PRESIDENTIAL DECISION MAKING AND WAR:
TESTING THE EVOLUTION MODEL

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Introduction

Popular Washington parlor games include debating how and why a President makes foreign policy decisions and which aides have the most power with the President. Will the National Security Advisor stay? Did the President cut the Secretary of State out of a discussion? Observers interested in foreign policy care not only about the policy itself but also the changes and evolution in the system the administration uses to create that policy.

A Washington Post opinion piece from April 2010 on the foreign policy decision making structure of the Obama administration said, “White House officials think they are finally hitting this bureaucratic cruising speed, well into the second year of Obama’s presidency. They have created a system that is framing and launching national security initiatives -- pop, pop, pop -- across a range of global topics.” In the article, David Ignatius praises Obama’s well-managed National Security Council and compares it to George W. Bush’s process, which he claims evolved from “pure chaos” to merely “disorderly.” The Financial Times assessed in late March, “Fifteen months after he took office, the character and structure of Mr. Obama’s foreign policy machinery is still evolving. But from interviews with dozens of insiders and outsiders... it is clear the buck not only stops with, but often floats for quite a long time around, Mr Obama himself.” The authors quote a senior official as saying, “People forget that we inherited two wars, terrorism threats, and perhaps the biggest single eight-year decline in America’s power and reputation in our history. It took time to put in place a process that could deal with the very complex decisions we had to take.” Why does the Financial Times care if President Obama is “his own Henry Kissinger” or chairs National Security Council meetings instead of the National Security Advisor, General Jim Jones? Process—and how presidents change the processes they use to make decisions—matters.

William Newmann, in his book Managing National Security Policy: The President and the Process, puts the familiar idea that each president evolves his decision making

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process over time into a theoretical framework. William Newmann’s evolution model of national security decision making argues that as each presidential administration progresses, the president narrows participation in national security decisions and relies increasingly on informal structures. Newmann hypothesizes that “changes in the international and domestic political environment, organizational dynamics, and presidential choices can lead to changes in the structure of decision making... These changes have a similar pattern in all administrations because of the similar pressures. Administrations will begin to... narrow the range of participation in decisions, add more informality and ad hoc processes, and increasingly bypass or streamline the standard interagency process.”

Newmann illustrates his theory with case studies from the Carter, Reagan, and George H. W. Bush administrations’ decision making on arms control and strategic nuclear doctrine. In Newmann’s conclusion, he asks, “Does decision making evolve in a similar manner and for similar reasons for other issues?”

The central questions this project seeks to answer are: Does the evolution model of national security decision making apply to matters of war and peace in presidential administrations? If so, are any modifications required when applying the evolution model to matters of war? This project tested the evolution model by changing the subject of the case studies from arms control to the Johnson and George H. W. Bush administrations’ national security decision making on Vietnam and Iraq.

The method of research for the project was a qualitative case study approach that reviewed primary and secondary sources related to national security decision making. For the study, the independent variables were the influences of the international and domestic environments, organizational and bureaucratic dynamics, and the management and political strategies of the president. The dependent variable was the administration’s national security decision making process and structure.

These case studies were chosen as two examples of modern presidencies that dealt with matters of war, but importantly, are also presidencies where enough time

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4 Newmann, 211.
had passed for primary and secondary sources to be readily available. The NSC started with Eisenhower, limiting the number of presidencies available to test the evolution model. The case studies reflect Stephen Van Evra’s criteria of data richness, intrinsic importance, and appropriateness for replication of previous tests. The differences in the two cases make for interesting comparisons. Traditional analysis holds that LBJ’s decision making on the Vietnam War was less structured and rigorous than George H.W. Bush’s decision making on the Gulf War. With two very different presidents running two very different wars, it is interesting to see how both presidents changed their decision making processes and structures over time.

Newmann’s evolution model of national security decision making does apply to the Johnson and Bush administrations’ decision making processes and structures for the Vietnam and Gulf Wars. This conclusion was a bit surprising. The working hypothesis for the project was that Newmann’s theory would hold for these two administrations overall, but the pressures of war would lead the President to formalize decision making. Surely a president could not conduct a war through an informal decision making structure! However, changing the variable to war did not greatly impact the Johnson and Bush administrations’ evolutions toward more informal and ad hoc processes. The Vietnam and Gulf Wars required a flurry of meetings to be sure, but the two presidents made their decisions they way they preferred-- informally.

This emphasis on presidential choice is an important aspect of the findings of this project. Newmann asserts in his evolution model that “changes in the international and domestic political environment, organizational dynamics, and presidential choices can lead to changes in the structure of decision making.” In both the Johnson and Bush administrations, this study found that both Presidents made major changes in their national security decision making processes and structures based on presidential choice. Bureaucratic infighting and the international and domestic political environments had

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6 Newmann, 172-173.
much less impact on the Presidents’ decisions to change their decision making processes and structures.

By testing a previously untested theory, this project makes an original contribution to the understanding of presidential decision making. While Newmann’s evolution model is very promising and seems to have great explanatory power, it benefits by being tested in a rigorous way by changing both the variable of administration and also the variable of topic of decision. The discovery that presidential preference was more important than organizational dynamics or political pressures leads to new questions for future research.

**Review of Literature**

The independent variables in Newmann’s model—the international and domestic political environment, organizational dynamics, and presidential choices—were chosen to represent different schools of thought on the pressures that affect policy formulation and implementation. In a review of models of foreign policy advising, Patrick Haney mentions Newmann’s model as a recent development that synthesizes and accepts previous schools of thought.⁷ Newmann does indeed synthesize previous study on organizational and bureaucratic models, presidential management, and new institutionalism to explain the different pressures that lead Presidents to change the way they make national security decisions. Newmann examines these pressures in a new way—he attempts to explain change in decision making over time, rather than accepting the static concept of decision making structure that other models assume.

Governmental politics models are the basis for the variable in Newmann’s theory that changes in the international and domestic political environment and organizational dynamics can lead to changes in the structure of decision making. Here, governmental politics models refers to both the organizational process model and the bureaucratic politics model, both developed in Graham Allison’s seminal work *Essence of Decision*,

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which built on a previously published article and outlined his models as they applied to the Cuban Missile Crisis.\(^8\) The organizational process model “contends that the government is best described as a vast conglomeration of semi-independent departments with interests and perspectives of their own; governmental policy is the output of attempts to merge those competing interests into coherent policy or the uncoordinated aggregate of decisions made by each department.” The bureaucratic politics model is similarly related, but “focuses on the perceptions, interests, and ambitions of individual governmental officials... Governmental policy, ultimately, is the result of bargaining and compromise between individuals and coalitions of individuals.”\(^9\) Based on the evolution model, bureaucratic and organizational infighting might move the president to modify his decision making structure.

Presidential management models emphasize the importance of the president’s preferences in decision making and are the basis of Newmann’s factor of presidential choices leading to changes in the structure of decision making. Partially in response to governmental politics models downplaying the role of the chief executive in policy and decision making, these models assert that “the role of the president, his decision making style, and his political needs are the crucial variables.”\(^10\) Since the publication of Richard Neustadt’s 1960 work Presidential Power, academics have argued over the scope and complexities of presidential authority. Proponents of presidential power argue that the president is more than just a glorified player in bureaucratic politics. Some scholars have studied how the president uses different strategies to gain compliance and others focus more on the impact of the president’s personality, leadership style, and experience on his foreign policy decision making.\(^12\) Whatever the focus of the work,

\(^8\) Graham Allison and Philip Zelikow, Essence of Decision: Explaining the Cuban Missile Crisis, 2\(^{nd}\) ed. (New York: Longman, 2009).
\(^9\) Newmann, 4.
\(^10\) Newmann, 5.
\(^12\) Haney, 292.
presidential management models believe that the president dominates the formulation of security policy.

New Institutionalism adds a new dimension to the study of decision making structures. New institutionalism initially asserted that Congress and other interest groups are influential in the structure of decision making, but evolved to include the president in the struggle between his wishes and the pressures of the Congress and interest groups. Amy Zegart’s work applies these ideas to national security structures. Zegart introduces a modified institutionalist framework for understanding the origins and evolution of national security agencies and illustrates her framework through case studies of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, CIA, and National Security Council. New institutionalist ideas are accounted for in the evolution model as domestic pressures—both Congressional and other interest groups could push the president to change his decision making structures.

Evolution Model

Newmann argues that these different pressures explained in governmental politics, presidential management, and new institutionalist theories are not mutually exclusive. All of these pressures combine to push presidential administrations to develop more informal structures with narrower group participation. This is not a nebulous process; the president himself decides to modify the structure and often provides an explanation for his decision. The president is either choosing to change the process because of his own personal preference (to prevent leaks, for example, or because he is more comfortable with smaller groups or an informal setting), organizational dynamics (perhaps the Secretaries of State and Defense are so at odds that one has to be cut out), or the political environment (public or Congressional criticism of the war’s handling reaches such a level that the president has to change the

13 Newmann, 5-6.
In making a change to the decision making process or structure, the president hopes to lessen those pressures or operate in a way that better suits his style.

