

# 3

## The executive branch

Key facts	35
Increasing number of actors	35
The President	36
The Vice President	39
The National Security Council	40
The State Department	45
The Department of Defense (Pentagon)	53
The intelligence community	60
Department of Homeland Security	64
Conclusion	64
Selected further reading	64

### Key facts

- Post-Cold War, US foreign policy has become more complex involving many more domestic agencies that are often engaged in “turf wars” for influence. In the wake of the 11 September 2001 attacks a new department of Homeland Security was established.
- The President is the most important actor with the ability to set the agenda. But his influence depends as much on his political standing with Congress and the public as on the constitution. The role of the Vice President varies with each occupant and wishes of the President.
- The President relies on the NSC staff for advice and briefing. The national security adviser is one of the key figures in the US foreign policy machine and the NSC plays a vital role in coordinating bureaucratic inputs into US foreign policy.
- The State Department is constitutionally the lead agency for US foreign policy but its influence varies from issue to issue and according to the standing of the Secretary of State with the President. Its funding was sharply reduced during the 1990s.
- The Pentagon, with its enormous resources, and the various intelligence agencies, are also important actors in national security and foreign policy issues. The Pentagon assumed responsibility not only for the war on Iraq but also for the post-war reconstruction efforts.

### Increasing number of actors

The US system of government is characterized by a strongly functioning separation of powers. The constitution states that power is shared between the presidency and a bicameral Congress plus a Supreme Court. In practice, power depends very much on the strengths and weaknesses of the President as well as the political and ideological balances in Congress. Before examining the powers of Congress, it is important to understand the role of the various actors within the executive branch. The complexity of US foreign policy was well illustrated at a State Department briefing on “Plan Colombia” in March 2001. Plan Colombia is the name given to the policy of the Colombian government, supported militarily and economically by the US, to tackle the problem of illegal drug production in that country. Most drugs are produced in areas of the country controlled by anti-government guerrillas. The US has a vital interest in the success of “Plan Colombia” as 80 percent of the cocaine on American streets comes from this Andean country. Although the briefing was given by officials from the State Department, the Justice Department, and USAID, officials from several other agencies, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), the Inland Revenue Service (IRS), the US Treasury, the US Marshal’s office, the US Customs Service, the Secret Service and the US Attorneys’ office, were also on hand to answer specific questions.

As American foreign policy has grown increasingly complex and distinctions between foreign and domestic policy have lessened, foreign relations are no longer solely, or even principally, the domain of the State Department. In some of the larger US embassies there may be representatives from upwards of twenty different agencies

## 36 The executive branch

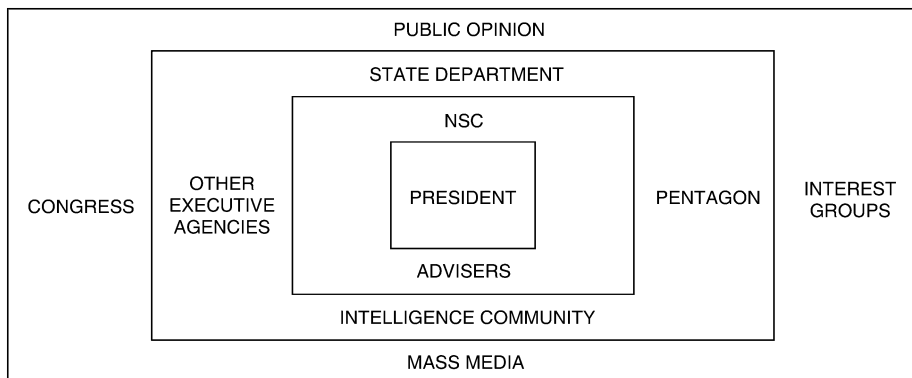
present and an increasing number of executive branch departments and agencies have international responsibilities and overseas programs. The Treasury, with its lead responsibilities toward the International Monetary Fund (IMF), was the dominant player throughout the Russian, Mexican, and Asian financial crises. The Department of Commerce promotes American exports while the Department of Agriculture looks after the particular external interests of American farmers. The USTR plays the lead role in international trade negotiations such as the Uruguay and Doha Rounds. The Environmental Agency is involved in international environmental negotiations such as the Kyoto Protocol. Since the end of the Cold War these economic branches of the government have increased their role and influence in US foreign policy.

Along with the new Department of Homeland Security, the Department of Justice and the FBI lead terrorism investigations, such as the investigation of the 11 September 2001 attacks and the Khobar Towers bombing in Saudi Arabia. The FBI also has a growing number of overseas programs and training activities, particularly in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. The Defense Department often supports humanitarian assistance operations, disaster relief, and has numerous cooperation and training programs with foreign militaries. The intelligence agencies also liaise with their counterparts around the world and have a significant input into the foreign policy process. The liaison efforts increased significantly as a result of the September 2001 terrorist attacks.

There are thus many, often competing, executive branch actors engaged in the formulation of US foreign policy. Within the administration, the President, operating mainly through the NSC, the State Department, the Department of Defense and the intelligence agencies, are traditionally among the most important actors. It is useful, therefore, to look at these structures in more detail.

### The President

The President is the most important actor in the foreign policy decision-making process. The famous inscription on President Truman's desk "The Buck Stops Here"



**Figure 3.1.** US foreign policymaking

remains true today. Foreign governments, lobbyists, ethnic groups and the media have the White House as their principal target in trying to influence American foreign policy. The President has to weigh all the political ramifications of any decision they make. For example, in the spring of 2001, the White House, under strong pressure from the energy lobby, decided not to make any effort to reach a compromise on the Kyoto Protocol on global warming. A year later the President decided to impose tariffs on imported steel to protect American steel producers. The White House knew that these decisions would cause widespread dismay abroad but it considered domestic interests should take priority.

Although Presidents rely mainly on the NSC for briefings and advice, they also listen and often take into account the views of family and close advisers. President Reagan admitted that his wife's reading of the stars influenced him. President Kennedy relied heavily on his brother, Robert, who was Attorney General, during the Cuban missile crisis. President Clinton discussed domestic and foreign policy issues with his close friend, Vernon Jordan. President George W. Bush received advice on foreign policy from his father as well as Karen Hughes and Karl Rove, his media and political advisers. All Presidents have friends in the business, labor, religious or ethnic communities that are not reticent about offering advice, particularly when their interests might be affected.

Everyone wants to meet the President, and if possible have a photograph taken with the occupant of the White House. Following each presidential election, there is a mighty scramble among foreign leaders to meet the new President and his top advisers. Similarly after the terrorist attacks of September 2001, there was a procession of world leaders to Washington to offer sympathy and support to the US. To symbolize the strong Anglo-American ties and instant British support for US military action, President Bush invited Prime Minister Tony Blair to attend his speech to the joint session of Congress on 20 September 2001. Tony Blair was also the first foreign leader to meet with President Bush after his re-election in November 2004.

The constitution makes the President commander-in-chief of the armed forces but does not allow him to declare war on his own authority, send envoys overseas without Senate approval, or raise money for foreign operations without congressional agreement. Traditionally, Americans have granted considerable latitude to their Presidents in foreign policy, compared to domestic policy. But since the Vietnam War, Congress and the public have pressed for tighter controls on the occupant of the White House. One leading authority on the presidency has even argued that unless the President exercises his informal powers of persuasion, then he may often be in a weak position to secure his goals (Neustadt 1990). As in other domains much depends on the political landscape in which the President operates as well as the personality and political skills of the President. A popular President enjoying a high reputation with a compliant Congress can achieve much more than a damaged President with a hostile Congress. An important aspect of the President's powers is his ability to set the agenda and to use the prestige of the office as a "bully pulpit" to explain and seek public support for his policies. It has been shown how President Wilson failed to persuade Congress of the merits of the League of Nations while President Roosevelt was able to win a huge majority to support US membership of the United Nations. President Clinton's

## 38 The executive branch

problems started in 1994 when for the first time in almost fifty years the Republicans won control of both the House and the Senate, while a Democrat occupied the White House. For most of the 1998–2000 Congress, that voted to impeach the President in 1999, Clinton was the lamest of lame ducks, and the Republicans saw no reason to cooperate with him, either on foreign or domestic policy. This desire to punish the President was one important reason for the Senate's rejection of the CTBT and its unhelpful attitude on other issues such as payment of dues to the United Nations.

The qualities needed to ensure an effective presidency include the ability to communicate, persuade, and rally public support. Presidents Reagan and Clinton were clearly much better communicators than President Carter or either of the two Bush Presidents. Carter and Clinton were “hands-on” Presidents, interested in every detail of policy. Reagan and George W. Bush preferred a more laid-back approach. The Clinton White House was characterized by a certain amount of chaos both as regards meetings and timetables. The author recalls one meeting on Yugoslavia that lasted over five hours. The George W. Bush White House was a much tighter, business-like, operation, perhaps befitting the first MBA to occupy the Oval Office. A President is also more effective if he understands how to operate the system, sets clear priorities, and has a team of strong, prudent advisers. Presidents also set the tone for the administration. Jimmy Carter felt very strongly about human rights and thus pushed the issue to the top of the foreign policy agenda. Ronald Reagan felt equally strongly about the evils of communism and made its defeat his top priority. Not even the strongest President, however, has complete control over the foreign policy agenda. Presidents are constantly buffeted by unforeseen events and have to react in an increasingly reduced timeframe.

A four-year presidential term also imposes its limitations. It can take almost a year before the President's full foreign policy team is in place. Senate confirmation hearings may take months to confirm a nominee, whether as an ambassador or senior State Department official. By the summer of 2001, six months after the new Republican administration took office, the State Department had only managed to secure the confirmation of 50 percent of its senior nominees. Usually a President has more opportunity to push his agenda in the early period of his administration, although he may require some time to work himself in and to disengage from unworkable campaign promises. During the 1992 campaign, Clinton criticized Bush for “coddling dictators” in China and inaction in the Balkans. In office, Clinton pursued policies little different to Bush. In the first nine months of his administration, George W. Bush pursued quite different policies to those of his predecessor but then he too was forced to retreat. Rarely has a President been able to chalk up any foreign policy successes in his final year. If running for re-election, foreign leaders will wait until they see who wins. If leaving office, foreign leaders will want to deal with his successor. Clinton made a determined effort in the last months of his presidency to secure a Middle East peace deal but it was probably illusory to set such a tight timetable, particularly at the end of a presidency. Another observer of the presidency has stated that:

The price we pay [for the four-year electoral cycle] is a foreign policy excessively geared to short-term calculations, in which narrow domestic political considerations often

outweigh sound strategic thinking, and where turnover in high positions is so frequent that consistency and coherence are lost.

