The end of sharp distinctions between domestic and overseas interests underscores the need for one foreign policy process, run by and responsive to the White House.... [We] recommend that the National Security Council (NSC) be the catalyst and the point of coordination for this new, single foreign policy process.

State 2000: A New Model for Managing Foreign Affairs
December 1992

Trade is central to our foreign policy. It's the connecting tissue between countries. We must compete and win in the global economy.

Mickey Kantor, U.S. Trade Representative, later Secretary of Commerce
March 23, 1995
among advisors and because of President Clinton's indecision as well, policy making toward Bosnia was stalled for a time, and bureaucratic stalemate contributed to policy inaction.6

The bureaucratic politics approach thus allows us to apply another perspective in order to interpret and understand American foreign policy. To apply this perspective, however, we must examine the key foreign policy bureaucracies within the executive branch, describe each one’s role in the policy process, and assess their relative policy influence. In this way, we begin to evaluate the relative success of some bureaucracies in the shaping of foreign policy on particular issues as compared to others.

In particular, we analyze four central foreign policy bureaucracies in detail: the Department of State, the National Security Council, the Department of Defense, and the intelligence community. We will also survey the increasing role of several other bureaucracies (e.g., the Department of Commerce, Department of the Treasury, the Office of the United States Trade Representative, and the Department of Agriculture) and their role in shaping the foreign economic policy of the United States. In the last part of Chapter 10, we try to bring this discussion together by showing how these individual foreign policy bureaucracies coordinate with one another through the process of forming interagency groups (IGs). Throughout both chapters, we discuss a crucial question of the bureaucratic politics approach: How are foreign policy choices the result of both efforts at interdepartmental coordination and interdepartmental rivalries?

THE DEPARTMENT OF STATE

The oldest cabinet post and the original foreign policy bureaucracy in the American government is the Department of State. The department was established originally in 1781 under the Articles of Confederation as the Department of Foreign Affairs and became the Department of State in 1789 with the election of George Washington.7 Over its 200-year history, the department has evolved into a large and complex bureaucracy with a variety of functions. Among those key functions are assisting the president in policy formulation on all international issues and implementing America’s foreign relations abroad. In this way, the Department of State coordinates the United States overseas programs that emanate from Washington, D.C.8 At the same time, the Department has had its influence weakened by internal and external problems over the years.

The Structure of State at Home

While the Department of State has always been arranged in a complex and hierarchical fashion, the Clinton administration undertook several organizational changes in an effort to rationalize the organizational structure and obtain greater efficiency in operation for the post–Cold War world.9 Stimulated by Vice President Gore’s National Performance Review (NPR) initiative, the Department’s Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), Secretary
of State Warren Christopher’s directive on reorganization, and budget-cutting pressures of the Congress, the Department has sought to streamline its internal structure through reorganization and restructuring of decision-making responsibilities and has downsized its foreign operations (about forty embassies and consulates were scheduled to be closed during the Clinton administration).

Office of the Secretary. Figure 9.1 displays the internal organizational structure of the Department of State. This chart reflects some important changes from only a few years earlier. At the top of the structure, the Clinton administration formally established the Office of the Secretary to aid the decision making of the secretary of state and the deputy secretary of state, who are housed there, and to assist those two officials “establish an operational agenda for Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and other senior officials.”10 Now, too, several different departmental individuals, bureaus, and activities report directly to this Office. These range from the Policy Planning Staff, the Bureaus of Public Affairs and Legislative Affairs and the Bureau of Intelligence and Research to the activities of numerous ambassador-at-large, counselors, and coordinators of policy toward particular countries or regions (e.g., the Middle East Peace Process, counterterrorist activities, North Korea, and Russia, among others). The overall aim is to have a more sharply focused decision process among the principal policy formulators within the Department.

The Role of Under Secretaries. A second important change has been “to strengthen the role of the Under Secretaries” and to have them serve as “the principal foreign policy advisors to the Secretary.”11 These officials (and their divisions) are now responsible for managing and coordinating the principal activities under their aegis and serving as a “corporate board” to the secretary of state. The under secretary for political affairs now oversees the six regional bureaus (Bureau of African Affairs, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, European and Canadian Affairs, Inter-American Affairs, Near Eastern Affairs, and South Asian Affairs) and the Bureau of International Organization Affairs. The under secretary for economic, business, and agricultural affairs is responsible for the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs. More importantly, within this Undersecretariat, an Office of the Coordinator for Business Affairs has been established. This office emerged from Secretary of State Warren Christopher’s commitment to establish an “America’s Desk” within the Department and is primarily responsible for aiding United States business interests in dealing with other countries and for coordinating activities with other government departments in facilitating American business activities abroad. The under secretary for arms control and international security affairs has primary oversight of a wide range of security and defense questions through the Bureau of Political–Military Affairs which now answers directly to this Undersecretariat. The under secretary for global affairs, a newly created position at Secretary Christopher’s directive, manages a number of functional bureaus dealing with several different policy questions: human rights and democracy, international narcotics, environmental affairs, and population, refugees,
The U.S. Department of State: Organization at a Glance

and migration. Finally, the under secretary for management oversees many of the common internal administrative activities of the Department, ranging from operating the Foreign Service Institute, which provides language, political, cultural, and now business-promotion training for American governmental personnel assigned abroad, and managing the Department's Personnel Office. This Secretariat also manages the Bureaus of Administration, Consular Affairs, Diplomatic Security, and Finance and Management Policy.

An assistant secretary of state (some nineteen in all at present) heads each of the bureaus within the Department's structure and answers to either the Office of the Secretary or to the appropriate under secretary. Because the recent reorganization has emphasized the need for the under secretaries to concentrate on broad overviews of policy, the assistant secretaries possess considerably greater latitude in policy formulation and decision making. As a result, these officials are likely to represent their bureaus within interagency groups consisting of other foreign affairs bureaucracies, in testimony before congressional committees or subcommittees, and perhaps with the secretary of state directly (although the chain of command goes through the appropriate under secretary).

Further, several functional activities were combined into new or consolidated bureaus, and the number of deputy assistant secretaries was scheduled for reduction in efforts to reduce the bureaucratic layering so evident in the State Department structure. On the one hand, several offices dealing with nuclear issues were consolidated into the Bureau of Political–Military Affairs. On the other hand, several international business activities were consolidated in the Bureau of Economic and Business Affairs.