In his own words, Newmann summarizes the seven main hypotheses of the evolution model as:

1. Changes in the international and domestic political environment, organizational dynamics, and presidential choices can lead to changes in the structure of decision making.
2. These changes in the structure of decision making are made deliberately by the president when he feels that the initial structures cannot give him the control over process and policy that he desires.
3. These changes are based upon three principles of decision making—economy, learning, and political pressure. These principles describe forces acting upon an administration that push all administrations toward similar decision structures.
4. These changes have a similar pattern in all administrations because of the similar pressures. Administrations will begin to do the following: narrow the range of participation in decision making, add more informality and ad hoc processes, and increasingly bypass or streamline the standard interagency process.
5. These changes generally lead to the use of three identifiable concurrent structures: the formal interagency process designed at the inception of the administration tenure, and informal process in which the president and his senior advisers will meet without staff, and a confidence structure in which the president comes to rely on one or two advisers more than all the rest.
6. These changes are nonlinear. They represent general tendencies. The idiosyncratic leadership style individual presidents will define how much of this evolution takes place, whether presidents give in to the pressures to make changes, ignore those pressures, or learn from them.
7. Differences in the origin, use or operation, and relationships between the three concurrent structures are due to the leadership style of the president.\textsuperscript{15}

This project tests these hypotheses in the Johnson and Bush administrations’ decision making on the Vietnam and Iraq wars, respectively. In both cases, different kinds of pressures did lead to changes in the structure of decision making, and those changes did generally follow into a pattern of narrower participation and more informality. Newmann’s sixth hypothesis that individual presidents affect the scale of

\textsuperscript{15} Newmann, 172-173.
evolution is an important aspect of the amount of change we see in the Johnson and Bush administrations. Newmann explains that a president’s leadership style is an important aspect of how he or she uses decision making processes and structures. He says, “Each president brings with him into office his own administrative personality. It is his preferred way or receiving information and advice, making decisions, and involving himself in the process.”¹⁶ For both Johnson and Bush, a majority of the changes they made to their decision making processes and structures were based on their own leadership style and idiosyncrasies, not because of bureaucratic infighting or political pressure.

**Case Studies**

**LBJ: Overview of Decision Making Processes and Structures**

In November 1963, Lyndon Johnson inherited both John F. Kennedy’s national security advisors and his limited commitment to Vietnam, a situation that was rapidly deteriorating. Johnson retained Kennedy’s advisors both to maintain continuity of government and because he was insecure in the foreign policy realm.¹⁷ Before assessing changes within the Johnson administration, it is important to review Johnson’s leadership style, his initial management strategy, and a brief sketch of the informal and confidence structures that developed before focusing on decision making structures and processes in their relation to the Vietnam war.

**Leadership Style and Management Strategy**

Johnson’s personality played a large role in his leadership style. George Herring says he was a “man of action rather than reflection,” so Johnson “did not subject an increasingly dangerous situation to searching reappraisal.”¹⁸ He was able to slowly

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¹⁶ Newmann, 56.
¹⁸ Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 137.
escalate the war without much public debate and consistently publicized his military actions and his calls for negotiations, trying to appease both proponents and opponents of the war.19 This constant political wheedling, an important part of Johnson’s leadership style, probably preempted an honest reevaluation of the war and caused the Administration to make constant incremental decisions.

Newmann defines management strategy as “the initial formal committee structures and procedures for policy review as well as the roles and responsibilities of the key advisers, in particular, the ANSA [National Security Advisor] and the secretary of state.”20 Kennedy did not follow much of a formal committee structure, but Johnson changed Kennedy’s decision making processes and structures when he became president, even as he retained Kennedy’s foreign policy team. Johnson also preferred informality, but recreated some formal structures as he retained Kennedy’s advisors. LBJ saw the importance of continuity in policy and personnel and he valued the group’s foreign policy expertise because his expertise and heart were in implementing his Great Society.

Johnson did use a basic NSC structure, though former Undersecretary of State Nicholas Katzenbach explains, “Security Council meetings really performed little function with respect to Vietnam other than giving people an opportunity to express their highly predictable views, and they were largely replaced by Tuesday Lunches for principals only.”21 Johnson’s first NSC meeting was 5 December 1963 on the USSR. Brookings Institute analysis recorded 78 NSC meetings, 45 percent of which were on topics regarding Asia.22 The President also issued traditional national security directives, which seem to be renamed by each administration. Johnson called them National Security Action Memorandums, or NSAMs. The first, NSAM 273, was issued on

19 Herring, America’s Longest War, 149.  
20 Newmann, 59.  
November 26, 1963 on Vietnam (Johnson continuously numbered his memoranda from the Kennedy administration). However, of 100 issued, only 16 were on Vietnam.

The principal advisors at the beginning of the administration were Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, and National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. All served fairly traditional roles, and while they may have disagreed on policy, there was no overwhelming animosity among them. Johnson communicated with and relied on his national security team inherited from Kennedy much more than he did with other advisors he inherited. In a quantitative analysis of Presidential interactions in LBJ’s first 25 months in office, James Best found that while 73 percent of his overall interactions were with his own appointees, and not Kennedy’s, the trend breaks when it comes to foreign policy.

Figure 1 Johnson—Formal
“Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara and President Lyndon B. Johnson at National Security Council meeting, 02/07/1968”

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Organizational Dynamics

Newmann explains that organizational dynamics are “the general rivalries between departments and senior officials that [shape] the contest for control over policy. In some ways this is the order of battle for the bureaucratic war over policy and power that is highlighted in governmental politics models.” Bureaucratic infighting was not a major problem in the Johnson administration, particularly between Johnson’s foreign policy advisors. Each advisor hoped to remain close to the President, and they did not have to worry much about undercutting each other.

The main departmental rift was between the military and administration civilians on Vietnam policy and strategy. The military constantly pushed for more troops, calling up the reserves, and a more intense strategy. Johnson had to balance military necessity with domestic opinion and passing Great Society legislation, so he generally countered military requests with compromise solutions. For his part, Secretary Rusk did not directly challenge the military despite his disagreements with them because “he did not think it his role to challenge the military in their own bailiwick, and he wanted no hint of disagreement within the administration,” according to George Herring.

Informal Structures

Newmann asserts that an informal structure will develop within six months when an administration takes office, and he was right in the case of the Johnson administration. A brief review of the overall development of informal structures will provide context for their use and development in the Vietnam case study. Here, informal is defined as not a part of the National Security Council structure, even if the participants see the meetings as formal and standard. Newmann points out that these types of groups are created because they provide advantages over the formal NSC process, even if they become the norm. These advantages include the ability to speak

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27 Newmann, 67.
freely, less risk of leaks and less pressure from the representative’s organization and subordinates.  

The first change LBJ made to his decision making structure was to institute Tuesday Lunches in 1964. The meetings served as an informal venue for him to meet with his foreign policy advisors. This was only one of several different ways Johnson changed his overall decision making process to become more informal. David Rothkopf assesses, “Johnson liked informality, a trait he carried to extremes by continuing discussion with key aides while he was in the bathroom—or, in one instance with Moyers, while he was actually having an enema. The most important difference between him and Kennedy managing his team... was to host Tuesday Lunches for his core team." While meetings in the bathroom are perhaps too informal to even meet the definition of informality, Johnson kept formal structures in place but had a strong personal preference for working issues out in more informal settings.

LBJ: Vietnam Case Study

From his reelection in 1964 to July 1965, Johnson made the United States’ obligation in Vietnam open-ended, started an air offensive, and escalated the commitment into major war. Johnson then used what may or may not have been North Vietnamese attacks on ships patrolling the Gulf of Tonkin in August 1964 into a resolution authorizing “all necessary measures to repel any armed attacks against the forces of the United States and to prevent further aggression.” Herring assesses that late 1964 to 1965 was “the pivotal period in the escalation of the Vietnam War.” As the South Vietnamese government crumbled further, LBJ decided in December 1964 and January 1965 that at the next opportunity (when the US was attacked, justifying retaliation) air strikes would begin. In February, Operation Rolling Thunder, a program of gradually escalating attacks, began and did not end until November 1968.  

