The fifty-three-year-old statutory language establishing the National Security Council (NSC) and authorizing a staff for it—a mere handful in 1947—still stands, but it masks a dramatic transformation. The formal council almost never meets, and the staff—an integral part of the White House—now numbers nearly two hundred.

The purpose of this chapter is not to retrace the history of this transformation but to describe how, today, the assistant to the president for national security affairs and his associates serve the council members and the president in achieving a mission that has remained unchanged from the council’s earliest existence: “the integration of domestic, foreign and military policies.”

The centerpoint for national security policy is still the president—the decisionmaker. And the old challenge is still present: the multiplicity of agencies whose work must be interwoven—State; Defense; the intelligence community; the United States Information Agency; frequently Justice; and often Treasury, Commerce, Energy, and the National Aeronautics and Space
Administration as well. What have been transformed are, first, the facilities and processes that support presidential decisionmaking; second, the methods contemporary presidents employ to govern America's national security operations.


Information in the White House is like arterial blood in the body: the indispensible nutrient. The ventricular center of the national security affairs staff is the Situation Room—the "Sit Room"—in the basement of the West Wing.

The departments and agencies of the national security community generate some 500,000 communications each day between Washington and U.S. diplomatic, military, and intelligence posts abroad. This torrent of electronic traffic, constrained in the first instance by its passage through the decryption processes, is then controlled for distribution in Washington by operations centers located at the top level of the responsible agencies: State, Defense (including all four armed services as well as the National Security Agency), and the CIA. It is these operations centers, working according to criteria handed down from cabinet-level authority or higher, that determine who will receive these communications—and how quickly. Special code words identify degrees of secrecy and urgency: the caption "CRITIC," for example, immediately warns any op center that a crisis is occurring.

Before the Kennedy administration instituted the White House Situation Room, messengers from the various agencies would trot across town, hand-carrying into the White House envelopes that contained paper copies of a few selected cables. The transformation since those years has been dramatic. Today the various op centers—established in the sixties—have systems that almost automatically skim off the most urgent and important national security messages and relay them immediately and electronically to the Sit Room. Around the clock, these thousands of communications flow into the White House filters. From the Department of State, for example, some 1,500 especially important and urgent incoming and outgoing diplomatic cables each day (4,000 a day during a crisis) are instantly transferred to the White House, where they are displayed on a bank of silently glowing computer screens in a semidarkened alcove behind the Sit Room.

The Situation Room staff can move the intake threshold up or down, vacuuming in hundreds of messages from a crisis area or raising a stricter standard to eliminate those deemed routine. If the Sit Room staff incom-
plete data, they will tell a distant post to wake up and produce more, in order not to expose the president to misleading information. To help guarantee responsiveness to the president’s priorities, the Sit Room prepares and distributes to the national security departments a weekly checklist identifying the topics that will be of special interest to the White House in the forthcoming days.

The Sit Room staff never forget, however, that presidents come before systems. If the boss says, “Get me everything,” he will get it: the whole pile. President Johnson at times demanded: “I want that report—NOW!”—and he would be given it—raw. Presidents can—and do—manipulate their institutional systems, or bypass them altogether.

Like the Sit Room, all the op centers are staffed twenty-four hours a day by skilled intelligence and watch-officer teams. Connected by secure conference lines, they check back and forth with each other constantly, supplementing their ultrasonified equipment with their own sensitive judgment. Neither the ambassadors who dispatch the cables nor the assistant secretaries who will act on them can limit their relay to the Situation Room; the telegrams may be marked “NODIS” (very limited distribution), but that does not deter State’s op center from sending them to the White House. From Defense, both strategic and tactical military communications pour into the Sit Room, especially if American armed forces are in action anywhere in the world. In addition to the classified cable traffic, 2,500 international news briefs come in daily on the tickers. A resource file of 15,000 items can be tapped for reference.

The experienced Sit Room staffers know precisely whom in the White House to notify, and how quickly. They alert the White House national security adviser to messages that are of presidential significance. (When a cable from an American ambassador is brought to the attention of the president, the secretary of state is notified, so that he or she can be prepared for a possible presidential phone call.) The hundreds of other messages are distributed, according to subject, to the NSC senior directors, who scrutinize them minutely.

Just as the torrential flow of electronic information can overwhelm the humans on the receiving end, the computers’ power can be harnessed to help channel that same flow: the intake or search instructions can be programmed to admit or select out communications that contain certain words, names, or phrases, or to create a personalized “profile” for a senior recipient, ensuring that only messages within defined categories will come through.

The twenty-five-person, round-the-clock Sit Room duty staff do more than simply receive messages: they compose an early-morning summary for
the president, the vice president, the national security adviser, and the NSC senior directors, with updates at nine and twelve in the morning and three in the afternoon. The summaries of the Sit Room staff dovetail with the special morning reports from State and the CIA—which are, in turn, used by the national security adviser in his daily intelligence briefings with the president.

Although State, Defense (and its National Security Agency), and the CIA share some of their messages and reports with each other, no one of them gets everything. Only at the White House does it all come together.

No student of the presidency should underestimate the significance of the Sit Room operation for American public administration. It is impossible to overstate how dramatically the transformation of this one office illustrates not only the emergence of the president as the absolute center of national security policy but also the burgeoning importance of the White House national security affairs staff in supporting and strengthening the president in his central role. Because of this facility and these procedures, the members of the White House staff—and, through them, the American president—can be privy to every detail, tactical as well as strategic, of the national security environment and operations. If the president can be that aware, he can be that much in command, just as the Constitution provides—a matter discussed later in this chapter.

The Development of National Security Policy

In the Bush and Clinton administrations, issues of national security were first addressed in interdepartmental working groups (IWGs)—but the chairmanship of those teams was most frequently assigned to an NSC senior director rather than to a departmental officer. Meetings were almost always held in the White House—in the Old Executive Office Building or, for highly classified gatherings, in the small, simple, but elegantly paneled Situation Room itself. Occasionally these sessions were conducted remotely, through secure videoconference facilities that allowed seven separate minigroups to participate (as well as others, if needed, on audio-only hookups). A special chamber next to the Sit Room could project onto seven separate screens all seven sets of participants simultaneously. One veteran IWG participant pointed out an additional advantage of using the remote system: it's more private. The press outside the West Wing doorway can't count the cars driving into West Executive Avenue or figure out which VIP is arriving at the White House.
Literally dozens of IWGs were created and disbanded to meet ever-changing needs. Papers were drafted, exchanged by secure fax, and hashed over in incessant meetings. When the issue was ripe for higher consideration, it was the chair—the NSC senior director—who would compose the summary option paper, sometimes including departmental contributions as attachments.

