

**The U.S. National Security Advisor & National Security Council:
Role Progression and Best Practices Needed**

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Since the beginning of the National Security Act of 1947 and the first National Security Advisor (NSA) and National Security Council (NSC) in the United States during the Truman Administration, visibility has shifted between the various roles and personalities of the NSA and NSC from the Truman to the Trump administration. Generally, the NSA is in place to set the agenda, engage in diplomacy, serve as a bridge between politics in policy, work as an intelligence official, be a congressional liaison, and for media relations. However, their influence relies on the relationship they have with the President since this role does not require confirmation from the

senate. Their relationship and influence vary typically due to the current state occurring during an administration.

There have been 24 NSA's since the creation during the Truman administration. All of which have had a unique role to the President based on their relationship to him, adaptability to their decision-making style, and expertise in foreign policy. Of these 24 NSA's there have been some that demonstrated key changes and significance to the NSC. One of these was McGeorge Bundy (John F. Kennedy & Lyndon Johnson administrations) who served as the NSA during the Cold War and Cuban Missile Crisis. Despite being very close with JFK, Bundy was able to have a larger role as an NSA due to the time of crisis that occurred while he was in position allowing him to assist in crucial decisions during difficult times and creating an NSC with foreign policy influence to exceed the U.S. State Department (Wanis-St. John, 1998). Another NSA of significance is Henry Kissinger (Richard Nixon administration) who played a dual role of NSA and Secretary of State. Kissinger dominated foreign policy with the creation of committees, such as WSAG (Washington Special Actions Group), and redirection of tasks formally handled by other agencies and departments. Kissinger was eventually ruled out to have too much control and replaced with Brent Scowcroft during the Gerald Ford administration as well as later in the George H.W. Bush administration. Scowcroft who vouched heavily for the importance of the NSA serving as an honest broker (like Bundy), wrote for the Tower Commission investigation of Iran-Contra and solidified the NSC with a cooperative process, among other things, to make him known as the most ideal NSA. After Scowcroft and then during the Jimmy Carter administration was NSA Zbigniew Brzezinski. Brzezinski was a strong-willed, opinionated advisor to Carter and was known for simplifying the NSC system from what it was from the Nixon administration, using Presidential notes for NSC actions (George & Rishikof, 2017). Skipping ahead to another

significant NSA is Condoleezza Rice (youngest and first African American woman NSA) who was the NSA during the George W. Bush administration. She was known for her close ties to the President and therefore saw ensuring his priorities as her primary goal. However, Rice faces some criticism due to the fact she was the NSA during the 9/11 attacks, where there could have been potential warning signs of the attack. Moving to the Barack Obama administration was James Jones, Thomas Donilon, and Susan Rice. Opposite to Condoleezza, Jones was not very close to the President and often delegated a lot of his responsibilities to Donilon, who was deputy at that time. When Donilon became the NSA he considered American public opinion greatly in his counseling, his successor Susan Rice also followed this methodology to some extent (George & Rishikof, 2017). Then in the recent Donald Trump administration, there has been a record number of 4 NSA's, Mike Flynn, H.R. McMaster, John Bolton, and Robert O'Brien. Flynn resigned after 24 days after misleading a conversation he had with a Russian ambassador, McMaster argued with Trump about not leaving the nuclear agreement with Iran and vouched for stricter measures with North Korea ultimately leaving Trump to fire him for having too many disagreements, and the previous NSA Bolton was known for similar types of disagreements with Trump and was soon fired as well (Rose, 2020). O'Brien, the most recent NSA to Trump, had been moving forward with cuts to the NSC staff and admitted the inevitability that Biden won the election despite Trump's stance near the approaching on inauguration and still managed to stay alongside Trump despite his predecessors (Dilanian, 2020). O'Brien has gotten along well with Trump, stating he does not see it as his job to "sway" the President into what he thinks is best but lay out all possible options for the President.

Now transitioning into the Biden administration, Biden has chosen Jake Sullivan to be his NSA. Sullivan served as deputy assistant to President Obama and NSA to Biden when he was a

Vice President. For the Biden administration to have a successful NSC, he must consider past mistakes of previous administrations while capitalizing on the positive methods done. An ideal NSA follows the role of being an honest broker, like Bundy and Scowcroft, and represents the NSC rather than being an advocate like Brzezinski and Kissinger. The NSA must help guide the President, uncorrupted, on foreign policy. Additionally, the NSA and NSC should be better at coordinating an inter-agency process. Kissinger had too much control in this area where other agencies should have been more in the loop. Next, the NSA must be careful to not be biased in one course of action in a decision while still giving a plausible opinion. Furthermore, the bureaucratic organization of the NSC must have expertise in all areas and have all parties on the same page. Meaning, effective communication of goals in foreign policy and crisis are vital. All of these components of a successful NSC and NSA also rely on the duty of a President. Having a close relationship with the NSA gives the NSA more of an ability to be an honest broker and the ability for the President to trust the opinion of the NSA. The President must also have it be clear of his or her political strategy as well as balance in policymaking actions. If these actions of an ideal NSA and NSC can be performed, the organizational success and ability to work with the President on foreign policy is attainable. Capitalization on the interagency process, playing the role of an honest broker rather than an advocate, and effective communication in all parties are the keyways in which the Biden administration should follow with his NSC in order to redesign the NSC to following all the best practices that have been learned from Truman to Trump administrations.

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