(Wittkopf and McCormick 1999: 108)

An American President is not free to formulate and implement foreign policy to the same extent as European leaders. This is not due to Cabinet interference – indeed the Cabinet rarely meets under the American system – but rather because of a constant battle with Congress, with much depending on the political balance between Congress and the White House. Although foreign policy experience was often regarded as an important requirement for a presidential candidate during the Cold War, it became less so after 1990. President George H. W. Bush was an acknowledged foreign policy expert, but his very expertise and interest in foreign policy worked against him in the race for re-election. Al Gore had a far greater grasp of foreign policy than George W. Bush but his experience in this field made little difference to the outcome of the 2000 presidential election.

Clinton began his presidency by focusing almost exclusively on domestic issues. No President, however, can completely ignore foreign policy and Clinton, as a confirmed policy wonk, was soon able to master the intricacies of Northern Ireland, Bosnia, and the Middle East. George W. Bush was also an acknowledged amateur in foreign affairs when he took office in January 2001 but he assembled a strong team of advisers and gradually began to play a more assertive role. His preference was for a one-page memo outlining the major points rather than a detailed policy brief. One staffer told the author in spring 2001 that the President had requested a new policy toward Russia that should be on one page, contain no more than four points, and be comprehensible to a farmer from Texas.

History demonstrates that one should not rush too early into assessments on how Presidents handle foreign policy. Many Presidents in recent times have had little or no foreign policy background, particularly those with gubernatorial backgrounds, such as Reagan, Carter, and Clinton. European voices were heard complaining about Carter's plans for the neutron bomb, at Reagan's description of the Soviet Union as "the evil empire," and at Clinton's lack of decisiveness on Bosnia. By contrast, the President with the most foreign policy experience, George H. W. Bush, was unable to win re-election for a second term, despite having "won" the Cold War and the Gulf War. His son, George W. Bush, with an acknowledged lack of interest in foreign policy, nevertheless had foreign policy thrust upon him as a result of the September 2001 terrorist attacks. His response to the terrorist threat was an important element if not the defining feature of his presidency. In the 2004 election, he sought to portray himself as the military commander-in-chief most able to defend Americans from the terrorist threat. John Kerry, the Democratic challenger, and a Vietnam war hero, also attempted to sell himself to the American electorate as a military leader.

## The Vice President

Traditionally Vice Presidents have played a supporting role in foreign policy with their overseas travel limited to attending the funerals of foreign leaders. Those with a strong

## 40 The executive branch

background and interest in foreign affairs, such as George H. W. Bush under Reagan, were able to carve out a niche for themselves. In contrast, Dan Quayle, the Vice President under George H. W. Bush, was almost invisible on the foreign policy front. Clinton's Vice President, Al Gore, played a prominent role in relations with Russia through the Gore–Chernomyrdin Commission, and he was also influential in international environmental issues, an area of high personal interest.

Dick Cheney, a former Defense Secretary, enjoyed a sweeping role as Vice President under George W. Bush, involving himself in all major foreign policy decisions and building an unprecedentedly strong team of advisers. With concerns about his health he did not undertake any substantial foreign travel as his predecessors had done. But he was a prominent supporter of the neocons' views on foreign policy and very influential in encouraging the President to invade Iraq (Woodward 2004:175). Paul O'Neill, who was secretary to the Treasury and resigned from the Bush administration, alleged in his memoirs that "the real power behind the throne was Dick Cheney." Although George W. Bush encouraged this more prominent role for Cheney, no President wishes to be overshadowed by his deputy and gradually the President began to play a more prominent public role himself in foreign policy. This became unavoidable after the 11 September terrorist attacks and the importance of selling the Iraq War to the American people.

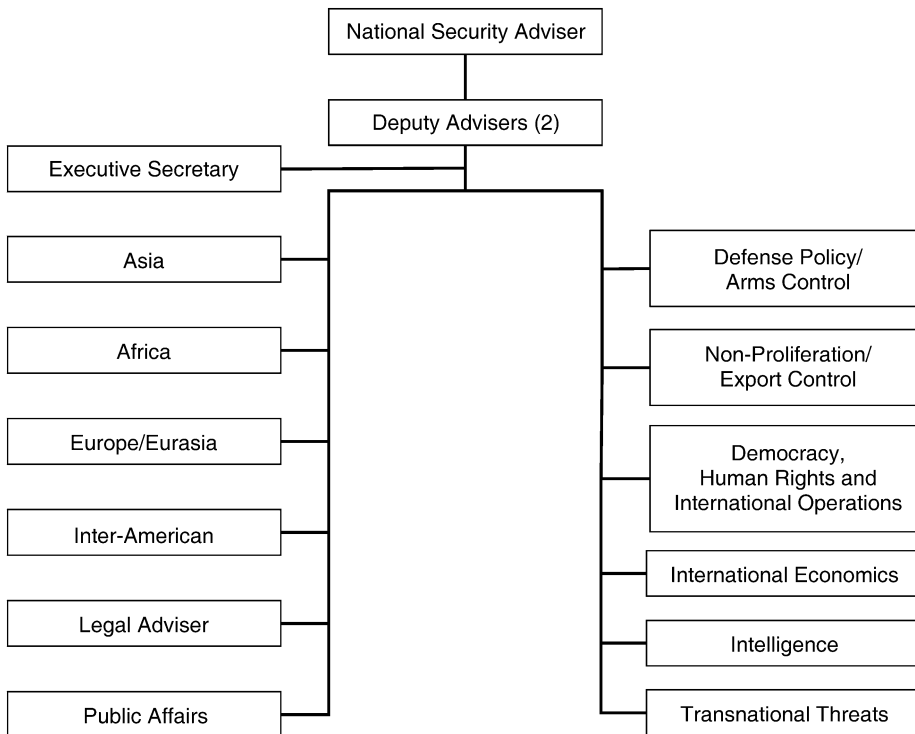
### **The National Security Council**

The formal National Security Council comprises the President's main external relations advisers including the Vice President, the Secretaries of State and Defense, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the director of the CIA, and the national security adviser. It is the NSC staff, however, that provide the steady stream of briefing papers for the President. The national security adviser is the hinge between the formal NSC and the working machine. Over the past few decades, the national security adviser has often emerged as the most important foreign policy aide to the President. This role has sometimes been exercised largely outside of public view, as was the case with Brent Scowcroft, who served under Presidents Ford and George H. W. Bush, or in a more high-profile manner, as was true for Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Sandy Berger and Condoleezza (Condi) Rice.

A piano-playing child prodigy, Rice had a role in the first George W. Bush administration going beyond foreign policy. She served on strategy groups dealing with race, education, and the environment. One White House staffer told the author in 2001, "when Bush speaks on foreign policy he reiterates what Condi prepares for him." She herself described the job as "working the seams and stitching the connections together tightly." There were however criticisms of her performance in failing to bang heads together in the run up to the Iraq War. The same staffer said that "she did not know how to fight the 'big beasts' in the jungle," a reference to Powell, Cheney and Rumsfeld. Nevertheless she was rewarded for her loyalty to the President by being appointed the first black, female Secretary of State in the second George W. Bush administration.

Unlike their Cabinet counterparts, the position of national security adviser is neither rooted in law nor accountable to Congress. As with members of the Cabinet, the national security adviser serves at the pleasure of the President. While the adviser heads a small staff, his/her managerial duties are quite limited compared to the huge departmental responsibilities of the Secretaries of State, Defense, Treasury, and others with a role to play in the formulation and implementation of foreign policy. There is little doubt, however, that the national security adviser and the NSC staff have become steadily more influential in the Washington power game. The long queue of foreign ministers, ambassadors, and diplomatic advisers seeking appointments with the national security adviser (and his/her deputy) is testimony to this increased influence. One staffer told the author that Condoleezza Rice only accepted about one in forty requests for an audience and her deputy only accepted about one in twenty. The competition for the President's attention between the NSC and State Department has been likened to a duel between the "courtiers" and the "barons" (Destler *et al.* 1984). The White House "courtiers" nearly always win the battles not only because of their proximity to the President, and can thus respond quickly to his needs, but also because Presidents increasingly use foreign policy for political purposes.

Over the years the NSC has expanded its staff from one of less than fifteen policy people in the early 1960s to what is today an organization of some 200 people, including about 70 to 100 substantive professionals. Inevitably the NSC has its own



**Figure 3.2.** Organization of the National Security Council

## 42 The executive branch

views on the myriad of national security issues confronting the administration. There are various reasons for the growing importance of the NSC. First, as can be expected of any organization that has operated for many decades, the NSC has become institutionalized and even bureaucratized. The White House situation room, established under Kennedy, has become the focal point for crisis management. The NSC communications system, also inaugurated under Kennedy but progressively more technically sophisticated, allows staff to monitor the overseas messages sent to and from the State Department, to have access to major intelligence material, and to communicate directly and secretly to foreign governments. Over time, these capacities, together with continuing presidential need, have built the NSC into a powerful agency.

Second, the kinds of foreign policy issues that need to be addressed have both expanded in number and become more complex in nature. As a result, the number and type of players concerned with each issue has grown – placing a premium on effective organization and integration of different interests. Of all the players in the executive branch, it is usually only the White House that has the trust and confidence of the agencies necessary to manage these disparate interests effectively; and within the White House only the NSC has the capacity to coordinate them as was demonstrated during the US response to the September 2001 terrorist attacks. In the weeks following the attacks, the NSC met three times a week, with the President usually attending, listening to positions, and taking decisions on the war against terrorism (*The New York Times*, 23 December 2001).

The structure and functioning of the NSC depends in no small degree upon the interpersonal chemistry between the President and his national security adviser. Under President Nixon, Henry Kissinger drew on an expanded NSC staff that rivaled the State Department in policymaking and implementation. As Nixon recalled in his memoirs: “From the outset of my administration, I planned to direct foreign policy from the White House. Therefore I regarded my choice of a national security adviser as crucial” (Nixon 1981). The NSC under Kissinger coincided with an extremely active period of American foreign policy and contributed to Kissinger’s growing power. Kissinger wrote later that “in the final analysis the influence of a Presidential assistant derives almost exclusively from the confidence of the President, not from administrative arrangements” (Kissinger 1979). He might have added that the location of the national security adviser’s office, just a few paces from the President’s study, is also an important factor. Although the office is small, barely seating six people, the location is perfect. He or she oversees all papers going to the President and is always present when the President meets or telephones with foreign leaders.

