

## LESSON 2

### NATIONAL SECURITY DECISION MAKING

*“As in a building, which however fair and beautiful the superstructure, is radically marred and imperfect if the foundation be insecure—so, if the strategy be wrong, the skill of the general on the battlefield, the valor of the soldier, the brilliancy of victory, however otherwise deserved, fail at their effort.”*

—A. T. Mahan

#### Lesson Introduction

Two broad perspectives tend to dominate strategic literature, and the two are generally not well integrated. The first examines national security in terms of factors that are *external* and, therefore, international and *strategic*. The other concentrates on *internal* determinants that are typically described as domestic and *political*. The former view holds that national security is driven by outside threats and the furtherance of national interests, and, therefore, the relationship between ends and means is clear and objectively calculable. The latter view emphasizes the impact of domestic political machinations in the development of national security strategy. Regardless, it is generally conceded that the objective of national security policy-making is to protect and extend national interests within the framework of national values and institutions. It is in this sense that conflict of interest among bureaucratic and political entities in the creation of national policy was purposefully established within the U.S. Constitution.

The Constitution was crafted to encourage debate and struggle between the Executive Branch, the Congress, and the Courts, not only for the privilege of directing national security policy, but also over every aspect of its development. Congress dominated the process in the nineteenth century, but the twentieth century witnessed the rise to dominance of the President. The two world wars and the Cold War led to an expansion of presidential power, and today this relative dominance of the White House is generally accepted as necessary in a complex and dangerous international environment. This White House dominance has not gone unchallenged on Capitol Hill, however. The Congress has enlarged its staffs and committees and added new institutions, and it continues to exert its authority through the power of the purse. In addition, the various departments and agencies of the federal government advance their own institutional interests and vie with one another for resources and funding. Within this framework, national security policy and strategy are created.

The objective of this lesson is to help you understand the national security decision-making process in order to place in proper context the strategic goals and objectives given the U.S. military. At the conclusion of this lesson, you should be able to identify the many and oftentimes competing interests that affect policy-making and strategy development. Additionally, you should be able to synthesize the political, organizational,

behavioral, and additional factors that shape national security decisionmaking. Finally, you should come to appreciate the manifold complexity of strategic thinking and strategic leadership. In that regard, this lesson continues our connected inquiry and should prepare you to translate policy and strategy to operational planning, both in the Operational Level of War and the Joint, Multinational, and Interagency Operations courses as well as in future command and staff assignments.

## **Student Requirements by Educational Objective**

### **Requirement 1**

Objective 1. Discuss the constitutional roots of American strategic thinking and how they affect U.S. national security decisionmaking. [JPME Areas 1(c), 2(b), 3(d), 4(a)(b)]

Objective 2. Examine the roles of the Congress and the Executive Branch in the creation and execution of strategy and policy. [JPME Areas 1(c), 2(b), 3(d)]

Read:

- Frederick Kaiser, “Congress and National Security Policy,” in *Grand Strategy and the Decisionmaking Process*, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1992, James Gaston, ed., pp. 213 to 240 (25 pages)

The basis for struggle in the American system of government, the dialectic of give and take, is found in the Constitution. Each branch of government has a prescribed role in the affairs of state, and the essential task of the Executive and Legislative branches, as adjudged by the Courts, is to balance constitutional prerogatives with the need for efficient, effective, and cooperative government in the pursuit of national interests. In that regard, the Founders subscribed to the idea that the rule of law—an objective standard of right behavior—should form the basis of decisionmaking and action in the United States in order to protect the people from tyranny.

The implications are manifold: in terms of decision-making, the static and backward-looking nature of legalism dominates our approach to problem solving and in a manner that does not promote strategic thinking. In fact, emphasis on the law enhances the procedural outlook of bureaucracies. With respect to national security decisionmaking, this tendency came to a head in the creation of the *national security state*, the birth of which is traceable to the National Security Act of 1947. The National Security Act created the architecture deemed necessary to promote the national security interests of the United States, including the creation of a National Military Establishment, a National Security Council, and a Central Intelligence Agency (among other institutions) in an effort to “provide...integrated policies and procedures for the departments, agencies, and functions of the Government relating to the national security.” The irony, of course, is that the National Security Act focused on the means of strategy as opposed to the ends.