Semiautonomous Agencies. In addition, four other agencies, attached to the Department of State in a semiautonomous fashion, complete the diplomatic apparatus of the United States government: the Office of the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, the U.S. Information Agency, and the U.S. Agency for International Development. The independent or semi-independent status of the last three remains quite precarious, especially with recent efforts to reorganize American foreign policy machinery by both executive and congressional officials. In 1993, for example, Secretary of State Warren Christopher proposed some rethinking of the independence of these agencies. Since the 1994 election, when Republicans gained control of the Congress and pursued the implementation of the "Contract with America," these offices have come under closer scrutiny, including calls for reorganization and elimination. Senator Jesse Helms, chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, has called for the incorporation of many responsibilities of these agencies within the Department of State itself. Indeed, in April 1997, President Clinton directed that a plan for the reorganization of the U.S. Information Agency, Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, and the Agency for International Development be developed by September 1997. Under the proposed initiative, the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency would be incorporated into the Department of State within one year and the U.S. Information Agency within two years. The Agency for
International Development would remain a separate agency, but the secretary of state would have greater control over its activities. The ultimate shape of these agencies, however, will still require congressional action. In this sense, the future status of three of the four semiautonomous agencies remains uncertain; still we can outline the specialized foreign policy responsibilities which each one pursued in the past.

The establishment of an Office for the U.S. Permanent Representative to the United Nations in the Department of State, an innovation undertaken by the Clinton administration, aims to allow America’s UN ambassador to coordinate activities more directly with the Department of State and the Bureau of International Organization Affairs within the Department. Further, since the Clinton administration had placed the U.S. permanent representative on the Principals Committee of the National Security Council, an office in the Department of State provides a ready mechanism for greater coordination among the key policy makers.

The Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) dates back to its establishment by Congress in 1961. Its responsibilities involve fostering global arms restraint, seeking arms control agreements with other states, and monitoring compliance with agreements in effect. Although its origins were initially tied to seeking nuclear weapons restraint, its efforts now include restraining conventional arms and weapons of mass destruction within developed nations and between developed and developing nations. This agency, for instance, has been deeply involved in the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT) of the 1970s, the Strategic Arms Reduction Talks (START) of the 1980s and 1990s, the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty of 1987, and the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) discussions of the 1990s. The impact of this agency on arms control policy is dependent upon how much confidence the president and his key advisors place in this bureaucracy. During the Carter administration, for example, ACDA began to have a greater role to play in policy formulation. For the Reagan administration, however, the White House assumed more direction in arms control policy, leaving less for this agency. For the Bush administration, the reliance upon the White House and the National Security staff for arms control policy implied a lesser dependence on ACDA. The Clinton administration committed itself “to strengthen and to revitalize ACDA in order for it to play an active role in meeting the arms control and nonproliferation challenges of the post–Cold War era.” ACDA Director John Holm testified before Congress in 1994 that the agency had been given a larger role: “Thus far, I have represented ACDA’s perspective at principals’ committee meetings [of the National Security Council] about once every 10 days, which I am told is dramatically more often than in the past.” Furthermore, ACDA played a useful role in securing an indefinite extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995.

Created in 1953 in the early years of the Cold War, the third semiautonomous agency associated with the Department of State, the United States Information Agency (USIA), has evolved into an agency with several different responsibilities today. One of its missions is to explain “the official policies of the United States, its people, values and institutions,” to other countries, another is to build “lasting relationships and mutual under-
standings” with nations and peoples abroad, and a third mission is to advise the American government on “foreign attitudes and their implications for U.S. policies.” To achieve these goals, USIA now broadcasts 900 hours weekly in forty-seven different languages through the Voice of America (VOA), operates Radio Marti, TV Marti, and WORLDMET, a satellite television network, and oversees the operations of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and Radio Free Asia. USIA also distributes some of its news and information programming through the Internet in sixteen different languages. It publishes, in five languages, the Wireless File, daily news and information summaries and transcripts of selected speeches and statements of American governmental officials. This agency also operates 160 libraries in 110 countries as well as support libraries in 100 binational centers in 20 different countries. USIA sponsors an extensive series of educational and cultural exchange programs, including new initiatives for the newly independent states of the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, more traditional Fulbright scholar exchanges, and the International Visitor program. Through all of these activities, the United States Information Agency attempts to provide an accurate picture of the United States to other nations and peoples.

Despite what still appears as a very large set of diverse activities, USIA has actually undergone considerable downsizing in recent years. This trend seems likely to continue for the foreseeable future, as efforts are under way to control spending and to reshape America’s foreign policy machinery after the Cold War. USIA’s budget request for fiscal year 1996 ($1.3 billion), for instance, was $121 million lower than for fiscal year 1995, and its actual fiscal year 1997 budget was lower still ($1.1 billion). It also initiated an 11 percent reduction in personnel (with more than 1,000 jobs scheduled for elimination) over the 1994–1996 period.

USIA has eliminated some entire areas of activities. Until recently, the agency published five magazines for distribution abroad, but these have fallen victims to budgetary constraints. Similarly, the United States Information Service (as the USIA is known abroad) has scheduled twelve libraries or outposts to be closed by the end of 1996, and it has altered service in others. One USIA library is restricting access to researchers only (thus eliminating public access in this foreign country), reducing staff, and employing new technology (e.g., CD-ROM and Internet facilities) at the expense of providing new books. In addition to these changes, the ongoing debate over reintegrating the agency within the Department of State keeps the future of USIA in a most precarious state.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID), another semiautonomous bureaucracy within the Department of State structure created by Congress in 1961, seeks to move United States foreign aid away from providing security assistance to greater considerations of economic need and development goals. The agency is an integral part of the International Development Cooperation Agency, an umbrella organization that coordinates the activities of several development units, including the Overseas Private Investment Corporation, the Trade and Development Program, the Development Coordination Committee, the Food for Peace Program, and United States participation in multilateral development banks and other international organizations and programs. The director of USAID
also heads the International Development Cooperation Agency and thus serves as the president's and the secretary of state's principal advisor on international development activities. The current mission of USAID is to promote "sustainable development" worldwide by supporting programs on population and health, economic growth, the environment, and democratic development. Organizationally, USAID seeks to achieve these goals through a series of regional and functional bureaus and through its various AID missions or posts located in countries throughout the developing world. Its budget is quite small, at approximately one half of one percent of the United States federal budget (e.g., in fiscal year 1993, $7 billion, and in fiscal year 1997, $6 billion), but, by combining its efforts with and through nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) working around the world, USAID points to numerous successes such as the eradication of smallpox, the immunization of millions of children worldwide, and assistance to small entrepreneurs.

This bureaucracy is undergoing the same kind of review and scrutiny as the two previous ones. As with the other two agencies, USAID has been targeted for budgetary cut and possible incorporation into the Department of State. In an effort to stave off such actions, USAID has undertaken several actions to rationalize and downsize its operation. By the end of 1996, for example, twenty-one overseas missions were slated to be closed, staff reductions of over 1,200 had already occurred, and numerous internal reforms had been put into place. Still, calls have been made for a 50 percent reduction in the foreign aid budget and for USAID's functions to be taken up by various bureaus within the Department of State. Whatever the ultimate shape of the reorganization efforts, the implication for USAID is much the same as for ACDA and USIA: It is likely to play a less important foreign policy role than during the Cold War years.