The NSC continued to play a major role under Jimmy Carter’s presidency with Brzezinski adopting a high-profile role like Kissinger. Policy differences between Brzezinski and President Carter’s Secretary of State, Cyrus Vance, eventually led to the latter’s resignation. During the Reagan administration, the NSC was heavily criticized over its role in the “Iran-Contra affair.” This was a clandestine effort, carried out without knowledge of the State Department, to provide Iran with arms in return for Teheran’s help to secure the release of American hostages in the Middle East. The profits from these arms sales were then used to fund the right-wing “Contras” who

were fighting the left-wing government in Nicaragua. The Iran-Contra affair severely damaged the reputation of the NSC and led to a thorough reform including a reduction of staff and the appointment of a legal counsel. President George H. W. Bush further reformed the NSC by establishing a principals' committee, a deputies' committee, and eight policy coordinating committees with the aim of ensuring a unified front by all parts of the administration in national security affairs.

President Clinton expanded the NSC to include the Secretary of the Treasury, the US representative to the UN, the assistant to the President for economic policy (who was also head of a newly-created national economic council (NEC) parallel to the NSC) and the President's chief of staff. The NEC was to deal with foreign and domestic economic issues in much the same way as the NSC coordinated diplomatic and security issues, and the assistant to the President for economic policy was to be included in meetings discussing international economic issues. One senior official in the Clinton administration appealed for an integrated international staff as one could no longer pigeonhole complex policy problems.

Today, the "international" element of US policy is organized around four separate structures: traditional national security (centered on the NSC); international trade and finance (centered on the NEC); law enforcement and counter terrorism (largely centered on Justice, the FBI and CIA); and science (the office of science and technology policy and the council on environmental quality).

(James Steinberg, *Washington Post*, 2 January 2001)

According to Steinberg, the bureaucratic divisions led to a lack of coherence and weakened US foreign policy. There was further pressure for a more integrated structure following the terrorist attacks in September 2001. On taking office, George W. Bush had simplified the NSC structure. The economic side was downgraded; three formerly separate regional offices were combined in a European and Eurasian affairs directorate. Offices dealing with health, the environment, refugees, and other humanitarian issues were consolidated in a single directorate for democracy, human rights, and international operations. Support offices were sharply reduced and some activities (legislative affairs and communications) were given back to the main White House machine. Bush also agreed to establish a second NSC deputy post, responsible for international economic issues, and who reports both to the national security adviser and the national economic adviser. The officials working in the NSC are a mix of political appointments and officials on secondment from other agencies.

The national security adviser has a number of tasks including advising and briefing the President, managing the decision-making process, and explaining and defending the policies of the administration in public. Each morning the adviser is present when the CIA director or his representative provides the President with the "daily brief," a short, global intelligence assessment. The adviser may see the President several other times during the day but he or she must try and minimize imposition on the President's time. This requires careful judgment on what issues should be brought to the President's attention and what can be resolved at a lower level.

## 44 The executive branch

Before any recommendation is sent to the President, the adviser must ensure that all executive branch agencies with strong stakes in the issue are included in the policy process; and that all realistic options have been considered and fully analyzed – including options not favored by any agency – before they reach the President. The adviser also has to mediate between departments should they come to the table pushing contradictory positions. The adviser must try and reach a compromise that reflects the political wishes of the President rather than the NSC or any department. It is not always an easy task to decide when to become involved in such mediating sessions. There is a danger that the NSC becomes bogged down in details rather than concentrate on the big picture. Moreover there will often be a temptation to seize control of an issue, even to the point of becoming responsible for policy implementation. As the Iran-Contra affair revealed, this can be a dangerous road to travel.

The adviser also must ensure that decisions are made in a timely manner and that they are implemented. In short, the national security adviser must balance the role of adviser and honest broker by both earning the trust of his or her colleagues in presenting their views fully, fairly, and faithfully to the President and giving the President his or her best advice on every issue. Certainly Rice made a major effort to ensure that there were as few disputes as possible reaching the President's desk. She made a point of meeting with Powell and Rumsfeld every week to try and iron out differences of opinion.

Another important task is briefing the President and assisting him when he is meeting foreign leaders. Meetings may be formal state visits, or working visits, or informal meetings in the margins of summits. But whatever type of meeting is scheduled, the bureaucracy requires a briefing book and the NSC will usually chair an inter-agency meeting before the President meets with the foreign leader to iron out any differences in approach and to agree the main messages to deliver. The competition for foreign visits to Washington is intense but usually varies little from President to President. The top candidates are close allies such as Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Israel, Egypt, Canada and Mexico. They are then followed by Russia, China, and South Korea and since the end of the Cold War by the East Europeans. The schedule for presidential visits abroad is partly determined by fixed summits such as the G8, EU, APEC, FTAA, NATO, and partly by the importance of business to transact. George W. Bush was less keen on state visits and dinners than Clinton. He did not schedule his first, with Vicente Fox of Mexico, until nine months into his administration.

Visits to the White House usually follow a set pattern. The visitors arrive at least ten minutes in advance of the scheduled meeting to pass through security and line up outside the Oval Office. When the line is ready, the door is opened and the visitors file in to meet the President. If there are too many in the overseas party, some may be asked to wait in Blair House, the government guesthouse situated across the road from the White House. A normal meeting would be 30–45 minutes but sometimes a foreign guest might only have 15–20 minutes with the President. In most cases there is a “photo opportunity” after the meeting followed by a press conference, or, more likely, press availability. This means that the President will take a few questions, usually on domestic rather than foreign affairs, while saying goodbye to his guest. For special guests the President may use his weekend retreat at Camp David or his own home. In

November 2001, President Bush invited Russian President Putin to his ranch in Crawford, Texas. In April 2002, British Prime Minister Tony Blair and Crown Prince Abdullah of Saudi Arabia received similar invitations. Other guests at the ranch have included the former Spanish (Aznar) and Italian (Berlusconi) prime ministers, both supporters of Bush's invasion of Iraq.

Although, since the Iran-Contra affair, the NSC has largely performed a coordinating and oversight function, Presidents have sometimes called on their national security adviser to undertake special missions. Both Berger and Rice had separate tracks with their Russian counterparts. And during Clinton's term the adviser also had direct links with the British and Irish governments to deal with Northern Ireland. It is understandable that Presidents will always want to make some operational use of their adviser, as this is normally someone they know and trust. The same is not always true for the Secretary of State and certainly not for the State Department, which is largely staffed by career officials.

As the national security adviser is not subject to congressional confirmation, he or she has no obligation to appear before Congress. But public speeches and media appearances have become more and more important. This reflects a change from earlier times when Brent Scowcroft counseled that the national security adviser "should be seen occasionally and heard even less." In recent years, the increasing politicization of foreign policy has made defense of the President's policies by his principal adviser more important. The second reason for the greater public exposure of the national security adviser in recent years is the rapidly expanding media landscape and continuous pace of the news cycle. There are more and more demands for the national security adviser to be seen and heard, in addition to the Secretary of State.

Rice herself played a more visible and operational role than some of her predecessors, meeting many foreign visitors and appearing on the major television talkshows. This reflects both a desire to sell the administration's policies and an acceptance that most foreign visitors view the White House as the real locus of power when it comes to foreign policy. Following the departure of Rice to the State Department, the President appointed her deputy, Stephen Hadley, as national security adviser. He had a much lower profile than Rice, reflecting his background as a bureaucrat and lawyer. Although much depends on the personality holding the title "national security adviser," it can be seen that he or she has played an increasingly important role in the making of US foreign policy over recent decades. This is unlikely to change in future as the political focus, at home and abroad, is likely to remain firmly fixed on the White House. The NSC is thus a highly developed and efficient system to coordinate and manage US national security policy. Its relations with other agencies vary according to the issues and the personalities involved. In day-to-day business it deals principally with the State Department and the Department of Defense.

## **The State Department**

Constitutionally, the State Department is the lead executive agency for the conduct of US diplomacy, a mission based on the role of the Secretary of State as the President's principal foreign policy adviser. The State Department has the primary role in:

## 46 The executive branch

- leading and coordinating US representation abroad;
- conducting negotiations and concluding agreements and treaties;
- managing the international affairs budget;
- coordinating and supporting international activities of other US agencies.

It would also like to see itself as the lead department in interagency coordination in developing and implementing foreign policy but it has a strong rival in the NSC for this task. The State Department was the first executive agency established under the constitution in 1789 and the Secretary of State as the first cabinet officer in line to succeed to the Presidency. (The succession starts with the Vice President, the Speaker of the House, the president of the Senate, and then the Secretary of State.)

Prior to the arrival of Colin Powell in January 2001 the State Department had few friends in Congress and had suffered large budgetary and staff cuts in recent years leading to problems of morale amongst serving Foreign Service officers (these problems are aired regularly in the *Foreign Service Journal*). One American diplomat told the author that “very often Secretaries of State have been interested only in the major political problems facing them and not in the machinery or functioning of the department.” The State Department employs some 9000 diplomatic staff and maintains 260 overseas missions in 180 countries. The 2005 budget was \$8.1 billion, an increase of 20 percent over 2001, largely to reflect assistance to countries in the war on terrorism and measures to protect US embassies. This figure is tiny compared to most other government departments. For example, the Pentagon had a budget of over \$450 billion in 2004. This has led some to describe the State Department as “a bureaucratic pygmy among giants” (Kegley and Wittkopf 1996: 383). Certainly the building in which the State Department is housed has nothing of the style of the White House nor the grandeur of the Pentagon. It could easily be mistaken for an insurance office. Many officials work in cramped offices with poor facilities. When Colin Powell first visited the State Department library in January 2001 he was staggered to find that there were hardly any computers. The State Department also suffers in that it has no domestic constituency to serve. According to some serving diplomats, many Americans are unaware of the State Department’s existence or unable to explain what it does. The department has also struggled to escape its image of a snobbish, East Coast, Ivy League, predominantly white, male establishment. Its long-suffering career officers are often described, unfairly in the author’s opinion, as “effete, snobbish, striped pants, cookie pushers” (Rubin 1985). According to a number of reports, State also suffers from excessive bureaucracy that leads many of the brightest officers to leave (see the 2000 report of the Advisory Council on US Public Diplomacy. *The New York Times* also highlighted this problem in an article “As Diplomacy Loses Luster, Young Stars Flee the State Department” on 5 September 2000). In addition, the working conditions for foreign service officers overseas has become much more difficult since 9/11. Most US embassies have become fortresses and interaction with the local population more difficult. The US plans to build one of its largest embassies in Baghdad but if its diplomats cannot operate in the country safely one wonders what they can achieve holed up inside a concrete block.