The deputies meetings—the most regularly used element of the policy machinery above the level of the IWGs—were attended by the number-two officials of the participating departments and were under the chairmanship of one of the two deputy assistants to the president.

The deputy assistant set the agenda, assigned whatever papers had to be readied, and held the meetings in the White House. Twice a week was the usual frequency—far oftener when there was a crush of issues. The vice president’s national security adviser attended, as did the White House chief of staff or his deputy. One of them observed: “Me. Did they want me there? Hell no. Did the State Department want me there? No. Did I go to all the meetings? Yes. Was I there to ask ‘dumb’ questions? Yes.”

In both the Bush and Clinton administrations, the next step up in the decisionmaking hierarchy were the principals: the cabinet heads and the CIA director. The meetings were chaired by the national security adviser, and the NSC staff—after combing through memoranda and intelligence information from the national security agencies—would draft the key papers for discussion.

Principals meetings were often attended by the “principals plus one” (the cabinet member, for example, could be accompanied by the responsible assistant secretary)—but not by the president. Bush’s national security chief, Brent Scowcroft, explained why principals meetings were used in this fashion: “It was without the president, and was a much more informal kind of a session, to try to hash out where we were, try to get more agreement, or highlight the points of disagreement, so we could go to the president and didn’t waste his time. We could be more candid with each other, without worrying about people carrying stories back to their departments.” A Clinton NSC veteran observed: “The advantage is that people perhaps speak a bit more freely. You can do a little bit more in depth on an issue. . . . It makes sense to have these meetings without him, and then to refine, often on paper, your options, and then staff them up to him.”

Did principals meetings ever include the president? Of course—in both administrations—when the issue was ripe. The group that convened was then called the foreign policy team. And the origin of the papers that were
discussed? An NSC senior staff member replied: “It depended on the issue. Sometimes, if it was a big enough issue, it would have supporting memoranda from the other members of the cabinet. But most of the time these were memos which were homegrown here in the NSC.”

The end results of meetings with president Clinton were sometimes presidential decision directives (PDDs)—formal documents signed by the president—but decisions were often communicated informally.

And what has become of the traditional, formal “National Security Council”? It has fallen into desuetude, apparently—in part because a formal meeting of the council carries with it the implied obligation to have numbered papers, minutes, numbered records of action, and a press briefing afterwards. The Clinton style was to steer away from such formalities; as of this writing, Clinton had not convened even one formal NSC meeting in his second term.

NSC Support for the President’s Personal Role in National Security Affairs

The words in Article 2 that specifically describe the president’s national security functions are scanty but puissant: “Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy . . . by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate . . . make Treaties . . . appoint Ambassadors . . . and Consuls . . . receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers.” From these and the other less specific admonitions of Article 2, however, has arisen the imposing panoply of modes by which the chief executive exercises personal governance of a great deal of the work of his national security community. Some of those modes are venerable, but a few are quite new in style—and potent in their requirements for staff support.

VIP Visitors in the Oval Office

A meeting in the Oval Office between the president and a foreign leader doesn’t happen without a written schedule proposal from the NSC—a proposal that then has to be defended against a plethora of competing requests. “I spent a lot of my time dealing with the scheduling people, fighting for time on the president’s calendar,” sighed one NSC officer. Clinton’s first national security adviser was almost too adroit at getting people onto the president’s schedule. “The president doesn’t have to see every general and deputy foreign minister that comes through town,” lamented a Clinton scheduling official. “One of the things that made my life miserable [was
that] things got on the schedule because Tony Lake put them there—but they didn’t have any fingerprints on them.”

Material for the necessary briefing memorandums was collected from State or Defense, but the memorandums themselves were written by NSC senior directors, then rewritten by a demanding and fastidious security adviser. As President Clinton became more familiar with foreign policy issues and needed only captions to remind him of substantive matters, even the memorandums were reduced to 5” x 7” cards. When President Reagan needed memorandums on foreign policy issues, State would produce them. “We don’t even go through that fiction any more. We don’t ask the State Department for cards; we produce them here,” explained a Clinton NSC staffer. When the door to Clinton’s office opened for a foreign visitor, it was a restricted meeting—but it nonetheless included the secretary of state; the vice president; the president’s national security adviser, Samuel (Sandy) Berger; the vice president’s national security adviser, Leon Fuerth; the White House chief of staff; and an NSC senior director, who was the note-taker.

President Bush enjoyed a unique form of Oval Office session that might be described as “Seminars with the President.” National security adviser Brent Scowcroft would invite a mix of people with different views—scholars, authors, think-tank researchers—to sit down with the president and engage in a leisurely but penetrating discussion of a foreign policy issue. Bush wanted to be exposed to experts from outside government in an environment free of any pressure for decisions. At least four such meetings were arranged: on the Soviet Union, on China, on Iraq, and on the Middle East.

**Summit Sessions**

The Constitution’s well-worn wording was an early indication that the American president might one day become chief diplomat as well as commander in chief. In the years since American presidents made historic journeys to Versailles, Yalta, and Potsdam, that is precisely what has occurred. Summit conferences are now routine—as are presidential trips to nearly every continent on the globe. As chapter 16 will describe, summit meetings are major productions, the presidential preparations advanced and managed almost wholly by the White House.

In preparation for face-to-face meetings between chiefs of state, it is the NSC staff that compiles the enormous briefing books. One of its senior staff officers described the process: “We solicit raw material from the State Department. It comes in and it is usually completely rewritten by the NSC staff. And then, the book that we give the president before the trip is usually just
the beginning point. We go on the trip, and every night—before the next
day’s meetings—we go back to what we have done, and very frequently
rewrite it, sometimes dramatically.”