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29 Newmann, 167.
31 Herring, America’s Longest War, 131.
32 Ibid., 144.
33 Ibid., 147.
1965, Johnson authorized the first ground troops into Vietnam — a routine request to send two Marine landing teams to protect an air base— but they soon began engaging in combat. In April, Johnson authorized an additional 40,000 ground troops, which was only the first of many additional troop requests to be fulfilled.34

In early May 1965, Johnson agreed to the first of several bombing pauses (this one for five days) accompanied by attempts to negotiate with the North Vietnamese. Herring determines that this was “primarily to silence domestic and international critics” and “the United States had no real desire to begin serious negotiations at a time when its bargaining position was so weak.”35 By 1968, half a million troops and three years of bombing (overall, two to three times the number of bombs dropped on Western Europe in World War II36) had not pressured the Vietnamese into capitulating or even seriously negotiating.37

The January 1968 Tet Offensive, “a massive, coordinated assault against the major urban areas of South Vietnam,” was technically a defeat for the North Vietnamese and NLF, but it was a major psychological blow to the US.38 The US and South Vietnam quickly defended key areas and cleared cities, and the North Vietnamese and NLF counterattack in February was not as strong as the January attacks. Newscaster Walter Cronkite, Johnson’s fellow Texan, even lost his composure on air and supposedly said, “What the hell is going on? I thought we were winning the war!”39

General William Westmoreland saw this as an opportunity to get more reinforcements and possibly the mobilization of the reserves, issues they had been pushing for years, and requested 206,000 troops. Johnson saw this as a major escalation and was wary of public opinion on Vietnam, so he gave the issue to his new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford for review. The Pentagon recommended only a small

34 Ibid., 153-156.
35 Ibid., 160.
38 Herring, America’s Longest War, 226.
39 Herring, America’s Longest War, 231-232.
troop increase and a strategy switch from search and destroy to population security, but Clifford’s formal report recommended “the immediate deployment... of 22,000 troops, a reserve call-up of unspecified magnitude, and a ‘highly forceful approach’ to [the South Vietnamese government] to get the South Vietnamese to assume greater responsibility for the war.” The administration quickly accepted the suggestions while it also cut back bombing and started (yet another) new peace initiative, both on Rusk’s suggestion, though it took Johnson weeks to reveal to his advisors that he had decided. Debate continued to rage in late March even though Johnson had rejected the military’s troop increases. Clark Clifford became more committed to de-escalation but others, particularly National Security Advisor Walt Rostow, remained committed to the war. Herring assesses that what finally pushed Johnson was a meeting of senior advisors from outside the Administration, who had previously been fairly optimistic (with Undersecretary of State George Ball continuing his singular resistance), but by 1968 the tide of opinion within the group had agreed that an independent South Vietnam was not a possibility. Johnson never revealed his intentions, and made a shocking speech on March 31, 1968 announcing a decrease in bombing, further “restraint” if Hanoi restrained its actions, his hope for peace talks, and finally, that he would not run for President. The administration continued “fighting while negotiating” and made a last effort with the October 1968 bombing halt to break the deadlock in the talks going on in Paris, but it didn’t work. Nixon, who had been secretly sabotaging the peace talks by promising the South Vietnamese a better deal, became the next president to inherit the conflict.

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40 Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 234-251
41 Herring, *America’s Longest War*, 262-263.
Evolution in Decision Making Processes and Structures: Vietnam

Tuesday Lunches

While Vietnam was not the only topic of discussion at Tuesday Lunches, an overwhelming majority of the meetings centered on Vietnam and almost all dealt with Vietnam at least peripherally. From 1964 to 1966 they were not held particularly regularly, but by 1967 they were held almost weekly and became the most important policy making structure. Regular attendees initially included Rostow, Rusk, McNamara, and the President, though meeting attendees were added and changed over time. First, Johnson added Press Secretary Bill Moyers and Director of Central Intelligence Admiral Raborn. Vice President Humphrey and General Westmoreland sometimes attended, and in 1967 Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Wheeler were added as well. When Rostow joined the team in 1966, he prepared meeting agendas and started distributing papers ahead of time, similar to the National Security Council process. The officials involved seemed to appreciate the chance to discuss issues openly and reflect on Vietnam weekly, but frustrated lower-level officials, who got readouts only informally and did not always hear what happened. Deputy Press Secretary Tom Johnson started taking notes at meetings between LBJ and his advisors, including at their Tuesday Lunches, at the President’s request. LBJ asked him to do this to provide a record for the future and no one in the administration saw the notes other than LBJ. Johnson used the meetings for thinking about issues and getting his advisers’ opinions, but he also used them to vent his emotions when he was depressed.

42 LBJ Library, Notes of Meetings and Tom Johnson’s Notes of Meetings
43 Herring, LBJ, 14.
44 Herring, LBJ, 10.
45 Herring, LBJ, 14-15.
Meeting notes confirm the stereotype of Johnson micromanaging the war, particularly in choosing locations for bombing. His advisors often debated which locations were appropriate to bomb (since they all feared escalating the war into one with China or the USSR) and LBJ often had to hear all the arguments and decide.  

![Johnson Micromanaging](image)

**Figure 2 --Johnson Micromanaging**

There are several explanations for why LBJ started the Tuesday Lunches. David Barrett assesses:

The Tuesday Lunch group came into existence somewhat haphazardly from 1964 through 1966 as the challenge of managing the Vietnam War grew increasingly complex and its standing with the public withered. Like many modern Presidents, Johnson preferred to make important foreign policy decisions in a setting smaller than that of formal National Security Council meetings, which often had twenty or more persons in attendance. While he experimented with decision making forums of various sizes, by 1967 the most important one was the Tuesday Lunch group.

Based on Barrett’s assessment, then, the President changed to an informal structure because international and domestic political systems increased their pressures on the Administration. He asserts that the most important aspect of moving to the Tuesday Lunch group was to control leaks from his administration, something that is clearly borne out in primary research in Johnson’s meeting notes and conversations.

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48 Barrett, 678.
50 Barrett, 676-677.
51 Barrett, 677.
George Herring agrees with Barrett’s assessment when he says, “Johnson was certain that the privacy of the luncheon, his intimate personal relationship with his top advisers, and the breadth of vision of Rusk and McNamara gave him access to the best advice.” He quotes Johnson as saying that NSC meetings were “sieves,” whereas the Tuesday Luncheons “never leaked a single note. Those men were loyal to me.”

Herring also points out that Johnson had used a similar weekly lunch meeting in the Senate.

There are also some indications that Johnson started the Tuesday lunches to minimize bureaucratic rivalries, though this is a secondary consideration. David Rothkopf quotes his interview with former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and South Asian Affairs Harold Saunders:

Lyndon Johnson wanted an NSC system that would force the bureaucratic elements out there, before recommendations came to the White House, to sort out their differences. I picture him as saying to Bob McNamara and Dean Rusk, Look, you guys are smart. I know your departments have differences. But I’d like you two guys to sit down and you figure out and recommend to me what you would do if you were in my shoes. And then come on over to lunch on Tuesday and we’ll sit down and each of you can say why you disagreed. And so, we’ll take it apart there, but I want the bureaucracies’ energies going into making up something that we can realistically do, not exacerbating the fights among them.

Over time the Tuesday Lunch turned from an important informal meeting to the most important meeting by 1967. As its importance grew, the accusations of groupthink or meetings closed from dissent become increasingly important if they are true. Stephen Hess outlines that it is a widespread belief that Johnson’s advisory system was inadequate and did not allow alternatives to be heard, but he concludes that dissent was encouraged, it just so happens that Johnson did not agree with the dissenters and determined not to lose Vietnam. After a review of several hundred pages of meeting notes, it is clear that there are plenty of times when advisors—both

54 Rothkopf, 99-100.
55 Barrett, 676-677.
regular advisors and special attendees at meetings—expressed dissent and it was taken seriously.

![Image](image_url)

**Figure 3 Johnson—Informal**
“Tuesday Luncheon, 07/24/1968”

*The Wise Men*

Meetings of the “Wise Men” were also an important part of LBJ’s decision making processes and structures. Daalder and Destler explain that this group was originally started to give weight to the 1964 campaign for reelection, but it evolved into an advisory group. While these meetings were not part of the decision making process per se, they were a way that Johnson heard dissent, particularly by 1968. George Ball recalls that they group first met in 1965, when Ball was still in government. Ball characterized the group (Arthur Dean, Dean Acheson, and “a miscellaneous lot of characters”) as “extreme hard-liners” and Ball was the only dissenter in the room to the advice of “go in and bomb and raise hell generally.” After the meeting, Ball approached Dean and Acheson and said, “You goddamned old bastards. You remind me of nothing so much as a bunch of buzzards sitting on a fence and letting the young men die. You don’t know a goddamned thing about what you’re talking about.”