Successful Secretaries of State have usually been those with close access to and the trust of the President. James Baker enjoyed the complete confidence of President George H. W. Bush and was an effective operator around the world. Warren Christopher, Clinton's first Secretary of State and a Californian lawyer, adopted a more managerial style and was under instructions to keep problems away from the President whom he rarely saw. His successor, Madeleine Albright, the daughter of immigrants from Czechoslovakia, was the first female occupant of the office and adopted a higher profile. Prior to her appointment, she had been the US permanent representative to the UN and before that she had been a professor and member of the NSC staff under Brzezinski. Albright won the race to succeed Warren Christopher partly because Clinton considered there would be political gains in appointing the first female Secretary of State and partly because it was felt that Richard Holbrooke, her main rival, might be too flamboyant and difficult to control (Halberstam 2001). She also enjoyed a good working relationship with Senator Jesse Helms, the then chairman of the SFRC, and nemesis of the State Department. Another part of her appeal to Clinton was her knack of explaining foreign policy to the general public in plain language. She too, however, struggled for access to the President.

President George W. Bush chose Colin Powell to be his Secretary of State. Powell was the son of immigrants from Jamaica and had a glittering military career before being nominated for State. With his star charisma, inspiring personal history, and reputation for leadership and integrity, Powell's appointment brought an instant increase in morale at State. One American diplomat told the author that "the moment he set foot in the State Department he was met with rapturous applause." In his first couple of weeks in office Powell invited the President to visit the department and ensured that desk officers carried out the President's briefing for his forthcoming Mexico visit. Many diplomats saw his reliance on the Foreign Service as a rejuvenating tonic to an institution that had felt marginalized. Despite his Washington-insider background, Powell still found it difficult to adjust to the environment at State. In an interview six months into the job, he admitted that he faced "a steep learning curve" (*USA Today*, 19 July 2001). In the fall of 2001 there were still critics. For example, the *Time* magazine cover of 10 September 2001 was "Where Have You Gone Colin Powell?" This would change, however, with the war on terrorism. Powell's experience of the military and diplomatic worlds, as well as the Washington bureaucracy, made him an increasingly powerful figure in the Bush administration but he had to fight a constant battle with Donald Rumsfeld, Secretary for Defense, and other neo-conservative members of the administration. Powell never had the full backing of the President and it was not surprising that he resigned at the end of the first George W. Bush administration. He had few concrete achievements to his name and his tenure included one major embarrassing incident, when, with faulty intelligence information, he tried and failed to convince the UN Security Council in February 2003 that Saddam Hussein possessed WMD.

In appointing Condoleezza Rice as Powell's successor, President Bush placed his closest foreign policy adviser in charge of the US diplomatic machine. With Rice, a close family friend of the President running Foggy Bottom (the slang term for the State

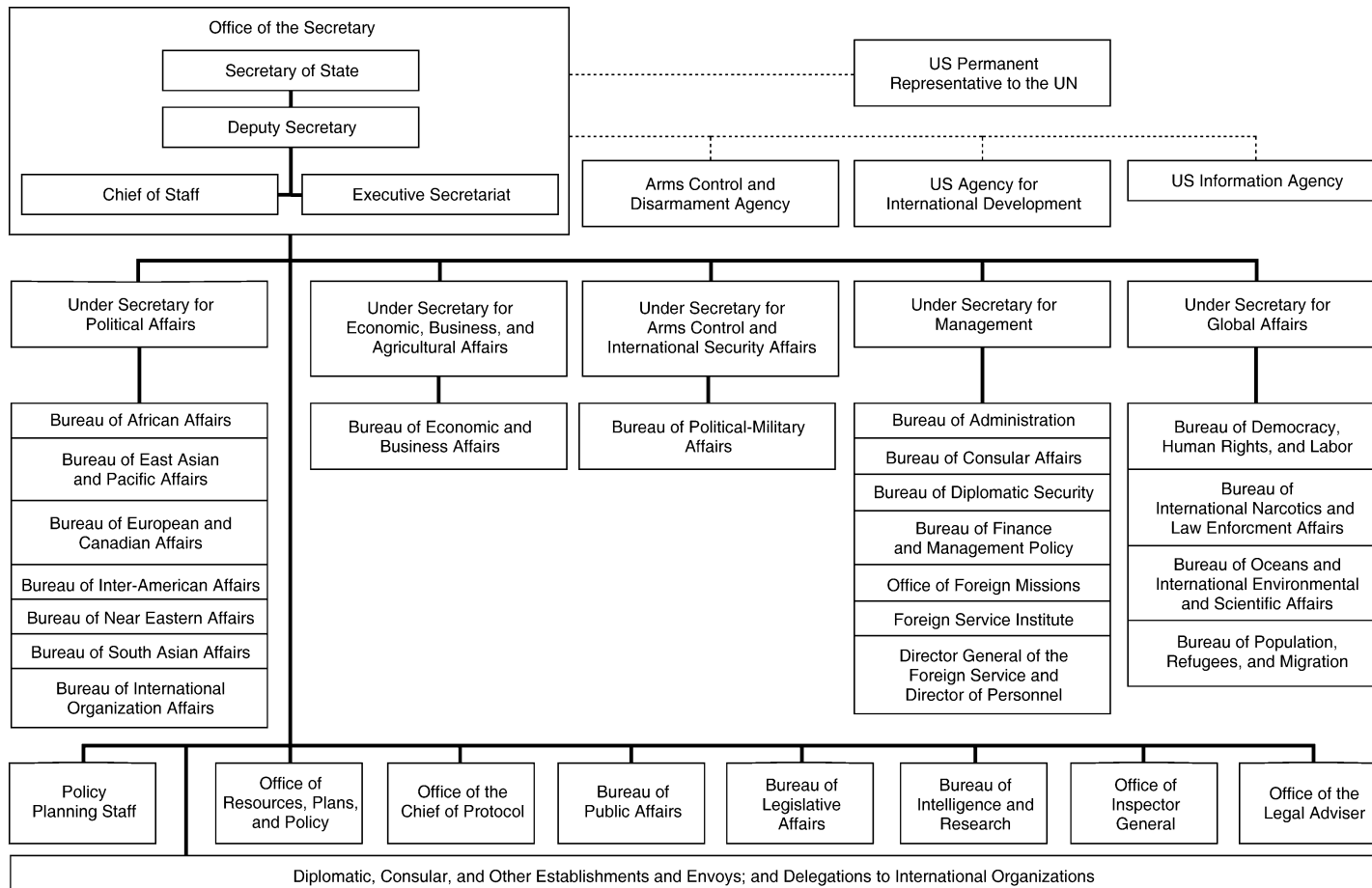
## 48 The executive branch

Department as it is located in this district of Washington DC), there would be no splits between State and the White House. Rice is a confirmed workaholic. Unmarried and with no real hobbies she used to spend more than 12 hours each day at the White House. She was the President's mentor on foreign policy for many years and a frequent visitor to his ranch in Texas. A confirmed conservative, the terrorist attacks on 9/11 convinced Rice (as well as the President) that she was helping to preside over nothing less than a titanic struggle between modernity and fundamentalism, good and evil. Few professional diplomats share this black and white view of the world and there was much speculation in early 2005 as to whether she would have more influence on the State Department or whether it would help change her thinking.

The State Department is organized in a pyramid fashion. In addition to the Secretary of State, there is a Deputy Secretary (under Clinton it was Strobe Talbott, a former journalist and university friend of the President; under George W. Bush it was Richard Armitage, a former political appointee at the Pentagon) and five under-secretaries. There are also more than twenty assistant secretaries who are a mix of political appointees and career officials, all of whom require Senate approval, as do all nominations for ambassadorial posts. There is a tendency in the State Department to view the six regional bureaus – African, European and Eurasian, Near Eastern, Western Hemisphere, East Asian and Pacific, and South Asian Affairs – plus International Organizations, as the cream of the crop. They handle the day-to-day emergencies that occur around the world and generally maintain the highest profile. The functional bureaus, by comparison, play a less glamorous role. The State Department has few friends in Congress where many consider that State pays too much attention to the wishes of foreign governments and too little to domestic interests. In an attempt to impose some rationalization in external affairs, Congress insisted that two formerly independent agencies – the US Information Agency (USIA), and the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency (ACDA) – were folded into the State Department in 1999.

The Secretary of State usually has daily meetings with senior staff when decisions are taken on the Secretary's schedule of visits and visitors as well as discussion of priority issues. State has also had to try and meet the challenges posed by new global issues such as climate change, infectious diseases, international crime, drugs and terrorism. Other issues such as patterns of energy consumption, food labeling, corporate taxation, once thought to be exclusively domestic issues, have now become topics of international concern and targets of concerted action. It has not been easy for the State Department or the Secretary to dominate this agenda, or indeed the general foreign policy agenda of the administration. One critic commented that Madeleine Albright had ceded large swathes of the world to the Treasury. The State Department was simply not equipped to handle the new challenges. "Nothing in the foreign policy manual tells you how to deal with financial crises" (Michael Mandelbaum, quoted in *The New York Times*, 28 December 2000). Even with Powell at the helm, one analyst commented that "audiences at home and abroad have been regularly forced to ask what did Cheney say, what did Rumsfeld think, where did Rice stand" (*Time*, 10 September 2001).

Unlike European diplomatic services, the US has a very high percentage of political, ambassadorial appointees which means that there are inevitably fewer top positions for



**Figure 3.3.** State Department – organizational chart

## 50 The executive branch

career officials. The number of political ambassadors has steadily increased in recent years, to around 30 percent, perhaps reflecting White House distrust of the career officials from State who may not be such loyal supporters of the President. According to one report in the *National Journal* on 15 June 2001, the minimum qualifications for an ambassadorship in 2001 were campaign contributions of at least \$250,000, friendship with and complete loyalty to the President. One former ambassador, Richard Burt, observed that “the system was downright embarrassing.” Richard Holbrooke took a similar view.

We’ve had some political appointees who made great ambassadors, and we’ve had some real duds. It’s a mixed bag. In the end, however, I don’t think we should be particularly proud of this tradition of rewarding campaign contributors, fundraisers and political supporters with ambassadorships. It’s clearly one of the last, pure vestiges of the 19th century spoils system.