The ends were not articulated until three years later in National Security Council-68 (NSC-68), the intellectual framework for the containment strategy against the Soviet Union. Integral to NSC-68 was the idea that the pursuit of national security is not merely to strengthen the United States in relation to an external threat, but also to preserve and protect the American system and American values that underlie that system. What is important about the relationship between the national security state and the Constitution is that the ends and means of the former are not necessarily those of the latter.

The tension between efficiently and effectively promoting national security interests versus preserving a free society has been present from the very beginning and remains the subject of much debate within the context of the *global war on terrorism*. The Founders sought to create a government based on the rule of law in order to protect the natural rights of the citizenry. The result was a loose association of states under the Articles of Confederation. However, the resulting weak national government (along with its weak international status) prompted the states some ten years later to agree to a stronger central government as provided for in the U.S. Constitution. The goal of the Constitution was to create an energetic national government, one that could serve domestic as well as international interests. But the Constitution was also written with certain checks and balances to ensure against despotism. If any branch asserts its prerogatives above the others—even in the pursuit of the national interest—the other branches will seek to redress the imbalance. Thus, given the centrality of the Constitution to American government and the American way of life, one cannot detach American strategy from the values embodied in the U.S. Constitution. In short, contrary to the usual narrow interpretation of strategy accorded to Clausewitz, in a representative democracy such as the United States, strategy is not merely instrumental but is, rather, comprehensive in its worldview derived from certain fundamental principles regarding the nature of domestic and international behavior.

A good example of this tension and its impact on strategic behavior is the Iran-Contra affair. In their zeal to promote American national security interests and to roll back communism, overly zealous members of the Executive Branch—including uniformed military members (for example, Admiral Poindexter and LtCol Oliver North)—became frustrated with Congressional scrutiny and the inefficiencies of the U.S. government, as designed by the Founders. As a result, the ends sought and the means employed were, at best, of questionable constitutional propriety. These overly zealous members were carrying out policy and executing strategy but in a manner that violated the very values that they were sworn to protect. In that regard, covert operations, secrecy, deception, and censorship have become the hallmarks of the national security state, thus raising an interesting question: are the Constitution and national security compatible?

## Requirement 2

Objective 3. Describe the purpose of the NSC in U.S. national security decision-making. [JPME Areas 1(c), 3(a)]

Objective 4. Relate the basic fundamentals of how the interagency process works with how national security policy is created and articulated through that process. [JPME Areas 1(b)(c)(e), 2(b)(c), 3(a)(e)]

Read:

- National Security Council Fact Sheet, 13 November 2003 (3 pages)
- Gabriel Marcella, "National Security and the Interagency Process: Forward Into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century," in *Organizing for National Security*, Carlisle: Strategic Studies Institute, November 2000, Douglas Stuart ed., pp. 163 to 179 (17 pages)

**NOTE:** In the Marcella reading there are references to Interagency Working Groups (IWGs). IWGs no longer exist. IWGs are similar in function to the newly created NSC Policy Coordination Committees (PCCs) described in NSPD 1. These groups are discussed in greater detail in the 8806A course.

The NSC was created as an advisory body to the President and to facilitate cooperation between the uniformed and civilian elements of the national security bureaucracy. In essence, the NSC was created to centralize policy-making in the face of the Soviet threat. To that end, the NSC assumed four broad functions, as follow:

1. Acts as the President's personal staff, examining policy issues of import, making recommendations in that regard, and anticipating future policy challenges;
2. Is the lead for crisis response management and contingency planning;
3. Oversees the interagency process; and
4. Supervises the execution of policy implementation by the various agencies and departments.

The NSC includes statutory members (the President, Vice President, Secretary of State, and Secretary of Defense) and statutory *advisors* (the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency) as well as additional members such as the National Security Advisor, the Secretary of the Treasury, and the Attorney General. The NSC has risen or fallen in importance, according to the President's use of the body. During the Cuban Missile Crisis, an ad-hoc Executive Committee was formed to advise President Kennedy, and a few years later Lyndon Johnson's Tuesday Luncheon Group largely supplanted the NSC in coordinating Vietnam War policy. On the other hand, Ronald Reagan used the NSC extensively as a policy-making body.

A key weakness of the NSC has been its lack of statutory authority to task other governmental agencies. However, through the instrument of interagency meetings, decisions are often reached by consensus, after which the NSC oversees implementation. In truth, the NSC was not designed to execute policy in the sense of coordinating interagency operations per se, but many within the interagency environment, nevertheless, look to the NSC for this very leadership.