Why was departmental material so routinely redone? A State Depart-
ment senior staffer with previous White House experience explained:

If you ask the State Department for a document . . . you get some-
thing that comes much too late, that’s much too long, much too con-
voluted, much too down-in-the-weeds—because people there are
dealing with their own day-to-day problems. It’s very hard for this
department to put itself in the shoes of the president and to say, “Now,
this is what he’s going to want to know.” . . . If you are the president,
you want a very different kind of a memorandum from what natu-
really arises from the bowels of this building. . . . There is a great line
in the movie The American President where a guy comes in and says,
“Some governor wants to see you. He wants to talk about X.” The
president says, “Trust me; he really wants to talk about Y.” That’s
what presidents think when they see foreign leaders: “What does he
want from me? What do I want from him? Can I give him what he
wants? If so, with what limits? And what can I get from him that will
help me—that is part of my agenda, not the [agenda of the] State
Department country director?”

Some summit encounters, however, have been more extemporaneous.
Attending the funeral, in Amman, of Jordan’s King Hussein, President Clinton
found himself in the midst of a rare assemblage of the world’s kings and
prime ministers, all confined in the palace for a lengthy period. Clinton’s
personal style coincided with the unbeatable opportunity: “He was like a
kid in a candy shop,” recalled the NSC staffer who tried to keep up with
him. “It was unstructured, rapid-fire, kinetic diplomacy . . . completely free-
form.” Clinton had cordial—and effective—“corridor conversations” with
a dozen of his counterparts.

Summit meetings were often followed up by personal correspondence—
drafts of which from State were, as an NSC staff officer explained,
“cross-hatched over here. . . . We rewrite many of those because they are,
frankly, not very well done.” Not infrequently the president would take a per-
sonal hand in such correspondence. When a human rights activist took refuge
in the American embassy in Beijing and the Chinese responded with obstre-
ctionist tactics, President Bush wrote a lengthy letter to Deng Xiaoping. “I wanted
a letter straight from my heart, so I composed it myself,” Bush later explained.
The President on the Telephone

The president-as-chief-diplomat does not wait for episodic face-to-face sessions to keep in touch with his opposite numbers. Foreign events move too quickly, and sensitive situations may arise that require immediate and direct personal contact. In another evolutionary development of tremendous significance, the American president gives twenty-first-century meaning to that original constitutional empowerment: he uses the telephone to communicate personally with other chiefs of state around the world.

A practice that began with Eisenhower, use of the telephone to communicate with foreign chiefs of state has now become a favorite means of presidential diplomacy. President Bush made and received over a thousand such telephone calls, many of them during his efforts to garner support before the Gulf War. President Clinton had 750 such phone conversations in his first five years in office; in 1998 he spoke by telephone with British prime minister Tony Blair an average of once a week. An impressive example of the value of such personal presidential telephone diplomacy was reported near the end of 1999: "After private diplomatic exchanges that included more than a dozen phone calls between President Clinton and Syrian President Hafez Assad since August, both sides will enter the [forthcoming Shepherdstown] talks with a clear understanding of the other’s requirements on issues relating to territory, timing, security and the nature of diplomatic, cultural and trade relations...officials said."\(^{11}\)

Sometimes the national security adviser takes the initiative and submits a schedule proposal explaining the pressing need for a presidential telephone call. Or the president himself may start the process. Explained Scowcroft: "He would be reading either the morning intelligence report, or perhaps just the morning newspaper, and exclaim, ‘Well, you know what Mitterand just did! Why don’t I call him about that?’ I would go back, call in my appropriate staff officer, and say, ‘The president wants to talk to Mitterand; give me a little background and some talking points.’ Sometimes—he had so many friends—he would say, ‘I think I’d just like to find out what’s going on in Europe; I’m going to call...’"\(^{12}\)

Before the call was put through, the national security adviser would submit the talking points and personally brief the president. The Situation Room would contact the U.S. embassy abroad and ask embassy staff to have the foreign ministry make the arrangements and confirm the date and time. The White House Communications Agency would make the connection and ensure the security of the call; interpreters (if needed) would be on hand on both sides; the security adviser or another NSC staff officer would
listen in, take notes, and write up a memorandum for the record. “The bureaucracy doesn’t like this calling business,” Scowcroft commented. “They hate it because it’s too hard to script.”

If a call was to be initiated by the head of a foreign government, the Sit Room would notify the NSC and a staff member there would check with State or with other sources to try to determine what was on the caller’s mind. After one disturbing experience—when a foreign caller hoaxed the White House and actually succeeded in getting the president on the phone—the White House practice has been to decline to take incoming calls, and to guarantee the caller’s authenticity by calling back from Washington through preestablished channels. Telephone diplomacy unquestionably requires White House staff resources: briefers, communicators, interpreters, notetakers. But this relatively new requirement of the nation’s chief diplomat is well worth it.

Many presidential calls, of course, are of the lightweight variety: checking in, exchanging information, wishing happy birthday. The more substantive calls may carry a double disadvantage. First, the U.S. ambassador abroad may not have been notified of the call—and nothing is more embarrassing than to have the leaders of the host government exclaim, “But we just talked to your president!” Second, negotiation via presidential telephone bypasses—and thus may deprive the United States of the benefits of—what ambassadors are paid to do: engage in robust, in-depth discussions of policy issues. “Let’s probe this some; let’s get some more facts; let us give you our counterarguments. . . .”

President Bush, nonetheless, makes a strong case for personal relationships:

There are actually commonsense reasons for an American president to build relationships with his opposites. If a foreign leader knows the character and the heartbeat of the president (and vice versa), there is apt to be far less miscalculation on either side. Personal relationships may not overcome tough issues dividing two sides, but they can provide enough goodwill to avoid some misunderstandings. This knowledge helps a president formulate and adjust policies that can bring other leaders along to his own point of view. It can make the difference between suspicion and giving each other the benefit of the doubt—and room to maneuver on a difficult political issue.

Scowcroft echoes this view: “President Bush invested an enormous amount of time in personal diplomacy—and, in my opinion, it was indispensable to the success of our foreign policy. His direct relationship with his counter-
parts had a tremendous effect upon them—most were immensely flattered. They would no longer be strangers, having only occasional formal contact. . . . As a result, foreign leaders tended to be there when we needed them, often only because they knew, understood, and empathized from having spoken with him on so many occasions.”