(*National Journal*, 1 September 2001 [Holbrooke 1998])

In recent years, the State Department, unlike the Pentagon, has been starved of funds. Since 1985, its international affairs budget has declined by almost 50 percent. In 1985 foreign affairs spending amounted to 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> percent of the federal budget – in 2000 it was less than 1 percent. In a speech at Georgetown University on 19 October 2000, Sandy Berger criticized Congress’s reluctance to fund American foreign policy. He argued that

America could not be a first-rate power on a third-class budget. We are at the zenith of our influence, yet our entire international budget for everything – from diminishing the nuclear threat, to preventing conflict, to fighting AIDS, to advancing democracy – is about the same as constructing eight miles of interstate highway.

According to Richard Holbrooke, “if I had to sum up my greatest concern about American foreign policy today, it’s the gap between our rhetoric and our resources. We keep proclaiming lofty goals, and then not putting up enough resources to achieve them” (*Financial Times*, 6–7 January 2001).

In a scathing report issued in January 2001, a non-partisan task force chaired by Frank Carlucci, a former Defense Secretary and ambassador to Portugal, warned that the State Department “was in a serious state of disrepair and plagued by long-term mismanagement, antiquated equipment and dilapidated and insecure facilities.” If the “downward spiral” was not reversed, the prospect of relying on military force to protect US national interests would increase because Washington would be less capable of avoiding, managing, or resolving crises through the use of statecraft. The report pointed out that the State Department was inadequate in mission, organization, and skills. Personnel policies had left some 700 diplomatic positions unfilled – a staffing shortfall of 15 percent. More than 90 percent of overseas posts were equipped with obsolete equipment to handle classified communications, and 88 percent of all embassies did not

meet basic security standards. More than a quarter of all diplomatic posts were seriously overcrowded. These problems rendered US foreign policy increasingly ill-equipped to shape and respond to the realities and challenges of the twenty-first century. Failure to address these shortcomings “would prompt significant negative consequences that will undercut national security.”

Madeleine Albright fought strongly but not very successfully for an increased budget. In a speech on 20 November 2000 she argued that the percentage of the federal budget allocated for foreign affairs

may well determine 50 percent of the history that is written about this era. Every year [the State Department] struggles with Congress for each nickel and dime and this forces us repeatedly to make no-win tradeoffs between such priorities as peace in Kosovo and curbing conflict in the Congo, improving security at our missions and enhancing the skills of our people.

In testimony to the HIRC on 7 March 2001, Albright’s successor, Colin Powell, made a strong pitch for increased funds, asking for and securing a 13.8 percent increase from \$6.6 billion in 2001 to \$7.8 billion in 2002. There were further small rises up until 2005. Powell said that his priorities were hiring new staff (360 extra in 2002), updating

**Table 3.1.** International affairs expenditure

<i>Fiscal year</i>	<i>Function 150 Constant FY2001 \$s</i>	<i>Function 150 Current \$s</i>
1981	12.194	22.445
1982	14.222	24.592
1983	16.017	26.443
1984	17.396	27.592
1985	24.057	36.977
1986	20.279	30.326
1987	18.800	27.229
1988	18.079	25.252
1989	18.537	24.873
1990	20.027	25.923
1991	21.321	26.511
1992	20.927	25.258
1993	21.194	24.851
1994	20.854	23.924
1995	20.166	22.599
1996	18.237	20.037
1997	18.333	19.786
1998	18.289	20.583
1999	23.824	24.981
2000	23.776	24.336
2001	23.119	23.119
2002	25.784	26.534
2003	26.975	27.893
2004	27.268	28.962

*Source:* Office of Management and Budget and CRS calculations

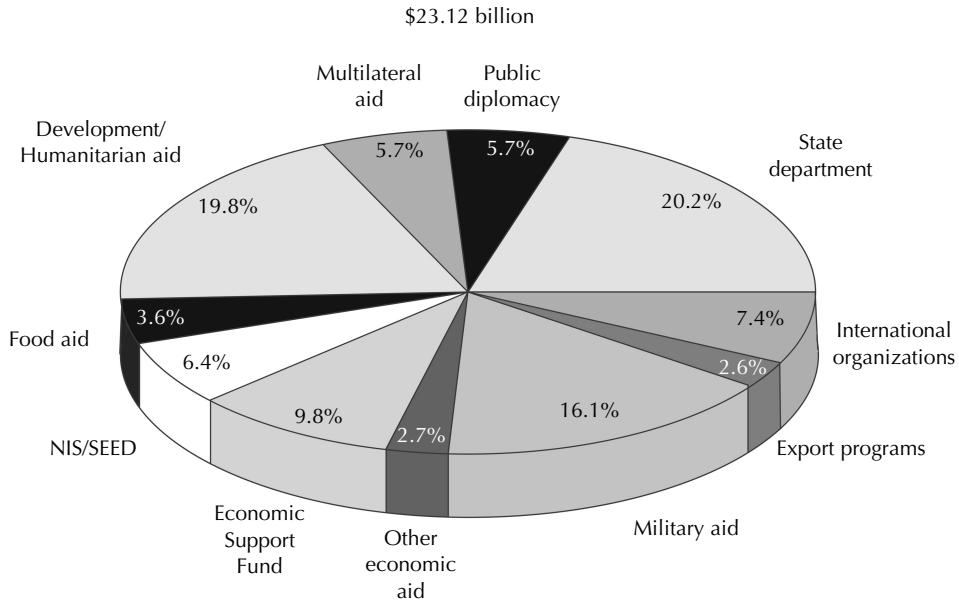
## 52 The executive branch

information technology, and improving embassy security and infrastructure. As regards the discretionary budget for international affairs, the figure rose from \$23.9 billion for 2002 to \$31.5 billion in 2005. This included increased funds for enhanced security measures and a large contribution to the Global Fund to combat HIV/AIDS and to support debt relief for poor countries.

If one examines US discretionary external expenditure during the 1990s one can observe that there has been a steady reduction in funding. The expenditures of the early 1990s were reflective of new aid programs in Nicaragua and Panama in response to the political changes in those countries and the need to provide foreign assistance to the drought- and famine-stricken countries of Africa and to former communist countries in Eastern Europe. During the mid-1990s, Congress worked to balance the federal budget and government expenditures on foreign aid fluctuated from 1993 to 1995 before being drastically cut in 1996. Since 1999, funding increases have resulted from increased humanitarian relief and peacemaking efforts. Support for Israel and Egypt consumes over 80 percent of all security assistance and almost 25 percent of all international affairs spending. Israel, with a per capita GDP of over \$12,000, receives over \$3 billion in bilateral assistance each year, while the whole of sub-Saharan Africa, with a per capita GDP of under \$500, receives a total of about \$165 million. This huge support for Israel and Egypt can be traced back to the power of the American-Jewish lobby and the desire of the US to be seen to support the Middle East peace process. The huge imbalance between military and non-military expenditure has been strongly criticized. According to former ambassador Richard Gardner, the resources devoted to preparing for war compared to those for conflict prevention are in a ratio of sixteen to one. In his view, "a realistic assessment of the long-term, trans-border threats to the security and welfare of the American people would argue for a re-balancing of US budget priorities" (*Financial Times*, 6 June 2001). Among the areas that had been cut in the 1990s were funding for public diplomacy and student exchanges. Some observers maintained that these cuts had contributed to the lack of objective knowledge about the US in the Arab world (Stephen Kinzer, *The New York Times*, 11 November 2001).

The decline in the budget for the State Department has been mirrored in other non-military external expenditure. Since the end of the Cold War, US foreign assistance has lost its core political constituency and much of its support, which has led to the steady decline in aid to developing countries. US aid appropriations in 2004 equaled only 0.11 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP), a figure that stands at roughly half of the foreign assistance spending averaged in the 1980s, which amounted to 0.2 percent of GDP. These figures fall well short of the United Nations' recommended 0.7 percent GDP target. As a percentage of the economy, official spending on economic aid is now more than three times greater in the typical OECD country than in the US.

In the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks, there was a significant shift in spending with the focus being on efforts to win the war on terrorism. Increased resources for strategic, development, and humanitarian purposes were approved in record time. The main beneficiary was Pakistan, followed by the countries of central Asia. There was also an increase in funding for the Millennium Goals aimed at tackling poverty. If the anti-terrorism and other foreign aid programs are shown to serve US



**Figure 3.4.** Division of international affairs budget

interests, help erode poverty, promote democracy, and stabilize the political situation of coalition partners, public opinion may in future support more robust programs. However, if a large portion of foreign assistance is mismanaged or abused, and/or accountability and impact are marginal, enthusiasm for foreign aid is likely to be undermined further. There is an on-going debate between conservatives who doubt the value of foreign aid programs, believing that free markets and the private sector are the keys to economic growth, and liberals who argue that the US has a moral responsibility to help reduce global poverty.

### The Department of Defense (Pentagon)

In constitutional terms, the Department of Defense (DoD) – often referred to as the “Pentagon” because of the huge five-sided building in which it is housed – is responsible for the formulation of general defense policy, in particular the military strategy and the definition of the “mission statement” of the armed forces. In terms of defining an overall approach and policy regarding national security issues, however, the DoD is but one actor and the NSC has increasingly taken the lead in defining the overall national security strategy. Because of its size and enormous resources, the Pentagon plays an increasingly important role in the formulation of US foreign policy. Donald Rumsfeld was never shy about intervening in foreign affairs, famously describing Europe as divided into “old Europe” and “new Europe.” Despite some criticism over his handling of the war in Iraq, President Bush reappointed him in December 2004.