The Structure of State Abroad

The State Department also has the responsibility to represent America abroad through United States missions, usually located in the capital city and with consulates in other major cities of host countries. As of March 1996, the United States operated about 260 embassies, missions, consular agencies, consulates general, and other offices abroad. It also had ten missions at the headquarters of various intergovernmental organizations (e.g., the United Nations, the European Union, Organization of American States, and the International Civil Aviation Organization). In all, the United States conducts diplomatic relations with over 180 nations; there are only a few nations with whom the United States does not presently have diplomatic relations: Bhutan, Cuba, Iran, Iraq, and North Korea. In one of the newest diplomatic openings, relations with Vietnam were reestablished in 1995, and Palau, a former trust territory, was given full diplomatic recognition by the United States.

The United States embassy is headed by a chief of mission, usually an ambassador, who is the personal representative of the president and who is authorized to conduct United States foreign relations toward that country. The ambassador is assisted by the deputy chief of mission (DCM), who is
largely responsible for conducting the day-to-day operation of the embassy staff. While political, economic, consular, and administrative foreign service officers from the Department of State serve the embassy, it also has representatives from several other executive departments housed within it. The composition of the “country team” of the United States mission in Venezuela illustrates this diversity (Figure 9.2).25 The country team consists of an agricultural counselor from the Department of Agriculture, a public affairs counselor from USIA, a commercial counselor from the Department of Commerce, a defense attaché from the Department of Defense, and a military advisory group from the Department of Defense as well. Other agency representatives are also present, ranging from the Drug Enforcement Agency to the Internal Revenue Service. In addition, officials from the Central Intelligence Agency—using a cover of some other position—are often represented in the country team. In all, numerous departments and agencies serve within a single United States mission abroad. The actual size of the mission will be a function primarily of the size of the nation where the United States mission is located and the perceived political and strategic importance of that nation. In the Venezuelan mission, in June 1985, 108 Americans were employed in the United States mission in Caracas and the consulate in Maracay. By contrast, the United States Embassy staff totaled 266 in London and only 21 in Brazzaville, the People’s Republic of the Congo at the time.26 More recently (1994 data), the sizes of American missions abroad range even more widely than these examples, with about 1,100 United States direct hires in Germany (and an additional 800 foreign nationals) to a one-person mission in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Today, the median size of a United States mission abroad is roughly 100—equally divided between Americans and foreign nationals.27

As this overview indicates, the structure of the Department of State (and its affiliated agencies) appears to be quite large and complex. Yet, in reality, the Department itself is one of the smallest bureaucracies within the executive branch. In 1995, the State Department had about 25,000 employees with 8,800 in the United States and 16,000 abroad (including about 10,000 foreign nationals). (By contrast, the Department of Defense had about 850,000 civilian employees at the same time.28) It is smaller in size than all but four other cabinet departments (Department of Energy, Department of Labor, Department of Housing and Urban Development, and Department of Education).29 Furthermore, the budget of the Department of State is one of the smallest within the government, at about $2.2 billion, and especially small when compared with other foreign affairs sectors of the government, such as the Department of Defense or the Central Intelligence Agency.30

The Weakened Influence of State

Despite its role as the principal foreign policy bureaucracy, and as the one that will usually offer the nonmilitary option for conducting foreign policy, the Department of State has been criticized for its effectiveness in both policy formulation and policy implementation.31 As a consequence, the
FIGURE 9.2
The Structure of a U.S. Mission Abroad—Venezuela

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<tr>
<th>Mission Unit</th>
<th>Agricultural Trade Office</th>
<th>Agricultural Counselor</th>
<th>Public Affairs Counselor</th>
<th>Commercial Counselor</th>
<th>Political Counselor</th>
<th>Economic Counselor</th>
<th>Administrative Counselor</th>
<th>Consul General</th>
<th>Defense Attaché</th>
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<th>Other agencies present:</th>
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<td>Internal Revenue Service</td>
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Department of State has not played the dominant role in recent administrations that its central diplomatic position might imply. Indeed, a recent departmental report has now formally acknowledged that the Department of State should not be the focus point for coordinating foreign policy. Instead, the State 2000 report asserted “that the National Security Council (NSC) [should] be the catalyst and the point of coordination for this new, single foreign policy process.”

In this sense, the policy influence of the Department of State is comparatively less than that of other foreign policy bureaucracies in the United States government. The factors that have reduced the policy influence of the State Department range from a series of internal problems, such as its increasing budget problems, its size, the kind of personnel within this bureaucracy, the “subculture” within the organization, and the relationship between the secretary of state and the Department to a series of external problems—such as the relationship between the president and secretary, the relationship between the president and the Department, and the perception of the public at large, as well as the growth of other foreign policy bureaucracies (e.g., the National Security Council and the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative). Let us examine several of these factors in more detail to give some sense of the weakened influence of the Department of State.

The Problem of Resources. The first problem that the Department of State faces in the competition to influence foreign affairs and to carry out its responsibilities is resources. The small operating budget of the Department has been a perennial problem over the last decade, with the Congress reluctant to fund all of its needs. By contrast, the funding for the Department of Defense and the intelligence community grew in the 1980s, although these departments, too, are suffering from budgetary pressures after the end of the Cold War (see Chapter 10).

To be sure, the Department of State’s budget has increased from about $700 million in 1979 to about $2.2 billion currently, but the effects of inflation, congressional mandates for establishing new departmental bureaus, and the expansion of foreign affairs responsibilities worldwide have caused a real problem. Moreover, the Congress has not always been responsive to the Department’s needs and, indeed, has sought to stop some activities with which it disagrees (e.g., several controversial foreign assistance programs). In February 1987, Secretary of State George Shultz became so frustrated that he commented that State’s budget problems were “a tragedy.” As a result, “America is hauling down the flag...We’re withdrawing from the world.” By November 1987, the Department began hinting that 1,200 jobs would have to be eliminated, and several embassies and consulates around the world would need to be closed because of these mounting budget problems.

By the time of the Clinton administration, the closing of numerous foreign posts (i.e., consulates, embassies) had become a reality. By the end of 1994, for example, the United States government closed seventeen foreign posts, and another twenty to twenty-five posts were under discussion. In July 1995, nineteen overseas posts were scheduled for closing by the end of 1996. To be sure, many of these closings were consulates in peripheral
locations around the world (e.g., consulates in Brisbane, Australia; Cebu, the Philippines; Udorn, Thailand; Bilbao, Spain; and Matamoros, Mexico) and represented efforts to consolidate operations within a country. A few, however, were embassies (e.g., Equatorial Guinea, Western Samoa, and the Seychelles). Nonetheless, all of these closings reduce American presence globally and increase the workload for other posts.

