chief of Staff of the Army, and the Chief of Naval Operations. The Standing Liaison Committee was the first significant effort toward interdepartmental liaison and coordination, although its work in the area was limited and uneven. The Liaison Committee largely concentrated its efforts on Latin American problems, and it met irregularly. Although it did foster some worthwhile studies during the crisis following the fall of France, it was soon superseded by other coordinative modes. It was more a forum for exchanging information than a new coordinative and directing body.[4]

An informal coordinating mechanism, which complemented the Standing Liaison Committee, evolved during the weekly meetings established by Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, who took office in June 1940. Stimson arranged for weekly luncheons with his Navy counterpart, Frank Knox, and Cordell Hull, but these meetings also did not fully meet the growing coordinative needs of the wartime government.

In May 1940, President Roosevelt used the precedent of the 1916 statute and established the National Defense Advisory Council (NDAC), composed of private citizens with expertise in specific economic sectors.[5] As with the earlier Council of National Defense, the NDAC was organized to handle problems of economic mobilization; by the end of the year, it had given way to another organization in a succession of such groups.

During the war, a number of interdepartmental committees were formed to handle various issues, and, while these did help achieve coordination, they suffered from two problems. First, their very multiplicity was to some degree counterproductive to coordination, and they still represented a piecemeal approach to these issues. Second, and more important, these committees in many cases were not advising the President directly, but were advising his advisers. Although their multiplicity and possible overlapping fit Roosevelt's preferred working methods, they did not represent coordination at the top. Roosevelt ran the war largely through the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), who were then an ad hoc and de facto group, and through key advisers such as Harry Hopkins and James F. Byrnes, and via his own personal link with British Prime Minister Winston Churchill.

The weekly meetings arranged by Stimson evolved, however, into a significant coordinative body by 1945, with the formal creation of the State, War, Navy Coordinating Committee (SWNCC). SWNCC had its own secretariat and a number of regional and topical subcommittees; its members were assistant secretaries in each pertinent department. The role of SWNCC members was to aid their superiors on political-military matters, and coordinating the views of the three departments. SWNCC was a significant improvement in civilian-military liaison, and it meshed well with the JCS system; it did not, however, concern itself with fundamental questions of

[4] Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1950), pp. 89-91, 93-94.

[5] R. Elberton Smith, *The Army and Economic Mobilization* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1959), pp. 103-04, 109-10; Bureau of the Budget, *The United States at War*, pp. 22-25, 44, 50-51.

national policy during the early months of the Cold War.[6] SWNCC operated through the end of the war and beyond, becoming SANACC (State, Army, Navy, Air Force Coordinating Committee) after the National Security Act of 1947. It was dissolved in 1949, by which time it had been superseded by the NSC.

The creation of SWNCC, virtually at the end of the war, and its continued existence after the surrender of Germany and Japan, reflected the growing awareness within the federal government that better means of coordination were necessary. The World War II system had largely reflected the preferred working methods of President Roosevelt, who relied on informal consultations with various advisers in addition to the JCS structure. However, the complex demands of global war and the postwar world rendered this system inadequate, and it was generally recognized that a return to the simple and limited prewar system would not be possible if the United States was to take on the responsibilities thrust upon it by the war and its aftermath.

The Creation of the NSC[7]

Introduction

The NSC was not created independently, but rather as one part of a complete restructuring of the entire national security apparatus—civilian and military, including intelligence efforts—as accomplished in the National Security Act of 1947. Thus, isolating the creation of the NSC from the larger reorganization is difficult, especially as the NSC was much less controversial than the unification of the military and so attracted less attention.

Proposals

As early as 1943, General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, had proposed that the prospect of a unified military establishment be assessed. Congress first began to consider this idea in 1944, with the Army showing interest and the Navy opposing the idea. At the request of the Navy, these investigations were deferred until 1945, although by then it was clear to Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal that President Truman, who had come to the White House upon the death of President Roosevelt in April 1945, favored some sort of reorganization. Forrestal believed that outright opposition would not be a satisfactory Navy stance. He also realized that the State Department had to be included in any new national security apparatus. Therefore, he had Ferdinand Eberstadt, a leading New York attorney and banker who had served in several high-level executive branch positions, investigate the issue.[8]

With respect to the formation of the NSC, a key question posed by Forrestal to Eberstadt was,

[6] Ray S. Cline, *Washington Command Post: The Operations Division* (Washington: Office of the Chief of Military History, 1951), pp. 326-27; John Lewis Gaddis, *The United States and the Origins of the Cold War* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1972), p. 126; U.S. Department of State, *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1944, v. I: *General* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1966), pp. 1466-70.

[7] One of the most thorough studies on the creation and development of the NSC through the Eisenhower Administration, including hearings, studies, reports, recommendations and articles, can be found in U.S. Congress, Senate, 86th and 87th Congress, Committee on Government Operations, Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery, *Organizing for National Security*, 1961, 3 vols.

[8] Demetrios Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), pp. 23-44; Walter Millis, ed., *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: The Viking Press, 1951), pp. 62-63.

> What form of postwar organization should be established and maintained to enable the military services and other governmental departments and agencies most effectively to provide for and protect our national security?

