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INTRODUCTION

The president's Cabinet has never become quite the advisory system for the president that Alexander Hamilton envisioned. Hamilton foresaw the Cabinet as "deputy presidents," serving as the president's primary advisors and departmental managers. Since the role of the president's Cabinet was never mentioned in the Constitution, George Washington followed Hamilton's advice and relied heavily on his four Cabinet officers for both policy and political advice in the course of his government.

Washington's relationship with his Cabinet was followed for nearly forty years, until Andrew Jackson introduced the spoils system, using Cabinet positions as a reward to his supporters, particularly from the newly admitted states. The presidential-Cabinet relationship changed under Jackson, as Jackson turned to other sources for policy and political advice. Cabinet officers continued to manage their departments and provide broad-based programmatic advice.

The Jacksonian model of White House-Cabinet relations remained operative throughout the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries. This model dramatically changed in the Roosevelt administration, following passage of the Reorganization Act of 1939, which gave the president a White House staff capable of providing a new source of policy and political advice. Although presidents since Roosevelt have maintained personal advisory networks, the White House staff has now become the president's primary advisory source. Cabinet officers, who maintain administrative responsibilities for their departments, respond to White House policy initiatives by providing detailed programmatic analyses and implementation strategies. The depart-

ments have moved to a reactive rather than proactive position in developing the administration's major policy proposals. White House staff now develop the administration's policy agenda and guide departmental proposals to meet that agenda.

The White House staff, which has grown in size throughout every administration since Franklin Delano Roosevelt, has suffered its setbacks during its growth process. Richard Nixon, in particular, sought to reduce both the size and the power of the White House staff. During the 1968 election, Nixon popularized the phrase *cabinet government* and promised to restore the Cabinet to its conciliar role as *deputy presidents*. Nixon promised a return to a Cabinet-based rather than a White House-based policy development system.

Once elected, Nixon aggressively moved to reduce the role of the White House staff and to increase the role of the Cabinet. However, within nine months of taking office, Nixon abandoned his efforts at Cabinet Government and moved policy-making power back to the White House staff. Most of Nixon's successors followed similar paths, starting office with a commitment to a strong cabinet and within a year restructuring the policy process to restore power to the White House staff.

What is it about the modern presidency that seems to preclude the Cabinet from dominating the policy process? Are there fundamental political and institutional barriers to a policy-making system centered in the Cabinet? The answer is quite clearly yes, as Richard Fenno noted in his seminal study of the Cabinet in 1959:

Cabinet members themselves are inextricably involved in the activities of the legislature, the bureaucracy, the political parties and the political interest groups. The Cabinet, and especially its individual members, participates in a great multiplicity of external relationships which are not in the first instance matters of its internal characteristics nor of its presidential tie.¹

Cabinet members establish strong relationships with players outside the executive branch in order to fulfill their statutory mission, relationships that presidents have not always supported.

The debate on the role of the White House staff in policy formulation and management has moved to the forefront of scholarly literature on presidential management style. As the Cabinet has become increasingly captured by its own clientele,² the White House staff has emerged as the central player in the policy process.³

The focus of more recent literature on White House–Cabinet relations centers on the degree to which White House staff should become involved in policy matters and how the White House–Cabinet relationship should be struc-

tured. That debate has sharpened in recent years. Some have argued that presidents should reduce the size of the White House staff and allow the departments greater independence in policy development.⁴ Louis Koenig, for example, argues that “power has gravitated excessively from the departments and the cabinet to the presidential staff.”⁵

A larger group, however, supports a strong White House staff in policy development. Harold Barger, for example, urged “an expanded presidential establishment [as] essential to the President’s staying on top of the action forcing processes that confront him.”⁶ Hugh Heclo similarly supports “continual presidential involvement” in guiding departmental policy initiatives.⁷ Lester Salaman argues that “presidents incur great costs when they rely totally on the agencies and departments to formulate policies.”⁸

While the debate continues on the degree to which the White House should control the policy development process, there is far more consensus on how the White House staff should be structured for policy-making. Research consistently indicates that White House staffs need to have a clear view of presidential goals and objectives, and need to have these goals constantly reinforced personally by the president.⁹ Staff also need to have a high level of issue agreement and goal compatibility not only among themselves but with the president.¹⁰

Literature on the structure of the White House staff has been sparser, with current literature focusing on a strong role for the chief of staff rather than the structure of the internal policy operation.¹¹ Most current studies on White House staff structures have focused on the Reagan White House and its use of cabinet councils to manage domestic policy.¹² The broader issue concerning structural options for White House–Cabinet interaction in policy development and internal White House policy structures has not been the subject of general concern in the literature.