The role of the Pentagon has been subject to heated debate at times with concern expressed about the continuing close ties between the military and industry as well as

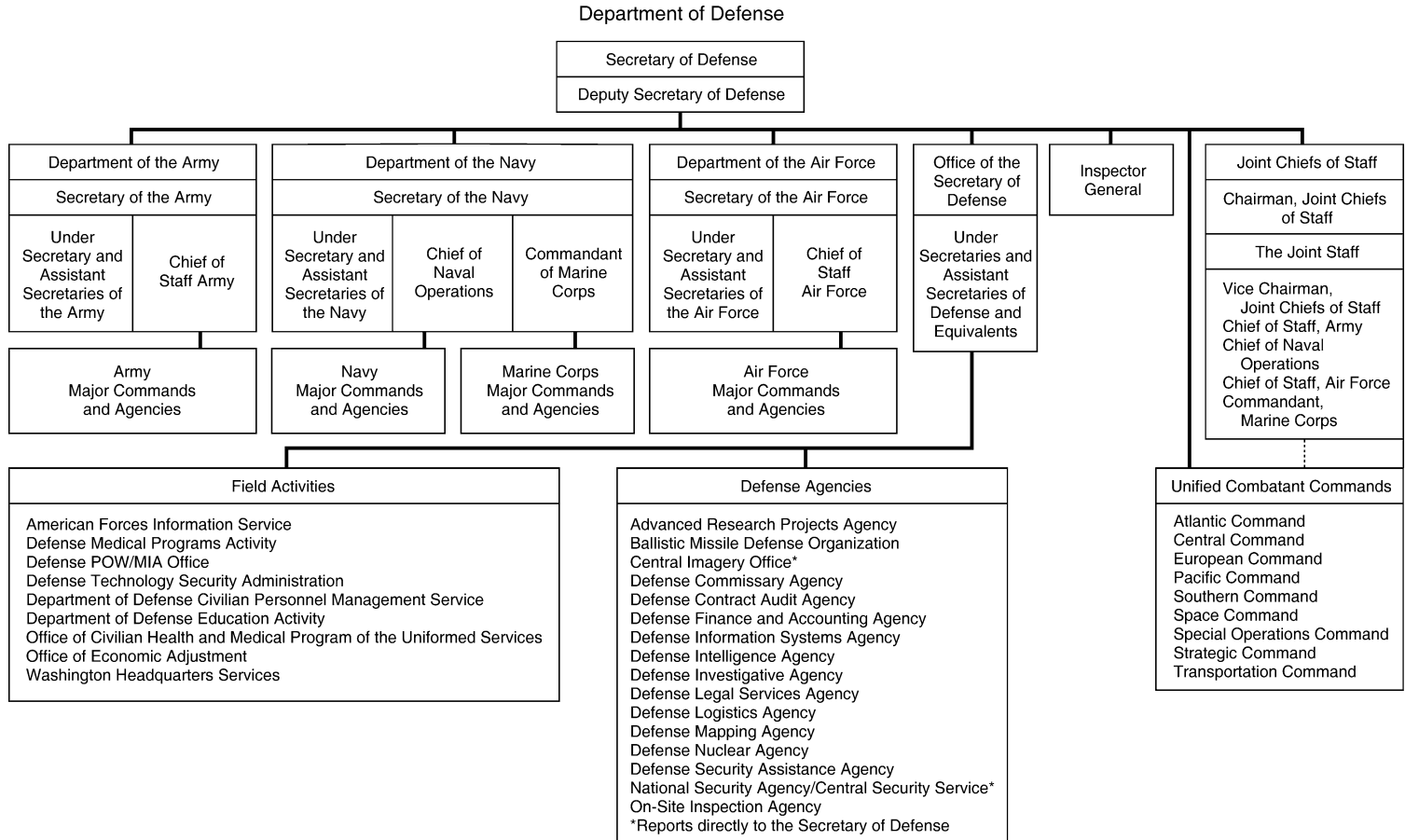
## 54 The executive branch

the political implications of bases and contracts in congressional members' districts or states. As far back as 1961, in his farewell address, President Eisenhower warned of the dangers of excessive influence by "the military industrial complex." In the succeeding forty years, fueled by the demands of the Cold War, the influence of the Pentagon in national security policy rose steadily, underpinned by the iron triangle of defense bureaucrats, defense contractors, and Congress.

In addition to the Secretary of Defense and a deputy, there are four under-secretaries and numerous assistant secretaries at the Pentagon. The most senior officer is the chair of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, although he does not formally hold any command position. The four regional commanders-in-chief (CINCs) are the real centers of operational control. The department's budget in 2002 was \$340 billion, with a further increase of \$48 billion in 2003. This marked a 20 percent increase over 2000, the final year of Clinton's term in office. The 2004 budget saw a further increase to nearly \$450 billion due to the costs of the Iraq War. The forces on active military duty total 1,370,000, but the Pentagon also employs over 700,000 civilians.

The American military is more powerful than any armed force in history. In air power the US possesses more jet bombers, more advanced fighter planes and tactical aircraft than all other nations combined. On the seas the US navy boasts twice as many combat ships as Russia and China combined and a dozen super-carrier battle groups while the rest of the world has none. Included in the super-carrier contingent are eight large and sophisticated Nimitz-class floating cities, served by nearly 6000 people and capable of launching more aircraft per minute than London's Heathrow airport. On the ground, the US not only possesses nearly 8000, highly effective, Abrams tanks (more than the combined numbers of modern tanks possessed by Russia and China) but, as both Gulf wars showed, it has the world's best trained troops. In amphibious forces, other nations have service branches called "marines" but none possess anything like the US marines – whole divisions backed by helicopter carriers, floating armor, and jump jets, capable of going ashore anywhere in the world. The US is the only nation that even maintains a standing heavy, amphibious force. In nuclear arms, there is a rough parity between the US and Russia but there are serious doubts about the state of the Russian nuclear forces. Moscow's strategic submarine fleet is in such poor repair that it rarely ventures far from port (and when it does it seems prone to accidents as witness the sinking of the *Kursk*). By contrast, several of America's Ohio-class strategic submarines are at sea at any given moment, and each carries sufficient weaponry to incinerate every major target in Russia and China. Overall, America's strategic deterrent is today stronger in relation to the rest of the world than it has been at any time since the brief American atomic monopoly in the late 1940s.

In technology, as was seen in Afghanistan and Iraq, US "smart" weapons increasingly hit their targets exactly (an improvement on the embarrassing incident of bombing the Chinese embassy in Belgrade during the Kosovo air campaign). Individual American soldiers can receive space-relayed battlefield updates, while US electronic jamming devices have grown so sophisticated that they cause false aircraft to appear on enemy screens while keeping the real ones undetected. The US has three classes of stealth aircraft already in operation, with three more close to production. No other nation even



**Figure 3.5.** Department of Defense – organizational chart  
*Source:* The United States Government Manual

has one on the drawing board. Under development are lasers for shooting down tactical missiles, pilotless fighters, and electro-magnetic rays to destroy enemy electronics.

The US possesses a vast qualitative military advantage over any other nation or group of nations in the world. While such superiority does not come cheap, the amount the US spends on its military is breathtaking. In money, American military spending is three times Russia and China's combined. Or to put it another way, the US spends twenty-three times more on defense than the combined spending of the seven countries or "rogue states" traditionally identified by the Pentagon as its most likely adversaries. In concept, the US is the world's sole military power whose primary mission is not defense. Practically the entire US military is an expeditionary force, designed not to guard American borders, but to project power elsewhere in the world. In day-to-day operations the military spans the world and the scope of its activity is staggering. The US maintains 100,000 troops in Europe, another 100,000 in East Asia and the Pacific, 25,000 in the Persian Gulf, 50,000 on rotation in Latin America and bases and fuel depots across the globe. As one defense staffer told the author, "the US is engaged across the world every day in areas most Americans cannot find on the map." Since 1945, the US has fought, and usually prevailed, in a dozen places thousands of miles from home. Even before the Soviet Union collapsed, America's military power was far ahead of the rest of the world. This relative strength has not declined in the past decade; it has steadily risen. And yet, during the 2000 presidential campaign, the Republicans painted the armed forces in a "serious state of decline" (George W. Bush speech to Veterans of Foreign Wars, 2 August 2000). Even John Kerry criticized the low levels of the armed forces in the 2004 campaign and promised a 40,000 increase in numbers.

Many criticize the armed forces for refusing to modernize. The navy insists on maintaining carrier battle groups to patrol the oceans at a time when no navy on earth is remotely capable of challenging it. The air force has been demanding the very latest in new technology to control and dominate space. The army resists low-intensity operations, such as policing in Bosnia and Kosovo, that happen to be the most frequent tasks of the post-Cold War world. As retired Admiral William Owens put it, "the most difficult obstacle to transition is the culture in which we have been raised and the bureaucracy that we have participated in building." His army colleague General William Nash agreed, arguing that "a fundamental error, both past and continuing, is that we in the US have been slow to redefine the nature of national security in the twenty-first century. The new security threats are more non-military than ever before" (*Foreign Policy*, November/ December 2001). Another critic, Fareed Zakaria, writing in *Newsweek* on 15 October 2001, was even more blunt. "For ten years now, our defense forces have been aligned for everything but the real danger we face."

As a result of the massive arms build up during the Reagan years, there was little need for much new equipment for the armed forces during the 1990s. The total size of the armed forces also declined from 2.1 million in 1989 to 1.4 million in 2001. In terms of strategic rationale, it remained US policy to be able to fight major wars in two regions simultaneously as well as maintaining a US-based force for rapid contingencies. Most scenarios were for wars in the Persian Gulf and the Korean peninsula. There are

many critics of the two-war strategy who argue that not only is it highly unlikely that the US would be engaged in two such distant theaters simultaneously but that its likely enemies possess far less and greatly inferior military equipment to that of the US. According to one staffer, this was “an inconceivable response to an implausible threat and no more than a marketing strategy for a high Pentagon budget.” Nuclear deterrence continued to be an essential part of US defense posture with both the US and Russia maintaining huge arsenals. In 2004, the US had some 7200 strategic nuclear warheads and Russia about 5800. The 1993 START II agreement calls for cuts to 3000–3500. In a statement following his talks with Russian President Putin in November 2001, President Bush said that he would like to reduce these levels further, assuming the US also proceeds with missile defense.

In a speech at Annapolis on 25 May 2001, President Bush stated that the armed forces of the future “would be defined less by size and more by mobility and swiftness.” They would rely “more heavily on stealth, precision weaponry and information technologies.” Advances in defense technology must be used “to keep the peace by redefining war on our terms.” The President tasked Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, to undertake a major policy review with the aim of modernizing the armed forces and preparing them for the tasks of the twenty-first century. Rumsfeld set up over twenty panels to provide input into the defense review. He deliberately excluded the interest groups that usually make defense policy – congressional committees, service chiefs, and contractors – from his deliberations. This helped to shield him from those defending the status quo but also left him few friends to support proposals for radical change. As one staffer commented to the author, “Rumsfeld cannot alter the fact that in arms procurement, the Pentagon proposes and the Congress disposes.” The initial drafts of his review met significant opposition from military leaders and their allies in Congress who were concerned at the implications of radical changes. It was widely reported that Rumsfeld intended to abandon the two-major-theater-war scenario as the basis for force planning, shift forces from Europe to Asia, reduce forward deployed forces, and reduce overall force levels, in particular, the army.