Eberstadt's response to this question covered the military establishment, where he favored three separate departments and the continuation of the JCS, as well as the civilian sphere, where he suggested the formation of two new major bodies "to coordinate all these [civilian and military] elements." Eberstadt called these two bodies the National Security Council (NSC) and the National Security Resources Board (NSRB). The NSC was composed of the President, the Secretaries of State and the three military departments, the JCS "in attendance," and the chairman of the NSRB. Eberstadt also favored the creation of a Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) under the NSC.[9]

Eberstadt's recommendations clearly presaged the eventual national security apparatus, with the exception of a unified Department of Defense. The NSC was also a useful negotiating point for Forrestal with the Army, as Eberstadt had described one of its functions as being the "building up [of] public support for clear-cut, consistent, and effective foreign and military policies." This would appeal to all the service factions as they thought back on the lean and insecure prewar years.[10]

War-Navy negotiations over the shape of the reorganization continued throughout 1946 and into 1947. However, some form of central coordination, temporarily called the Council of Common Defense, was not one of the contentious issues. By the end of May 1946, agreement had been reached on this and several other points, and by the end of the year the two sides had agreed on the composition of the new coordinative body.[11]

Congressional Consideration

The creation of the NSC was one of the least controversial sections of the National Security Act and so drew little attention compared with the basic concept of a single military department, around which most of the congressional debate centered.

The concept of a regular and permanent organization for the coordination of national security policy was as widely accepted in Congress as in the executive branch. When the NSC was considered in debate, the major issues were the mechanics of the new organization, its membership, assurances that it would be a civilian organization and would not be dominated by the new Secretary of the National Military Establishment, and whether future positions on the NSC would be subject to approval by the Senate.[12]

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[9] Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, pp. 40-41; see also Jeffrey M. Dorwart, *Eberstadt and Forrestal: A National Security Partnership, 1909-1949* (College Station, TX: Texas A & M University Press, 1991), especially pp. 90-107.

[10] Ibid., pp. 86-87, 91; Hammond, "The NSC as a Device for Interdepartmental Coordination," pp. 900-01.

[11] Caraley, *Politics of Military Unification*, pp. 136-37; Millis, *Forrestal Diaries*, p. 222.

[12] The congressional debate over the National Security Act is summarized in Caraley, *Politics of Military Unification*, pp. 153-82; on the NSC, see p. 161. Examples of congressional opinion can be found throughout the lengthy debate. Some representative comments can be found in the *Congressional Record*, v. 93, July 7, 1947, p. 8299, and July 9, 1947, pp. 8496-97, 8518, 8520.

The NSC as Created in 1947

The NSC was created by the National Security Act, which was signed by the President on July 26, 1947. The NSC appears in Section 101 of Title I, Coordination for National Security, and its purpose is stated as follows:

> (a) ... The function of the Council shall be 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.
>
> (b) In addition to performing such other functions as the President may direct, for the purpose of more effectively coordinating the policies and functions of the departments and agencies of the Government relating to the national security, it shall, subject to the direction of the President, be the duty of the Council
>
> (1) to assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to our actual and potential military power, in the interest of national security, for the purpose of making recommendations to the President in connection there with; and
>
> (2) to consider policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the Government concerned with the national security, and to make recommendations to the President in connection therewith....
>
> (d) The Council shall, from time to time, make such recommendations, and such other reports to the President as it deems appropriate or as the President may require.[13]

The following officers were designated as members of the NSC: the President; the Secretaries of State, Defense, Army, Navy, and Air Force; and the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board. The President could designate the following officers as members "from time to time": secretaries of other executive departments and the Chairmen of the Munitions Board and the Research and Development Board. Any further expansion required Senate approval. The NSC was provided with a staff headed by a civilian executive secretary, appointed by the President.

The National Security Act also established the Central Intelligence Agency under the NSC, but the Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) was not designated as an NSC member. The act also created a National Military Establishment, with three executive departments (Army, Navy, and Air Force) under a Secretary of Defense.

Implicit in the provisions of the National Security Act was an assumption that the NSC would have a role in ensuring that the U.S. industrial base would be capable of supporting national security strategies. The Chairman of the National Security Resources Board, set up by the same act to deal directly with industrial base and civilian mobilization issues, was provided a seat on the NSC. Over the years, however, these arrangements proved unsatisfactory and questions of defense mobilization and civil defense were transferred to other federal agencies and the membership of the NSC was limited to the President, Vice President, the Secretary of State, and the Secretary of Defense.[14] Thus, the need for a coordinative entity that had initially been perceived to center on economic mobilization issues during World War I had evolved to one that engaged the more permanent themes of what had come to be known as national security policy.

The creation of the NSC improved past coordinative methods and organization, bringing together as it did the top diplomatic, military, and resource personnel with the President. The addition of

[13] 50 U.S.C. 402.

[14] More specific information on the history of the transfers of defense mobilization and civil defense authorities may be found in Sections 402 and 404 of *U.S. Code Annotated*, Title 50 (St. Paul, MN: West Publishing Co., 1991).

the CIA, subordinate to the NSC, also provided the necessary intelligence and analyses for the NSC so that it could keep pace with events and trends. The changeable nature of its organization and its designation as an advisory body to the President also meant that the NSC was a malleable organization, to be used as each President saw fit. Thus, its use, internal substructure, and ultimate effect would be directly dependent on the style and wishes of the President.

How Does the National Security Council Function?