By the November 1967 meeting, the war had changed, but Ball remained the lone dissenter. In the next meeting in March 1968, the tone of the advisors had changed

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57 Tuesday Luncheon, 07/24/1968, National Archives, ARC Identifier 192576, [http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ExternalIdSearch?id=192576](http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ExternalIdSearch?id=192576)
58 Daalder and Destler, 47.
59 George Ball, Oral History Interview, LBJ Presidential Library, 8.
dramatically (Dean said, “All of us got the impression that there is no military conclusion in sight. We felt time is running out.”)

and this negativity made its impression on the administration. In Ball’s words, “[At the 1967 meeting] Everyone spoke his little piece; I spoke my customary dissent; and that was the end of it. But I don’t think I had a friend among the group, with the opinions I was expressing at that time... This was why the one in 1968 had such an effect. There were so many reversals of position... I think Clark Clifford, who told me was the one who instigated it, was just hoping to God that the group coming in from outside would change things.”

Regarding the 1967 meeting, Nicholas Katzenbach said later that “LBJ’s resolve was strengthened by the unanimity of this diverse, experienced group of statesmen.” Katzenbach saw the 1968 meeting as a “genuine turning point.” He continues, “The upshot was that their unanimity was shattered and they too, like the administration itself, were divided. It was a blow to LBJ, and to some extent to Rusk and Rostow as well... It was not a unanimous turnaround, but it did not have to be to matter.” It did have a big affect on LBJ. His notes from the meeting show that he was engaged, and he focused on doodling “can no longer do what we set out to do.”

Hess assesses that it was unusual for LBJ to continue to have outside advisors, including the Wise Men and his relationships with Abe Fortas and Clark Clifford, who became Supreme Court Justice and McNamara’s replacement, respectively.

Unusual as it may seem, Johnson valued these meetings with outside advisors as part of his decision making process.

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60 “Summary of Notes,” March 26, 1968, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, LBJ Library.
61 Ball, Oral History Interview, 9.
62 Katzenbach, 268.
63 Katzenbach, 274-275.
64 “Summary of Notes,” March 26, 1968, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, LBJ Library.
65 Hess, 80.
Other Informal Meetings

Johnson created a few meetings for lower-level administrators of the war. One was the Vietnam Public Affairs Policy Committee that met for a few months in the fall of 1965 to work on public relations for Vietnam. It was chaired by Rusk, but did not meet for long. Slightly more successful was the Non Group meeting of Assistant Secretaries, which started in 1967 and addressed Vietnam solely, meeting each Thursday afternoon.

67 “Summary of Notes,” March 26, 1968, Meeting Notes File, Box 2, LBJ Library.
68 Herring, LBJ, 12.
at 5:30 for drinks. Katzenbach recalls that LBJ asked him to see if any of his “Ivy League friends” had any suggestions for peace in Vietnam, so Katzenbach got his approval to start the group, which included Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance, Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security of Affairs John McNaughton, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Wheeler, Director of Central Intelligence Richard Helms, Walt Rostow, Ambassador Averell Harriman and Assistant Secretary of State of East Asian Affairs Bill Bundy. The meeting was strictly informal, and Katzenbach set rules that nothing could ever be quoted and only a superior could attend in the place of a deputy. Nobody took notes and discussions never led to any policy initiatives, just helped the members take time to form their opinions on the war. Katzenbach hoped to have an open discussion with a friendly discussion of what was happening and should happen in Vietnam. Most participants generally agreed that the war was unwinnable, though for different reasons. However, Katzenbach remembers, “Rostow was the only confirmed hawk in the group. I suspect he feared I was fostering a revolutionary cabal. I know he reported the discussions to LBJ, but I do not know what he said. I do know that on occasion there was a seemingly promising consensus for a modest initiative, but before anyone could initiate it, Rostow would nip it in the bud.”

Herring speculates that the Non Group was started to placate the lower-level of the bureaucracy who was cut out of the loop in the Tuesday Lunches. It is hard to speculate whether Johnson truly wanted Katzenbach to take a look at the possibilities for peace or if he was making the Deputies feel more important. The fact that he had Rostow surreptitiously reporting back points toward the latter.

**Evolution of the Formal Process**

Two interesting developments work against Newmann’s general hypothesis that decision making will become more informal. First, the role of the National Security Council predictably waned until the end of LBJ’s administration, when he was pressured

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69 Katzenbach, 263-265.
70 Herring, *LBJ*, 15.
to use the meetings more often. Second, LBJ created a Senior Interdepartmental Group in 1966 at the urging of a State Department official who saw the need for more formal oversight over overseas programs.

As reviewed earlier, Johnson did not hold very many National Security Council meetings, preferring instead to decide things on his own, mainly through the Tuesday Lunch Group. Even in a time of crisis in Vietnam, LBJ did not use the NSC as a decision making tool. When the Gulf of Tonkin Crisis broke out in August 1964, Johnson stayed true to form. While his aides were struggling to figure out what had actually happened in the two attacks, Johnson had already made up his mind. According to Daalder and Destler:

After hearing the first reports, [Johnson] ‘had come storming over to Bundy’s office’ that morning and ‘announced that he had decided to retaliate.’ ‘I interrupted,’ Bundy recalled thirty-one years later, ‘and said I think we ought to think it over.’ Johnson snapped back, ‘I didn’t ask you that. I told you to help me get organized.’ Bundy realized his place... By the time the captain’s second thoughts were cabled in, Johnson was meeting with the National Security Council ostensibly to ask his advisers’ views, but in essence demanding their concurrence.71

Later in the administration, Johnson was being pressured by the media and even by President Eisenhower to properly use the National Security Council and not a more insular decision making process.72 The Washington Post ran a well-informed story on Tuesday Lunches in May of 1967. It concluded, “Criticism of the Tuesday Lunch procedure abounds: the group is ingrown; Rusk and McNamara are tired men; there is too much secrecy; there is an inadequate upflow of ideas and an inadequate downflow of results; it is more crisis management than forward-looking decision making.”73

Johnson did respond to that pressure and hold more National Security Council meetings, but they continued to be less important than the Tuesday Lunches. Herring determines

71 Daalder and Destler, 44.
72 Herring, LBJ, 13-15.
that NSC meetings were more used to brief members on decision Johnson was making rather than discussion among the members on important issues.  

In 1966, Ambassador to Vietnam General Maxwell Taylor got Johnson’s approval to reorganize the interdepartmental coordination on implementing overseas programs. Taylor had been Ambassador to South Vietnam and saw firsthand that Washington needed a better way to coordinate policy. Enshrined in NSAM 341, the new policy had the State Department as the executor of overseas programs and established a Senior Interdepartmental Group (SIG) to assist State. The group was a mix of Principals and Deputies—it included “the Undersecretary of State, Executive Chairman, the Deputy Secretary of Defense, the Administrator of the Agency for International Development, the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the director of the United States Information Agency, and the Special Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs.” The NSAM also created Interdepartmental Regional Groups to “assure the adequacy of US policy for the countries in their region and... implementing that policy.”

Herring judges that the SIG process was not successful. The first Undersecretary of State to use the process was George Ball, but he did not use it very much. The next Undersecretary Nicholas Katzenbach reconstituted the SIG and found the process “extremely helpful,” but does not mention their use in coordinating Vietnam actions. Herring assesses that the SIGs were effective for issues where the principals and the President were not involved, but for Vietnam, Johnson preferred to have his meetings more tightly controlled and at a higher level, above the assistant secretaries.

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74 Herring, LBJ, 13-15.
75 Herring, LBJ, 12-13.
77 Herring, LBJ, 13.
78 Katzenbach, 222.
79 Herring, LBJ, 13.
Confidence Structures

Johnson’s relationships with his advisors changed throughout the administration, but his reliance on Rusk and McNamara remained throughout the entire administration (or almost, in McNamara’s case). From the beginning of the administration until the fall of 1965, Johnson’s main confidence relationships were with Bundy, McNamara, and Rusk, who were known as the “awesome foursome.”

Kennedy got along well with Bundy the best; they were old friends from Massachusetts and Harvard. This was exactly the dynamic Johnson hated. While he did not mind working with Bundy at the beginning of the administration, he bonded more with whiz kid McNamara and the southern Rusk. Their relationship evolved to a deep one by the decision for escalation in 1965, mainly because of their deep loyalty and hard work. Of McNamara, Johnson “stood in awe of his genius as an organizer and his drive and persistence” and Herring quotes Johnson as saying, “He’s like a jackhammer. He drills through granite rock until here’s there.”

Johnson’s Secretary of State remained a trusted advisor throughout the administration. For example, as Johnson was debating government actions after Tet, he accepted proposals for a peace initiative and reduction in bombing “because it came from Rusk, a man whose loyalty, caution, and measured judgment he had come to cherish.” In what seems like ultimate praise by Johnson, he told his brother Rusk was “hard-working, bright, and loyal as a beagle” and the New York Times “he has the compassion of a preacher and the courage of a Georgia cracker.”