Scowcroft goes on to rebut the concern of the professional diplomats:

Foreign ministries had their own ways of viewing issues, sometimes quite different from those of their current head of state or government. The Quai d’Orsay (foreign ministry) in France, for example, had a reputation with the State Department as adversarial and obstinate. It was enormously helpful to [Secretary of State] Jim Baker that the various foreign ministries knew that, if they were disposed to be negative or simply drag their feet on an issue, they might receive an inquiry from their head of government—stimulated by a Bush phone call.16

On February 16, 1994, in a message to Swedish prime minister Carl Bildt, President Clinton inaugurated an even newer method of personal diplomacy: e-mail. Clinton’s note concluded: “I share your enthusiasm for the potential of emerging communications technologies. This demonstration of electronic communications is an important step toward building a global information superhighway. Sincerely, Bill.” The prime minister’s reply ended: “It is only appropriate that we should be among the first to use the Internet also for political contacts and communications around the globe. Yours, Carl.”17

The President as Tactical Commander in Chief

The first section of this chapter described the NSC’s Situation Room and the streams of information that flood into its computers and appear on its monitors. During a national security crisis—especially when U.S. armed forces are threatened by or engaged in combat—the Situation Room is capable of pulling in highly detailed tactical intelligence from the distant crisis area. Thanks to small, unmanned Predator planes, which produce live digital videos, and big J-STARS (Joint Strategic Airborne Reconnaissance System) 707s, which use Doppler radar to detect anything moving, the White House, should it choose, can even observe a battlefield in real time.

Top-ranking military professionals, however, traditionally adhere to the dictum of Sun-tzu (a Chinese sage who lived some 2,500 years ago): “He will win who has military capacity and is not interfered with by the sover-
eign.” Echoing Sun-tzu, national security leaders under Bush and Clinton strongly voiced their opposition to any White House attempts at battlefield management. Referring to a Reagan-era “command center” on the second floor of the Old Executive Office Building—an office that he dismantled—Brent Scowcroft explained: “I’m not going to use it; I’m never going to take the president into that building. I don’t want him to see the disposition of forces; I don’t want him to see all those things. That’s not what he is designed to do. He has to make the big decisions. I don’t want his mind cluttered up with all this stuff. This is not the SAC [Strategic Air Command] command post; this is not the Pentagon. I like the Situation Room, where the best thing you have is a clock.”

Photographic intelligence, however, has a special appeal to presidents. Reagan looked at photos often, and news accounts described President Clinton’s scrutiny of videotapes from Predator planes over Bosnia.

Scowcroft reflected further:

It’s a tough issue. In these limited kinds of conflicts—like Vietnam, for example—you have to trade the knowledge that the battlefield commander has on the scene of what the tactical situation really is with the strategic knowledge of vulnerability that a president has, in Washington. The tactical commander knows what’s on the scene, but he doesn’t know what kind of trouble he could get his commander in chief into if he does A instead of B. So, whenever there is that kind of decision to be made, any commander in chief is going to want to be in on it. Because if there is going to be a disutility it is better to have it in the field than in Washington, and have a big disaster. So that’s the balance you have to keep. And it’s not always an easy one.

Not infrequently, the commander in chief will at least want to engage in battlefield management in advance: to inspect tactical military plans before the engagement begins. President Bush reportedly did this before the initiation of Operation Desert Storm: “[Secretary of Defense Richard] Cheney also reviewed the target list with the President, to make sure Bush was aware of potential points of controversy. He wanted Bush to be happy with all of it. The President was concerned about one set of targets and asked that it be dropped. It included statues of Saddam, and triumphal arches, thought to be of great psychological value to the Iraqi people as national symbols.”

A quite recent—and very impressive—example of the dilemma that General Scowcroft describes took place during the spring of 1999, during the seventy-eight-day NATO bombing operation in Kosovo. The question of
which targets to strike was not merely a military but a political decision. The “quints”—the foreign ministers of Britain, France, Germany, Italy, and the United States—acted as a “management committee” and “held a five-way conference call almost every day.” But above the foreign ministers were the presidents themselves:

[French president] Chirac asked to review any targets in Montenegro, a small republic of Yugoslavia that had remained democratic and was trying to stay out of the war. [British prime minister] Blair wanted a veto over all targets to be struck by B-52 bombers taking off from British soil. And all three leaders wanted to review targets that might cause high casualties, such as the electrical grid, telephone system and buildings in downtown Belgrade.

All agreed on [these] . . . new guidelines . . .

At a morning intelligence briefing, [General Wesley K.] Clark was informed that Yugoslav artillery in Montenegro was shelling northern Albania. . . . “Hold off on that,” he said, “I’ll get French permission.”

Within hours, Clark and three of the Clinton administration’s top players—[Secretary of State Madeleine] Albright, national security adviser Samuel R. “Sandy” Berger and defense secretary William Cohen—dialed their counterparts in Paris. By the next morning, Clark had political approval for the strike. . . .

After the internal military review, the target approval process passed through the White House, the British prime minister’s office and the French presidential administration. During the first 45 days, Gen. Henry H. Shelton, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, was at the White House every day, seven days a week, with targets that needed the president’s approval.

From Shelton’s perspective, the White House process was expeditious. Clinton and his top advisers were quick to make decisions, and there was never a logjam of targets waiting to be approved. In the field, though, the wait sometimes seemed long and mystifying.  

Months later, U.S. leaders had second thoughts about this lengthy and involved political clearance arrangement for military operations. Testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee in mid-October of 1999, General Shelton acknowledged that “the NATO target approval process was slow. Obtaining consensus before striking highly sensitive targets proved the most challenging.”

Defense Secretary Cohen added:
I think that we have to really have greater thought given to the target approval process in the future. . . . [We] have to decide in advance what sort of latitude and leeway our military commanders who are charged with carrying out the operation have, and set these forward in a fairly straightforward fashion, so we do not have to have questions raised during the course of the campaign: is this something that must necessarily be kicked up to the higher political authorities for their judgment? . . . At what point does the need for allied cohesion tend to be outweighed by the military effectiveness of an operation? . . . I do not think you are ever going to have a situation in which the elected leaders of a democracy are going to say we are turning it over to the military; we do not care what you do, you can make a desert and call it peace, and you can wipe out an entire population as long as you succeed in your military objective. I think the military itself would object to that, and surely a democratic society would object to that, and so what we need to do is to evolve into that process, and see if we cannot speed up and improve the process in the future. We will never eliminate it, and we do not want to.\textsuperscript{24}

Readers will immediately appreciate the significance—and the potential consequences—of this debate for the future functioning of the national security affairs office at the White House.