According to Title 50, U.S.C. §3021, the National Security Council today has three primary functions:

1. advise the President with respect to the integration of domestic, foreign, and military policies relating to the national security so as to enable the Armed Forces and the other departments and agencies of the U.S. government to cooperate more effectively in matters involving the national security;
2. assess and appraise the objectives, commitments, and risks of the United States in relation to the actual and potential military power of the United States, and make recommendations thereon to the President
3. make recommendations to the President concerning policies on matters of common interest to the departments and agencies of the U.S. government concerned with the national security; and
4. Coordinate, without assuming operational authority, the United States Government response to malign foreign influence operations and campaigns.[15]

Since its inception in 1947, the National Security Council, and the institutions that support it, has evolved from a statutorily mandated meeting of cabinet-level officials into a complex system of coordination, adjudication, and in some instances formulation (as in the case of Dr. Kissinger's tenure as National Security Advisor) of policies among relevant departments and agencies. As a result, when individuals refer to the "NSC," they variously refer to the decisionmaking body created in statute in the 1947 National Security Act, the staff that supports that decisionmaking body, or the processes used by the White House to discuss and adjudicate decisions across different agencies of the executive branch.

- **The National Security Council** is the President's statutory advisory body on matters related to national and international security. Pursuant to Title 50 U.S.C §3021, the NSC's statutory members are the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, Secretary of the Treasury, and the Secretary of Energy. Other senior officials, including the National Security Advisor, participate in NSC deliberations at the President's request. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Director of National Intelligence are the NSC's statutory advisors.[16] The National Security Council is chaired by the President.
- **The National Security Council Staff**. The NSC's activities are coordinated and directed by the Presidentially-appointed National Security Adviser (NSA). They are supported by a National Security Staff (NSS, or NSC staff) comprising permanent employees of the Executive Office of the President and detailees from other government agencies serving temporary assignments. It is organized into

[15] P.L. 115-232 §1043(a)(1).

[16] This "statutory advisor" designation exists to help prevent the politicization of the military and intelligence inputs into the national security decisionmaking process.

offices that focus on a variety of long-term strategic issues and ad hoc working groups that address emerging topics. Each President configures the NSC to address risks to U.S. global security interests according to prescribed policy priorities. The size of the NSC staff and ratio of political appointees to detailees have varied with each Administration. In P.L. 114-328, the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017, Congress limited the number of policy-focused individuals serving on the NSC staff to 200 persons. During the Obama Administration, the Homeland Security Committee and National Security Council staffs were combined into an organization called the National Security Staff.

- **Decisionmaking committees.** Coordinating and managing U.S. national security affairs requires routine coordination and discussion among relevant departments and agencies. Most administrations have therefore set up a hierarchical system of committees designed to discuss, and when appropriate decide, national security matters. These committees meet as frequently as the White House deems necessary. The design and composition of the committee structure is the prerogative of the President, but the approach has often included some variant of the following:
  - **The Principals Committee (PC)** is a level below the NSC, convened by the National Security Advisor. The PC does not need to include all statutory NSC members, but it generally includes the heads of departments or agencies involved with the subject matter being discussed at a given meeting.
  - **The Deputies Committee (DC)** is convened by the Deputy National Security Advisor, and generally includes the deputy heads of departments (i.e., the Deputy Secretary of Defense or Deputy Secretary of State) involved with the subject matter being discussed at a given meeting.
  - **Interagency Policy Committees (IPCs)** are established by the National Security Advisor in consultation with the Deputies Committee and are responsible for day-to-day management of national security matters on a given region or topic at the Assistant Secretary level from relevant agencies. These are chaired by members of the National Security Staff whose subject matter portfolios are relevant to the issue at hand. Different Administrations have used various titles for these committees; under President Trump, this forum was called the Policy Coordination Committee.

Other Named NSC Positions

There are currently two positions within the National Security Council that were established by Congress:

- **The Special Advisor to the President on International Religious Freedom.** Established P.L. 105-277. According to Title 50 U.S.C., the Special Adviser should "serve as a resource for executive branch officials, compiling and maintaining information on the facts and circumstances of violations of religious freedom (as defined in section 6402 of title 22), and making policy recommendations. The Special Adviser should serve as liaison with the Ambassador at Large for International Religious Freedom, the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, Congress and, as advisable,

religious nongovernmental organizations. The position should be comparable to that of a director within the Executive Office of the President."[17]

- **Coordinator for combating malign foreign influence operations and campaigns**. Established in P.L. 115-232 §1043(a)(2). This individual is to be an employee of the National Security and designated by the President as "responsible for the coordination of the interagency process for combating malign foreign influence operations and campaigns" and is required to brief Congress on the responsibilities and activities of the employees no less than twice yearly.

Overall, the NSC and its supporting processes and institutions are designed to be flexible, thereby affording the President maximum latitude to create a security advisory body that suits his unique decisionmaking style. Apart from appropriating the NSC annual budget, Congress has little oversight over the Executive Office of the President, and the National Security Council system in particular, due to the fact that most national security positions within the White House itself (as opposed to the senior levels of Departments and Agencies) are not currently subject to the advice and consent of the Senate. Some observers over the years have argued that the position of National Security Adviser should be subject to Senate confirmation and available to testify before congressional committees, as are officials from other government departments and agencies. Others argue that the President is entitled to confidential advice from his immediate staff.