At the same time, reductions in State Department staff have occurred as well. In May 1995, Secretary of State Warren Christopher indicated that 500 State Department positions would be eliminated to save money, streamline the policy process, and forestall even greater reductions by the Republican-controlled Congress. Six months later, the Department of State reported that over 1,100 jobs had been trimmed. Furthermore, budgetary pressures remain as domestic efforts continued to balance the federal budget by 2002.

In the views of those at the Department of State, serious policy implications accompany these funding problems. First, State Department personnel are not adequately compensated or supported under such circumstances. Salaries are relatively low (compared to similar positions in the private sector), and salary increases are small. As a result, top-quality staff becomes more difficult to keep and less easy to recruit. While concerns have been expressed that the quality of the new recruits does not match that of earlier years, regular recruiting has been forestalled. The foreign service exam, the principal mechanism to screen new foreign service officers, was not even offered in two recent years (1994 and 1995). Second, budget restraints also mean that individuals are asked to carry greater and greater workloads, and, inevitably, the quality of their work suffers. Third, morale also suffers as officials are asked to do more with less and, at times, even to work without pay. Finally, America’s foreign policy representation around the world potentially pays a price in this kind of environment. Both the collection of information and implementation of policy by the departmental personnel are unlikely to be as complete under such circumstances. All in all, then, from the Department of State’s view, the continuing budget problem reduces both the incentives and the capacities of the Department for competing with other bureaucracies in shaping United States foreign policy.

The Problem of Size. A second problem of the Department of State, as it attempts to compete with other bureaucracies, focuses on its size. It is, at once, too large and too small. It is too large in the sense that there are “layers and layers” of bureaucracy through which policy reviews and recommendations must progress. At the present time, for example, there are six geographical and fourteen functional bureaus involved in policy making. In most instances, policy recommendations must go through the appropriate regional and functional bureaus before they can reach the “seventh floor,” where the executive offices of the department are located.

As Bush’s Secretary of State James Baker quickly found out, and reported in his memoir, getting things done at State can be a challenge: “Different floors of ‘the building’ [the State Department] had their own unique views on events: ‘The seventh floor [where the Secretary and under secre-
taries are located] won’t want it that way.’ ‘The sixth floor [where the assistant secretaries are] wants to reclaim on that’....‘EUR [the Bureau of European and Canadian Affairs] is out of control.’"37 In this sense, the structure of State’s bureaucracy hinders its overall effectiveness and reduces efficiency in developing policy.

At the same time, the Department has been criticized as too small, because it is dwarfed by the other bureaucracies in terms of political representation in the National Security Council interagency process (see Chapter 10). Furthermore, staff does not often carry the same domestic political clout as other large bureaucracies. Consider the lobbying power of the Department of Defense, the Department of Commerce, Department of Treasury, or even the Department of Agriculture; all these agencies have large and vocal constituencies to argue their policy position with the American people, the Congress, and, ultimately, the president. By contrast, the Department of State lacks a ready constituency within the American public to offer support and political lobbying within the Congress.38 The State Department must therefore lobby by itself through the testimony of its officials during congressional hearings, through its informal contacts with congressional staff through the implementation of legislative action programs (LAPs), and through the interagency process. Suffice it to say, these avenues do not always yield political success for the Department of State.

The Personnel Problem. A third problem of the Department of State focuses on its personnel and the environment in which they operate. Foreign service officers, reserve foreign service officers, and civil service personnel from the United States Foreign Service comprise the principal officials of the department. Primary policy responsibility, however, rests with the approximately 7,300 foreign service officers (FSOs) in the department.39 These officers have sometimes been depicted in the past as an “Eastern elite,” out of touch with the country and determined to shape policy in line with their own foreign policy views. According to this line of criticism, many of these foreign service officers share the same educational background (e.g., Princeton, Harvard, Yale, Johns Hopkins, Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy), overrepresent the Eastern establishment, and adopt a rather inflexible attitude toward global politics. However, several careful analyses of the foreign service officer corps challenge some of these stereotypes, and mid-career (“lateral entry”) and minority recruitment efforts were undertaken to address them as well.40 Nonetheless, this elitist image persists, as more recent assessments confirm, and it reduces the effectiveness of the Department of State.41

At least two additional personnel problems are perceived among members of Congress, the foreign affairs bureaucracy, and the public at large. One is the charge of “clientelism,” or “clientitis.”42 That is, in an FSO’s zeal to foster good relations with the country in which he or she is serving, the officer becomes too closely identified with the interests of that state, sometimes at the expense of American interests and the requirements of American domestic politics. While the criticism is largely overdrawn, it becomes an important staple of members of Congress or the executive branch.
who want to avoid relying too closely on the recommendations of the State Department.

A second problem is the level of expertise the State Department personnel and FSOs possess on increasingly specialized issues. While these individuals are undoubtedly capable generalists, the level of specific knowledge on technical subjects—and some reluctance to recruit outside experts—foster the charge that the quality of work is inadequate:

Critics complain the State Department studies are long and too descriptive and often unsatisfactory. Based heavily on intuition, and almost never conceptual, many of the analyses are unaccompanied by reliable sources and information, or reflect the FSO’s lack of adequate training and expertise; papers are so cautious and vague as to be of little use to policymakers who long ago concluded that such “waffling” constitutes the quintessential character of the “Fudge Factory at Foggy Bottom.”

The other side of this personnel complaint is exactly the reverse: “The tendency to assume that others do not understand foreign affairs as well as the Foreign Service.” With the emergence of sound academic programs, research institutes, and Washington think tanks on many specialized issues, and with political appointees in and out of government on a regular basis, State Department FSOs should be more willing to look to these individuals for policy advice as well.

The Subculture Problem. Accompanying this kind of personnel problem is a related one. Even if the individuals themselves are not the source of the problem for the Department of State, the environment of the department creates a personnel problem. A bureaucratic “subculture” has developed in the State Department that emphasizes the importance of “trying to be something rather than...trying to do something.” “Don’t rock the boat” is the dominant bureaucratic refrain. Because of these institutional norms, obtaining regular promotions and ensuring career advancements become more important than creating sound, innovative policy: “Subcultural norms discourage vigorous policy debate within the Department....The Department is not inclined toward vigorous exploration of policy options and it is not inclined to let anyone else do the job for it.” Another analyst describes the subculture in this way: “The prudent course is the cautious course. ‘Fitting in’ has a higher value than ‘standing out.’”

More recently, former Secretary of State James Baker confirmed the persistence of this State Department subculture. In his experience, Baker noted, “the State Department has the most unique bureaucratic culture I’ve ever encountered.” While Baker acknowledged the skills of most foreign service officers, he also found that “some of them tend to avoid risk-taking or creative thinking” because of the bureaucratic environment. As a result, he found that sole reliance on State Department officials in policy making was not possible.