As one wag has put it, the interagency functions like a dog swimming. Although, on the surface, a dog seems purposeful and deliberate, underneath the water the dog's legs are flailing madly. This is probably too harsh a characterization, but, owing to the lack of statutory authority to task, the NSC functions primarily in the role of honest broker.

The notion of interagency cooperation is not new. As early as 1940, the Marine Corps *Small Wars Manual* spelled out the specific relationship between the Marines and the State Department with respect to foreign interventionary operations. The intersection of diplomacy and Marine expeditionary activities was so concrete that the *Small Wars Manual* stated that Marines, at the time, were often referred to as "State Department troops."

The difference is now interagency cooperation is more complex. When the *Small Wars Manual* was written, the Marines only had to deal with a handful of foreign-service officers in the Embassy. Today, when one considers that a large U.S. embassy overseas may have representatives from all the military services—perhaps some in the attaché function and others in the security assistance office—as well as representatives from Justice, Commerce, Agriculture, Treasury, the CIA, DEA, USAID, ACDA, etc., all of whom have their own agendas, priorities, and prerogatives, one can easily see how cooperation is very difficult, much less coordinated.

The problem of interagency cooperation can be a vexing one. Strategic planning involves all the elements of national power and, by extension, the many agencies outside the military chain of command. Former USACOM commander, Admiral Paul Miller, was thus moved to say, "...interagency cooperation is essential to smooth policy implementation." For now, however, established routines for interagency cooperation available to commanders are few and limited in their reach.

Joint Pub 3-08, *Interagency Coordination During Joint Operations*, is the Defense Department's doctrine with respect to interagency operations. The doctrine states that the primary responsibility for coordination between the military and the interagency environment, at the strategic level, is vested in the office of the Secretary of Defense.

Operational guidance in the doctrine simply encourages the creation of interagency working groups (PCCs) to seek consensus on policy implementation. To this end, practical guidance, such as that given in the *Joint Task Force Commander's Handbook for Peace Operations*, encourages the establishment of a civil military operations cell at

the JTF level. The topic of interagency coordination is virtually devoid in Service doctrine.

The first serious attempt at organizing the interagency environment was the Clinton Administration's PDD 56, which was born of necessity. As a consequence of recent experiences in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, etc., the need to integrate a variety of dimensions of U.S. planning contingencies, including the political, military, humanitarian, and economic aspects, was found to be acute. Complex contingencies are defined as peace operations (Bosnia), humanitarian intervention (Provide Comfort), and humanitarian assistance operations (Sea Angel). PDD 56 has been replaced by NSPD 1, which also attempts to organize the interagency environment by defining an interagency coordination process. NSPD 1 is discussed in greater detail in the Joint, Multinational, and Interagency Operations course (8806A).

## **Lesson Summary**

In this lesson, you learned how the Executive and Legislative branches of government under the U.S. Constitution were designed to function. You also saw how the various Presidential Administrations worked within this framework. Additionally, an array of domestic and international factors that exert influence on national security policy was discussed. Those domestic influences include the following:

- Structural aspects of the American system of checks and balances among the branches of government.
- Political influences, which include partisan political differences, competing domestic priorities, "pork versus policy" dilemmas, etc.
- Societal influences, which include American values and self-image and traditional policy debates (for example, isolationism versus interventionism, idealism versus geopolitics, conservatism versus liberalism, etc.).

This lesson also introduced you to the NSC and its role in national security decisionmaking and the interagency coordination process. Since its creation in 1947, the NSC has taken on a variety of roles, depending upon how the incumbent President views the utility of the statutory composition of the NSC. Several Presidents have preferred a less formal way of developing national security policy. Nevertheless, the NSC today remains a national security decisionmaking tool of the Executive branch of government and one of the only mechanisms available to coordinate interagency operations.

National security decisionmaking within our system of democracy is a complex and often convoluted process, seemingly inefficient and contradictory, yet the U.S. continues to be the world's only superpower. Hopefully, you now have a better grasp of the national security decisionmaking processes. This should enable you to better understand the context in which strategic goals and objectives are created and then passed on to military

leaders and planners for execution through a variety of military operations. You should be able to identify the many and often competing interests that affect policy-making and strategy development.

**JPME Summary**

AREA 1					AREA 2				AREA 3					AREA 4					AREA 5			
A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D	E	A	B	C	D
	X	X				X	X		X			X	X	X	X							