The National Security Advisor and the Secretary of State in the Obama Administration: Thomas Donilon and Hillary Clinton

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Abstract
This article analyzes the relative influence of National Security Advisor Thomas Donilon and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton in the Obama administration. Specifically, using national security advisor typologies and the bureaucratic politics model, the article argues that although Donilon entered the president’s inner circle, Clinton turned out to be a relatively powerful actor, not least in the 2011 Libya intervention. Examining how advisors interact with one another, their status in the advisory group, and the manner in which presidents solicit information from advisors will further our understanding of how, when, and under what conditions national security-level leaders make decisions.

Introduction
The secretary of state and the assistant to the president for national security affairs (APNSA) are two of the most significant individual members of the U.S. foreign policymaking community. Some presidents have favored a system in which the State Department is placed in the leading role, others one in which the NSA dominates. Some presidents have, for example, chosen to work through a strong secretary of state (as Dwight Eisenhower did with John Dulles), others have relied exclusively on the NSA (as Richard Nixon did with Henry Kissinger). President Jimmy Carter preferred a middle course, in which the secretary of state and the NSA competed for control of foreign policy. There is a strong contrast between fluctuations in relative authority between these positions, but a larger historical trend involves the movement of authority from the State Department to the National Security Council (NSC), and especially to the NSA (Dumbrell). Presidents tend to enter office with a declared commitment to a strong State Department and a strong secretary; often, however, this commitment breaks down (Mulcahy). Hence, the NSA has become one of the major principals in some administrations, wielding significant power, sometimes even more than cabinet secretaries. This rise in prestige and influence has also created a discussion surrounding the fact that the position is unchecked by Congress.

1. The APNSA is more commonly referred to as the national security advisor (NSA). The acronym NSA is used henceforth in this study.
2. Because Congress does not confirm the national security advisor and has no oversight, it cannot call the advisor to testify. Presidents can use their executive privilege to prevent their NSA from testifying. See Destler, “How.”
This development became evident during former President Barack Obama’s first tenure because he concentrated power in the White House rather than delegating it to his cabinet secretaries (Pfiffner). However, Obama’s first NSA, James Jones, would become one of the weakest and most isolated NSAs since the creation of the NSC in 1947 (Marsh, “Contemporary Presidency”). After Jones’s resignation, Deputy NSA Thomas Donilon became the new NSA, a choice Robert Gates, at that time the secretary of defense, said would be a “disaster” (Woodward 343). At the same time, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton served as one of the more important foreign policy actors in the first term of the Obama presidency, contradicting the predictions of some commentators who expected her to be overshadowed by Jones and other heavyweight actors including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates and Vice President Joseph Biden. Clinton was, for example, a key participant in several of the administration’s central foreign policy decisions, including the 2009 troop surge decision to Afghanistan (Marsh, “Obama’s Surge”).

This article argues that the relative foreign policy influence of Obama’s second NSA, Donilon, and his first secretary of state, Hillary Clinton, provides scholars of U.S. foreign policy with a valuable opportunity to continue the study of two of the more prominent and influential positions within the U.S. foreign policymaking community. Accordingly, the balance of power competition between Obama’s diplomatic chief and his chief White House advisor for national security affairs will be carefully examined to achieve a comprehensive and descriptively accurate conception of the U.S. foreign policymaking process.

A number of scholars have examined the role of the NSA and NSC in order to develop a greater understanding of the U.S. foreign policy decision-making process (Destler, “National Security Advice”; Mulcahy; Bock; Brzezinski; Moe; Best; Inderfurth and Johnson; Burke, “Neutral/Honest”; Rothkopf, Running the World; Daalder and Destler). These studies show that the NSC staff’s power and size have grown tremendously over time and that this expansion has resulted in its members, especially the NSA, having greater responsibility in U.S. foreign policymaking. Other scholars have attempted to categorize different NSAs and determine the role they played in their respective administrations (Moe; Daalder and Destler). Various case studies have also applied typologies and models of NSC advisor roles to individual NSAs (Mulcahy; Burke, “Neutral/Honest”; Burke, Institutional Presidency). Regarding the secretary of state, scholars employing the bureaucratic politics model (BPM) have analyzed the secretary’s role and policy preferences in key decisions in U.S. foreign policy (Allison and Zelikow; S. Smith; Hicks; Holland; Zhang; Marsh, “Intersection of War”; Marsh, “Obama Surge”). However, research on the role of individual secretaries of state in the foreign policymaking processes of specific administrations is rather limited (Dumbrell; Larres; Marsh and Jones).
The argument put forth here is that, although the characteristics and possible roles of advisors have been extensively analyzed, few studies have focused on the balance of power between the White House and the State Department and that the question of why some NSAs and secretaries are more powerful than others remains largely unexamined from a formal political science perspective. In particular, the tenures of Donilon as NSA and Clinton as secretary of state have been subjected to limited scientific analysis, leaving an important research gap for foreign policy analysis.