The Rumsfeld defense review was put on hold in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks. Congress was not in the mood for changes but seemed determined to throw more money at the Pentagon in the expectation that military might alone be

**Table 3.2.** Comparison of defense spending

<i>Country</i>	<i>Defense spending</i>	<i>Percent of global total</i>	<i>Percent of GDP (billions of dollars)</i>
US	452	3.9	35
Russia	58	5.1	6.9
Japan	42	0.9	5.1
China	41	5.4	4.9
France	38	2.7	4.6
UK	37	2.6	4.5
Germany	32	1.6	3.8

*Source:* IISS Military Balance, 2004

able to somehow defeat the terrorist threat. There was no discussion of the wider aspects of security policy, including what would be the best approaches, besides the military, to tackle these threats. The Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR), released on 30 September 2001, made only minor changes to existing strategy. The size of the armed forces would remain constant but portions would be reconfigured to combat asymmetrical threats. It recast the two-major-war scenarios into a new concept which envisages having sufficient force capabilities to defend the US, and, second, the ability to fight two contingencies at the same time. Force planning should also be based on current peacekeeping commitments and other global requirements that in practice have proved as demanding as a major theater war. The QDR emphasized the need for the US military to transform itself in order to concentrate on “protecting the US base of operations on tactical, operational and strategic levels; information operations; power projection capabilities; space operations; and leveraging information technology.” The commitment to cooperate with allies in improving regional defense was emphasized although the review did not question the Pentagon’s own regional command structure. In light of the war against Afghanistan, and global terrorism, Rumsfeld was keen to promote unified joint regional commands with rapid reaction forces being a top priority. (The QDR is available at [www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr2001.pdf](http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/qdr2001.pdf))

The war against terrorism and in particular the Iraq War may also signal the end of the “Powell Doctrine” – the idea that forces should only be committed where they can be used decisively and with overwhelming superiority to accomplish clearly defined goals. The administration’s mission to defeat global terrorism has never been defined precisely. Indeed the commitment to an ongoing, perhaps unending, campaign implies a willingness to engage in a long series of difficult engagements with no guarantee of success, a view of the role of military forces that is quite alien to US military leaders. In the summer of 2004 the President announced that the US would bring home some 70,000 troops stationed in Germany, South Korea and Japan. This was partly a recognition that these countries no longer faced conventional threats and partly to ensure that the US had sufficient troops for a lengthy engagement in Iraq.

While the US military was highly capable of combat operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, post-combat operations in both countries have exposed the reality that US forces are less well trained and prepared for long-term occupation, security and post-war reconstruction tasks, especially in a hostile setting. The defects exposed in Iraq and Afghanistan have raised serious questions about the government’s civil–military planning capabilities. Post-war reconstruction in Iraq has also called into question the Pentagon’s privatization agenda. A broad range of services, from security to catering to reconstruction projects, have been contracted out, leading to a blurring of the line between core and non-core military functions.

Apart from its seat on the NSC, the Pentagon also plays an important role in US external relations through its foreign bases, its training and assistance programs, and its regional military commanders, or CINCs. The CINCs are a quartet of high-ranking military leaders responsible for managing US military operations in distinct regions of the world: Central, European, Southern, and Pacific. The war against the Taliban regime in Afghanistan was masterminded from Central Command headquarters in

Tampa, Florida. Since their inception in 1986, these command posts have continually gained power and influence within the US foreign policy decision-making process. For example, after the Pakistani army's coup in 2000, the new Pakistani President, General Musharraf, decided to respond to the US criticism by calling General Anthony C. Zinni (the then Central Commander – and later Middle East envoy under Powell) instead of any other administration official. This highlights the active US foreign policy role that these semi-autonomous military commanders play in their respective regions of the world. As one observer notes, “with little oversight, the CINCs have evolved into the modern-day equivalent of the Roman Empire's pro-consuls – well-funded, semi-autonomous, unconventional actors of foreign policy” (*Washington Post*, 28 September 2000).

The massive budgets administered by the CINCs increase their impact on US foreign policy. These budgets have expanded throughout the past decade without congressional scrutiny, while the budget of the State Department has been significantly reduced. The four CINCs combined sustain a budget of \$380 million a year, double their budget appropriations at the end of the Cold War, allowing them to host international conferences, maintain large staffs, travel extensively and maintain round-the-clock intelligence centers. Three CINCs have staffs as large as the executive office of the President. More people, about 1100, work at the smallest CINC headquarters, the US Southern Command, than the total assigned to the Americas at the NSC, State, Commerce, Treasury and Agriculture departments.

The CINCs command considerable respect in their regions and have an important input into US foreign policy. But their philosophies on building alliances abroad, developed over long military careers, sometimes clash with civilian views. The most pronounced differences involve how to treat foreign militaries that commit human rights abuses. The administration and Congress routinely press for stopping arms sales and military assistance to countries that violate human rights, e.g. Guatemala, Colombia, Pakistan, Nigeria, and Indonesia. But the CINCs and the Pentagon nearly always advocate using continued engagement to induce change. In Bosnia and Kosovo, General Wesley Clark used the autonomy and resources that have devolved to the CINCs to push NATO troops toward an anti-corruption and a nation-building role often opposed by the Pentagon (Clark 2001; Halberstam 2001). Clark was not rewarded for his efforts, being forced into early retirement shortly after the conclusion of the Kosovo campaign. In the wake of the Afghanistan conflict and the worldwide war on terrorism there was renewed discussion as to whether the autonomous CINCs' command structure was best suited to a global campaign.

The increased role of the CINCs has also been criticized within the military. According to General Nash, “the evolution of the CINCs to pro-consuls is a dangerous trend, both in terms of the image of our democracy, and our larger national security.” His naval colleague, Admiral Owens, agreed.

If you are in China and you ask who is the most important American in the Pacific, the answer is certainly CINC-PAC. As Americans we have to ask whether we want to be represented to our friends and adversaries by a senior four-star officer.

(*Foreign Policy*, November/December 2001)

## 60 The executive branch

From this brief review, it can be seen that the US possesses a huge, well-trained, well-supplied, well-supported fighting machine capable of meeting almost any military task it is required to perform. Until Iraq, American leaders have been careful, however, to avoid sending troops into a situation that could lead to a repetition of the Vietnam War scenario. In the post-Cold War world, American forces have been used regularly but for limited purposes. They have either dropped bombs on the enemy from a great height or, with the exception of the Gulf War, confronted small groups of militia on the ground. The Iraqi army scarcely put up any resistance to the US invasion in March 2003. Total American casualties in Iraq up to the end of 2004 were just over one thousand, a politically acceptable number. There were some, particularly in the Islamic world, who argued that the US was a paper tiger as it was so reluctant to take casualties. This argument lost much of its resonance after the American response to the 11 September terrorist attacks. There are also some who argue that America suffers from imperial over-stretch, rather like Britain in the inter-war years. There are too few troops to do the jobs demanded of them. There was certainly much criticism of Donald Rumsfeld for failing to foresee that the US would need a much bigger force to keep the peace in Iraq after the fall of Baghdad. But in the absence of the two-theater war becoming a reality, this assertion is impossible to prove or disprove. One can conclude with some certainty that there are few powers if any likely to be ready, willing, and able to confront the US militarily over the next two decades.

### **The intelligence community**

The US has the largest intelligence apparatus in the world with the 15 different agencies making round-the-clock input into the formulation of US foreign policy. The Director of the CIA is simultaneously director of the intelligence community, of which the CIA is but one component. In 2003–4 the intelligence community was widely criticized for its failure to provide accurate intelligence on whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. As a result, the CIA director, George Tenet, resigned in the summer of 2004, to be replaced by Porter J. Goss, a former CIA official and member of the house of representatives.

The intelligence community really began to grow in the early years of the Cold War when the all-consuming effort to defeat communism led to huge resources being devoted to intelligence efforts. It is inevitably difficult to provide an assessment of the effectiveness of these efforts. Scandals often appear in the media but the successes usually go unsung. Some of the more publicized scandals involved the CIA's role in the abortive 1961 Bay of Pigs operation in Cuba, the ousting of socialist President Allende in Chile in 1973, and the violation of US laws in supporting illegally the Contras in Nicaragua (see the 1976 report on the CIA by Senator Frank Church). According to Robert Gates, a former CIA director, the intelligence community did enjoy considerable success during the Cold War although there were also serious lapses of judgment, including the overstatement of Soviet military and economic strength (Andrew 1995).

Oversight of the intelligence community is exercised by the NSC and the President's foreign intelligence advisory board (PFIAB). There are also two congressional oversight

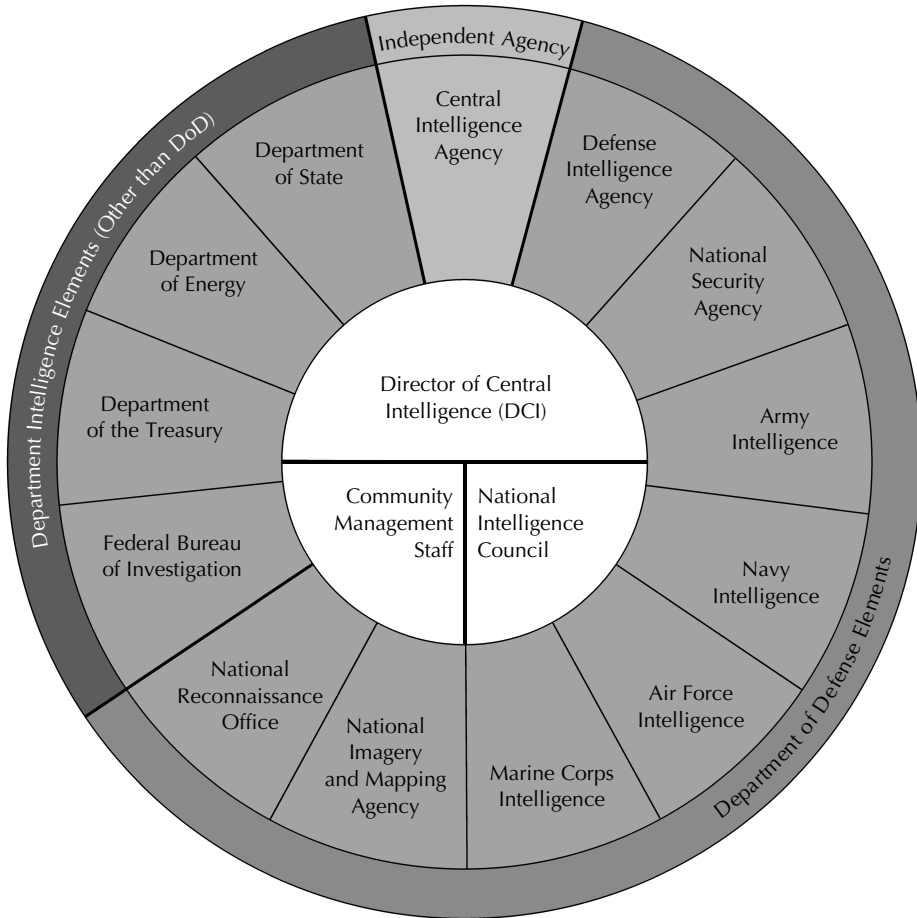
committees that have a remit to review operations and the Senate must approve the director of intelligence. The vast budget of the intelligence community (generally estimated at \$32 billion in 2004) is largely hidden in the budget of the Pentagon. Most of the budget is spent by the national reconnaissance office on spy satellites that provide photographic imagery and by the national security agency which is responsible for electronic surveillance of all communications. There have been charges in the European Parliament (Echelon report of September 2001) that the NSA also spies on allies and that electronic spying alone cannot supply the US with the intelligence it needs to combat terrorism (Bamford 2001).