The National Security Adviser and His Staff

Former President Bush emphasized the importance of the officer whose formal title is assistant to the president for national security affairs: "The President should make clear that in all but title the NSC adviser is like the Chief of Staff for foreign affairs. Clearly the Chief must be included in discussions and decisions on major foreign policy or security matters; but it is important that the NSC adviser be seen as the President's powerful National Security principal on all NSC matters. If this does not happen the NSC adviser will be bypassed not just by staff and Cabinet, but by diplomats as well."\textsuperscript{25}

Besides managing the policy development process and supporting the president's personal national security role, the security adviser and his staff have important additional responsibilities.

\textit{In the Security Adviser's Office}

In recent years foreign representatives, recognizing that the White House is the locus of national security decisionmaking, have beaten a path to the
West Wing door of the national security adviser himself, but only a few have succeeded in getting a spot on his notoriously cramped schedule. Most are welcome in the White House but are referred to whichever NSC senior director follows the affairs of their particular country. Some only want to make a courtesy call; others carry “eyes-only” messages for the president. Refused a meeting with Clinton’s national security adviser, one ambassador whined directly to the Congress that he couldn’t get into Berger’s office. Explained Brent Scowcroft: “Ordinarily I would see them when we wanted to put a White House twist on something—either really impress them that the president was serious about something, or make them feel good, coming to the White House. . . . You know, it is useful to use the White House as a part of diplomacy; it’s like underlining a word in your sentence.”

Richard Haass, Scowcroft’s senior director for the Middle East, observed: 

In normal times, we didn’t do a lot of it. But during crises we did a bit more, particularly with the Kuwaiti ambassador, with [Saudi ambassador] Bandar, with the Israeli ambassador. That’s because the White House is the center. . . . [You] know when you have a crisis, it’s no longer just diplomacy; it’s no longer just State. In normal times, State is first among equals. But in a crisis, the White House becomes the hub of the wheel; State just becomes the end of one of the spokes. You have the Pentagon and others, so you [in the White House] end up doing more of it yourself.”

The members of the national security staff are careful to keep their colleagues in the Department of State informed about such visits.

In addition to ambassadors, international luminaries with some notoriety—such as the Dalai Lama, author Salman Rushdie, and Irish partisan Gerry Adams—were received in Sandy Berger’s office. To preserve the subterfuge that such visitors were not accorded a formal or official Oval Office appointment, the president would then drop by—a strategy that helped forestall accusations from the Chinese, the Muslims, or the British that the American president was, in some official way, sanctioning their enemies.

Under Clinton, the national security adviser was especially involved when the president was preparing to meet with a foreign chief of state, as the following excerpt (from a March 1997 White House press secretary briefing) indicates: “The National Security Adviser, Samuel Berger, met with Egyptian President Mubarak this morning at Blair House, in preparation for the working visit on Thursday with President Clinton. They had a good discussion, which focused mostly on the current state of the Middle East peace process.”
In the evolution of White House dominance of national security affairs, one of the most significant steps was taken by Henry Kissinger when he arranged to install a direct, secure telephone connection to Bonn, Paris, and London—not to the U.S. embassies, not to the foreign ministries, but to his counterparts: the national security advisers in those three countries. (Kissinger also made heavy use of back channels—via the CIA station chief—to reach the heads of foreign governments; in this fashion, he would send policy messages personally that bypassed the American ambassadors.)

Scowcroft continued Kissinger's "drop-line" system; he could simply pick up the proper phone on his desk and it would ring on the desk abroad. Members of Clinton's national security staff similarly relied on a network of telephones that linked them to their opposite numbers in certain foreign countries. These links were made secure through a portable encryption gadget that could be plugged into any senior staff member's phone—whether at home or at the office—and that worked in tandem with a companion piece that had been lent (sealed up, of course) to the appropriate office abroad. There was even such a link to the Zhongnanhai headquarters of the Chinese leadership in Beijing.

Why are such connections useful? If a foreign country is being run by a coalition government, the prime minister and the foreign minister may be of different parties—or even within the same party, not the best of friends. It can be assumed that the national security advisers abroad, like those in the United States, serve as close personal assistants to the heads of their respective governments. For the White House, that is the connection that counts.

The Bush and Clinton national security advisers eschewed the back-channel approach to communications, in which instructions were issued to U.S. embassies without the knowledge of the secretary of state. As one State Department staffer commented: "I think the Iran-Contra escapade put that to rest. Too many people got burned: Where were you taking instructions to or from? Now there is quite a rule about that. NSC staff may call an embassy to ask, 'What is going on?' but Tony Lake and Sandy Berger would limit themselves to suggesting to the secretary of state that she might send some instruction out to X."29

**NSC Staff for Legislative Liaison**

Congress being the control gate for every national security action that requires statutory authorization, for every dime that is spent to carry out such actions, and for the approval of every international treaty, the national security adviser and his colleagues watch the Hill intently. In fact, one of
the senior directors of Clinton’s national security staff was specifically assigned that task.\textsuperscript{30}

The NSC legislative assistant worked under dual oversight: he or she was part of the NSC group and attended NSC staff meetings; but because the assistant’s duties also came under the jurisdiction of the White House director of legislative affairs, he or she participated in those staff meetings as well. For the NSC, this assistant snared all incoming congressional mail on national security matters, assigned it to the right experts on the NSC staff, and got the responses cleared with both the national security adviser and the White House assistant for legislative affairs. A collaborative triad—the NSC legislative assistant and his or her counterparts in State and Defense—kept in sync through daily conference calls, bringing in Justice, the CIA, and other agencies as needed. One incumbent composed a nightly report about any actions or events on the Hill that might affect national security matters.

With a TV monitor on the wall carrying continuous live floor debate, the four members of the legislative assistant’s staff could split their time between the Hill and their White House desks, all the while concentrating on their principal task: taking the lead in arranging briefings for the Senate and House leadership on pending national security issues. The cabinet departments were expected to work with their respective congressional committees, but the White House dealt with the congressional leadership—knowing that if necessary, it could call in the heaviest support: phone calls from the president.