As a theoretical foundation for evaluating the NSA and the secretary of state, this article draws on both NSA and BPM literature. In so doing, it puts a specific focus on one of the signature foreign policy decisions of Obama’s first tenure: the decision to order U.S. military forces to launch Operation Odyssey Dawn (OOD) against Libyan military targets in 2011. The Libya intervention is a highly visible, relevant, and useful illustrative case for developing a more textured understanding of the Obama administration’s foreign policymaking process. The decision received widespread media coverage, revealing the key players and their associated policy preferences, as well as the highly political nature of the debate. The decision-making process was marked by internal divisions, bureaucratic inertia and read by some commentators as a sign of the scattershot decision-making process within President Obama’s foreign-policy apparatus. The idea of military action in Libya was also met with reluctance in Congress and low backing from the American public. This backdrop suggests that an analysis of Donilon and Clinton based on NSA and BPM models offers a promising avenue to examine the context, background, and nature of the decision to use force against Libya.

A variety of explanations have been offered for the Libya intervention, including the viability of NATO, humanitarian interventions, and international law. Additional studies have focused on questions of OOD’s constitutionality and ramifications for presidential war powers (Barry; B. Jones; Hendrickson; Chivvis). Studies focusing on the influence and relative power of the NSA and secretary of state are, however, few. In attempting to assess the balance of power between two of Obama’s most central advisors, this article focuses on two aspects of traditional U.S. foreign policymaking literature. First, drawing on NSA literature, it evaluates the extent to which President Obama’s managerial style and the personal advisory relationship with the president influenced the relative power of the NSA and secretary of state in the administration. Second, drawing on the BPM model, it analyzes the extent to which President Obama’s decision to attack Libya was influenced by the NSA and the secretary of state. In order to assess the relative power of the NSA and the secretary of state, the study asks the following questions:

1. Did the presidential managerial style benefit the NSA and/or the secretary of state?
2. Was the personal advisory relationship with the president favorable for the NSA and/or the secretary of state?

3. Did bureaucratic interests influence the policy preferences of the NSA and the secretary of state in the case of Libya, and if so, how?

Because the Obama administration left office, the records that would be needed to answer these questions conclusively will be classified. The sources available are public documents such as speeches, press conferences, press releases, memoirs, and opinion polls. Even with these constraints, the available sources presented as data in this article are sufficient to draw meaningful conclusions. This article proceeds as follows: in the next section, the key elements and propositions of the NSA and BPM analytical categories are introduced. The second section contains the evaluation of the propositions through primary and secondary sources. Finally, the primary arguments of the study are summarized, and further research possibilities are introduced.

**The NSA and the Secretary of State in U.S. Foreign Policymaking**

There is little statutory or legal constraint (beyond budgetary limits) in how the role of NSA advisor is defined or how the NSC staff is organized and operates. Beyond different roles and models of the NSA, the NSA literature identifies three factors that explain variations in the power of the NSA: the power of the presidency, the management style of the president, and the personal relationship between the president and the NSA (Greenstein; Samuel; Haney; Burke, “Neutral/Honest”). This study will draw primarily on the latter two factors, as they are the most influential in the decision-making process. As emphasized by I.M. Destler, “to be effective, an NSA must be personally close to the president and in sync with his operating style” (“Donilon”).