NSC Functions: Theory vs. Practice

As noted earlier, the 1947 National Security Act established the NSC in order 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." Presidents have latitude to structure and use the NSC as they see fit. In practice, the NSC staff's activities now extend somewhat beyond providing policy advice. First, as one former NSC official notes, "White House involvement is often needed for precise execution of policy, especially when secrecy is required to perform delicate tasks." Second, the rise in strategic importance of transnational threats such as terrorism and narco-trafficking, along with post-Cold War military campaigns in the Balkans, Iraq, and Afghanistan, has increasingly necessitated "whole of government" responses that leverage diplomatic, military, and development tools from a variety of different U.S. government agencies. The NSC often coordinates such responses, and as the international security environment has become more complex, whole-of-government responses to individual crises have become more frequent, translating into even greater NSC involvement. This expanding role is leading many scholars and practitioners to question the appropriate size, scope and role for the NSC.

NSC Reform?

Currently, two primary schools of thought exist regarding what types of reforms are necessary. One view reflects the U.S. experience during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and maintains that interagency coordination issues prevented the United States from consolidating gains after achieving tactical military successes. Greater synchronization and integration of the instruments of national power are required to achieve desired campaign effects. According to this view, much of the needed policy synchronization is now occurring at the NSC rather than at lower levels due

[17] 50 U.S.C. §3021.

to insufficient interagency coordination mechanisms. In the absence of meaningful interagency reform, the size of the NSS has grown in order to help manage U.S. policy in an era of greater complexity and to mitigate policy "immobilization" in the interagency. Under this school of thought, right-sizing and scoping the NSC therefore requires legislation akin to the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Defense Reform Act, to promote better coordination among executive branch departments (see CRS Report R44474, *Goldwater-Nichols at 30: Defense Reform and Issues for Congress*, by Kathleen J. McInnis).

Others believe that the enlarged NSC staff itself is what drives the organization to take on "operational" roles that are inappropriate, given the NSC's mandate to help the President formulate strategy and monitor its implementation. These observers point to the fact that the NSC staff in the early 1990s under the George H.W. Bush Administration averaged approximately 50 persons; by contrast, the current NSC comprises between 300-400 people, although during the final years of the Obama Administration, NSA Rice reduced its size by 10%. According to this view, the comparatively large staff (relative to prior Administrations) has resulted in the "micromanagement" of the activities of the Departments in the executive branch, often by relatively junior personnel. Some therefore believe that in order to force the National Security Staff to focus on its core, strategic responsibilities, its size should be limited.

NSC Executive and Congressional Liaison

As part of the Executive Office of the President, the NSC does not have the same relationship with Congress and its committees that the member departments and agencies have. Most briefings on intelligence matters are undertaken by the DNI; information on diplomatic and military matters comes primarily from the Departments of State and Defense. As noted above, the National Security Adviser is not subject to confirmation by the Senate.

Over the years, there have been a considerable number of congressional hearings and reports relating to the NSC. However, many have had to do with topics peculiar to a given period: wiretaps against NSC staff members allegedly ordered by Henry Kissinger, the unauthorized transfer of NSC documents to officials in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and information on Al Qaeda prior to 9/11. More recently, as part of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act deliberations, Congress examined the appropriate size of the National Security Council Staff, and whether it was inappropriately "micromanaging" the operations of the departments it oversees.[18]

Often annual hearings are held concerning the NSC budget, and occasional hearings have been held concerning NSC organization and procedures. Very few of these hearings and reports have served as briefings for Congress on current issues that the NSC might have been considering. NSC appropriations are handled by the Subcommittees on Financial Services and General Government of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees.

Congress's role in NSC matters and its relationship with the NSC are limited. As noted above, the Senate does not approve the appointment of the National Security Adviser, although it does confirm statutory NSC members. Congress does have authority over the designation of those positions that are to have statutory NSC membership, as well as budgetary authority over the NSC. In 2007, as part of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007 (P.L. 110-140, §932), Congress added the Secretary of Energy to the NSC. However, notwithstanding the legislative provisions enacted as part P.L. 114-328, Congress has little direct say in matters of NSC

[18] S. 2943.

organization, procedure, role, or influence, although a number of hearings on these topics have been held.

The NSC is not a primary and regular source of national security information for Congress. National security information is for the most part provided by those departments and agencies that are represented on the NSC. The NSC, as a corporate entity, rarely testifies before or briefs Congress on substantive questions, although in some Administrations informal briefings have been provided.

Conclusion

The NSC is an organ devoted to the workings of the executive branch in the broad area of national security. Its role is basically that of policy analysis and coordination and, as such, it has been subject to limited oversight and legislative control by Congress. Both in its staff organization and functioning, the NSC is extremely responsive to the preferences and working methods of each President and Administration. It would be difficult to design a uniform NSC structure that would meet the requirements of chief executives, who represent a wide range of backgrounds, work styles, and policy agendas.