The CIA is certainly the most famous or infamous part of the intelligence community, mainly because of its association with “dirty tricks,” including numerous plots to assassinate the Cuban leader, Fidel Castro. Covert operations, however, are only a small part of the CIA’s remit. By far the largest task is the collation and analysis of intelligence from all sources. The ties between the CIA and the White House vary from administration to administration and generally reflect the importance that each President places on the agency’s reports. There was considerable anxiety at the CIA when stories circulated early in the Clinton administration that the new President had little interest in intelligence, though that did not turn out to be true. Under George W. Bush, the agency’s access to the White House increased markedly. (CIA headquarters was renamed the George H. W. Bush Center for Intelligence in 1998 in honor of the former President, who was an ex-director of the agency.)

In a television debate in September 2000, two former CIA directors reflected on the relations between the CIA and the White House. According to Gates, “the relationship between the President and the CIA director, if close, can assist enormously in the creation of foreign policy.” Gates said he met with the President once or twice a week “if there was something I ought to talk to him about.” The best part about meeting face-to-face with the President was to get instantaneous feedback on what his agenda was. “He asked questions and we would get answers to him, and thus had a direct dialogue with the President that is most often missing in the normal daily mix of things.” Under Clinton intelligence briefings became more haphazard. Making things worse was the President’s poor relationship with James Woolsey, a Washington lawyer whom Clinton had never met before he named him agency director. Woolsey admitted that he saw the President very rarely, except at NSC meetings, and only had two semi-private meetings in two years.

According to one American diplomat, Presidents often attach too much importance to intelligence reports simply because of the way the material is presented. Documents stamped “top secret” and full of code words can give a false sense of importance to the material. Intelligence can thus play a greater role in the President’s mind than normal diplomatic reporting. Gates also considers that most Presidents have exaggerated expectations of intelligence.

Presidents expect that, for what they spend on intelligence, the product should be able to predict coups, upheavals, riots, intentions, military moves and the like with accuracy. Presidents and their national security teams usually are ill-informed



**Figure 3.6.** Members of the intelligence community

about intelligence capabilities; therefore they often have unrealistic expectations of what intelligence can do for them, especially when they hear about the genuinely extraordinary capabilities of US intelligence for collecting and processing information.

(Andrew 1995: 2)

Gates also alleged that “most Presidents often attach as much – if not more – credibility to the views of family, friends, and private contacts as they do to executive agencies, including the intelligence community” (Andrew 1995: 5). There was considerable criticism of the intelligence community following the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. But the defenders of the intelligence community responded that the CIA had become a very defensive bureaucracy in light of its experience of the White House failing to support it if things went wrong. Furthermore, Congress had passed

legislation in the 1980s that forbade the CIA to recruit unsavory characters who had criminal records. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks there was a relaxation on many restrictions placed on the CIA and an increased budget for the intelligence community.

Perhaps the biggest intelligence failure in modern times was over Iraq. The CIA was heavily criticized for its wrong assessment that Iraq possessed WMD, a central argument in the US case for the invasion of that country. The CIA also admitted that it did not have a single agent in Iraq. The CIA chief, George Tenet, resigned just before publication of the report by the Commission investigating 9/11. The report said that 9/11 was a shock but should not have been a surprise. There was considerable evidence that Al Qaeda had been planning such an attack for several years. Across the government, however, “there were failures of imagination, policy, capabilities and management.” Terrorism had not been the overriding national security concern of the Clinton or pre-9/11 Bush administrations. The US had not updated its capabilities to tackle threats from Al Qaeda and was poor at pooling intelligence. The report pointed to too many priorities, outmoded structures and bureaucratic rivalries. It condemned the fact that there was no national intelligence estimate on terrorism between 1995 and 9/11. The report then stated that US policy should have two ends: dismantling the Al Qaeda network and, in the longer term, prevailing over the ideology that contributes to Islamic terrorism. The Commission concluded by calling for a thorough overhaul of the intelligence agencies, more resources, the establishment of a national counter-terrorism center and the creation of a new post of National Intelligence Director as a sub-cabinet post separate from CIA. It emphasized the need for information sharing rather than “the right to know” and the importance of congressional oversight. (<http://www.9-11commission.gov/>). In April 2005 Bush appointed John Negroponte as the first Director of National Intelligence

A further Senate committee report criticized the CIA and the other intelligence agencies for “group think.” They all assumed that Saddam Hussein had a WMD program and never stopped to consider alternative scenarios. To do so would have been considered heresy which is why Hans Blix, the chief UN weapons inspector, accused America of posting “faith-based intelligence.” Although both reports were well received, many CIA staff were angered that the White House later attempted to misuse the intelligence provided on Iraq and blamed the CIA for the intelligence failure. One anonymous officer wrote a devastating critique, *Imperial Hubris*, that claimed the war on Iraq was a major digression from the war on terrorism.

The 9/11 Commission’s recommendations were largely accepted by the Congress but in late 2004 both the Senate and the House put forward rival bills that proved difficult to reconcile. Donald Rumsfeld was accused of lobbying to block the proposal to create an intelligence supremo that would direct Pentagon resources. It seemed the wrangle over intelligence structures and budgets would continue into 2005. The focus on terrorism also made the administration aware of the importance of the CIA and FBI’s collaboration with foreign intelligence and security organizations. Despite its intelligence superpower status, the US was painfully aware that it was dependent on other countries for assistance.

## Department of Homeland Security

In June 2002, President Bush established a new cabinet-level Department of Homeland Security, headed by his old friend, Pennsylvania Governor Tom Ridge. The new department meant a radical shake-up of the Washington bureaucracy as it took over 22 agencies that had previously been located in other federal departments. It also took over some 170,000 staff and had a budget of nearly \$40 billion. Its main tasks were border and transportation security, emergency preparedness, chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear countermeasures, and information analysis and infrastructure protection. The new department was also given responsibility for the immigration and naturalization service, the customs service and the coastguard. As it expanded it also took over shared responsibility for cooperation with US allies in protection against terrorism. But inevitably this led it into turf battles with the FBI and CIA. In February 2005 Bush appointed Michael Chertoff as successor to Ridge.

## Conclusion

In the post-Cold War world, there are an increasing number of foreign policy actors involved in the executive branch. As foreign policy has become more of a political football, the President has come to depend more and more on his closest advisers in the White House and NSC. The NSC, operating under the direct authority of the President, has steadily increased its authority in recent years and the national security adviser has become the key figure in the US foreign policy machine. Other executive branch actors, including the State Department, have seen their influence decline, although much depends on the personalities holding these positions and their relationship to the President. There are inevitably ongoing rivalries between the national security adviser and the Secretary of State, between the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Defense. It takes a skillful President to ensure that these powerful figures work together as a team rather than pull in opposite directions. The defense and intelligence agencies received more money from Congress following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 and some organizational changes were made. It is likely that their influence will increase as the US continues the war on terrorism. The Pentagon for example assumed responsibility for the reconstruction of Iraq. Despite their central failure on WMD in Iraq, the intelligence agencies were also given substantially more resources. Since the end of the Cold War, Congress has increasingly challenged the White House in foreign policy especially when the incumbent is from a different political party. It is important to examine what powers Congress has in foreign policy and how it uses them.

## Selected further reading

Presidential authority is discussed in Neustadt (1990) *Presidential Power and the Modern Presidents*. Shoemaker (1992) examines the role of the NSC in *The NSC Staff*. Kegley and Wittkopf (1996) *American Foreign Policy* provides a comprehensive overview of the

making of US foreign policy. Rubin (1985) examines the struggle the State Department has to exert itself as a major player in *Secrets of State*. Proposals to reform the State Department are covered in *The Foreign Service in 2001* (Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University, 1992); Eagleburger and Barry, "Dollars and sense diplomacy: a better foreign policy for less money," *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 1996. The *Foreign Service Journal*, for State Department officials, provides a forum for debating changes in the department ([www.afsa.org](http://www.afsa.org)). Destler, Gelb, and Lake (1984) *Our Own Worst Enemy* examines the infighting between State and the NSC. There are also interesting details about the State Department in the memoirs of Baker (1995), Christopher (1998), Albright (2003) and Dobbs's (1999) biography of Madeleine Albright. The role of technology and its impact on the armed forces is discussed in Michael O'Hanlon's (2000) *Technological Change and the Future of Warfare*. The intelligence agencies are well covered in Kessler (1992) *Inside the CIA*, Andrew (1995) *For the President's Eyes Only* and Bamford (2001) *Body of Secrets*. The 9/11 Commission report also provides a vast amount of detail on the intelligence agencies.

All US government agencies have their own websites. The White House and NSC can be accessed at [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov); the State Department at [www.state.gov](http://www.state.gov); the Pentagon at [www.defenselink.mil](http://www.defenselink.mil); the CIA at [www.cia.org](http://www.cia.org); the FBI at [www.fbi.gov](http://www.fbi.gov) and the Department of Homeland Security at [www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/theme\\_home1.jsp](http://www.dhs.gov/dhspublic/theme_home1.jsp).