Thus, the president’s managerial style will influence how the president, NSA, and secretary of state relate to each other: the degree to which they communicate, how much they confide in one another, and who they involve in the decision-making process (Daalder and Destler). For example, the president’s managerial preference may be to delegate power to his cabinet; this may result in a weaker NSA and a stronger secretary of state. Alternatively, the president may prefer to concentrate power in the White House, which may result in a weaker secretary of state. Managerial style, therefore, represents an important explanation for the amount of power an NSA and/or a secretary of state can attain. In other words, choice and presidential preference matter, and different presidents’ different managerial styles will affect how much power they give to their cabinet secretaries and especially to their NSA. This factor will be assessed by analyzing indicators such as who acted as the public spokesman for U.S. foreign policy, whether or not Obama centralized the decision-making and reduced the influence of the State Depart-
ment, and whether the NSA coordinated the interagency process and acted as foreign policy counsellor to the president.

Second, the NSA is in a particularly important position and proximity to the Oval Office, which makes him or her a daily barometer of presidential inclination and intention. The need for “fit” appears especially important. The personal relationship model views the power of the NSA in the context of his or her personal relationship with the president (Bock). Given how important trust is in the decision-making process, this model argues that the president will give more authority and autonomy to the NSA if he trusts his advisor. Trust is an important determinant of power, and it is assumed here that the stronger the trust and personal relationship between the president and the NSA, the more powerful the NSA. This model predicts that advisors who already have strong relationships with the president will have the most power. Indicators of trust and closeness to the president include a close advisory relationship with the president and the NSA, and whether the NSA enters the president’s circle of trusted political aides (Daalder and Destler).

Moreover, many of the procedural problems faced by secretaries derive from their lack of proximity to the president. Closeness to the president is not as necessary for the secretary of state as it is for the NSA. The NSA is usually much closer to the president, in terms of being more intimately tied into the president’s immediate political interests and fortunes. To determine the personal advisory relationship between the secretary of state and the president, this study draws on Halperin and Clapp’s conception of how actors (secretaries) become influential by gaining the support of the president. They described this as “a participant who has the president’s ear quickly acquires a reputation for being able to win” (Halperin and Clapp 35-37).

Finally, the traditional bureaucratic politics literature introduces the concept of bureaucratic role, role position, and organizational mission and essence into the calculus of decision-making. Actors can be expected to favor policy options that fulfill their bureaucratic role and enhance their power (stand-sit proposition). Thus, the mission of bureaucratic actors is to pursue and realize the interests of their organization (Allison and Zelikow). The bureaucratic politics literature treats the secretary of state and other cabinet officials as department managers, who are predicted to support policies enhancing the role, capabilities, and influence of their associated bureaucratic unit. According to this analysis, actors’ policy positions are determined largely, but not exclusively, by their positions within government and associated bureaucratic role (Allison and Zelikow; C. Jones).

Political competition is crucial to bureaucratic politics and government decisions are the products of “pulling and hauling” between actors (bargaining proposition). Bureaucratic actors that are involved in the
bargaining processes not only differ concerning their policy preferences but also with respect to power. In the BPM, power comprises three elements: the advantages of actors in bargaining processes, an actor’s desire and ability to use these advantages, and the other players’ perceptions of those elements. Thus, power is inherent in bureaucratic position and determines what an actor can and must do. While players assume preferences and adopt stands based on “parochial priorities and perceptions,” each player’s impact on results will be a function of relative bargaining power among the players. The decision-making process will be aggregated politically through such means as bargaining, coalition building, and compromise. The BPM thus argues that players adopt stands and agendas based on parochial priorities and perceptions; policy outcomes reflect these parochial concerns and players’ relative power, the nature of action channels, and the rules of the game (Allison and Zelikow 1).

Against this backdrop, the NSC is expected to seek flexibility and political protection for the president. The NSC’s bureaucratic role dictates that it seek to develop multiple policy options, provide advice and information to the president, and manage the interagency process. The NSC and, by extension, the NSA also have a bureaucratic interest in preserving flexibility for the president and ensuring that his or her foreign policy preferences are implemented (Marsh, “Intersection of War”).

The State Department coordinates and directs the civilian diplomacy of the United States and works with ambassadors to implement diplomacy and provide advice and recommendations to the president on foreign policy issues (Halperin and Clapp 35-37). The secretary of state, the most prominent diplomat in the U.S. government, represents the United States abroad and represents the administration in meetings with foreign officials. Secretaries of state are presumed to support diplomacy, nation-building, multilateralism, and other policy options which will enhance the role and influence of the State Department in foreign policy. In this role, secretaries of state are expected not to be proponents of the use of force, as this usually directs greater control of foreign policy to the department’s rival, the Department of Defense (Marsh, “Intersection of War” 418). However, this prediction does not preclude the secretary of state from ever supporting military action, nor should it be construed to presuppose that secretaries of state will always support diplomatic options.