Appendix A. Comparative Charts of Individuals Named as Members or Attendees of NSC and/or PC Meetings[19]

Table A-1 depicts the membership of the NSC, from the Reagan Administration through the Biden Administration. This report uses the following categories to classify NSC membership:

- **Statutory Members**—positions specifically designated as comprising the NSC by 50 U.S.C. §3021 during the indicated Administration.
- **Statutory Advisors**—positions designated by law as principal advisors to the President, the National Security Council, and the Homeland Security Council during the indicated Administration. Currently, 50 U.S.C. §3023 designates the Director of National Intelligence as the principal adviser to the President, to the National Security Council, and the Homeland Security Council for intelligence matters related to national security. The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff is designated by 10 U.S.C. §151 as the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense.
- **Other Members or Regular Attendees**—positions not statutorily designated as comprising the NSC by 50 U.S.C. §3021 during the indicated Administration, but explicitly identified as a "member" or "regular attendee" of the NSC in the presidential directive establishing the structure and function of the NSC for the indicated Administration.
- **Named Attendees**—positions not statutorily designated as comprising the NSC by 50 U.S.C. §3021 during the indicated Administration, but explicitly identified as an invited or required attendee of the NSC in the presidential directive establishing the structure and function of the NSC for the indicated Administration.
- **Situational Attendees**—positions not statutorily designated as comprising the NSC by 50 U.S.C. §3021 during the indicated Administration, but explicitly identified as an invited or required attendee of the NSC in certain specific circumstances in the presidential directive establishing the structure and function of the NSC for the indicated Administration.

Table A-2 depicts the membership of the PC, from the George H.W. Bush Administration through the Biden Administration.

[19] The author is grateful to Heidi Peters, CRS Research Librarian, who compiled the NSC and PC participation tables.

Table A-1. NSC Membership in Presidential Administrations, as Established by Presidential Directive

Administration	Statutory Members	Statutory Advisers	Other Members or Regular Attendees	Named Attendees	Situational Attendees
Ronald W. Reagan[a]	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense	• Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	See footnote 21[20]	—	• Heads of other executive departments and agencies[b]
George H.W. Bush[c]	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense	• Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	—	• Chief of Staff to the President • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Adviser)	• Secretary of the Treasury[d] • Attorney General[e] • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisors to the NSC, and other senior officials[f]
William J. Clinton[g]	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense	• Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	**Members—** • Secretary of the Treasury • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy • Chief of Staff to the President[21]	—	• Attorney General[h] • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisors to the NSC, and other senior officials[i]

[20] Note that while Reagan's NSDD-2 does not explicitly name the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs as either a member of the NSC or an attendee of NSC meetings, the directive established that the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs was "responsible for developing, coordinating, and implementing national security policy as approved by" the President; was to "determine and publish the agenda of NSC meetings;" and was to "ensure that the necessary papers are prepared and – except in unusual circumstances – distributed in advance to Council members." NSDD-2 also established that the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs was also responsible for preparing decision documents, and for disseminating such documents after approval by the President.

[21] In presidential directives establishing the structure and function of the NSC, the participation of the Chief of Staff to the President in NSC meetings has differed by

Administration	Statutory Members	Statutory Advisers	Other Members or Regular Attendees	Named Attendees	Situational Attendees
George W. Bush[j]	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense	• Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	**Regular attendees—** • Secretary of the Treasury • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs	• Chief of Staff to the President[k] • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy[l]	• Counsel to the President[m] • Attorney General[n] • Director of the Office of Management and Budget[o] • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, as well as other senior officials[p]

Administration—in some Administrations, the Chief of Staff to the President is specifically designated as a "member" or "regular attendee" of the NSC, while other Administrations have characterized the Chief of Staff to the President as an invited or required attendee at NSC meetings.

Administration	Statutory Members	Statutory Advisers	Other Members or Regular Attendees	Named Attendees	Situational Attendees
Barack Obama[q]	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense • Secretary of Energy[r]	• Director of National Intelligence[s] • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	**Members—** • Secretary of the Treasury • Attorney General • Secretary of Homeland Security • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff (Chief of Staff to the President) • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Advisor)	• Counsel to the President[t] • Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor[u]	**When international economic issues were on the NSC agenda[v]—** • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy • Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers **When homeland security or counter-terrorism related issues were on the NSC agenda[w]—** • Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counter-Terrorism **When science and technology related issues were on the NSC agenda[w]—** • Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy **As appropriate[w]—** • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials

Administration	Statutory Members	Statutory Advisers	Other Members or Regular Attendees	Named Attendees	Situational Attendees
Donald J. Trump[x] **(NSPM-2)**	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense • Secretary of Energy	• Director of National Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	**Regular attendees—** • Secretary of the Treasury • Attorney General • Secretary of Homeland Security • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Advisor) • Assistant to the President for Homeland Security (Homeland Security Advisor) • Representative of the United States to the United Nations	• Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff (Chief of Staff to the President)[y] • Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist[y] • Counsel to the President[y] • Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs[y] • Director of the Office of Management and Budget[y]	• Heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials[z] **When international economic issues were on the NSC agenda—** • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy
Donald J. Trump[aa] **(NSPM-4)**	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense • Secretary of Energy	• Director of National Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	**Regular attendees—** • Secretary of the Treasury • Attorney General • Secretary of Homeland Security • Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Advisor) • Assistant to the President for Homeland Security (Homeland Security Advisor) • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • **Director, Central Intelligence Agency** (added in NSPM-4)	• Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff (Chief of Staff to the President)[bb] • Counsel to the President[bb] • Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs[bb] • Director of the Office of Management and Budget[bb] • *Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist (removed in NSPM-4)*	• Heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials[cc] **When international economic issues are on the NSC agenda—** • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy

