

National Security Council

March 28, 1995

Anna K. Nelson: "The 'Top of Policy Hill': President Eisenhower and the National Security Council," Diplomatic History, vol. 7 no. 4 (Fall 1983): 307-326

Fred Greenstein, Richard Immerman, Douglas Kinnard challenge old view of Ike as passive and dominated by Dulles; instead Ike was manipulative and actively in control

Major changes from Truman to Eisenhower: 1) special assistant to the president for national security affairs; 2) establishment of the Operations Coordination Board (facilitate implementation and coordinate psychological strategy)

Eisenhower made NSC central in the decision-making process; theme is comprehensive staff work, planning

Nelson using recently released information from NSC meetings on Indochina, 1953-54.

NSC meetings were educational or informational

Ike mixed informal meetings with formal meetings

Most important, according to Nelson, is the way Ike "managed to orchestrate three activities into it: activities in the State Department represented by the secretary, activities in the NSC coordinated by the adviser, and activities in the oval office facilitated by the staff secretary." (P. 313)

Cutler affirmed the position of Sec. Of State; avoided conflict and avoided creating a large staff.

(314): Dulles kept control of day to day operations, which, in his view, were not the subject of council discussions.

Admiral Arthur Radford: Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Special Assistant Gordon Gray replaced Cutler in 1958

OCB was restructured in January 1957; Dulles rejected suggestion put to President that Vice President (Nixon) should replace undersecretary of state as chairman.

Example of 3-dimensional policy: decision on Dienbienphu in 1954 Problem: support French colonialism or lose to Communists; US did not intervene at Dienbienphu: most significant decision of Ike administration

1. NSC offers policy papers

2. Operational decision in the oval office

3. diplomacy in hands of Dulles (p. 315)

Add: staff secretary General Andrew Goodpaster, who facilitated operation matters; Cutler and Gray coordinated and facilitated planning and policies that constituted the work of the NSC (p. 318-319)

argument: 3-part arrangement (State Dept, NSC, and oval office) was not really understood in 1960.

Critique of NSC process had lasting repercussions on NSC.

Senate Subcommittee on National Policy Machinery in 1960: a subcommittee of the Committee on Government Operations. (Result of a resolution introduced by Sen. Henry Jackson)

Hearings: Ike's staff in trying to defend NSC undermine it, and make Ike seem overly dependent on NSC bureaucracy.

Jackson hearings looked at procedures not substance of NSC decisions. (P. 322)

Jackson report: Ike relied too much on his staff, failed to exert leadership; result was policy dangerous to the country.

When Ike met JFK, Ike emphasized the NSC process

Nelson: everyone writing about the NSC in Eisenhower administration has missed the point. Point is: foreign policies were a result of a continuing conversation among several people, formally and informally. Good communication about planning.

Ike criticized JFK for absence of an efficient Planning Board, with an executive in charge of staff work. Ike pointed to Bay of Pigs. JFK scuttled the NSC

Nelson: in their zeal to protect their structure and system, Ike's supporters and assistants undermined it and left it open to attack. So JFK heeded the critics and changed Ike's methods. Jackson subcommittee was quite influential in this process; McGeorge Bundy heeded the criticisms of the Jackson subcommittee

Result: JFK dismantled the Planning Board and the Operations Coordinating Board; council meetings became less frequent.

JFK contrasted his approach to Ike's (just as Ike had contrasted his approach to Truman's) (P. 325)

JFK said he did not want just one set of advisers; thought Ike was too passive. JFK: the president should be "the vital center of action." (P. 325)

Nelson: Ike's assistants had failed to explain the 3-dimensions of policy or that Ike was really at the center. That failure led Bundy and JFK to create an entirely new process that included the national security advisor and staff. This new pattern has shaped the period since 1961. (P. 326)