**President Obama’s NSC**

Presidents are given a tremendous amount of autonomy when structuring their administration at the outset of their first term in office. They decide whether or not to concentrate power in the White House or create a cabinet-style government. Thus, as noted above, presidents can choose to have a powerful NSA or can place responsibility for foreign policymaking on their secretary of state.
At the start, President Obama wanted to install an NSC that was larger and more powerful than that of his predecessor, George W. Bush. He announced the structure of his NSC in Presidential Policy Directive (PPD)-1, issued on February 13, 2009 (Obama, “Presidential Policy Directive”). Obama also wanted to extend the scope of the issues under the purview of the NSC to include energy security, cyber security, and homeland security (Hsu). Obama later announced, on May 26, 2009, that he would merge the Homeland Security Council and NSC and increase the number of personnel at the NSC to 240. The NSA would be accountable for shaping the agenda, ensuring that necessary papers were prepared, and recording NSC actions and presidential decisions in a timely manner. The NSA was also tasked with chairing and determining the agenda of the influential NSC Principal’s Committee (the committee consisting of the cabinet secretaries on the NSC and equivalent heads of agencies) as well as the Deputies’ Committee (Obama, “Presidential Policy Directive”).

As in many previous administrations, the character of President Obama’s NSC varied widely. It started out as an organization of limited influence under NSA James Jones. Jones tried to create an honest-broker, bottom-up organization, but like Kennedy, Obama wanted to rely on trusted advisors independent of the formal NSC process. Jones never gained Obama’s trust, and, like Truman and Kennedy, Obama initially downgraded the formal role of the NSC, relying heavily on insider advisors like Vice President Joseph Biden and Valerie Jarrett (Holmes).

President Obama relied on his inner circle in the White House because he wanted to control power and decision-making, “enabling him to make the ultimate decisions” (Mann 82). The concentration of power within this inner circle took power away from his cabinet secretaries and NSA. D.C. veterans, who had lived through many presidential administrations, “compared (the Obama administration) to the Nixon days where everybody knew that that’s where foreign policy is being made and the president himself was a big decision maker” (Saba 46).

**Donilon, Clinton, and President Obama’s Managerial Style**

From the start, there was a consensus that Donilon’s bureaucratic skills, management style, and access to the president would be an advantage. Most importantly, he was, according to President Obama, “one of my closest advisers” (qtd. in Destler, “Donilon”). When he became NSA on October 8, 2010, the NSC process was upgraded and became more formalized. Obama found that an inadequately strong NSA and too much informality did not necessarily serve his interests. Once Obama had an NSA he trusted in place, he was willing to give him more authority (Mann).

The Donilon NSC became a changed institution with the departure of Jones. Donilon would get things done in the manner the president
wanted. Indeed, Donilon was described as “the most powerful man in the White House whose name isn’t widely known” (Luce and Dombey 11). Obama, however, made up for his own lack of prior foreign policy experience by both picking very experienced advisors and by insisting upon a rigorous process. Decisions were made promptly, and cabinet members knew that Donilon had the ear of the president and could get responses in real time. Donilon prepared the president’s daily briefing, advised Obama on a wide array of foreign policy and national security issues, and chaired the interagency and deputies’ committees at the NSC (Baker, “A Manager”). However, Donilon operated mostly behind the scenes, avoiding the role of public spokesman for the administration that past NSAs had played. In his first two years on the job, Donilon seldom gave speeches or appeared on Sunday talk shows. Donilon was “a master of process, enforcing order and structure for a president who deeply values both and is very devoted to a rigorous process” (Nicholas and Parson).

Donilon’s rise to NSA reflected Obama’s wish to maintain personal control over foreign strategy. Rather than rely on architects with a worldview worked out through years of study and research, Obama wanted an NSA who would execute the president’s vision, that is, someone willing to work to achieve Obama’s goals (DeYoung). Donilon has acknowledged that the model and structure of the NSC under former president George H.W. Bush’s NSA Brent Scowcroft, including staff organization, principals’ meetings, deputies’ meetings, and working group meetings, was a source for much of the initial organization of the Obama team (Rothkopf, “The President”).