The research in *Powersharing* is aimed at expanding the literature on the Cabinet’s role in policy development and on structural organizations within the White House to manage policy development. All the material included in this research involves domestic policy and the expanding role of the White House staff in managing the administration’s domestic policy initiatives. National security policy and foreign policy were excluded from the research for a number of reasons.

The most important reason for this exclusion concerns the narrow framework of foreign policy development, focused within the province of only two departments, State and Defense, both of which have a limited clientele. The president remains the primary client of the departments, although the defense industry certainly influences the decision process. In contrast, the outer Cabinet, composed of the domestic policy agencies, is in the less tenable position of serving several clients in addition to the president, notably

Congressional committees, staff, departmental clientele, and bureaucratic interests. As a result of these centrifugal forces, Cabinet officers often are pulled away from the president's policy objectives. This tug of war for departmental policy control has led recent presidents to exert greater White House control over the entire domestic policy process.

A second basis for focusing this research on domestic policy was the sheer size of dealing with two policy mechanisms in the White House. The domestic policy process itself was a major undertaking. It is also worth noting that numerous documents regarding White House action in national security policy remain classified. Other files on national security have been placed out of the reach of scholars due to law suits. Henry Kissinger, for example, has tied up nearly all the key files on Vietnam, détente with Russia, and the China initiative. Similarly, Caspar Weinberger, Oliver North, and others have tied up many of the Iran-Contra files. More recent files, such as those on the Persian Gulf War, are not open for scholars yet.

The final decision to focus this research on domestic policy centered on the availability of primary sources. Both White House staff and Cabinet officers were accessible for interviews. Since so many departments were involved, as opposed to only two in foreign policy matters, far more material was available.

The White House–Cabinet relationship remains a fragile one. The most appropriate role for either the Cabinet or the White House staff as the President's domestic-policy advisor is defined in each administration and shaped by the president's personal management style. Powersharing between the White House staff and the Cabinet is inevitable in today's complex bureaucratic policy process.

Six presidencies are examined in depth: those of Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan, George Bush, and Bill Clinton. These six presidencies are reviewed to see how they structured White House–Cabinet relations for domestic policy development. How large were the White House staffs in each administration and what was their role in policy coordination and policy development? Did Cabinet officers have to be screened by White House staff before they saw the president on policy issues? How was the White House–Cabinet relationship structured in each administration and why did it flourish or fail? Is there a White House–Cabinet relationship that is workable within the constraints of the existing institutional and political framework from which the president must deal? Have the White House staff permanently supplanted the Cabinet as the president's chief policy advisors?

It is the central thesis of this book that the White House staff have indeed supplanted the Cabinet as the president's chief policy advisors. The primary function of the White House staff in the modern presidency has emerged as one that designs a narrow, achievable agenda within the parameters of cam-

paign objectives. That agenda has incorporated the central themes of the campaign within its current political and fiscal constraints.

The White House staff has also emerged as the focal point of the administration, guiding departmental policy-making within the framework of the presidential agenda. Interdepartmental clashes and competition for limited revenue sources have been minimized as a result of White House oversight of departmental policy-making. Department heads, who are constantly nurtured by White House staff and ensured of their role in the presidential circle, have remained loyal to the administration agenda. Cooption within the Cabinet by bureaucratic and constituent interests has been mitigated by strong alliances forged between the White House and the Cabinet.

It is, therefore, a difficult task that the White House staff faces. They must frame administration policy goals and simultaneously build bases of support within the Cabinet for those goals. Most administrations have been successful at one or the other of these tasks, but few have been successful at both. The test of future administrations will be to ensure success at both endeavors.