Having worked on the Hill earlier in his career, security adviser Berger was at home in the Capitol; he needed no reminder of the intimate connection, in national security matters, between the legislative and executive branches; nor did he need to be reminded how essential it was for him, as the head of the national security affairs office, to consult often with legislators. “If I told Sandy, ‘I really need you on this,’ he would do it,” explained Bill Danvers, who served nearly four years in the liaison post. “We would do nose counts; we would do it interagency; we would work with the leadership; we would go to whip meetings.”\textsuperscript{31}

It was not unusual for the national security adviser to be on the Hill as often as four times a week, and on the telephone to members between three and six times a day. During the contentious debate on the Chemical Weapons Convention, for example, Berger headed an administration team that—at the request of majority leader Trent Lott, and with a strict deadline impending—negotiated with nine senators to iron out a set of conditions and assurances (which would accompany the ratification resolution) sufficient to persuade several reluctant conservatives finally to agree to passage.
On issues like this, Bill Danvers emphasized, there was not much horse trading between White House and Congress; indeed, there was little to trade. It was a matter of persuading senators and representatives to support the president’s policy.

NSC’s Own Legal Staff

In 1985, hunting for legal advice that would support their desire to supply the Nicaraguan contras with arms, NSC deputy assistant John Poindexter and staff member Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North went not to the junior officer who at that time was responsible for giving legal advice to the NSC staff but to “an odd source”: a lawyer working for the president’s Intelligence Oversight Board, a group that is independent of the NSC. According to that officer, the restrictions in the Boland Amendment did not apply to the NSC staff. This was the advice they wanted—and the rest is history. One disaster and two years later, the President’s Special Review Board recommended “that the position of Legal Adviser to the NSC be enhanced in stature and in its role within the NSC staff.” As a result of that recommendation, the NSC staff came to include a legal adviser and three deputy legal advisers.

National security policy questions are steeped in legal issues: the limits of congressional oversight, the proper wording for presidential findings to authorize covert actions, the boundaries of presidential war powers, the interpretation of conditions imposed on treaty ratifications, the judgment as to whether or not a space interceptor would be permitted under the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty, and so forth.

One particularly difficult legal issue that arose between the CIA and the FBI concerned terrorist attacks against Americans in foreign countries. The CIA uses its resources abroad to track down the perpetrators; the FBI wants to bring them to the United States for trial. But obtaining a conviction at an open trial would likely require disclosure of the CIA’s sources and methods. To reconcile intelligence and law enforcement objectives, the NSC arranged to create a high-level coordination group consisting of representatives from the two agencies—which, in former times, had barely been in communication with each other. An NSC staff officer sat with this group to track its work, and to call in White House intervention if required.

Departmental general counsels are the first level of review for interagency national security issues, but they can and do disagree—in which case the NSC legal adviser steps in to oversee a review. If a departmental general counsel is under pressure, for policy reasons, to concur with the proposed action of his or her own agency, it has become the duty of the NSC legal adviser to stiffen
the departmental counsel’s spine—and, if legal problems have been passed over or left unresolved, to blow the whistle. The NSC legal office provides “the last legal review of all documents going to the president in the national security area with ‘legal effect,’” that is, “presidential determinations, reports to Congress, executive orders and Presidential Decision Directives.”

Like the NSC legislative assistant, the NSC legal adviser works under dual oversight: as part of the staff of the national security adviser but closely linked to the counsel to the president—and sits in on the staff meetings of both groups. He asks for the White House counsel’s concurrence if there are significant legal issues in a national security paper going to the president. (President Bush’s counsel, Boyden Gray, actually chose the person who served as the NSC legal adviser.)

The legal assistant will often ask the Office of Legal Counsel (OLC) at the Justice Department to aid in unsnarling interdepartmental legal disputes that are critical to national security policy decisions. (If the disputes are irreconcilable, it is the OLC, not the NSC legal adviser, that has the authority to adjudicate.)

Is it indispensable for the national security assistant to have his own legal adviser? The Clinton administration thought so. But General Scowcroft, who signed the 1987 review board report but who then served as President Bush’s security adviser, changed his mind, indicating that he thought it better for the NSC to rely on the White House counsel. However, that office’s almost total preoccupation, in 1998–99, with the Monica Lewinsky scandal and with its aftermath—the impeachment imbroglio—is a signal that this question has two sides to it.

**NSC Press Relations Staff**

Another dual arrangement: like the White House itself, which has a press secretary and assistants, the Clinton NSC had its own “press and communications” group: a senior director (who also had the title of deputy White House press secretary) and a small staff.

Each morning, the first task of the NSC press group was to equip the national security adviser to answer questions or make comments at the White House senior staff meeting. The staff accomplished this task by combing through the thick stack of photocopied press articles—which had been delivered to every White House office—and alerting the adviser to any stories, editorials, or op-ed columns about national security issues.

The NSC press group’s next duty was to help prepare the White House press secretary for his daily press briefing. To do so, the press staff tapped
a variety of sources. They would approach the NSC senior directors, who would already have been in touch with their policy counterparts in State and Defense. For any current issues, the senior directors would compose talking points for the press secretary that incorporated just the right language, the right nuances: What could the press secretary say about a given situation? What could he say about actions the U.S. government was taking? What should he avoid saying? State and Defense, meanwhile, would have developed guidance for their own press staffs; the NSC press group would obtain copies of these materials, and ensure that any disparities were reconciled before the press secretary appeared in the Briefing Room. The NSC press group also perused the CIA’s *National Intelligence Daily* and obtained copies (from the Sit Room) of State’s pertinent cable traffic. Finally, the NSC press officers would listen in—and chime in as needed—to the White House press secretary’s hour-long daily conference call with his opposite numbers at State, Defense, the CIA, and the U.S. Mission to the United Nations.

The product of all this research was a summary paper from the NSC press office to the White House press secretary that covered the national security questions that might come up during the early-afternoon press briefing. At the briefing, some members of the NSC press group would sit along the side of the room, alphanumeric pagers at the ready; meanwhile, other members of the press group would watch the press briefing on closed-circuit monitors. If an unexpected query was thrown at the press secretary, he would likely answer, “I’ll get back to you on that”—whereupon the NSC press office staffers (who were watching the monitors) would dig out the answer, ring up the pagers, and dictate a short response. An NSC press staffer would then scribble the answer onto a card and slip it to the rostrum. This quick-reply technique was not often used, but in case the press secretary needed information, misspoke, or used inappropriate terminology, the correction could be made on the spot—before the press conference ended and before any damage was done.

After the press conference, members of the NSC press staff would return to their office, where follow-up calls were piling up: typically seventy in a day.

**NSC Speechwriting Staff**

In the spring of 1989, President Bush decided to make a set of four speeches: his debut pronouncements on foreign policy. The first, concerning Eastern Europe—especially developments in Poland—would be delivered
in Hamtramck, Michigan, a blue-collar community vibrant with Polish-Americans, thereby adding a domestic political coloration to the occasion.