Regarding the secretary of state, Clinton directly addressed how she viewed her role as secretary of state in a 2009 interview: “I consider myself the president’s chief foreign policy adviser, the country’s chief diplomat, and the State Department’s chief executive. That’s how I see my role, and I’m working in all three of those areas” (Kessler). As noted above, however, many important foreign policy issues were handled by the White House during Clinton’s tenure (Gordon and Landler A1). Nonetheless, Clinton had maneuvered herself into a central role within the administration’s foreign policymaking (Baker, “Inside the Situation Room” A1; Woodward 254). At the start a serious political rival of the president, Clinton developed an obviously powerful position within the administration because she represented a large sector of the Democratic Party that Obama was unwilling to provoke (Woodward 254).

Clinton was particularly active as a diplomat; she visited more than 100 countries during her tenure and is the most well-traveled secretary of state in history (Ghattas). She also served as an important spokesperson for Obama’s foreign policy, giving multiple major foreign policy addresses during her travels and repeatedly testifying before Congress in support of administration initiatives, including the Afghanistan surge and Libya intervention. In addition, Clinton regularly advocated for
the administration’s foreign policy positions on various media outlets (CNN). Clinton’s commitment to the role of department manager and advocate was apparent through her push for additional Foreign Service Officers, increased budgets for State, benefits for the same-sex partners of State employees, and more leadership opportunities for women at State (Calabresi). Clinton worked to increase the State Department’s resources, reorganize its diplomatic efforts, and repair its working relationship with the Pentagon and armed forces (Clemons).

In short, President Obama operated a tight foreign policymaking circle in the White House run in close co-ordination with the NSC and overseen by NSA Donilon. Obama’s managerial style depended on his most trusted advisors. However, despite the authority he had amassed, Donilon operated mostly behind the scenes, avoiding the role of public spokesman for the administration. Donilon was viewed as more of a manager than a strategist. In contrast, Clinton maneuvered herself into becoming a central player in the Afghanistan surge decision-making process, and, indeed, within the administration’s foreign policymaking as a whole (Woodward). At the same time, although the president had managed to concentrate power in the White House, Clinton was visible and active. For example, during national security meetings on the Arab Spring upheaval in early 2011, Donilon would kick off with the agenda, and if the focus was foreign policy, Obama would turn to Clinton to ask for her input before the advisor was even finished. If she was not present, Obama would often say, “I want to know where Hillary is on this” (Ghattas 240).

Personal Advisory Relationship with the President

Through a combination of his personal closeness to the president, his political background, and his ties to the vice president, and other principals, Donilon quickly assumed a level of power and access to the president that surpassed that enjoyed by the former NSA, James Jones (Baker, “A Manager”). Donilon was sworn in as NSA on October 8, 2010, and during his tenure he gathered internal control over Obama’s foreign policy. Proximity to the president is a recipe for power in the White House and Donilon had just that; nobody spent more time with the president (Nicholas and Parson). He had walk-in privileges to the Oval Office as the advisor who chairs the morning national security briefing. The NSA protected this access carefully, for example when he gave Obama his daily briefing on national security. Donilon, who worked in the Clinton administration and initially supported Joe Biden in 2008, appears to have won the president’s confidence by making himself indispensable (Mann 82).

By most accounts, Donilon generally avoided major frictions with cabinet officers. However, as Deputy NSA, he had made enemies at the Pentagon during the debate over sending more troops to Afghanistan.
The NSA also clashed fiercely with officials from the State Department over control of, and credit for, various aspects of Obama’s foreign policy. He had friction with former Under Secretary of Defense Michèle Flournoy because of her inability to get Secretary Clinton and Michael Mullen, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, to bring a single, unified position to NSC meetings. He suspected the military of trying to manipulate the new president, and the military suspected Mr. Donilon, who never served in uniform or visited Afghanistan, of substituting politics for strategy.

Regarding the personal advisory relationship between secretary of state and the president, Clinton was expected to receive a Cabinet position. However, her nomination for secretary of state surprised many commentators, who discussed the prior mistrust between the Obama and Clinton camps and also questioned whether Clinton could subordinate her foreign policy views to Obama’s vision (Baker and Cooper A1). Clinton lacked both personal and political relationship with President Obama and had run against him in a tough primary campaign in 2008. Early in Obama’s presidency, she had worked hard to win the trust of the president, and she sometimes showed anxiety about being cut out of his inner circle. In one 2009 email, she fretted to aides: “I heard on the radio that there is a Cabinet mtg this am. Is there? Can I go?” (Becker and Shane). Clinton had praised the selection of Jones as NSA, calling him an honest broker. She had less praise for Rice, however, who had often attacked her during the 2008 campaign (Hard Choices 23). Not only were relations with Rice uncomfortable throughout Clinton’s four years at the helm of State, but her relations with Donilon were often icy, and she often had complaints about his managerial style. Unlike Jones, who gave the cabinet officers wide latitude, Donilon sought to bring not only decision-making but messaging under the purview of the White House (Conley).

