



In the Shadow of the Oval Office: Profiles of the National Security Advisers and the Presidents They Served--From JFK to George W. Bush

By Ivo H. Daalder, I. M. Destler

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The most solemn obligation of any president is to safeguard the nation's security. But the president cannot do this alone. He needs help. In the past half century, presidents have relied on their national security advisers to provide that help.

Who are these people, the powerful officials who operate in the shadow of the Oval Office, often out of public view and accountable only to the presidents who put them there? Some remain obscure even to this day. But quite a number have names that resonate far beyond the foreign policy elite: McGeorge Bundy, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Colin Powell, Condoleezza Rice.

Ivo Daalder and Mac Destler provide the first inside look at how presidents from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush have used their national security advisers to manage America's engagements with the outside world. They paint vivid portraits of the fourteen men and one woman who have occupied the coveted office in the West Wing, detailing their very different personalities, their relations with their presidents, and their policy successes and failures.

It all started with Kennedy and Bundy, the brilliant young Harvard dean who became the nation's first modern national security adviser. While Bundy served Kennedy well, he had difficulty with his successor. Lyndon Johnson needed reassurance more than advice, and Bundy wasn't always willing to give him that. Thus the basic lesson -- the president sets the tone and his aides must respond to that reality.

The man who learned the lesson best was someone who operated mainly in the shadows. Brent Scowcroft was the only adviser to serve two presidents, Gerald Ford and George H. W. Bush. Learning from others' failures, he found the winning formula: gain the trust of colleagues, build a collaborative policy process, and stay close to the president. This formula became the gold standard --

all four national security advisers who came after him aspired to be "like Brent."

The next president and national security adviser can learn not only from success, but also from failure. Rice stayed close to George W. Bush -- closer perhaps than any adviser before or since. But her closeness did not translate into running an effective policy process, as the disastrous decision to invade Iraq without a plan underscored. It would take years, and another national security aide, to persuade Bush that his Iraq policy was failing and to engineer a policy review that produced the "surge."

The national security adviser has one tough job. There are ways to do it well and ways to do it badly. Daalder and Destler provide plenty of examples of both. This book is a fascinating look at the personalities and processes that shape policy and an indispensable guide to those who want to understand how to operate successfully in the shadow of the Oval Office.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

The position of national security adviser is by far the most powerful unelected (and unconfirmed by Congress) post in the federal government, with tremendous influence over American foreign policy (for good and for ill). Daalder (coauthor, *America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy*) and Destler (coauthor, *American Trade Politics*), foreign policy experts at, respectively, the Brookings Institution and the University of Maryland, do an excellent job of examining the different philosophies and styles of all who have filled the role, from McGeorge Bundy to Condoleezza Rice, as well as how different presidents have deployed the skills of their national security advisers. Unlike Cabinet secretaries, the national security adviser maintains an office in the White House and operates free of the politics and bureaucratic demands of running federal departments. There is no one-size-fits-all mold, and no standard résumé for this vital job. Some advisers have been college professors, others diplomats, still others veterans of the military. Each, as the authors astutely show, has brought unique talents and prejudices to the assignment, and each has left an indelible mark on history. (Feb.)

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From [Booklist](#)

An assessment of national security advisors since McGeorge Bundy, this work queries their roles in the formation of foreign policy. Avoiding foreign policy per se, the authors describe how each advisor envisaged the functions of the position and how effectively each carried them out. Crediting Bundy with institutionalizing the post, Daalder and Destler explain its main tasks of creating a staff, operating the Situation Room, and controlling the flow of information to the president. A dilemma is inherent in the position, argue the authors, between the advisor's role as the conduit to the president of the national security bureaucracies' preferences in foreign affairs, and the advisor's potential to wield power in foreign affairs. According to the authors, Henry Kissinger stands alone as a political player, while Brent Scowcroft is the model of an efficient, self-effacing national security advisor in his interactions with President George H. W. Bush. Concluding with advice for future advisors, this study, readable and not overtly scholarly, should appeal to interests in American foreign policy. --Gilbert Taylor

Review

"With well-drawn examples, Ivo Daalder and I. M. Destler chart U.S. foreign policy through the prism of the vital but amorphous post of National Security Adviser. Their tracing of bureaucratic intrigue from McGeorge Bundy through Kissinger and Brzezinski to Condoleezza Rice is always fascinating, if not always reassuring." -- A.J. Langguth, *Our Vietnam: The War 1954-1975*

Users Review

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Mark Johnson:

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Thomas Taylor:

In the Shadow of the Oval Office: Profiles of the National Security Advisers and the Presidents They Served--From JFK to George W. Bush can be one of your beginning books that are good idea. Many of us recommend that straight away because this publication has good vocabulary that can increase your knowledge in terminology, easy to understand, bit entertaining but nevertheless delivering the information. The copy writer giving his/her effort to set every word into delight arrangement in writing *In the Shadow of the Oval Office: Profiles of the National Security Advisers and the Presidents They Served--From JFK to George W. Bush* nevertheless doesn't forget the main stage, giving the reader the hottest and based confirm resource data that maybe you can be among it. This great information may drawn you into fresh stage of crucial thinking.

Dona Cole:

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