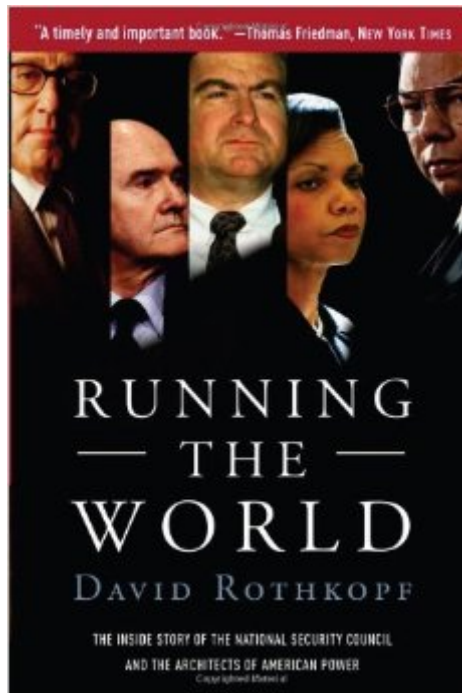


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Running The World: The Inside Story Of The National Security Council And The Architects Of American Power



Synopsis

Never before in the history of mankind have so few people had so much power over so many. The people at the top of the American national security establishment, the President and his principal advisors, the core team at the helm of the National Security Council, are without question the most powerful committee in the history of the world. Yet, in many respects, they are among the least understood. A former senior official in the Clinton Administration himself, David Rothkopf served with and knows personally many of the NSC's key players of the past twenty-five years. In *Running the World* he pulls back the curtain on this shadowy world to explore its inner workings, its people, their relationships, their contributions and the occasions when they have gone wrong. He traces the group's evolution from the final days of the Second World War to the post-Cold War realities of global terrorism; exploring its triumphs, its human dramas and most recently, what many consider to be its breakdown at a time when we needed it most. Drawing on an extraordinary series of insider interviews with policy makers including Condoleezza Rice, Colin Powell, Henry Kissinger, senior officials of the Bush Administration, and over 130 others, the book offers unprecedented insights into what must change if America is to maintain its unprecedented worldwide leadership in the decades ahead.

Book Information

Paperback: 576 pages

Publisher: PublicAffairs (July 11, 2006)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1586484230

ISBN-13: 978-1586484231

Product Dimensions: 5.8 x 1.3 x 8.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.0 out of 5 stars [See all reviews](#) (24 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #133,563 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #107 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Diplomacy](#) #187 in [Books > Textbooks > Social Sciences > Political Science > International Relations](#) #263 in [Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > International & World Politics > Security](#)

Customer Reviews

The arrogance and naiveté of the National Security Council and its principal protagonists is ably reflected in the title. The pretentiousness and unreality of "Running the World" is fittingly

complemented by a cover photo of a Cabinet meeting, not an NSC meeting-the latter take place in crummy little rooms with poor ventilation, not at all the kind of image one wants as an Emperor, naked or not. There are three consistent and very useful themes throughout the book that make it extraordinarily valuable to any student of the pathologies of the national security "decision" process (I use that term *very* loosely). First, that each Administration allows personal ambitions and an almost pathological desire for "differentiation" from the previous Administration to first destroy and then slowly rebuilt the NSC. Hence, it is dysfunctional much of the time, regardless of the ideology prevailing at the time. The second prevailing theme, one that Amy Zegart captured so well in her seminal scholarly work, "Flawed by Design," is the perpetual dysfunctionality, a constant dysfunctionality, between the Departments of State and Defense, and between Defense and the loosely managed U.S. Intelligence Community. The bottom line is that personalities and politics, not intelligence nor wisdom, are the prevailing drivers of U.S. national security. Lastly, the irrelevance of secret intelligence to the White House decision process, regardless of what Administration is in power, is documented. Page 361 is an especially good indictment of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in particular, and with specific reference to its complete incompetence at economic intelligence needed by the Department of the Treasury. In general, intelligence in this book is portrayed, accurately, as either irrelevant or a pawn to the politically-driven preferences of the White House. This is not a scholarly work, but merits great credit for the many interviews. Over-all the author has leveraged close access to a large variety of U.S. players over time, while not engaging the other players, including foreign players, private sector players, and non-governmental players. The book, even with its focus only on US players would have benefited from an annex charting and comparing the approaches of various NSC iterations to various issues and topics, to include number of action officers, number of meetings, and number of decision papers, but that kind of hard work does not appear to have been part of the plan. There is also little mention of the role lobbying and blatant corruption play in making foreign and security policy--for example, there is no mention of how the White House and the U.S. Senate, from 1974-1979, knew full well that Peak Oil (the end of cheap oil) had arrived, but in what may well be the most treasonous and retrospectively impeachable offence against the public interest, both the White House and the Senators decided to "live the dream" and waste 25 years during which we could have achieved energy independence and sanity. The book, by virtue of its focus on primary research, does not address the substantive literature on global issues, nor the scholarly and practical literature on the NSC. Morton Halperin's seminal work on "Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy" and other works on the NSC such as those edited by Dr. Loch Johnson, the foremost academic observer of secrecy and policy, are