Joseph R. Biden	• President • Vice President • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense • Secretary of Energy • Secretary of the Treasury	• Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff • Director of National Intelligence	• Attorney General, • Secretary of Homeland Security • Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations • Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff (Chief of Staff to the President), the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (National Security Advisor) • Assistant to the President and Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP Director) • Administrator, the United States Agency for International Development • Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (in advisory capacity)	• Counsel to the President • Deputy Counsel to the President • NSC Legal Advisor (NSC Legal Advisor). • The Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor (serving as Secretary)	• Secretary of Commerce • Secretary of Labor • Secretary of Health and Human Services • Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency • Director of the Office of Management and Budget • United States Trade Representative • National Cyber Director • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy • Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy • Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers • Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Deputy National Security Advisor (Homeland Security Advisor • Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies (Deputy National Security Advisor for Cybersecurity) • Deputy Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics (Deputy National Security Advisor	

Administration	Statutory Members	Statutory Advisers	Other Members or Regular Attendees	Named Attendees	Situational Attendees
					for International Economics) • COVID-19 Response Coordinator • Special Presidential Envoy for Climate. • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials, as appropriate.

Sources: National Security Decision Directive-2 (1982); National Security Directive-1 (1989); Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-2 (1993); National Security Presidential Directive-1 (2001); Presidential Policy Directive-1 (2009); National Security Presidential Memorandum-2 (January 2017); and National Security Presidential Memorandum-4 (April 2017).

a. As established by National Security Decision Directive (NSDD)-2, "National Security Council Structure," January 12, 1982.

b. NSDD2 established that the heads of Departments and Agencies that were not "regular members" would participate in NSC meetings as appropriate, "when matters affecting their Departments or Agencies are concerned."

c. As established by National Security Directive (NSD)-1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," January 30, 1989.

d. NSD-1 established that the Secretary of the Treasury would "normally" attend NSC meetings, "except that on occasions when the subject matter so indicates, he will not be asked to attend."

e. NSD-1 established that the Attorney General would attend "meetings pertaining to his jurisdiction, including covert actions."

f. NSD-1 established that the President intended to "invite the heads of other Executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisors to the NSC, and other senior officials to attend meetings of the NSC where appropriate in light of the issues to be discussed."

g. As established by Presidential Decision Directive (PDD)/NSC-2, "Organization of the National Security Council," January 29, 1993.

h. PDD/NSC-2 established that the Attorney General would be "invited to attend meetings pertaining to his jurisdiction, including covert actions."

i. PDD/NSC-2 established that the heads of "other Executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisors to the NSC, and other senior officials shall be invited to attend meetings of the NSC where appropriate."

j. As established by National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD)-1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," February 13, 2001.

k. As established by NSPD-1, the Chief of Staff to the President was "invited to attend any NSC meeting."

l. NSPD-1 established that the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy was "invited to attend any NSC meeting."

m. As established by NSPD 1, the Counsel to the President was to be "consulted regarding the agenda of NSC meetings," and was to "attend any meeting when, in consultation with the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, he deems it appropriate."

n. As established by NSPD-1, the Attorney General was to be "invited to attend meetings pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities," which was to include "those matters within the Justice Department's jurisdiction and those matters implicating the Attorney General's responsibility under 28 U.S.C. §511 to give his advice and opinion on questions of law when required by the President."

o. NSPD-1 established that the Director of the Office of Management and Budget was to be "invited to attend meetings pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities."

p. As established by NSPD-1, the "heads of other executive departments and agencies, as well as other senior officials," were to be "invited to attend meetings of the NSC when appropriate."

q. As established by Presidential Policy Directive (PPD)-1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," February 13, 2009.

r. In December 2007, P.L. 110-140 (codified at 50 U.S.C. §3021(a)) added the Secretary of Energy to the statutory members of the NSC.

s. In December 2004, P.L. 108-458 (Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act of 2004, or IRTPA) abolished the position of Director of Central Intelligence (DCI), replacing the position with a new Director of National Intelligence (DNI). The DCI position was created by President Truman in 1946 (by presidential letter), prior to passage of the National Security Act of 1947 (P.L. 80-253). Provisions in the act authorized a "triple-hatted" arrangement in which the DCI simultaneously served as community manager for the intelligence community, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and chief intelligence adviser to the President. IRTPA divided the DCI's three major responsibilities between two new positions—the Director of the CIA (DCIA) and DNI—making the new DNI community manager and principal adviser to the President, and leaving leadership of the CIA to the DCIA.

t. PPD-1 established that the Counsel to the President "shall be invited to attend every NSC meeting."

u. PPD-1 established that the Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Adviser "shall attend every meeting" of the NSC and would serve as Secretary.

v. As established by PPD-1, the NSC's "regular attendees" would include the named positions when related issues were on the NSC agenda.

w. As established by PPD-1, the heads of other executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials, were to be "invited to attend meetings of the NSC as appropriate."

x. As established by National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM)-2, "Organization of the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council," January 28, 2017.

y. As established by NSPM-2, the Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff; the Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist; the Counsel to the President; the Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs; and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget are "invited as attendees to any NSC meeting."

z. As established by NSPM-2, "invitations to participate in specific" NSC meetings are to be "extended to those heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials, who are needed to address the issue or issues under consideration."

aa. As established by National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM)-4, "Organization of the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and Subcommittees," April 4, 2017.

bb. As established by NSPM-4, the Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff; the Counsel to the President; the Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs; and the Director of the Office of Management and Budget are "invited as attendees to any NSC meeting."

cc. As established by NSPM-4, "invitations to participate in specific" NSC meetings are to be "extended to those heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials, who are needed to address the issue or issues under consideration."

dd. As established in National Security Memorandum-2, "Memorandum on Renewing the National Security Council System," February 4, 2021.