Johnson’s confidence structures changed over time, and the reason they changed was primarily Vietnam policy. First Bundy, then George Ball, and finally McNamara all left primarily because their views on Vietnam policy forced their

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82 Herring, *LBJ*, 7-8. Cracker was probably not meant here in a derogatory way. One non-pejorative use of the term refers to Georgia and Florida cowboys and their descendents, according to the Georgia Encyclopedia. Until 1965, the Atlanta Minor League baseball team was the Crackers.
resignation. In some cases, Johnson remained close with and listened to his advisors until the end, but things were a bit different with Bundy.

Changes in decision making structures necessarily include changes in personnel, the integral part of the relationships in formal, informal, and especially confidence structures. In the LBJ administration, changes in personnel were often forced over Vietnam policy. The first to leave was National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy. While his relationship with Johnson was less comfortable than Johnson’s relationships with Rusk and McNamara, Bundy was incredibly important to Johnson. Perhaps too important, according to George Herring, because “his presumed indispensability became a liability in Johnson’s eyes and led to his departure from the government”\(^{83}\) and because “Johnson was increasingly annoyed with Bundy’s public reputation as the indispensable man and the preeminent figure in foreign policy.”\(^{84}\) Daalder and Destler tell a slightly different story of Bundy’s departure, claiming that he agreed with escalation but wanted Johnson to speak openly to the public about its implication. The final straw in the tension between the two seems to have been, according to Daalder and Destler, that Bundy debated scholar Hans Morgenthau on the war, going against LBJ’s wishes (even though Bundy clearly won the debate and got on the cover of *Time* for his efforts). Johnson told Moyers, “He didn’t tell me because he knew I didn’t want him to do it. Bill [Moyers], I want you to go to Bundy and tell him the president would be pleased, mighty pleased, to accept his resignation.” Moyers never said anything to Bundy, but Johnson remained unhappy and started doing petty things like mispronouncing his name. Bundy left soon after to be the president of the Ford Foundation.\(^{85}\)

Johnson did not actually replace Bundy, but did appoint the director of State Policy Planning Walt Whitman Rostow as special advisor to the president. Rostow and Moyers were the main coordinators of Vietnam policy after Bundy left in early 1966, though Rostow increasingly became the more traditional National Security Advisor.  

\(^{83}\) Herring, *LBJ*, 8.  
\(^{84}\) Herring, *LBJ*, 10.  
\(^{85}\) Daalder and Destler, 48-50.
described his job as a “channel of two-way communication between the President and the national security agencies,” and he set meeting agendas, even for Tuesday Lunches, and organized foreign policy materials for Johnson. Rostow became increasingly important to Johnson and their confidence relationship became as important as Johnson’s with Rusk. Johnson described Rostow as a “hell of a good man” and “a man of conviction who doesn’t try to play President.”

McNamara hung in until 1968, but his confidence with the president began to decline after McNamara advocated the December 1965 bombing pause and peace initiative that failed. Johnson had agreed to the plan under McNamara’s pressure, so McNamara took all of the blame for the failure. McNamara also became increasingly skeptical that the war could be won. Herring claims that by 1968, Johnson had even cut McNamara off from some information. Johnson replaced McNamara with Clark Clifford, a friend and advisor from outside the administration who was seen as a hawk. To everyone’s surprise, Clifford also turned and became skeptical that the war could be won militarily.

Even Johnson’s Vice President was sidelined because of Vietnam. James Best’s quantitative analysis shows that Humphrey was sidelined after he wrote a memo against escalation in February 1965. Before then, he stopped attending foreign policy meetings and described his status as “in limbo,” according to James Best, who also noted that “during the first four months of 1965 he [Humphrey] had 46 interactions with Johnson; during the last eight months he had only 64 and few of those with Rusk and McNamara.”

Conclusions

George Herring assesses, “The Johnson administration did not modify its national security machinery after going to war in July 1965. In part, undoubtedly, this was because it felt no need to do so... Expanding the war by stages eliminated any sense...
that major changes were required.”\textsuperscript{89} While LBJ did not make major changes to Vietnam decision making that were different from his overall decision making policy, he did make some changes that shed new light on Newmann’s evolution model. Overall, Johnson did narrow his decision making group and move to informal processes, as the Tuesday Lunch shows. James MacGregor Burns assesses that as Vietnam wore on, “[Johnson] narrowed his team of advisers to hard-core loyalists and spend more time with military men, picking bombing targets and pouring over battle reports…. Cabinet meetings decayed into dull, scripted ceremonies; doubts about Vietnam were not on the agenda. And one by one, those who developed doubts abandoned the administration…”\textsuperscript{90}

At the end of the Administration, Johnson had to change his decision making processes and structures to become more formal in the face of direct public criticism of his decision making. This change is contrary to Newmann’s model, but indicates that the public—at least at the time-- saw informal decision making processes as inferior and if they too widely known, there will be pressure for change. George H.W. Bush also used an informal process as his primary decision making structure, but connected it to the formal process though Deputy National Security Advisor Robert Gates.

Overall, the Johnson administration’s decision making processes and structures fit the evolution model. Johnson was particularly obsessed with preventing leaks and he preferred informal decision making structures. He also slowly narrowed the circle of advisors in whom he trusted as each one left the administration frustrated over Vietnam policy.

\textbf{Bush: Overview of Decision Making Processes and Structures}

Reagan’s dutiful Vice President George H.W. Bush took office on January 1989 as one of the office’s most experienced presidents, having been Vice President for eight years, a member of Congress, an Ambassador to China and to the United Nations, and

\textsuperscript{89} Herring, \textit{LBJ}, 9.

the Director of Central Intelligence. He presided over a quickly changing world as the Cold War ended, and he and his foreign policy team of friends and former colleagues handled the transition from the basis of their similar realist foreign policies. They saw Iraq’s 1990 invasion of Kuwait as the first test of a new world order and dispatched the threat while helping the US move past its fear of military action after the conclusion of the Vietnam War.

**Leadership Style and Management Strategy**

George Bush was a reactive leader in terms of national security policy; he admitted himself he lacked “that vision thing.” In terms of leadership within his own national security decision making structure, he chose his advisors very carefully and crafted a group that worked well together under his leadership. He was very hands on with security issues, thanks to his extensive experience. Bush says in his memoir that he knew from the beginning that he wanted to be hands on so he could make informed decisions, but at the same time try to delegate so he wasn’t micromanaging.

Bush carefully set up the roles and responsibilities of his key advisors because he had watched bureaucratic rivalry paralyze the Nixon and Reagan administrations. Secretary of State James Baker was to be the number one in foreign affairs and had long been one of Bush’s closest friends and advisors. For National Security Advisor, Bush chose his old colleague Brent Scowcroft, who had been Ford’s National Security Adviser and had recently written the section of the Tower Commission report on Iran Contra detailing improvements to the NSC system. Scowcroft served in the model of the National Security Advisor as honest broker and process manager, though he did step to the front on some issues where he had more expertise than others. Bush admired

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91 Newmann, 58-59.
93 Newmann, 65-66.
Scowcroft’s ability to keep Bush informed of differing views and to try and work out differences ahead of time.\footnote{Bush and Scowcroft, 35.}

For Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Bush retained Admiral William Crowe until he retired in September 1989. Bush then chose, on Cheney’s suggestion, General Colin Powell, who had been National Security Advisor to Reagan. Bush was initially concerned he might be too young to promote, but quickly appreciated his decision. Bush said, “When he briefed me, I found there was something about the quiet, efficient way he laid everything out and answered questions that reduced my fears and gave me great confidence. I admired his thoroughness, and above all his concern for his troops—something that came through again and again in planning for Desert Storm.”\footnote{Bush and Scowcroft, 23.}

Scowcroft adds that Powell managed the tricky relationship of serving as a principal in the NSC along side his boss, the Secretary of Defense, very well and was “unfailingly imperturbable.”\footnote{Bush and Scowcroft, 24.}

For his initial take at the NSC process, Bush set up a President-led meeting of principals, but the formal process quickly evolved into something more elaborate under Scowcroft’s direction. The basic structure in National Security Directive-1 has a full NSC meeting supported by three lower level meetings: Principals (PCs, the cabinet members without the President and Vice President, chaired by the National Security Advisor); Deputies (DCs, the Deputies of each cabinet official, chaired by the Deputy National Security Advisor), and Policy Coordinating Committees (PCCs, chaired by the NSC Senior Director or an Assistant Secretary from the agency in charge of the issue). DCs focused on more operational issues, while PCs served as preparation for a full NSC meeting.\footnote{Newmann, 61-62.}
Organizational Dynamics

Rivalries between departments and advisors were not a major problem in the Bush administration. When Steve Yetiv compared the utility of different theories in explaining the Gulf War, he found the Governmental Politics model the least useful because Bush preempted problems between individuals and agencies. Bush himself says, “I had witnessed the inevitable personality conflicts and turf disputes that would spring up between cabinet members, advisors, and departments. I was determined to make our decision making structure and procedures in the new Administration so well defined that we would minimize the chances of such problems.” Bush put a premium on working together as a team, despite disagreements, and tried to find constructive ways to handle those. James Baker puts it a bit differently. Baker says, “Behind closed doors, this group would bump heads plenty of times. We were all strong-willed men,

