

An Argumentative Essay



CJCS and NSC

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Since its inception, the National Security Council (NSC) has undergone several key organizational changes. These changes were adopted to address the evolving nature of geopolitical and security challenges that might threaten America's vital national interests, at home and abroad, as well as to improve the NSC's overall effectiveness. One of the most notable amendments to the National Security Act of 1947 was the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. Under this Act, military advice was centralized in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), as opposed to the distinct service chiefs.¹ Therefore, the CJCS has since become the principal military adviser to the President, NSC, and Secretary of Defense (SECDEF).² The adoption of Goldwater-Nichols Act, particularly with respect to the increasing "power" of the CJCS within the DOD and the NSC, has positively impacted on the U.S. national security formulation process.

The original members of the NSC established in 1947 were the President, the Secretaries of State, Defense, the Army, the Navy, and the Air Force, and the Chairman of the National Security Resources Board.³ Together, these seven permanent statutory members worked as a mechanism, which ensured that the U.S. foreign policies were consistent with its military capabilities, and domestic resources.⁴ In this regard, the SECDEF and each service secretary (all civilian posts) were responsible to bring in military viewpoint.⁵ The JCS, which comprised of Chief of Staff of the Army, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commandant of the Marine Corps, did not have a vote in the NSC. They could only express their

¹ See Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986

² *Ibid*

³ Sidney Souers, "Policy Formulation for National Security" in the American Political Science Review, Volume 43, Issue 3 (American Political Science Association, 1949), 535

⁴ *Ibid*, 536

⁵ *Ibid*, 535

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perspectives through the SECDEF. In 1949, the NSC was reorganized, where the three service secretaries were eliminated, and the CJCS post was created to replace their roles.⁶ However, despite the creation of CJCS position within the NSC, the military was still organized along the traditional command structure, where everything was service-centric. Therefore, in NSC meetings, the CJCS did not have significantly different power and influence than the other members of the JCS. Everyone in the JCS, including the Chairman, would equally have one vote.

This NSC structure, where the CJCS was a mere formality, suggested that the President would need to obtain military advice from each member of the JCS. They would generally express their policy recommendations based on their service's capabilities, best practices, and interests. Consequently, it would be quite problematic for the President to accommodate all of them. Additionally, this made him exposed to the risk of missing a complete picture of how to effectively employ the military instrument of national power, which would largely involve joint operational concepts, synchronized capabilities, and unity of efforts among services. The President could always seek a more objective military advice from the SECDEF. However, the SECDEF sometimes lacked of substantial expertise or experience in military affairs. He might have achieved several key leadership positions throughout his long, successful career. Yet, he should admit that the military-world was different from civilian bureaucracy, academic institution, or private enterprise. Therefore, in devising a policy or strategy, which required major military deployment or force projection, the SECDEF must rely on, and leverage, the role of CJCS. So must the President.

⁶ See Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986

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During the Cold War, the U.S. military constantly engaged in different wars and armed conflicts in different parts of the world. Regardless of the outcomes of those involvements, the military must endure the challenge of integrating its forces. One of the biggest factors was the intense competition among the services to acquire federal resources, primarily to keep their relevance, and competitive edge. All pursued the required funding to modernize weapons system, improve training and education, as well as recruit and retain more personnel to fulfill their respective end-strength. Such a mindset significantly hindered the military to achieve the much needed effectiveness and efficiency, which could be derived from deliberate joint efforts. Only in mid 1980s, the issue of inter-service rivalry could be finally resolved. The 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act served as the foundation for the military to carry out reforms. Among others, two changes stood out the most: first, the chain of command; and second, and more importantly, the organizational culture.

Everything was then oriented towards the integration, synchronization, as well as unity of command, and unity of efforts among the different services. To achieve these, the chain of command was streamlined: from the President (as the Commander in Chief), to the SECDEF (as the civilian head of the U.S. military), and to the Unified Combatant Commanders who held the command authority of specific geographic area of responsibility; or to the Specified Combatant Commanders responsible for specific functional area.⁷ This implied that the Secretaries of Military Departments should assign all forces under their jurisdiction to Unified and Specified Combatant Commands to conduct missions assigned to those commands; and the service chiefs would no longer retain the authority to deploy, and operate forces in the warzones or operational

⁷ <http://www.jcs.mil/About.aspx>

theaters.⁸

The Goldwater-Nichols Act, on the other hand, strengthened the advisory role of the CJCS in the NSC. This made possible due to the reform of the military command structure, and the shift of its organizational culture, from service-centric to joint-efforts. The Act essentially assigned the CJCS as the principal military adviser to the President, the NSC, and the SECDEF. This allowed the President to focus his time and energy to examine the military aspect of a national security policy based on an unbiased perspective from the CJCS. Further, with greater power in the NSC, the CJCS could influence the SECDEF, as well as other members of the NSC, to better appreciate the cost and benefit of employing joint military forces, as part of the much bigger national strategy. General Colin Powell, the CJCS during the Gulf War, seized upon the expanded authority granted by the Goldwater-Nichols Act.⁹ First, he built the narrative to liberate Kuwait and defeat the Iraqi Army. Then, he carefully exercised his authority to convince the NSC, and advocate President to George H. W. Bush to launch operations “DESERT STORM”.¹⁰ He also attempted to promote a truly joint culture among the U.S. forces; and prove that carefully planned joint military operations could ultimately bring about a quick, and decisive victory.¹¹ Indeed, he was heavily involved in the planning of the operations. However, the outcome of the war might be totally different, had the CJCS’ authority in the NSC not been expanded.

⁸ *Ibid*

⁹ Con McDonald, “*The Impact of the Goldwater-Nichols DOD Reorganization Act of 1986 on Civilian/Military Relations*” (Carlisle, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2000), 8

¹⁰ *Ibid*

¹¹ *Ibid*

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The adoption of Goldwater –Nichols Act brought about significant impact on the NSC’s policy formulation process. It gave the CJCS a greater power and influence, especially in providing military advice in support of the national security, as well as in protecting the U.S. vital interests, at home and abroad. However, the introduction of new positions, or the strengthening of one’s power in the NSC might also present certain challenges for the President. “More people in the room” does not necessarily translate into a more rapid decision-making. In fact, new tension may arise since those additional brains and personalities may further complicate the already complex process. However, no one has greater influence on the NSC climate, other than the chairman himself. Each President has personal preference in choosing who has a “permanent” seat (next to him) in the situation room, or who should he invite to his informal meeting, regardless of what security issue is being discussed. The CJCS must appreciate such a reality, and position himself appropriately. It is a delicate situation, where he may not always be on the same page as the SECDEF and the President. In the end, the NSC is no more than a mechanism, which is expected to get us to our desired end state. To be successful, all members must alter their ego, and be part of a team. Only then, the NSC can fully support the President in making critical decisions, formulating deliberate policies, and taking decisive actions to address various challenges and threats against America’s national security.