essential complements to this author's offering. The book whitewashes Tony Lake, whose incapacity as an advisor merits note. Most of what the author puts forward about Lake is contradicted by other accounts including those of Dick Clarke, who says he could not get Lake's support until the time came for the latter to leave government and write a book. Naturally there are different points of view. The book is a hatchet job on the Reagan era, even catty in its tone, but the author avoids appearing to be a sycophant to Bush II in that he very properly documents the grotesque dysfunctionality of the Bush II team (and the extraordinary competence of Vice President Cheney in getting his way as co-President). The author has done a good job of leading up to a severe indictment of the Bush II national security decision process, and excels at showing how Condi Rice was "run over" and side-lined by Cheney, Rumsfeld, and the neo-conservatives. His documentation on Cheney as a de facto prime minister is quite good, and these few pages are alone worth the price of the book. Pages 428-429 are "hot" and make it clear that the Bush II Administration, where Cheney was given the terrorism mandate in passing (something not widely known to the public), chose to emphasize invading Iraq, national missile defense, and energy sweetheart deals over counter-terrorism during the critical three months leading to 9-11. There are a few disconcerting errors or failures in the book. In lambasting Reagan for invading Grenada, he says that 8,612 medals were handed out. Had he troubled to check with the military, he might have learned the difference between medals and campaign ribbons. He seriously over-sells both Burger and Lake while ignoring the blatant manner in which the Clinton Administration, and Madeline Albright in particular, sought to down-play terrorism to the point of suppressing alarmist reporting and ignoring or side-lining Dick Clarke. He claims, on page 387, that the Clinton Administration "foiled plots against trans-Pacific jumbo jet traffic." Not so fast. The terrorist blew himself up in the Philippines prior to executing the plot, which was completely undetected by U.S. intelligence, and it was that error that revealed the plot when Philippine authorities responded to the resulting fire. On page 457 he makes the observation that the Congress has less turnover than the Soviet politburo. This should have been credited to Peggy Noonan and Ronald Reagan, who used it in an address to a joint session of Congress. He ends the book wisely, saying, "The ultimate check is an educated American public," which thought tallies nicely with Thomas Jefferson, who said "A Nation's best defense is an educated citizenry." This is a book that needed to be written. It documents the pathetic manner in which U.S. national security is in the hands of a small group of people that place loyalty to one another above intelligence, wisdom, and strategic thinking. We all suffer. It is a primary reference for all who would wish to understand why the greatest Nation on the planet has such a pathetic lack of strategic culture, vision, process, and outcome. The Executive, and the Congress, and

Broken. Here are some other books, with my reviews:

Vice: Dick Cheney and the Hijacking of the American Presidency

The One Percent Doctrine: Deep Inside America's Pursuit of Its Enemies Since 9/11

State of War: The Secret History of the CIA and the Bush Administration

A Pretext for War: 9/11, Iraq, and the Abuse of America's Intelligence Agencies

Weapons of Mass Deception: The Uses of Propaganda in Bush's War on Iraq

Running on Empty: How the Democratic and Republican Parties Are Bankrupting Our Future and What Americans Can Do About It