The President and the Secretary of State. A fifth problem of the Department of State focuses on its relationship with the president and the secretary of state. Postwar presidents and secretaries of state have often not made extensive use of the Department for policy formulation. Instead, presidents
have tried to be their own “secretary of state” or have relied on key advisors instead of the appointed secretary of state for foreign policy advice. For these reasons, the power of the secretary of state in policy making may be more apparent than real. Even when the secretary of state enjoys the confidence of the president for formulating policy, he sometimes chooses not to involve the department widely and instead relies on a few key aides. Because of these patterns, the State Department’s role has once again been diminished.

President John Kennedy, for example, initially sought to use the Department of State for foreign policy, but he ultimately came to rely upon his formal and informal advisors within the bureaucracy and the White House. His secretary of state, Dean Rusk, did not enjoy a central role in the formulation of policy. President Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, made more use of Secretary Rusk than did Kennedy, but he, too, depended upon his national security advisor, first McGeorge Bundy, then Walt Rostow, for key foreign policy advice.

Recent presidents have followed a similar pattern. President Richard Nixon did not view Secretary of State William Rogers as his key foreign policy advisor; instead, National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger was the primary architect of foreign policy during those years. President Carter initially tried to create a balance in policy making between Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, but he depended more on Brzezinski for shaping his response to global politics. In fact, Vance resigned in April 1980, after losing a policy dispute over the wisdom of attempting to rescue the American hostages in Iran. President Reagan came to office committed to granting more control of foreign policy to the secretary of state—first to Alexander Haig and then to George Shultz—but here, too, recent evidence suggests that at least three of Reagan’s national security advisors, William Clark, Robert McFarlane, and John Poindexter, were quite influential in policy making at the expense of the secretary of state. Indeed, Secretary Shultz testified to the Congress that on one of the major foreign policy initiatives he was generally kept in the dark. He knew little about the Iran arms deal—and opposed what he knew—and was not aware of the diversion of funds to the Nicaraguan Contras. After the Iran-Contra affair became public, Shultz gained more control of foreign policy than had previous secretaries of state in some time. Nonetheless, he continued to engage in protracted bureaucratic battles to put his stamp on policy.

Even the two postwar presidents who have relied on the secretary of state for policy formulation did not often go beyond him to enlist the full involvement of the department itself. Dean Acheson and George Marshall, secretaries of state under President Harry Truman, were primarily responsible for making their own foreign policy without much input on the part of the department. Similarly, John Foster Dulles, secretary of state under President Dwight Eisenhower, was given wide latitude in the formulation of foreign policy.

The Bush and Clinton administrations tried to combine these various policy patterns. President Bush viewed foreign policy as an area of his own expertise since he had served as United States ambassador to the United Nations, director of the CIA, and the American representative to the People's
Republic of China. As such, he assumed a large role in policy formulation, but relied on both his close friend and secretary of state, James Baker, and his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft. By contrast, during his first term, President Clinton eschewed the importance of foreign policy and largely left its oversight to Anthony Lake, his national security advisor, and Warren Christopher, his secretary of state. In his second term, he is more directly involved, but his national security advisor, Samuel Berger, and his secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, remain key formulators of policy.

More formally, then, both Bush and Clinton placed the national security advisor and his staff at the center of foreign policy making, as we shall discuss below, but both sought to include their secretaries of state in the foreign policy process. Clinton’s first secretary of state, Warren Christopher, for example, was the more public figure of President Clinton’s foreign policy advisors (e.g., traveling to Europe to promote a new Bosnian effort or traveling to Asia to improve relations in that region). In the policy areas, too, Christopher played a key role, emphasizing the importance of economics as an American priority in foreign policy, the importance of Asia to America’s future, the need for progress in the Middle East and reform in Russia, the dangers of nuclear proliferation, and the need to promote human rights. Given his lawyerly background, Christopher generally sought diplomatic and negotiated routes for these pressing foreign policy issues.

Clinton’s second secretary of state, Madeleine Albright, follows in these traditions. While she will continue to be the public spokesperson for American diplomacy, she is likely to be a more assertive policy formulator than was Christopher within the administration. Yet, she is unlikely to achieve any kind of independent policy-making role such as characterized some earlier secretaries in the post–World War II years, since the national security council system and the influence of the national security advisor mitigate against such independence (see Chapter 10). In sum, the secretary of state in the Clinton administration, like other recent administrations, will continue to be prominent, but will not dominate, policy formulation; instead, policy making will increasingly be a shared responsibility.

In sum, under any of the arrangements for the past five decades—where the secretary of state was primarily responsible for foreign policy, where the president relied upon other advisors for policy making, or where the president tried to be his own secretary of state—the Department of State’s role in the formulation of foreign affairs has been reduced in comparison with other executive institutions or key individuals.

The President and the Department. Yet another aspect of the problem between the Department of State and the president was summarized by a former foreign service officer, Jack Perry, in this way: “...the Foreign Service does not enjoy the confidence of our presidents.” Too often, foreign service officers are perceived as potentially “disloyal” to the president. Instead, they are seen as being loyal “either to the opposition party or else to the diplomat’s own view of what foreign policy should be.”

The percentage of ambassadorships that go to political friends—mainly large campaign contributors with limited foreign policy experience—reflects this degree of suspicion between the president and State. These appointments
reduce the opportunities available for career foreign service officers, whose aspirations may be to gain ambassadorships to cap their long service to the Department of State. While some analyses focusing on only the first year or so of an administration found somewhat higher percentage of appointments going to political friends as opposed to career diplomats, the entire record of ambassadorial appointment by presidents from Kennedy through Clinton reveals that slightly less than one-third went to political friends and campaign contributors. The percentage of such appointments ranged from 24 percent for Carter to 33 percent for Kennedy and Reagan (see Figure 9.3).
While these percentages have remained relatively stable over the past eight administrations, what these numbers fail to reveal are that some key and prestigious ambassadorships in several administrations have not gone to presumably the most skilled foreign policy officials; instead, they have gone to large campaign contributors and political allies. President Clinton, for example, appointed the late Pamela Harriman, who had contributed $132,000 to Democrats in recent years, to be ambassador to France, and a successful hotel operator in California, M. Larry Lawrence, who donated $196,000 to the Democratic party, as ambassador to Switzerland. Other large contributors received ambassadorial appointments to the Netherlands, Austria, and Barbados.59

Aside from the influence of money in politics, critics see serious problems with such appointments from a policy point of view. They reduce the role of the Department of State in the foreign policy process, and the political appointees’ inexperience may be damaging to the conduct of United States foreign policy. Furthermore, these ambassadors may feel much freer to circumvent the State Department in shaping policy and use “backchannels” to the White House. In doing so, they alienate the career personnel within an embassy and further weaken an orderly foreign policy process. One senator described such appointments starkly: They are “ticking time bombs moving all over the world.”60

The United States ambassador to a small Asia-Pacific nation, and a political appointee of the Clinton administration, defends these kinds of appointments.61 The political appointee as ambassador, he argues, has better access to the president than nonpolitical appointees. Furthermore, the president may be more willing to listen to his or her personal appointee than to a career diplomat. In this way, these kinds of appointments may actually enhance American diplomacy by better serving both the United States and the host country.