Initially, administration insiders were wary of the secretary of state’s political ambition (Woodward 245). Although lacking a personal relationship with the president, Clinton became an important foreign policy actor in the first term of the Obama presidency (Ghattas). Hillary Clinton had ensued a high level of power within the Obama administration’s foreign policy team, and it usually “didn’t escape notice that Clinton was the second most powerful Democrat in the room” (Alter). However, Donilon had a stronger personal relationship with the president and understood Obama’s preference for a decision-making process that enabled the consideration of multiple alternatives (Jackson).

**The Libya Decision**

In early March 2011, as violence in Libya intensified, the Arab League unexpectedly voted in favor of a no-fly zone over Libya. The Obama Administration changed course from reluctance about mili-
tary action to press for United Nations (UN) authorization for military action to protect Libyan civilians from the regime’s attack. UN Security Council Resolution 1973 was passed on March 17, authorizing “all necessary means” to this end (UNSC). On March 19, 2011, cruise missile and bomber strikes from an American-led coalition destroyed Libya’s air-defense systems, forced its armored columns to retreat, and established a no-fly zone over the country (Chivvis). Two days later, when notifying Congress about American participation in the campaign, Obama declared it limited in its “nature, duration, and scope” (“Letter”). France and Britain assumed the lead in pushing the international community to intervene militarily to protect Libyan civilians. The United States initially took a more cautious approach, an approach that sparked a debate over whether Washington was “leading from behind” (Lizza).

Policy Preferences and Bureaucratic Interests

By the end of February 2011, President Obama had begun a series of discussions on how to handle Libya. The actors broke down into two distinct camps. On the critical side were top-level Pentagon and White House advisors who were skeptical of further military intervention, given the continued U.S. presence in Afghanistan and Iraq. On the other side of the division within the Administration was a faction within the White House and the State Department (Sanger). The critical group included Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, who dubbed calls for intervention “loose talks” (Watt). The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (CJCS), Michael Mullen, shared these concerns and said in a Pentagon news conference that a no-fly zone would be “an extraordinarily complex operation to set up” (Gates and Mullen).

Moreover, the bureaucratic role of the NSC, and by extension the NSA, requires that it seek to develop multiple policy options, provide advice and information to the president, and manage the interagency process (Marsh, “Intersection of War”). NSA Donilon, who was known within the administration as a pragmatist highly protective of the president, leaned towards Gates and Mullen’s position; he was skeptical and urged caution (Mann 286). In a briefing on March 11, Donilon downplayed military alternatives and emphasized the importance of other options, saying for example that “[t]he isolation of the region matters. Denying the regime resources matters” (Donilon). Donilon often viewed foreign policy through the lens of national interests rather than values (Pfiffner). He did not support intervention based on his individual staffers’ evaluations of Libya and warned the president against using force that was not of vital interest for the United States (Mann 287). Instead, it seemed more important for him to assert his bureaucratic role as the head of the interagency process and ensure that alternative options were presented to the president. Other actors skeptical of another military
commitment for over-stretched U.S. forces included Vice President Biden, who also opposed the Libya intervention for bureaucratic reasons. Biden sought to preserve the president’s freedom of action and argued that the risks were simply too high and that it would be better not to go into Libya at all than to become immersed in a battle between Gaddafi and his own people. He declared that “it would be politically stupid” (Lewis). Biden often disagreed with Gates, but this time he sided with the secretary and also with his personal friend Donilon (Hastings).