The Broken Branch: How Congress Is Failing America and How to Get It Back on Track (Institutions of American Democracy)

Breach of Trust: How Washington Turns Outsiders Into Insiders

The Battle for the Soul of Capitalism

For this new book by David J. Rothkopf, one can ignore the cover and title as sales hype for the book for this is a solid history and analysis of the NSC from around 1945 to the present day; it is a 550 page book in small font so it is fairly detailed and lengthy, generally an impressive book in terms of volume of information, detail, and scope; the book is mainly text and notes but it has a few pictures. It gives an up close look at the workings of the NSC for various administrations going back to approximately 1945 - 46, and The National Security Act of July 26, 1947, which was used to create the National Security Council under Truman. The early role of the NSC was to coordinate other departments and act mostly in an advisory role to the president. The NSC was started under Truman but became much more important under Eisenhower, who as a former general, appreciated good preparation, research, and security planning of foreign policy. The NSC included the President who was the chairman, the Vice President, Secretaries of State and Defense, and Director of the Office of Defense Mobilization. Also, other cabinet members participated including the Secretary of the Treasury, the Chairman of the JCS, and the Director of Central Intelligence. This form of the NSC, refined by Ike, has continued through to the present day, with the formality and impact of the NSC rising and falling, from one administration to the next, depending on the president and how he viewed and utilized his advisers. Kennedy did water down Eisenhower's NSC a bit and changed the NSC to permit the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs to in effect run the committee, but the overall importance of the NSC was restored somewhat by Kissinger working for Nixon. I guess what I found interesting about the book was the idea that the author believes that Kissinger, especially in the time just before the Nixon resignation, changed the importance of the NSC as a body. It is generally well known Kissinger was involved in both policy-making and implementation. In the early days of the Nixon administration, Kissinger kept a low public profile at the NSC - before the Nixon visit to China - but he emerged after that trip as a media star - and continued that during his

famous Middle East shuttle diplomacy. In a very interesting section of the book, we learn how Kissinger convened a meeting of the NSC while Nixon slept prior to his resignation and Kissinger on his own, but chairing the NSC as an assistant to the president or in effect acting as the president, put the US armed forces on a high DEFCON alert status - something that normally only the president would do. Similarly, after Nixon's resignation, Gerald Ford was not comfortable with Kissinger but opted to keep him on for the sake of continuity. In addition, and as an example, the author gives us some insight into the Kissinger - Arthur Schlesinger rivalry, that was won out by Kissinger, but Kissinger was sometimes outmanoeuvred by Rumsfeld in the Ford administration. The book goes on to outline the long Kissinger legacy at the NSC where many subsequent advisers and members had direct and indirect ties to Kissinger. It chronicles the changes under Carter and the use of the NSC by Clinton, but Kissinger dominates a large central section of the book. The importance of the NSC rose and fell with subsequent administrations including the Reagan and Bush Republican administrations, but the ghost of Kissinger lingered on through people such as Cheney and Rumsfeld, and other advisers, who have direct and indirect links back to the Kissinger era. This is an impressive and a detailed look into the workings, the history, the people, the internal politics, the accomplishments, and the mistakes made by the National Security Council. Most readers of American history and politics will enjoy and appreciate the book. Incidentally, the author himself has ties to Kissinger through Kissinger Associates. Also, he is a well known author of five other books, and has lectured at Columbia.

We certainly ain't in Kansas anymore. We've gone international in a big way in the last 60 years. Decision making on this level has changed. Whether you realize it or not could be based solely on whether you've read this book, or not. "Running The World" by David Rothkopf. It's a great (sometimes funny, sometimes scary) look into the function of the NSC, probably the most important branch of the government...that no one knows about. As far as a ruling body, the National Security Council are the CEOs of our government. Rothkopf is a great storyteller and as the former Managing Director of Kissinger Associates and Deputy Under Secretary of Commerce (Clinton), he's been involved with domestic and international policy from the inside. He has the ability to captivate and inspire thought and ideas. Rothkopf himself coined the now-so-popular phrase "Emerging Markets" that has been spoken by Presidents Clinton and Bush. This was a great first read for me for the summer, it'll be a tough act to follow.

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