The use of political appointees within the Department of State and the weighing of political loyalties in appointing foreign service officers as ambassadors also exemplify this suspicion between State and the president. One tactic, for instance, has been to engage in a “purge” of bureaus and personnel that were perceived as not fully committed to the administration’s policy. The Bureau of Inter-American Affairs suffered this fate early in the Reagan administration because it was not fully in tune with the priorities of the White House. The assistant secretary of state of this bureau was replaced with a career diplomat perceived as more loyal to the administration’s goal, albeit lacking in Latin American experience. When the diplomat began to waver on policy, he was ultimately replaced by a political appointee who was a staunch conservative and wholly committed to the policy of aiding the Nicaraguan Contras. Ambassadors to several Central American countries (El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Honduras) from the Carter administration were fired or transferred because they were not viewed as fully committed to a marked change in policy to the region. In turn, they were replaced by “foreign service officers with reputations as good generalists willing to follow orders and not raise troubling questions.”62

The Bush administration employed a number of political appointees, particularly at the top of the State Department bureaucracy. The four key
political operatives for Secretary of State James Baker came from outside the Department, and one of them was responsible for screening all papers that reached the secretary. By one account, the Department’s attitude “evolved from deep hostility to ambivalence” toward Baker and these appointees. The career foreign service people “felt altogether shut out for a time, and to some extent they still are.”63 They were, however, pleased that Secretary Baker was personally close to the president because, if they could break through to the leadership, they could play a greater role in policy making.

For the Clinton administration, the most notable political appointment within the Department of State was President Clinton’s long-time friend and one-time roommate during their days at Oxford, and a former journalist, Strobe Talbott.64 Talbott was initially appointed as an ambassador at large with special responsibilities to the Secretary of State regarding policy toward the former Soviet Union. By the end of President Clinton’s first year in office, however, Talbott was appointed as deputy secretary of state, with numerous career officers being passed over. With his new title, Talbott largely continued his work on policy toward Russia, and his policy importance was manifest in that “only Talbott was in the room for Clinton’s one-on-one with Yeltsin,” during a Moscow summit in 1994.65 In addition, he also began to assume a more consequential role across the policy agenda and in internal State Department operations.

Other critical Clinton appointments also went to key political allies and campaign activists, and the ranks of the foreign service were bypassed once again. The under secretaries for International Security Affairs and for Economic and Agricultural Affairs, for example, were outsiders as were the initial assistant secretary for European and Canadian Affairs and the director of USAID.66 While these kinds of political appointments are not particularly new with the Clinton administration, they do reflect the eroding reliance on personnel within the Department itself.

As with other recent administrations, too, the policy direction of the Clinton administration, especially over Bosnia, caused grumbling within the State Department ranks because their advice was not heeded. By early 1994, five State Department officials resigned and others protested to the secretary.67 While some were surely unhappy over the failure to heed the views of the foreign policy analysts within the Department and over policy changes by the administration, morale still remained “level,” according to one close observer.68

Overall, though, the role of the career officials at the Department of State continued to erode, with increasing numbers of political appointees, both as ambassadors and as key departmental leaders. In a slightly different context, one former foreign service officer perhaps said it best more than a dozen years ago: “Creeping politicization has corrupted foreign service professionalism.” In turn, this former FSO added, politicization “has hindered American diplomacy.”69

The Public’s View. A final reason for the Department of State’s weakened influence derives from the whole domestic setting: The department has never really enjoyed a sound reputation among the American public. Beyond
the view that the State Department is out of step with the nation as a whole, members of Congress and the executive branch have called for making the Department more efficient and effective. While the negative public image has perhaps waned over the decades, it, along with the other restraints evident within the Department, has produced a certain caution in policy choices advanced by State Department personnel.

THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

The National Security Council (NSC) and its staff remains the bureaucracy that has enlarged its role in the foreign policy process over the last four decades. The NSC has grown from a relatively small agency with solely a policy-coordinating function to one with a separate bureaucratic structure and major policy-making function. Its head, now designated as the assistant to the president for national security affairs (or the national security advisor), is viewed as a major formulator of United States foreign policy, often surpassing the influence of the secretary of state and the secretary of defense.

Because of this evolution, an important distinction ought to be kept in mind as we discuss two different, but related, bureaucratic arrangements operating under the “National Security Council” label. One bureaucratic arrangement refers to the “NSC system” and focuses on the departmental memberships on the National Security Council itself and the subsequent interagency working groups established by presidents to coordinate policy making across the existing bureaucracies. That coordination process remains intact and is the focus of the last portion of Chapter 10. The other bureaucratic arrangement, and one that has become more commonly discussed lately, refers to the “NSC staff” (or simply “the NSC”), the separate bureaucracy that has developed over the years and which has increasingly played an independent role in United States foreign policymaking. The following discussion focuses on the growth of that bureaucracy and its policy-making role and leaves the former to the next chapter.

The Development of the NSC Bureaucracy

As originally constituted under the National Security Act of 1947, the National Security Council was to be a mechanism for coordinating policy options among the various foreign affairs bureaucracies. By statute, members were to be limited to the president, the vice president, secretary of state, and secretary of defense, with the director of central intelligence and the chairman of the joint chiefs of staff as advisors; these members, along with others that the president might choose to invite, met to consider policy options at the discretion of the president. Over time, the NSC system has evolved with a set of interdepartmental committees to support the National Security Council itself.

Table 9.1 portrays the composition of the National Security Council under the Clinton administration. The composition includes those required
Table 9.1

Composition of the National Security Council

Statutory Members of the NSC
- President
- Vice President
- Secretary of State
- Secretary of Defense

Statutory Advisors to the NSC
- Director of Central Intelligence
- Chair, Joint Chiefs of Staff

Other Attendees
- Chief of Staff to the President
- Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs
- U.S. Representative to the United Nations
- Secretary of Treasury
- Assistant to the President for Economic Policy
- Attorney General (for meetings dealing with her jurisdiction)
- Others as invited

*By executive order, the Clinton administration has designated these two appointees as members of the National Security Council.


by statute, but in 1993 some important additions were made to the regular attendees at such meetings. Most notably, by executive order, the secretary of treasury and the head of the National Economic Council were designated as members of the National Security Council as well.72

Under the original legislative mandate for the National Security Council, the assumption was that the staff of the NSC was to be small and its responsibilities focused largely on facilitating the coordination of activities among the various foreign affairs departments. Indeed, the NSC staff originally had only three major components: “(a) the Office of the Executive Secretary; (b) a Secretariat...and (c) a unit simply called ‘the staff.’” The executive secretary and the secretariat were the permanent employees and generally undertook the actual coordinating activities of the Council. The staff “initially consisted wholly of officials detailed on a full-time basis by the departments and agencies represented on the Council” and was assisted by a full-time support group as well.73 Their responsibilities focused on preparing studies on various regional and functional questions. Nonetheless, the staff members continued to maintain and coordinate their work with the respective departments from which they were drawn. Coordination across departments appeared to be more important than an independent assessment that they might undertake.