Table A-2. NSC Principals Committee (PC) Membership in Prior Presidential Administrations, as Established by Presidential Directive

Administration	Regular Attendees	Other Participants	Situational Participants
George H.W. Bush[a]	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State • Secretary of Defense • Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff	—	• Secretary of the Treasury—governed by guidelines for participation in NSC meetings, which established that Secretary of the Treasury would "normally" attend NSC meetings, "except that on occasions when the subject matter so indicates, he will not be asked to attend." • Attorney General—governed by guidelines for participation in NSC meetings, which established that the Attorney General would attend "meetings pertaining to his jurisdiction, including covert actions." • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, the special statutory advisors to the NSC, and other senior officials—when invited by the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, in consultation with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense, where appropriate in light of the issues to be discussed.
William J. Clinton[b]	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State (if unavailable, the Deputy Secretary of State or the designee of the Secretary of State) • Secretary of Defense (if unavailable, the Deputy Secretary of Defense or the designee of the Secretary of Defense) • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • Director of Central Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff	• Assistant to the President for Economic Policy—"as appropriate."	• Secretary of the Treasury—"invited as needed." • Attorney General—"invited as needed." • Heads of other executive departments and agencies—"invited as needed."

Administration	Regular Attendees	Other Participants	Situational Participants
George W. Bush[c]	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State • Secretary of the Treasury • Secretary of Defense • Chief of Staff to the President	• Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Adviser (PC Executive Secretary)—to attend "all meetings" of the PC. • Chief of Staff to the Vice President—to attend "all meetings" of the PC. • National Security Adviser to the Vice President—to attend "all meetings" of the PC.	• Director of Central Intelligence—to attend "where issues pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities and expertise are to be discussed." • Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff—to attend "where issues pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities and expertise are to be discussed." • Attorney General—to be invited to attend meetings "pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities," including both those "matters within the Justice Department's jurisdiction and those matters implicating the Attorney General's responsibility under 28 U.S.C. §511 to give his advice and opinion on questions of law when required by the President." • Director of the Office of Management and Budget—to be invited to attend meetings "pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities." • Counsel to the President—to be consulted regarding the agenda of the PC, and to attend "any meeting when, in consultation with the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs, he deems it appropriate." When international economic issues were on the PC agenda, the PC's regular attendees included— • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy (Chair for agenda items that principally pertained to international economics) • Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers • Secretary of Agriculture—when the "issues pertain to her responsibilities"
Barack H. Obama[d]	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State • Secretary of the Treasury	• Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor—to be "invited to attend every meeting" of the PC. • Deputy Secretary of State—to be "invited to attend every meeting" of the PC.	When international economic issues were on the PC agenda, the PC's regular attendees included— • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative

Administration	Regular Attendees	Other Participants	Situational Participants
	• Secretary of Defense • Attorney General • Secretary of Energy • Secretary of Homeland Security • Director of the Office of Management and Budget • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • Director of National Intelligence • Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff	• Counsel to the President—to be "invited to attend every meeting" of the PC. • Assistant to the Vice President for National Security Affairs—to be "invited to attend every meeting" of the PC.	• Assistant to the President for Economic Policy (who, at the discretion of the National Security Advisor, served as Chair) • Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers When homeland security or counter-terrorism related issues were on the PC agenda, the PC's regular attendees included— • Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counter-Terrorism (who, at the discretion of the National Security Advisor, served as Chair) When science and technology related issues were on the PC agenda, the PC's regular attendees included— • Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy Invited as appropriate— • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, and additional senior officials
Donald J. Trump[e] (NSPM-2)	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State • Secretary of the Treasury • Secretary of Defense • Attorney General • Secretary of Homeland Security • Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff • Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist • Homeland Security Advisor	• Counsel to the President—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Director, Office of Management and Budget—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Adviser to the Vice President—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Executive Secretary (Executive Secretary of the PC)—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC.	• Director of National Intelligence—to attend "where issues pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities and expertise are to be discussed." • Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff—to attend "where issues pertaining to [his or her] responsibilities and expertise are to be discussed." • Representative of the United States to the United Nations—"may attend as appropriate." • Assistant to the President for Intragovernmental and Technology Initiatives—"may attend as appropriate." • Cabinet-level heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials—"who are needed to address the issue under consideration."

