Understanding the Players in US National Security Policy

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Recent breakdowns in American national security have exposed the weaknesses of the nation’s vast overlapping security and foreign policy bureaucracy and the often dysfunctional interagency process. The Washington Post investigation “Top Secret America” showed how convoluted the system has become post-9/11, and the 2008 Project on National Security Reform found that the problems in the national security enterprise are primarily organizational in nature. However, in the literature of national security studies surprisingly little attention is given to the specific dynamics or underlying organizational cultures that often drive the bureaucratic politics of US security policy.

Filling this void is the new book The National Security Enterprise, which Robert Art of Brandeis University calls “the most comprehensive analysis yet available of the system by which the United States makes its national security decisions...essential reading for those concerned with US national security decisionmaking.” This volume offers a broad overview and analysis of the many government agencies involved in national security issues, the interagency process, Congressional checks and balances, and the influence of private sector organizations. The chapters cover the National Security Council, the Departments of Defense and State, the DNI, the CIA, the FBI, the Department of Homeland Security, and the OMB. Also highlighted are: Congress, the Supreme Court, the media, think tanks, and lobbyists.

Long-time practitioners in the field detail the organizational culture and personality of these institutions and their impact on major US security policies. As no conceptual or structural fix to the current system is likely to succeed unless it understands the organizations and people that make up that system, the book offers unique insights into how diplomats, military officers, civilian analysts, spies, and law enforcement officials are distinct breeds of policymakers and political actors. Lee H. Hamilton, president and director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, praises the work: “This volume’s comprehensiveness is remarkable, surpassed only by the erudition of its authors, who are perfectly suited to lead the reader through the many twists and turns of how America formulates its foreign policy.”

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