Presidents Truman and Eisenhower used the NSC as a coordinating body, too. Because President Truman had relatively strong secretaries of state, and because he tended to employ them for policy advice, he used the
National Security Council meetings primarily as an arena for the exchange of ideas (often not attending the meetings himself until the outbreak of the Korean War). President Eisenhower, by contrast, met with the National Security Council on almost a weekly basis and relied upon it for decision-making discussions. (By one account, Eisenhower attended 306 out of 338 NSC meetings during his presidency.) Actual policy decisions, however, seemed to have been made outside this forum, especially as Secretary of State John Foster Dulles gained decision-making influence. For neither of these presidents, though, was the NSC staff the independent policy influencer that it was to become.

Under Eisenhower, however, the structure and staff of the National Security Council bureaucracy began to change and gain some greater definition. Eisenhower, for instance, created the post of special assistant to the president for national security affairs for Robert Cutler and named him the “principal executive officer” of the NSC. The staff structure was also revamped and enlarged, and the mandate and duties of the NSC itself expanded. Most notably, President Eisenhower stated that members of the NSC were “a corporate body composed of individuals advising the President in their own right, rather than as representatives of their respective departments and agencies.” In a later revision, however, he did indicate that “the views of their respective departments and agencies” ought to be stated as well. While Cutler and the NSC staff continued to perform their coordinating role, President Eisenhower’s statements were the first hints of a more independent policy role for the NSC bureaucracy and its staff. Moreover, such a view of the NSC bureaucracy would eventually become a reality during the succeeding administrations.

The Rise of the National Security Advisor

By the time of the Kennedy administration, the role of the National Security Council began to change, and a more prominent role for the national security advisor (“special assistant for national security affairs”) emerged. Now more reliance was placed on key ad hoc advisors, including the national security advisor, but not on the NSC as such by the president. In fact, few meetings of the Council were held during the Kennedy years. Instead, the national security advisor began to emerge as a source of policy making, rather than as only a policy coordinator. As a result of Kennedy’s reorganization of the NSC staff, the national security advisor had a number of previous staff responsibilities consolidated into his office. As a consequence, McGeorge Bundy became the first national security advisor to serve in a policy-formulating and policy-coordinating capacity.

The role of national security advisor was enhanced even more during the administration of President Lyndon Johnson. Walt W. Rostow, successor to Bundy during much of President Johnson’s term, and a small group of advisors (the “Tuesday Lunch” group) played an increasingly large role in the formulation of American foreign policy, and especially Vietnam policy. As during the Kennedy years, the national security advisor gained influence, but the National Security Council, as a decision or discussion forum, actually declined in importance.
The full implication of this changed decision-making style became most apparent during the administration of President Richard Nixon. In particular, the appointment of Henry A. Kissinger as national security advisor further transformed the use of the national security advisor in foreign policy making. Henry Kissinger, an academic and consultant to previous administrations, was familiar with, and critical of, the bureaucratic machinery of government. In large measure, he saw the bureaucracy as being an impediment to effective policy making and as hindering the job of the “statesman.” Through his considerable personal skill, Kissinger was able to reorganize the decision-making apparatus of the foreign policy bureaucracies so that he was able to dominate all the principal decision machinery, and the National Security Council and staff were to become the focal point of all policy analyses.

Kissinger accomplished this transformation through the development of a series of interdepartmental committees flowing from the National Security Council system. These committees included representatives from the other principal foreign policy bureaucracies, but, at the same time, they excluded those institutions from ultimate authority for making policy recommendations. In fact, Kissinger set up a senior review group, which he himself chaired, for examining all policy recommendations before they were sent to the National Security Council and the president. Even when Kissinger became secretary of state (as well as national security advisor) in September 1973, and when Gerald Ford became president in August, 1974, this pattern of National Security Council staff dominance continued.

The National Security Advisor: The Carter and Reagan Administrations

Under President Jimmy Carter, the initial impulse was to reduce the role of the national security advisor and his staff (partly in reaction to the role that Henry Kissinger had played in the previous eight years) and to place more responsibility for foreign policy in the hands of the secretary of state. More accurately, President Carter’s goal was to balance the advice coming to the president from the secretary of state and from the national security advisor. The elaborate NSC committee system developed during the Kissinger years was initially pared back to only two. Ultimately, however, the national security advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, was able to play a more dominant role in the shaping of foreign policy and to work his will in the policy process due to the force of his personality, his strong foreign policy views, and the challenge of global events (e.g., the seizure of American diplomats in Iran in November 1979 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979). This development only continued the pattern of moving away from the Department of State and toward the national security advisor in the formulation of American foreign policy.

Under the Reagan administration, a return to the earlier pattern of collegial policy making was once again attempted. President Reagan’s first secretary of state, Alexander Haig, came to office determined to restore the dominance of the Department of State (and especially the office of secretary) and to make himself the “vicar” of foreign affairs. In part to facilitate this
reversion to the earlier model of policy making, a relatively inexperienced foreign policy analyst, Richard Allen, was appointed by President Reagan to be the national security advisor. In this environment, it seemed possible that the secretary of state could reassert his authority as the dominant force in the shaping of policy.

Although Secretary of State Haig achieved some initial success in shaping the foreign policy of the Reagan administration, he failed to dominate the process. Ultimately, he was forced to resign when policy frictions developed among the White House staff and the secretaries of state and defense and when a new national security advisor, William Clark, who was closer to President Reagan, was appointed. Power seemed to be shifting more perceptibly back to the White House and the national security advisor.

George Shultz, Haig’s successor as secretary of state, initially appeared to be given some latitude in policy making, but National Security Advisor William Clark soon eclipsed his role. A series of events reflected this shift in decision making. Whether over arms control policy (e.g., the Strategic Defense Initiative), Central American policy (the removal of the ambassador to El Salvador and the firing of the assistant secretary of state for Inter-American affairs), or Middle Eastern policy (e.g., a change in the President’s personal representative), the decisions once again illustrated the shift in policy dominance toward the NSC and away from the Department of State. In fact, by one assessment, Clark “became the most influential foreign policy figure in Reagan’s entourage” in a very short time. The shift was so perceptible that Shultz reportedly complained directly to the president that he could not do his job effectively if foreign policy decisions were made without his participation.