Administration	Regular Attendees	Other Participants	Situational Participants
Donald J. Trump[f] **(NSPM-4)**	• Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs (Chair of the PC) • Secretary of State • Secretary of the Treasury • Secretary of Defense • Attorney General • Secretary of Homeland Security • Assistant to the President and Chief of Staff • Representative of the United States to the United Nations • Homeland Security Adviser (Chair, as and when directed by the National Security Advisor) • Secretary of Energy (Added in NSPM-4) • Director of National Intelligence (Added in NSPM-4) • Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (Added in NSPM-4) • Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (Added in NSPM-4) • *Assistant to the President and Chief Strategist (Removed in NSPM-4)*	• Counsel to the President—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Deputy Counsel to the President for National Security Affairs—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Director, Office of Management and Budget—"may attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Assistant to the President and Deputy National Security Advisor—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Deputy Assistant to the President and National Security Adviser to the Vice President—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Executive Secretary (Executive Secretary of the PC)—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC. • Deputy National Security Adviser for Strategy (Added in NSPM-4)—"shall attend all [meetings]" of the PC.	• Cabinet-level heads of executive departments and agencies, and other senior officials—"who are needed to address the issue under consideration." • Assistant to the President for Intragovernmental and Technology Initiatives—"may attend as appropriate." When international economic issues were on the PC agenda, the PC's regular attendees included (Added in NSPM-4)— • Secretary of Commerce • U.S. Trade Representative • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy (who serves as Chair for agenda items that principally pertain to international economics)
Joseph R. Biden[g]	• The National Security Advisor (serving as chair) • Secretary of State • Secretary of the Treasury • Secretary of Defense • Attorney General • Secretary of Energy • Secretary of Homeland Security • Director of the Office of Management and Budget	• Director of National Intelligence (in an advisory capacity) • Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (in an advisory capacity) • Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (in an advisory capacity) • Principal Deputy National Security Advisor • Counsel to the President • NSC Legal Advisor	• Secretary of Labor • Secretary of Commerce • Secretary of Health and Human Services, • Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency • United States Trade Representative • National Cyber Director • Assistant to the President for Economic Policy • Chairman of the Council of Economic Advisers • Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy • OSTP Director

Administration	Regular Attendees	Other Participants	Situational Participants
	• Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations • Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development • Chief of Staff to the President.	• National Security Advisor to the Vice President	• Deputy National Security Advisor for Cybersecurity • Deputy National Security Advisor for International Economics • COVID-19 Response Coordinator • Special Presidential Envoy for Climate • Homeland Security Advisor, who, at the discretion of the National Security Advisor, may serve as Chair (when homeland security-related issues are on the agenda) • Heads of other executive departments and agencies, along with additional senior officials, shall be invited as appropriate

Sources: National Security Directive-1 (1989); Presidential Decision Directive/NSC-2 (1993); National Security Presidential Directive-1 (2001); Presidential Policy Directive-1 (2009); National Security Presidential Memorandum-2 (January 2017); and National Security Presidential Memorandum-4 (April 2017).

a. As established by National Security Directive (NSD) 1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," January 30, 1989.

b. As established by Presidential Decision Directive (PDD)/NSC 2, "Organization of the National Security Council," January 29, 1993.

c. As established by National Security Presidential Directive (NSPD) 1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," February 13, 2001.

d. As established by Presidential Policy Directive (PPD) 1, "Organization of the National Security Council System," February 13, 2009.

e. As established by National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM)-2, "Organization of the National Security Council and the Homeland Security Council," January 28, 2017.

f. As established by National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM)-4, "Organization of the National Security Council, the Homeland Security Council, and Subcommittees," April 4, 2017.

g. As established in National Security Memorandum-2, "Memorandum on Renewing the National Security Council System," February 4, 2021.

Appendix B. As Established in National Security Memorandum-2, "Memorandum on Renewing the National Security Council System," February 4, 2021, National Security Advisers, 1953-Present

Robert Cutler	March 23, 1953	April 2, 1955
Dillon Anderson	April 2, 1955	September 1, 1956
Robert Cutler	January 7, 1957	June 24, 1958
Gordon Gray	June 24, 1958	January 13, 1961
McGeorge Bundy	January 20, 1961	February 28, 1966
Walt W. Rostow	April 1, 1966	January 20, 1969
Henry A. Kissinger	January 20, 1969	November 3, 1975
Brent Scowcroft	November 3, 1975	January 20, 1977
Zbigniew Brzezinski	January 20, 1977	January 21, 1981
Richard V. Allen	January 21, 1981	January 4, 1982
William P. Clark	January 4, 1982	October 17, 1983
Robert C. McFarlane	October 17, 1983	December 4, 1985
John M. Poindexter	December 4, 1985	November 25, 1986
Frank C. Carlucci	December 2, 1986	November 23, 1987
Colin L. Powell	November 23, 1987	January 20, 1989
Brent Scowcroft	January 20, 1989	January 20, 1993
W. Anthony Lake	January 20, 1993	March 14, 1997
Samuel R. Berger	March 14, 1997	January 20, 2001
Condoleezza Rice	January 22, 2001	January 25, 2005
Stephen Hadley	January 26, 2005	January 20, 2009
James L. Jones	January 20, 2009	October 8, 2010
Thomas E. Donilon	October 8, 2010	July 1, 2013
Susan E. Rice	July 1, 2013	January 20, 2017
Michael T. Flynn	January 20, 2017	February 14, 2017
LTG H.R. McMaster	February 20, 2017	April 9, 2018
John Bolton	April 9, 2018	September 10, 2018
Charles Kupperman (Acting)	September 10, 2019	September 18, 2019
Robert O'Brien	September 18, 2019	January 20, 2021
Jake Sullivan	January 20, 2021	Present

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