As Chief of Staff, William Daley was responsible for ensuring that the president’s policy preferences were implemented, and that the president was protected politically. Daley was worried that the United States would be militarily involved in a third Muslim country and emphasized the need for a joint operation with U.S. allies. Any intervention in Libya naturally presented a significant risk to Obama’s popularity and also threatened support for other signature domestic policy initiatives (Friedersdorf). The U.S. public was profoundly fatigued by military intervention and polling in the second week of March found that less than a third of Americans favored helping the rebels militarily (Pew Research Center). The intelligence community assessments did not help the case for intervention. Director of National Intelligence (DNI) James Clapper testified in Congress that Gaddafi possessed so much more in armaments and equipment than the opposition that his troops were likely to prevail in the long run (Benson).

The State Department had been divided on how to act in Libya all along, and Clinton was skeptical of any military action (Cooper and Lee Myers). At first, she stuck with Gates and worried that if an intervention failed to remove Gaddafi or to gain enough international support, it would jeopardize American credibility (Clinton, Hard Choices 367). But on March 1, she said that a no-fly zone was not off the table (Clinton, “Secretary”). From March 12, after the Arab League had requested action from the UN, Clinton seemed to have decided to split from Gates and work actively for an intervention in Libya (Clinton, Hard Choices 367). In an interview, Clinton stated that the UN-backed intervention in Libya was “a watershed moment in international decision-making” (ABC News).

As secretary of state, Clinton was expected to favor policy options emphasizing diplomacy and enhancing the role, prestige, and power of the State Department, and yet Clinton ultimately supported the intervention. Essential for this change were three preconditions, two diplomatic and one humanitarian. First, on March 12, the Arab League came out in favor of a no-fly-zone. During a trip to Paris, Cairo, and Tunis in the following days, Clinton met with Arab leaders and with leaders of the Libyan opposition. She reported back to Obama that the leaders in the region were serious and even willing to take part in the military operation (Clinton, Hard Choices 370). According to Clinton, these were not just “hollow calls for action” (Mann 290). Second, British
and French officials privately made clear that they not only wanted but expected America to join them. According to Clinton, British Foreign Secretary William Hague’s positive stand on a military intervention “counted for a lot” (Hard Choices 368). Third, in Libya, Gaddafi’s forces were approaching Benghazi, where a large group of civilians could soon be left defenseless at the hands of the Libyan troops. At a minimum, the secretary of state had a responsibility to insist on multilateralism, and it was, thus, imperative for Clinton to reach consensus with U.S. allies and get legal support for any military actions (364; Chivvis 55). Thus, Clinton’s support for intervention was in large part based on her diplomatic engagement with the Arab League and key U.S. allies. After these meetings, Clinton emerged as a leading advocate for military intervention against Libya.

In her capacity as UN ambassador, Susan Rice’s primary duty was to keep the State Department informed of events at the UN, and she played a major role in the passing of UN Resolution 1973 (Lizza). On March 16, Rice, one of the most vocal interventionists from the outset, signaled publicly for the first time that the Obama administration supported the Security Council’s discussion of further international steps, including a no-fly zone in Libya. According to Rice, it was necessary to be prepared to contemplate steps that might go beyond a no-fly zone, given that a no-fly zone had inherent limitations in terms of protection of civilians at immediate risk (Rice). Moreover, within the NSC there was a group of staff members that joined ranks with Rice and pushed for military intervention. These staff members belonged to the core of a White House group that argued the case for humanitarian intervention (Hastings). Alongside Rice, Power was the second senior official who had come into the Obama administration determined to prevent any further atrocities like those in Bosnia or Rwanda (Mann 284-85). Other staff members within this group included Ben Rhodes, Gayle Smith, and Jeremy Weinstein. In early March, when Gaddafi’s forces began to move toward Benghazi, this group, together with Rice, began to support the use of force, if necessary, to stop mass killings (Sanger 342).

On March 15, 2011, Obama met with members of his NSC in the Situation Room. Mullen laid out the plans for a no-fly zone. The president asked whether this no-fly zone would stop the possible bloodbath in Benghazi and Mullen said no. “Then why are we focusing on a no-fly zone?” Obama responded, “I want more options” (Sanger 343). The NSC meeting restarted at 9:00 pm, and this time the president received a range of military options. One was to use no American force at all, but simply provide intelligence and other support to the French and British. Another was the no-fly zone. The third was to go beyond the no-fly zone by sending planes to strike at Libyan ground targets. Gates again voiced his reservations for any military alternative. Clinton was out of the country but had made her views known in advance. Finally, the president chose the third military option (Mann xiii).
As noted above, the NSA enjoyed the bargaining advantages of access and proximity, and Donilon utilized his access to the president in an effort to ensure that the advocates of the military alternative did not restrict the options available to Obama. However, proximity was not enough to overcome the myriad of bargaining advantages enjoyed by Clinton and the interventionists. Thus, a powerful cabinet secretary (and UN ambassador) outweighed the NSA, the Pentagon, the vice president, and the chief of staff. Donilon, while a significant presidential advisor, lost the debate, as the president selected an option more closely aligned with the views espoused by the secretary of state. Clinton’s opposition to Gates was rare, however, and lent bureaucratic power to Rice and other intervention advocates. Gates emphasized the importance of Clinton’s support for intervention: “In the final phase of the internal debate, Hillary threw her considerable clout behind Rice, Rhodes, and Power” (Gates, Duty 511).