100 Bush and Scowcroft, 18.
dealing with terrifically important issues. With the rarest of exceptions, however we sang from the same hymnal in dealing with foreign leaders, Congress, the agencies, and the press.”\textsuperscript{101} Richard Haass, an NSC staff member who has worked for four presidents, said, “There was considerably less infighting and associated dysfunctional in this administration than in any of the others. Presidents set a tone, and this one made it clear that intense bureaucratic infighting would not be tolerated, much less rewarded.”\textsuperscript{102}

Advisors had similar worldviews, so there were not major breaks over policy. The traditional rivalry between Secretary of State and National Security Advisor did not develop for several reasons. While Scowcroft became very close to the President, Baker always had the knowledge that he and Bush were even closer as personal friends. Bush says, “Brent and Jim did get moderately crosswise, but very rarely. Jim was worried that he might get excluded from a decision that affected his department…. It is probably accurate to say that the NSC staff and Brent were also concerned about what State might be up to. We tried very hard, and I think successfully, to keep all the participants informed and eliminate personality clashes which could undermine policymaking as well as effective diplomacy.”\textsuperscript{103} When Baker and Scowcroft did have differences, they worked them out as best they could, knowing their boss would not tolerate a rift.\textsuperscript{104}

Baker and Colin Powell developed a special relationship because they both opposed Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney’s views at times. Baker promised Cheney that he would not call Powell without informing him, but Baker broke that rule when Powell needed advice. Baker notes that this happened the most during the Gulf War,

\textsuperscript{103} Bush and Scowcroft, 36.
\textsuperscript{104} Newmann, 66.
but because the officials all trusted each other, this informal discussion did not threaten Cheney.\textsuperscript{105}

\textit{Informal Structures}

Bush quickly developed an informal structure that would assist him with foreign policy decision making outside of the constrictive structures of the National Security Council. Within a few months, Bush realized he needed another process and started what became the Gang of Eight, which became a regular process by March 1989. Participants included Bush, Baker, Secretary of Defense Dick Cheney, Scowcroft, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff William Crowe (and later Colin Powell), Deputy National Security Advisor Bob Gates, Chief of Staff John Sununu, and Vice President Quayle. Bush’s model had one incredibly important difference than Johnson’s Tuesday Lunch, however—Bush had Deputy National Security Advisor Bob Gates sit in on the Gang of Eight meetings and use that knowledge to run the formal NSC Deputies’ meetings.\textsuperscript{106}

\textbf{Figure 7 Bush—Informal}

“President Bush meets with General Colin Powell, General Scowcroft, Secretary James Baker, Vice President Quayle, Secretary Dick Cheney, Governor Sununu and Robert


\textsuperscript{106}Newmann, 75.
Gates about the situation in the Persian Gulf and Operation Desert Shield, \textit{01/15/1991}^{107}

There was also an informal corollary to the PC, a Breakfast Group between Baker, Cheney, and Scowcroft that began at the very beginning of the administration, even earlier than the Gang of Eight. James Baker remembers, “[Scowcroft] hosted a seven o’clock breakfast every Wednesday in his office, where he and Cheney and I compared notes to make sure we were all singing from the same hymnal. Oftentimes, when our staffs were warring over a given issue, we’d read our prepared talking points to one another, and discover in the process just how much the State, Pentagon, and NSC bureaucracies distrusted each other.”\textsuperscript{108} As Baker illustrates, the collegial atmosphere of principals mediated bureaucratic political fights among their organizations.

Bush also had daily national security meetings, starting with his morning intelligence briefing, where Scowcroft, Gates, and Chief of Staff Sununu would join him to hear intelligence and task his policy team for follow up. After that, the Vice President would join in and Scowcroft would review national security items for the day and get the President’s guidance on each topic. Scowcroft explicitly did not use these daily meetings for decision making that involved other agencies because he was wary of the criticisms of the Tower Commission after the Iran Contra scandal. He also had Gates attend these and other meetings to serve as note taker and a check on the informal meeting system.\textsuperscript{109}

\textbf{Bush: Gulf War Case Study}

Early administration policy on Iraq had been to concentrate on the security and economic importance of the Persian Gulf and the need to use Iraq to balance Iran. One of Bush’s early strategic reviews (a process the team undertook for all kinds of current

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{107} “President Bush meets ... about the situation in the Persian Gulf and Operation Desert Shield, \textit{01/15/1991},” National Archives, ARC Identifier 186429, \url{http://arcweb.archives.gov/arc/action/ExternalIdSearch?id=186429} \textsuperscript{108} Baker, 25. \textsuperscript{109} Bush and Scowcroft, 30-31.}
security issues) focused on Iraq policy. An October 1989 directive from the President outlined, “Normal relations between the United States and Iraq would serve our longer-term interests and promote stability in both the Gulf and the Middle East. The United States Government should propose economic and political incentives for Iraq to moderate its behavior and to increase our influence with Iraq.” The administration held two Deputies Committee meetings before the outbreak of the war. A May 20, 1990 meeting addressed Saddam’s increasing belligerence and the group agreed to increased economic pressures on Iraq. A May 29, 1990 DC settled that the US would not continue a second set of credit guarantees to Iraq, “about all that was left of the attempt to build a relationship,” according to Richard Haass, who set up PCC-level meetings on the topic.

Moderating Saddam’s behavior quickly became difficult, and Scowcroft saw that in early 1990, his behavior was even less predictable and he seemed to have changed his policy toward the US, while at the same time pursuing weapons of mass destruction and become increasingly belligerent to Kuwait over the border and oil rights. The crisis with Kuwait continued to escalate, and by July, Saddam had 100,000 troops on the Iraq-Kuwait border. The US had warned Iraq against belligerence but had not threatened to intervene; Arab leaders had warned against it.

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110 Haass, 45-46.
116 Haass, 51-52.
117 Bush and Scowcroft, 305-310.
118 Bush and Scowcroft, 312-313.
On August 2, Iraq invaded Kuwait. After a late night interagency meeting running into the night of 1 and 2 August, Scowcroft informed Bush at 5:00am, and at 8:00 Bush held a National Security Council meeting to discuss the situation and possible options. The media was invited at the beginning of the meeting and the President read a quick statement. The chaotic meeting centered on cutting off Iraq’s oil from the world and defending Saudi Arabia. Scowcroft said, “I was frankly appalled at the undertone of the discussion, which suggested resignation to the invasion and even adaptation to a fait accompli.” Scowcroft and Bush agreed that the next meeting, Scowcroft would “outline the absolute intolerability of the invasion to US interests.”

After a day of a Presidential speech in Aspen and many phone calls to world leaders, the NSC met again on 3 August and took a more serious look at the options the US had to pressure Iraq to leave Kuwait. The next day, 4 August, the President and his advisers met at Camp David to review military options, where they decided to ask the Saudis for permission to send troops to in case Saddam attacked there next, a possibility particularly after the US pushed for sanctions. On August 5, Bush told a reporter, “This will not stand, this aggression against Kuwait.” While Bush had not yet decided that force was necessary, he had decided he would do “whatever it took to remove Iraq from Kuwait.”

After a lot of hard work garnering support, the UN National Security Council passed Resolution 665, which authorized “all appropriate measures” to enforce an oil embargo on Iraq. Meanwhile, Iraq had been increasingly belligerent and the US embassy employees in Kuwait refused to leave and were under siege. Bush writes that by late August, he “could not see how we were going to remove Saddam Hussein from Kuwait without using force.”