Who would write these speeches? The national security staff had the experts—the senior directors, whom Scowcroft trusted; but the White House speechwriting office, supported by Chief of Staff John Sununu, had a knack for dramatic political rhetoric. There was an astringent division of opinion in the White House. The speechwriters’ view of the NSC product? It would tend to be written “in an academic and ‘heavy’ style... too difficult to fix.” Scowcroft’s view of the speechwriters’ product? “Their texts seemed to be marked by a choppy political-campaign style, designed for applause at rallies but hardly befitting a serious discussion of important policy issues.”

Scowcroft believed that in order to get the substance exactly right for the international as well as the domestic audience of a major presidential address, his NSC staffers should always do the first draft; the professional speechwriters could add the catchy phrases later. Miffed by the implication that they were no more than technicians, the speechwriters insisted that they could fully absorb the substance and explain it lucidly. In practice, portions of some drafts were created jointly by the NSC and the White House speechwriters. But, adds Scowcroft, “there were instances of competing NSC and speechwriter drafts.”

During the Bush presidency, the debate was never really settled. “It remained a major irritant, with a negative impact on the quality of the president’s foreign policy speeches throughout the administration.”

Things were different, however, under Clinton, as a senior NSC officer made clear: “We write the speeches now. Any foreign speeches, we write... from soup to nuts. And not just the speeches, obviously, but what is called the ‘toppers’—which, although [they precede] this administration—[are] a favorite device now. If the president is going to an event, say an AIDS event, but if something newsworthy is going on in the world, he will say, ‘Before I talk about AIDS, permit me to...’ And then he will issue a warning about Kosovo, or something like that.”

Clinton had a five-person NSC speechwriting staff. Security adviser Berger—himself a former speechwriter—worked heavily on any major foreign policy speech. Only when Berger said “Go” was the draft released for comment to the White House speechwriting office, to a few other senior White House advisers, and to the secretary of state. “Then the slings and arrows would begin,” an NSC officer said with a smile. “If the suggested change is from ‘happy’ to ‘glad,’ our NSC speechwriters will take it. If it’s
something that cuts to the core of an argument, they will check with Sandy. Sandy closely controls the speechwriting process; he rewrites heavily."  

From the point of view of the State Department, NSC drafts invariably arrived with too tight a deadline. The direct copy that came from Berger was "never too early from our perspective," acknowledges a senior State officer. "It's always a last-minute thing. If we only get it at ten to five, we have to work all night."  

Reciprocally, State sent the secretary of state's speeches to Berger in advance, for comments and a green light.  

Given their unbeatable credibility, national security advisers are always in demand to appear on the Sunday TV talk shows. In fact, the White House press secretary hoped that all the administration's knowledgeable senior national security officials would follow Berger's practice and blanket the Sunday roundtables. Although under Clinton there was almost always an understanding with the president that such appearances were acceptable, even encouraged, in the past some presidents had insisted on giving specific advance approval. Brent Scowcroft and Tony Lake were very conservative about going public; Sandy Berger did so with gradually increasing frequency and became expert at it.  

But no national security leader ever wants to be surprised by the TV appearances of any of his colleagues. It was the practice of the Clinton team that if any appearances were scheduled, a conference call would be arranged ahead of time so that all the senior national security players would know who would be saying what.

**Expanded NSC Leadership for Counterterrorism**

President Clinton and the national security community were deeply concerned that the United States was vulnerable to rogue or foreign-state-sponsored terrorism in the form of chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear attack here on our own soil.  

The Oklahoma City and World Trade Center bombings and the sarin gas episode in the Toyko subway were warning signs of potentially even more catastrophic events. Local governments would be the first line of response to a domestic attack, but federal resources to "manage the consequences" would be needed immediately, and from some agencies—such as Agriculture (which would have to oversee food safety) and the General Services Administration—that are not accustomed to working with the national security community.
"We must have the concerted efforts of a whole range of federal agencies," explained the president, "from the Armed Forces to law enforcement to intelligence to public health." Clinton designated the NSC staff as the centerpoint for mobilizing such efforts. On May 22, 1998, President Clinton signed Presidential Decision Directive 62, which established, within the NSC organization, the Office of the National Coordinator for Security, Infrastructure Protection and Counter-Terrorism. The coordinator is to "oversee the broad variety of relevant policies and programs" and to "report to the President through the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs and produce for him an annual Security Preparedness Report."

The national coordinator was promptly appointed: one of his first efforts was to work closely with the director of the Office of Management and Budget to review the budgets and programs of the ten most relevant domestic federal agencies—identifying duplications, gaps, and weaknesses that would need to be addressed in order for the planned special-defense efforts to be effective. The objective was to create a unified antiterrorism budget while fully recognizing that despite the superintendency of the White House national coordinator, it would be the federal domestic agencies themselves—with their staffs and resources in the field—that would provide the primary support for local governments in the event of a terrorist attack that used weapons of mass destruction.

NSC Relationships within the White House

The NSC staff participates heavily in many enterprises that cut across internal White House boundaries, yet it also needs to be fenced off somewhat, both for security reasons and to ensure that it remains insulated from partisan political manipulation. For these reasons, President Clinton and national security adviser Berger designated the NSC executive secretary as the exclusive "bridge" between the NSC staff and all White House and Executive Office units (except for the chief of staff; the counsel; and the legislative, press, and speechwriting shops.)

After the Roger Tamraz and campaign coffee-klatsch embarrassments, national security adviser Berger, in June of 1997, issued a set of instructions entitled "Appropriate Contacts." According to this document, any staff office—other than the NSC itself—that plans to invite any foreign visitor to meet the president, the vice president, or either of their spouses is required to request clearance for such a visit from the NSC executive secretary at least three days in advance. The executive secretary then checks the name
with State, the CIA, and NSC staff, and makes a recommendation to the White House chief of staff, who is to make the final decision. If other senior staff officers want to meet with foreign visitors, similar checks are required. The instructions caution NSC officers about meeting with any outsiders, prohibit them from having contact with officials of any political party, and warn them never to show favoritism when American businesses are competing for foreign contracts.43

The NSC Staff

The title of this chapter is something of a misnomer. Clearly the tasks and responsibilities that have been described thus far cannot be undertaken by one national security adviser—even with the assistance of two deputies. The staff of the NSC has become the largest policy group in the White House. Indeed, its combination of skill and size is a measure of the ascendancy of the White House in executive-branch policy development and policy coordination. As noted earlier, NSC staff members in 1948 numbered barely a handful; today they number nearly two hundred.