**Conclusions**

President Obama operated a tight foreign policymaking circle in the White House in close co-ordination with the NSC, overseen by NSA Donilon. His managerial style depended on his most trusted advisors. NSA Donilon operated mostly behind the scenes, avoiding the role of public spokesman for the administration. Usually when a president concentrates power within the White House, the power and influence of the NSA increases. This was, however, only in part the case with Donilon, given that Secretary Clinton maneuvered herself into a central position in the foreign policymaking of the Obama administration as a whole. But although Clinton was visible and active, the president concentrated power in the White House and did not generally delegate a great deal of authority to his cabinet secretaries.

In addition to coordinating the interagency process, Donilon also became a close personal foreign policy advisor and an inside player on Obama’s campaign team. Thus, he had a stronger personal relationship with the president than Clinton. Even if Clinton’s relationship with the president developed to be more functional and harmonious than could have been imagined at the height of their nomination battle, the relationship was never close personally or politically. Obama’s relationship with his secretary of state, unlike those of his predecessor, were shaped less by personal ties than by his tendency to maintain White House control over national security policy. Nonetheless, Clinton became a rather powerful actor, not only by virtue of her position but also because she was successful in gaining the support and attention of the president.

This becomes evident in the analysis of the Libyan case. As an illustrative case of this process, the BPM offers mixed evidence in accounting for the Libyan intervention. The stand-sit proposition holds that an actor’s bureaucratic interest is to realize the interests of his/
her organization. At first glance, bureaucratic positions could predict the stance of both Donilon and Clinton. In other words, where one sat bureaucratically influenced where one sat on the Libya question. The bargaining proposition holds that decision-making processes are best characterized as political bargaining processes. However, Donilon's proximity to the president was not enough to overcome the bargaining advantages enjoyed by Clinton and the interventionists. In this case, a powerful cabinet secretary and UN ambassador outweighed the NSA, Pentagon, the vice president, and the Chief of Staff. In sum, Clinton's role during the Libya crisis reflected her overall rise as a primary foreign policy advisor.

In sum, the White House, rather than the State Department, remained in control of major foreign policy initiatives during the Libya intervention. President Obama's centralized foreign policy within the White House and had an activist, deeply involved management style that subsumed many of the potential roles of an NSA. He did not, however, appoint honest brokers but chose to control the details of policymaking himself. But it may be that Donilon's low-key, reserved style served him well in the Obama Administration. He cultivated a good reputation for behind-the-scenes diplomacy by avoiding headlines. However, regarding signature decisions such as the Libya intervention and the Afghanistan troop surge, the balance of power dynamic between the NSA and secretary of state altered to Clinton's advantage.

This account of the administration of foreign policy under President Obama highlights the difficulty of determining the balance of power between the NSA and the secretary of state. Based on the BPM, Clinton's diplomatic support for the operation originated from her departmental interests. Critics have argued, however, that Allison exaggerated the importance of bureaucratic logics over other important dynamics (Bernstein; Krasner; M. Smith). It might be the case that other factors, such as Clinton's independent political stature and the possibility of leveraging the media and public opinion in contrast to Donilon's ability to do so, also were influential in this case. In other words, Clinton might have had ambitions beyond the bureaucratic role model and therefore not have been as constrained by bureaucratic interests as the BPM model would predict. This study further illustrates the continued need for research on competition between the nation's diplomatic chief and the president's chief White House advisor for national security affairs. The combination of a general NSA evaluation with a case-oriented BPM evaluation produces a more comprehensive and descriptively accurate understanding of these two roles and their relation to the president.
Works Cited