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119 Haass, 60.
120 Haass, 61.
121 Bush and Scowcroft, 315-318.
122 Haass, 62-63.
123 Bush and Scowcroft, 327-329.
124 Bush and Scowcroft, 332-333.
125 Bush and Scowcroft, 353.
1990, and Scowcroft saw that in mid-October, Bush seemed calmer about the idea of using force and had resolved the issue within himself.\(^{126}\) On October 30, Bush met with his core advisers and they decided to continue to build forces in the Gulf for a possible defensive option. Meanwhile, diplomatic efforts to solve the crisis through sanctions continued.\(^{127}\) In mid-November, Bush met with General Schwarzkopf in Saudi Arabia and was convinced that a war would be successful, and after meeting with Arab leaders on his way back to the US, he was resigned that there would be no diplomatic solution.\(^{128}\)

Baker made the rounds with some intense diplomacy, and on November 29, 1990, the UN Security Council voted in favor of Resolution 678, which authorized “all member states cooperating with the government of Kuwait, unless Iraq on or before January 15, 1991 fully implements [the resolutions] to use all necessary means to uphold and implement [all those resolutions] and restore international peace and security to the area.”\(^ {129}\) From November through January, Saddam tried all kinds of negotiations to try and delay the use of force while the US tried to convince him to withdraw before January 15. On January 12, Congress passed a joint resolution authorizing force in what was an incredibly close vote in the Senate at only 52 to 47. That same day, Bush and his advisors decided that the attack would begin on January 16/17. Bush admits that even if Congress had not passed a resolution authorizing force, he would have continued with his plan.\(^ {130}\)

The next major decision, after the air campaign had wound down (and the US had kept Israel from responding to Scud attacks from Iraq), was when to send in ground troops. Baker hoped that air power would convince Saddam to withdraw from Kuwait, but Cheney, Scowcroft, and President Bush all understood the limits of airpower and wanted to destroy Iraq’s offensive military capabilities. By mid-February the President was anxious for the military to be ready to send in ground troops. The US gave Saddam

\(^{126}\) Bush and Scowcroft, 382.  
\(^{128}\) Bush and Scowcroft, 412.  
\(^{129}\) Bush and Scowcroft, 414.  
\(^{130}\) Bush and Scowcroft, 446.
until February 23 to withdraw, and when he did not, the ground campaign began on February 24. Hostilities ended on midnight of February 27 for a ground war of 100 hours.\footnote{Bush and Scowcroft, 462-464, 477-486.}

The end of the war was less satisfying than the quick victory would indicate. The historian Robert Divine argues, “The passage of time has made ever clearer the incomplete nature of the US victory over Saddam Hussein.”\footnote{Robert A. Divine, “The Persian Gulf War Revisited: Tactical Victory, Strategic Failure,” \textit{Diplomatic History} 24, no. 1 (Winter 2000) 129.} Bush and Scowcroft argue that their goal was not to remove Saddam or change the Iraqi regime, but only to weaken the state so that it no longer posed a threat. Even so, the ground campaign was so short that it was, as Divine says, “hasty and ill-considered.” Much of the elite Republican Guard remained intact even though Schwarzkopf’s plan included destroying those units in particular.\footnote{Divine, 129-130.} Schwarzkopf told his commanders, “We need to destroy the Republican Guard—not attack, not damage, not surround—I want you to \textit{destroy} the Republican Guard.”\footnote{Schwarzkopf, General H. Norman, \textit{It Doesn’t Take a Hero}, 1992, 381-384, quoted in Divine, 132.} While the objective of the war was to invade Kuwait and not Iraq, another aim was to cripple Saddam’s control over Iraq.

Richard Haass, the Director for Near East and South Asian Affairs at the national Security Council, recalls the hasty end to the war in \textit{War of Necessity, War of Choice}. He was called into a Gang of Eight meeting as it was in progress, and the attendees were concerned that the US looked like it was attacking retreating soldiers. The President asked if there were any objections to ending the war that night, and after Powell called Schwarzkopf and he agreed, the war ended after 100 hours. Haass was surprised because he had expected the war to continue for several days. Haass explains that the Gang of Eight thought that the Republican Guard was trapped and the offensive’s goals had been achieved. Schwarzkopf had no objections, even after checking with his commanders, so the matter was settled.\footnote{Haass, 129-130.} Mahnken claims that the break down is that
Schwarzkopf did not have a clear understanding of the situation on the ground. He checked with his Ground Component Commander, who knew the Republican Guard had not been trapped, but did not object to his superior. Schwarzkopf later claimed that he had recommended to continue the ground war, but it must not have been during that conversation.\footnote{Thomas G. Mahnken, “A Squandered Opportunity? The Decision to End the Gulf War,” in \textit{The Gulf War of 1991 Reconsidered} (Portland, OR: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003) 128-131.}

After ground operations concluded General Schwarzkopf met the Iraqis on March 3 at Safwan airfield. The two delegations met to declare a cease fire and worked out issues with prisoners of war, personnel missing in action, and Iraqi use of helicopters to transit the country since fixed wing aircraft use was banned.\footnote{Alastair Finlan, \textit{Essential Histories: The Gulf War 1991} (New York: Routledge, 2003) 83-84.} On March 2, Shia in southern Iraq took the town of Nasiriah while at the same time, Kurds started rebelling in the north. The parts of the Iraqi Army that had not mobilized for Kuwait put down the two rebellions easily. Baker explains that the US did not support the rebellions because the administration wanted to keep the country intact and were wary of the Iraqi Shia’s relationship with Iran, and did not want to antagonize Turkey by supporting the Kurds. The Pentagon and the administration were both reluctant to do anything that would restart the war. This mindset remained even after Saddam started using the helicopters Schwarzkopf had allowed to operate to help put down the rebellions. Baker asserts that the administration did consider supporting the rebellions through covert operations, but decided against it.\footnote{Baker, \textit{Politics of Diplomacy}, 438-441.} Haass explains that US policy making after the hostilities ended was “ragged” because everyone was exhausted after seven months of crisis operations and the administration had not expected internal rebellion, only a possible coup by the Iraqi military.\footnote{Haass, 136.} After a few weeks, the humanitarian situation in Iraq led Gates and Haass to present ideas to Scowcroft about airdropping food and keeping the Iraqi military out those areas, which eventually became the no fly zone.
above the 36th parallel. This became inadequate, and the US launched Operation Provide Comfort to provide safety for the Kurds. A no fly zone was extended to Southern Iraq as well. Iraq remained a strategic problem for the rest of the administration, particularly as Saddam toyed with weapons inspectors. The administration reviewed possibilities to support regime change but decided that nothing was likely work.140

**Evolution in Decision Making Processes and Structures**

Overall, the decision making process and structure for Bush administration decision making on the Gulf War did not differ drastically from the basic structure that evolved earlier in the administration, but there were several innovations that helped the administration prosecute the war. In the formal, informal, and confidence structures, one important lynchpin seems to be Brent Scowcroft himself. According to Daalder and Destler:

> From the very first moment of the crisis, Brent Scowcroft took control of the process overnight, chairing a series of deputies meetings (Gates was on vacation), drafting presidential orders... and preparing for an NSC meeting the president would chair early the following morning. Having gained the confidence of other key players in the administration, built an effective and cooperative interagency process, and established his close proximity to the president, Scowcroft now sought to make his own views of the stakes, goals, and strategies the president’s.141

The Bush administration’s organizational handling of the Gulf War shows the importance not only of the types of formal, informal, and confidence structures the administration has set up, but also the importance of its personnel.

**Informal Meetings**

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140 Haass, 140-150.
141 Daalder and Destler, 196.
Bush preferred to make Gulf War decisions in a more informal setting even though the more formal NSC continued to meet. For example, he made the decision to double the number of troops when he was with Scowcroft, Baker, Cheney, and Powell only.\textsuperscript{142} The Gang of Eight began meeting long before the Gulf War started, but its creation is interesting nonetheless because it shows the importance of Bush’s personal management style. The Gang of Eight evolved, according to Newmann’s readings of Baker and Gates, because of “the inability of the bureaucracies to deal creatively and innovatively with the revolutionary changes in the world.”\textsuperscript{143} According to Scowcroft:

Even this early in the Administration, it was becoming apparent to me that a full-blown NSC gathering was not always the place for a no-holds-barred discussion among the President’s top advisors. Some might be inhibited form expressing themselves frankly with staff present and the constant possibility of leaks... The President liked the suggestion, and it worked. This marked the beginning of a new pattern for top-level meetings... While we continued to hold formal NSC meetings, and informal group became the rule rather than the exception for practical decision making.”