In the Clinton White House, nineteen regional and functional senior directors (listed at the end of the introduction to part 2 of this volume) supported the top offices of the assistant and the two deputy assistants. These nineteen, in turn, were supported by the White House Situation Room, described at the beginning of this chapter, and by three auxiliary offices: for systems and technical planning, records and access management, and administration. Each of the NSC senior directors has carried the additional title of special assistant to the president, marking them formally as officers of the White House staff.

The security adviser has had the latitude to create new staff units as necessary and to cut back or disband others; he has also had great flexibility in hiring and terminating staff members, all but a very few of whom serve at the NSC at the pleasure of the president.44 In fiscal year 2001, the internal White House “ceiling” for NSC staff “slots”—that is, those salaried by the government—was 155. Of those, 60 were paid from funds appropriated to the NSC (the number given in the personnel summary of the NSC staff that was reported to Congress in the fiscal year 2001 budget). Of the other 130-plus, most were on detail from State, Defense, or the CIA; the others were “non-counters” against the ceiling of 155: full-time consultants whose salaries were being paid by the universities from which they had come. Finally, there were usually a few interns at the NSC (who also did not count against the ceiling).
The fiscal year 2001 budget request for the NSC was just over $7 million. As a member of the White House staff, the national security adviser is exempt from the duty to defend that budget in congressional appropriations subcommittee testimony; that job is handled by the director of the Office of Administration.

The Historic Tension: The National Security Adviser and the Secretary of State

This chapter has so far described the principal duties and operations of the assistant to the president for national security affairs and his colleagues. Every hour—indeed, every minute—these duties and operations directly affect the Departments of State and Defense—State in particular. As is to be expected, differences of opinion arise on virtually every foreign policy issue; many of these differences are both profound and sharp. But whereas policy arguments can be resolved at whatever level is needed—and can be brought to an end by conclusive answers—conflicts about jurisdiction tend to linger, suffusing the entire interdepartmental environment. It is in the area of jurisdiction that the greatest changes have occurred in the White House in the years since 1948.

During that span of time, the NSC staff has been transformed from a small group performing primarily secretariat functions into a major policy shop that generates its own substantive views. In its initial years, the NSC staff simply reproduced and distributed policy papers from State and Defense; now it writes its own—and sends them to the president. NSC staffers once merely took notes at interagency meetings; now they chair the meetings. NSC staff used to depend on State’s “desk officers” to share whatever information they received from embassies abroad; now all the important raw cable traffic comes directly to the NSC staff, who read it themselves. The secretaries of State and Defense used to send memorandums to the president; these are now most likely to end up as attachments to memorandums from the security adviser. Our nation’s most sensitive matters in England, France, Germany, and China were once handled as part of our ambassadors’ visits to the foreign ministries; now the White House national security adviser is in direct telephone contact with his counterparts in London, Paris, Berlin, and Beijing. The president formerly used his ambassadors to conduct crucial diplomatic relations; now he often telephones the foreign chiefs of state and conducts them himself—with an NSC staffer listening in. The
president once depended on his secretary of state to journey overseas to negotiate the most sensitive agreements; now he convenes personal, face-to-face summit meetings. It was the practice that foreign ambassadors accredited in Washington transacted their business with assistant secretaries of state; now they bring many of their most delicate concerns to the NSC staff. The relationship between the White House and the State Department is indeed, to borrow a phrase from Messrs. Bush and Scowcroft, a world transformed.

These transformations have been bumpy, or worse. Many readers will remember how acrimonious—and degrading to the Department of State—were the relations with the White House during the Nixon, Carter, and Reagan presidencies. They will recall the anger of the chief of naval operations at the White House management of the 1962 naval blockade of Cuba. During the Bush and Clinton administrations, however, the historic tensions were at least contained, if not damped down almost entirely. How come?

The answer is clear: security advisers Brent Scowcroft, Tony Lake, and especially Sandy Berger assiduously reached out to the secretaries of State and Defense, using constant and open communication to forge strong institutional and personal connections. These connections were reciprocal, and pertained at all staff levels. If the president had a substantive telephone conversation with a foreign chief of state, the secretary of state was either notified orally or received a copy of the memorandum of conversation—the gist of which, in most cases, was also cabled to the U.S. ambassador. If a foreign ambassador had a serious talk with an NSC senior director, the latter promptly informed the responsible assistant secretary in State. If Sandy Berger took an official trip abroad, a State Department officer accompanied him; if Secretary of State Madeleine Albright or Secretary of Defense William Cohen traveled overseas, an NSC staffer went, too.

Berger convened a weekly “ABC” luncheon with Secretaries Albright and Cohen, plus a weekly breakfast with Albright, Cohen, CIA head George Tenet, Joint Chiefs Chairman Henry Shelton, and the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. Albright and the president talked very frequently on the phone. Berger and Albright—who typically spoke on the telephone thirty times a day—were especially careful to check with each other if either was considering making a speech or appearing on a Sunday roundtable. Similarly, Scowcroft recounts, “I never went on a TV show that I did not say, ‘Jim [Baker], is this OK with you?’”

There are, of course, endemic differences in perspective between any cabinet officer and any presidential staffer: the secretary will appreciate getting as much personal praise as possible from a successful action, while the
White House staff member will want to turn the credits toward the president. Personal factors affect the mix as well: Madeleine Albright and Sandy Berger, for example, had known each other, worked together, and been friends for many years by the time she was elevated to the cabinet and he was appointed national security adviser.

Mindful, then, both of the tensions of the past and of the enormity of the fifty-year transformation of the relationship between State, Defense, and the NSC, the three “ABCers” worked out the “four rules for not killing each other”:

1. No friendly fire: we don’t criticize each other publicly.
2. Walk ourselves back: rather than say, “Well, Berger doesn’t know what the hell he is talking about,” Berger himself walks back and says, “Maybe I overstated it.”
3. Presumption of innocence: “Before you accept the fact that your colleague has been engaged in some kind of mischievous, dishonest effort, you pick up the phone and talk it through.”
4. No policy by press conference: “We ought to agree to things before we make policy.”

The American people can hope that these four rules—and the open communication practices that have accompanied them—will endure long into future administrations.