Only under Clark’s successor as NSC advisor, Robert McFarlane, and after the disclosure of the Iran-Contra affair did Shultz gain policy dominance. Because McFarlane was not personally close to President Reagan and because he felt constrained by the president’s insistence on “cabinet-style” government, the pattern began to change somewhat. Still, crucial national security decision directives were issued by McFarlane’s office, often without prior departmental clearance. After November 1986 and the domestic political fall-out from the Iran-Contra affair, things changed more perceptibly.

While the Iran-Contra affair in one sense demonstrated the extent to which the NSC had dominated policy making (after all, the episode seemed to be directed entirely by individuals within the NSC), it also showed the dangers of such a procedure. Both investigations of this affair—the presidential inquiry, known as the Tower Commission, and the report of the two congressional committees—cited the dangers of allowing the National Security Council staff to run covert operations without presidential accountability, faulted the poor operation of the NSC system under the Reagan administration, and recommended reforms in the decision-making system itself. After the firing of John Poindexter as national security advisor, Poindexter’s two successors—first, Frank Carlucci and then, Colin Powell—were much more inclined to serve as policy coordinators than as policy formulators. As a result, Secretary of State George Shultz increasingly dominated the policy process.
The National Security Advisor: The Bush and Clinton Administrations

At least by formal design, the Bush administration returned to a more familiar pattern of NSC dominance of foreign policy making. In National Security Directive 1 (NSD-1), President Bush placed his national security advisor, Brent Scowcroft, and his deputy at the head of the foreign policy-making machinery by appointing them as chairs of the two key coordinating committees of the NSC system—the NSC/Principals Committee and the NSC/Deputies Committee (see Chapter 10 for details on these committees). As heads of these two committees, the NSC and its staff were in a strong position to dominate the Departments of State and Defense in the shaping of policy. Further, the national security advisor, albeit in consultation with the secretaries of state and defense, was given responsibilities for establishing appropriate interagency groups to develop policy options, as the need arose.

With James Baker as Secretary of State and with Baker’s close personal ties to President Bush, some raised doubts about Scowcroft’s ability to dominate the process. However, with his previous experience as national security advisor under President Ford and with his background in bureaucratic politics, Scowcroft fared quite well. He did not seek the limelight, he put together a staff that was generally applauded, and he quickly undertook a broad review of American policy. Content to allow Baker to do more of the public relations side of foreign policy (e.g., congressional relations and trips abroad), Scowcroft ultimately was identified as the principal molder and the real “mover and shaker” of American foreign policy within the foreign policy hierarchy.

Clinton’s first national security advisor, Anthony Lake, was cut from the same cloth as Scowcroft and was less like, say, a Kissinger or Brzezinski in carrying out this foreign policy assignment. Lake did not seek the limelight and rarely got it. By one assessment, he was “surely the only national security advisor ever to stand beside the President in a New York Times photograph and be described as an ‘unidentified’ man.” While that comment surely understated his importance, it conveyed his style of influence: a quiet, behind-the-scenes approach.

Lake’s influence derived from his geographical closeness to the president and Clinton’s limited foreign policy experience and foreign policy interest. He saw the president every day to brief him on global development and served as the arbiter among the conflicting bureaucracies whether State, Defense, or the intelligence community. While Lake said that he was careful “that the President is getting all points of view,” he also offered his own views. As he gained more confidence in his role, Lake assumed a more assertive posture in the policy debate. He was more likely to assert his own position sooner in the process “because it helps move issues to a resolution.” Despite a self-effacing personal style, Lake, after the president and vice president, was perhaps “the most powerful influence on foreign affairs.”

Lake’s successor was his former deputy, Samuel (Sandy) Berger, appointed in December 1996. As with Lake, he appears likely to enjoy considerable policy influence, based upon his knowledge of foreign affairs and
his close ties with the president. He had previously worked for Lake in the Department of State during the Carter administration and, in turn, worked for four years as Lake’s top aide on the National Security Council during Clinton’s first term. In addition, he has a long personal relationship with President Clinton, beginning with their involvement in the McGovern campaign for president in 1972.94

With a new foreign policy team in place for Clinton’s second term, Berger’s immediate challenge is to meld those new officials into a smoothly working team. With George Tenet (who formerly worked on the National Security Council Staff) heading the CIA, Berger will have a familiar face (and perhaps an ally) in any bureaucratic debates over policy that may develop with new secretaries at the Department of State and the Department of Defense. Yet, with his close ties to the president, Berger ought to be in a good position to continue as the most influential foreign policy maker, much as the assistants to the president for national security affairs have been over the past several decades.

Another important reason why Berger will likely possess such influence (as have other national security advisors) is the elaborate bureaucratic structure for the National Security Council and the national security advisor that has evolved over the last four decades. Figure 9.4 shows the present
structure of the National Security Council staff. The NSC bureaucracy now has regional (e.g., Asian Affairs, African Affairs) and functional (e.g., International Economic Affairs, Defense) directorates and several important leadership positions. These positions start with the assistant to the president for national security affairs and his deputy, but they also include an executive secretary, a legal advisor, a legislative affairs advisor, and a counselor. As the NSC organizational structure imitates that of the Department of State, it is a direct and often successful competitor with that bureaucracy. Compare Figures 9.1 and 9.4 and note the similarity in the structures of the two organizations.

The increasing importance of the NSC staff in foreign policy making also reveals itself in the significance attached to the individuals appointed to its key positions. Indeed, an important gauge of the direction of American foreign policy can be gleaned from the kind of staff people appointed to the various divisions within the NSC organization and the foreign policy views that they possess. Moreover, these positions now rival and even surpass the importance of similar positions at the Department of State or the Department of Defense.

WHY TWO DEPARTMENTS OF STATE?

With the National Security Council and the Department of State competing for influence, the foreign policy apparatus of the United States has actually evolved into what political scientist Bert Rockman calls two Departments of State.95 There are now “regular” channels (through the Department of State) and “irregular” channels (through the National Security Council) for foreign policy making. Yet, even this simple division is too narrowly drawn in reality; instead, the division ought to be stated more boldly. The division is really between the irregular channels, epitomized by the National Security Council, and the regular channels—including the Department of State and all the other foreign policy bureaucracies—with foreign policy responsibilities. After all, the NSC controls the interagency process within the government (as we shall discuss in Chapter 10). Still, it is important to consider why these irregular processes have been in ascendancy and have actually come to dominate the foreign policy process, and why the regular channels have lost ground as a result.

Rockman offers several insightful reasons for the prominence of the irregular channels.96 System overload is the first one. Overload refers to the tremendous amount of information and policy analyses available to the president from the various regular bureaucracies. Thus, the national security staff provides a ready arena for coordinating and distilling such a volume of material for the president—something that a single formal bureaucracy would not likely be able to do. As Rockman acknowledges, however, while overload might account for the coordination of policy within the NSC, it does not actually explain the decision-making growth of the NSC system. For this explanation, he looks to institutional and organizational arrangements within the foreign policy bureaucracies and the political culture within Washington.