There were a few changes to informal structures because of the Gulf War, mainly to prevent leaks and protect the sensitivity of the discussions and to facilitate faster decision making. According to Daalder and Destler, Bush’s “inner inner circle” of decision making included Bush, Scowcroft, and Baker, but replaced Baker with Cheney on military issues during the war. Daalder and Destler also allege that Bush, Scowcroft, and Cheney kept General Powell out of discussion that led to decisions on the Gulf War.\textsuperscript{144} Scowcroft also developed a bit of an informal brainstorming group. Richard Haass explains, “During the Gulf Crisis of 1990-1991, every Saturday morning, Brent and I, or Brent, Bob Gates, and I, used to gather in Brent’s office. And Brent would be lying down on his couch, and he’d basically say, Okay what do we do now?... And we just institutionalized it.”\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} Daalder and Destler, 199.
\textsuperscript{143} Newmann, 75.
\textsuperscript{144} Daalder and Destler, 179.
\textsuperscript{145} Rothkopf, 298.
Evolution of the Formal Process

The formal NSC met a few times, but only a few. The Gang of Eight remained the main decision making body for the principals. Rothkopf counts only four NSC meetings in 1991 and 1992.\textsuperscript{146} To supplement the informal process, Scowcroft used the Deputies Committee to look at options for action in the Gulf War that the Principals were not yet ready to fully consider but might in the future. For example, when the President held meetings in December 1990 on specific war aims, Scowcroft had already asked the Deputies Committee to review these types of questions.\textsuperscript{147}

During one of those few formal NSC meetings, Scowcroft and the President even threatened to narrow the decision making circle if leaks didn’t stop. According to the 6 August 1990 NSC meeting notes: \textsuperscript{148}

While the Deputies Committee had been created before the Gulf War, it was “extraordinarily effective” during the Gulf War, according to Daalder and Destler. The role of Deputy National Security Advisor Bob Gates as the go between from the informal principals process to the formal deputies process cannot be underestimated. Gates explains, “When I would go into a Deputies meeting, I knew exactly where the president was, I knew where his concerns were, I knew what the issues were.” If there was a question during a meeting, Gates “would simply say, ‘Well, I’m going to go up and ask the president...’ You only have to do that once or twice.”\textsuperscript{149} The success of the DCs was

\textsuperscript{146} Rothkopf, 267.
\textsuperscript{147} Bush and Scowcroft, 432.
\textsuperscript{149} Daalder and Destler, 186.
due in part to the access that the deputies had to their principals—nobody could join the group who couldn’t get an answer from the Cabinet-level principal quickly.

**Figure 8** Heading of Robert Gates’ Notes from a 22 January Informal Meeting of the President, Vice President, Secretaries of State and Defense, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Chief of Staff, National Security Advisor, and Himself.\(^{150}\)

Some smaller, more informal groups also formed at the Deputies level to manage the crisis. Richard Haass explains that a subset of the Deputies Committee called “the small group” was formed “for handling the most sensitive aspects of the crisis” and “became a venue for true policy planning.” Membership in the group included: Robert Kimmitt from State, Paul Wolfowitz from Defense, Admiral David Jeremiah from the Joint Chiefs, and Dick Kerr from CIA, Bob Gates, who chaired the meeting, and Richard Haass, who drafted papers for the group.\(^{151}\) The pace of being integrally involved in the formal and informal processes was excruciating. The State representative at the DC Robert Kimmett, quoted by Daalder and Destler, remembers:

At 11 a.m., the deputies committee would get on the video conference and talk. That would go until about 12:00pm. You can get about seventy-five percent of your work done there. And then we’d get together in a small group, in the situation room, just seven or eight of us. Gates would then attend the meeting of the Big Eight. Importantly, very importantly, we would also meet on the way back down and have another small group meeting, back to a video conference with deputies, and then we would meet inside the department, because, frankly, policy implementation is much tougher than policy formulation.\(^{152}\)

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\(^{151}\) Haass, 92-93.

\(^{152}\) Daalder and Destler, 185.
Confidence Structures

Bush had a built in confidence structure when he started the Administration because he appointed one of his closest friends and colleagues as Secretary of State. At the end of the war, Bush reflected on the abilities and importance of the advisors closest to him in his diary on February 28, 1991:

Everyone seems to be giving me credit, and yet, I don’t look at it that way... I hope I provided steady leadership; but on the other hand, I will confess that I needed the strength that has come from Powell; Schwarzkopf, who is steady and dependable; loyal Dick Cheney; and the ability of Jim Baker... The difficulty of the diplomacy has been underestimated and he’s done it superbly. The, of course, Brent Scowcroft... He takes the burden off the President, tasks the bureaucracy, sorts out the differences, and never with credit for himself. He’s always quiet but always there and always dependable.  

Bush tried to remain open to all his close advisers. For example, Colin Powell went to the President to encourage him to continue sanctions at the urging of

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154 Haass, 82.
155 Bush and Scowcroft, 487.
Scowcroft, Baker, and Cheney. Even though the other principals disagreed with Powell, they respected him and wanted his voice to be heard by the President.\textsuperscript{156}

**Conclusions**

Bush’s decision making processes and structures largely follow Newmann’s model, but the administration did not create any major new processes to handle decision making on the Gulf War other than the Deputies Committee small group. This was possibly due in part to the success of the processes that were in place and also to the shorter length of war. There was some narrowing of the decision making group and overall the pace of meetings increased directly. We see this in the description of the constant process of small meetings between Gang of Eight, DC, and PCC meetings that occurred daily.

With the Bush administration, we can see the cumulative effects of the history of national security decision making process and structure affecting the way the group operated. Bush and Scowcroft consciously set up their decision making system to avoid the mistakes of the past, particularly the damaging Iran Contra scandal. While the administration quickly realized that it needed an informal structure, it was thoughtfully tied to the formal structure so that all levels of government were informed of decisions. Perhaps this thoughtfulness comes from a history of government service in national security, and all of the hard lessons each member of the group learned as they served in many different positions. The basic NSC/PC/DC/PCC structure survived through the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations, which serves as a testament to Scowcroft’s thoughtfulness and success.

**Implications**

Changing the variable from arms control to war did not make a huge change from Newmann’s findings. For both administrations, war did not lead to a large change in process from the overall trend of the administration. For the Johnson administration,
it may be because escalation ramped up so slowly that the basic formal and informal processes in place were able to handle the situation. While the Tuesday Lunch process was created as an informal structure to handle the war, because it was a practice Johnson had used in his Senate days, it seems to reflect his personal management style and not the pressures of war. The same holds true for the Wise Men; Johnson had used this group in his 1964 campaign.

For Bush, the informal process of the Gang of Eight was created before the Gulf Crisis. In both administrations, the pace of war demanded that all kinds of meetings be held more frequently—formal, informal, and confidence—and reinforced the trends that had already been occurring. The difference in this between the two administrations is that the Vietnam War was such a huge part of Johnson’s national security portfolio from day one that its pressures would inevitably be part of the overall trends of the administration. For Bush, his structure was set from pressures that were not related to the Gulf War.

The fact that both Johnson and Bush narrowed the decision making circle citing the possibility of leaks is no surprise. Halperin and Clapp argue that this is the most popular reason given to exclude participants from decision making. George Reedy explains, “The environment of deference, approaching sycophancy, helps to foster another insidious factor. It is a belief that the president and a few of his most trusted advisers are possessed of a special knowledge which must be closely held within a small group lest the plans and the designs of the United States be anticipated and frustrated by enemies... Therefore, the most vital national projects can be worked out only within a select coterie, or there will be a ‘leak’ which will disadvantage the country’s security.”

There is one notable exception to Newmann’s hypothesis that decision making will become more narrow and informal. Johnson was forced by domestic pressure at the end of his administration to formalize his decision making, though it was not truly a part of Johnson’s decision making. Johnson used the meetings to assuage the pressure and criticism of his decision making processes and not to actually inform his decisions.

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More study needs to be done of the evolution of decision making processes and structures within administrations and more tests of Newmann’s model will be needed to help refine it. Encouraging for Newmann is that even under the conflicting and different pressures of war, administrations continued to narrow decision making under stress. It remains to be seen if this holds for other administrations, however, and a contemporary study of the Clinton, George W. Bush, and Obama administrations would be most helpful to see if contemporary presidencies experience the same pressures to change their decision making processes and structures.

As the evolution model begins to withstand tests of different administrations and variables, the next step might be to see if these changes are positive or negative for the policies that those decisions lead to. President Eisenhower said, “Organization cannot of course make a successful leader out of a dunce, any more than it should make a decision for its chief. But it is effective in minimizing the chances of failure and in insuring that the right hand does, indeed, know what the left hand is doing.” Of course, the question of whether or not a specific decision making structure makes “better” policy is outside of this exploration of the evolution of decision making within presidential administrations, but perhaps it will be helpful for presidents to understand that if he finds him or herself more of a dunce than a successful leader, perhaps a change in organization will help.

Even though it seems evident in these two cases that presidential management styles were the main factor in determining the evolution of the decision making process, it does not generally hold that presidential management models have the most explanatory power in every administration. Newmann’s model still includes governmental politics and political pressures as factors in a president’s decision to change his decision making structure because they are incredibly relevant in other administrations. James Baker reflected on the Bush and Reagan administrations and said, “I do not think President Reagan’s foreign policy apparatus served him the way it

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should have. It was often a witches’ brew of intrigue, elbows, egos, and separate agendas... I can’t remember any extended period of time when someone in the National Security cluster wasn’t at someone else’s’ throat.”

Each administration has different pressures, and an inclusive model is important to capture all of the different variables, even if they are not present in every case.

The evolution model will policymakers and executive branch participants in national security policy formulation and implementation understand that their process will not remain static. Hopefully, the evolution model will help those presidential advisors understand and develop the best and most effective balance of formal, informal, and confidence structures over time. National security policy may seem uninformed or haphazard, but an understanding of how formal, informal, and confidence roles lead to decision-making would help assuage some frustrations.

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