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National Security Councils: Their Potential Functions in Democratic Civil–Military Relations

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INTRODUCTION

This article builds on recent contributions to the study of civil–military relations (CMR) by broadening the focus beyond democratic control to encompass other dimensions and levels of analysis. There are problems with the classical literature, as has recently been noted by some scholars.² The first problem is that CMR has dealt almost exclusively with issues of control. In the more established democracies, the literature focuses on how control is exercised; in newer democracies, on how it can be achieved. What is scarce in the literature is attention to what the military and other security forces do; that is, their roles and missions and how effectively they implement them. Second, the CMR literature consists mainly of detailed case studies that are difficult to generalize to other times and places.³

Based on on-going work in research, teaching and policy advising in many countries, the development of the sub-discipline of CMR requires both a comparative focus on institutions, and attention to factors relevant to the effective implementation of roles and missions. In our academic and applied work in democratic civil–military relations, we have come to conceptualize civil–military relations as a trinity comprising democratic control, effectiveness and efficiency.⁴ The thesis of this article is that a national security council (NSC) can be a core element for democratic CMR in that it enhances civilian control and the effective implementation of roles and missions.⁵ In this article the authors will not focus on efficiency, to be defined below, since an NSC has little impact on this dimension.

Few countries have NSCs that even begin to fulfill the two fundamental functions of democratic control and effectiveness. Based on recent research in eight countries, the title NSC itself may have little meaning and there is little commonality of experience from one country to another. Until recently, in South America and Turkey, an NSC connotated military control in an authoritarian regime. Thailand's Council for

National Security was behind the military coup in that country on 19 September 2006, while there was until recently concern in Bangladesh that proposals to create an NSC will mark the end of democracy.⁶ In short, the existence of an organization called “NSC” implies neither democratic civilian control nor effective strategy formulation and co-ordination. Nor does past success with an NSC guarantee continued success, as evidenced by the process involved in the US decision to invade Iraq.

Many newer democracies, however, claim to have NSCs based on the model of the United States. In the authors’ experience, few of these NSCs actually exist, and those that do play virtually no role in national security and defense, or in democratic civil–military relations. Even if the US NSC did currently function as well as in the past, and may well again in the near future, there are still three main reasons to question its relevance as a model, especially for newer democracies. First, the United States is a wealthy country in which the most relevant departments, Defense and State, are deeply entrenched, highly “stovepiped” bureaucracies. This makes inter-agency co-ordination, although a high priority, extremely hard to achieve. Second, a key to an effective NSC is an adequate, well-trained staff; the US NSC staff consists of approximately 200 highly qualified and motivated officials and military officers seconded from their home services and departments, who consider serving on the NSC to be a plum appointment. Few countries have anything like these human resources to draw on. Third, the US Congress, in the National Security Act of 1947, imposed the NSC on the presidency, as part of a package of legislation to ensure that a sneak attack on the United States, such as Pearl Harbor, would never again occur.⁷

THE CMR TRINITY: CONTROL, EFFECTIVENESS AND EFFICIENCY

As already noted above, civil–military relations is a trinity comprising democratic control, effectiveness and efficiency. The authors believe this conceptualization captures what governments throughout the world are attempting to achieve with their security forces. The authors have also found that their conceptualization encompasses all that they find useful in the literature and programs on security sector reform.⁸

The first leg of this trinity is democratic civilian control. It must be emphasized that democratic civilian control does not exist unless it is grounded in, and exercised through, institutions ranging from organic laws that empower the Ministry of Defense, oversight committees and executive bodies that direct the police forces, to budget processes and civilian control of promotions within the military and intelligence agencies.⁹ Accountability operates, if at all, through these institutions. If these institutions are not in place, democratic civilian control is only a façade. While the range of such institutions varies from country to country, an NSC-type can be one of these institutions.

The second leg of the trinity is the effectiveness with which security forces fulfill their assigned roles and missions. There are several basic considerations in the conceptualization of this leg. First, there is a very wide spectrum of potential roles and missions for the various security forces. Second, roles and missions cannot be effectively implemented without adequate resources, including money, personnel, equipment and

training. Third, few roles or missions in the modern world can be achieved by only one service in the armed forces or one civilian agency, without the involvement of other services and agencies. Thus “jointness” and inter-agency co-ordination are indispensable to security decision-making. The place to do this is in an inter-agency forum, such as a national security council. Fourth, to make things even more complicated, which is life in the real world, there are the paradoxes of evaluating effectiveness in the context of deterrence, wherein wars are avoided precisely because a country is perceived not to be vulnerable; or an intelligence organization supplies information that either prevents or induces a specific desired response, without the knowledge of anyone but those directly involved. Fifth, and last, most of the imaginable roles and missions will be carried out within a web of coalitions or alliances, e.g. NATO, the African Union, or the United Nations. In short, there are complicated methodological issues and nuances involved in evaluating effectiveness, and analysts must grapple with them to begin to understand what is required for the armed forces and other security forces to do what is expected of them.¹⁰

The third dimension of the trinity is efficiency in the use of resources to fulfill assigned roles and missions. This dimension is complicated initially by the wide variety of potential roles and missions, and the difficulty in establishing measures of effectiveness for any one, let alone a combination of them.¹¹ Again, there are several requirements, beginning with a statement of objectives and an NSC-like organization can play a role here. In most instances there is no defining document, such as a national security strategy, that lists objectives and establishes preferences for one set of goals over another. Democratically elected governments fail to produce such documents, first, because their opponents will quickly point out the inevitable discrepancies between goals and achievements, and second, because an established inter-agency process is necessary not only to define but also to assess priorities.¹²

In recent research on the function of NSCs in eight countries, the authors have discovered that an NSC-type organization can play an important role in two of these three dimensions of CMR. Before elaborating on this key point it is necessary first to review the main roles of an ideal NSC.

THE ROLES OF NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCILS

There is a minimum of seven main roles for NSCs to play.¹³ The first is to inform and advise the chief executive on events and policies in the areas of national security and defense. The NSC is where all the information and the principal officials interact on politics and policy, formal and informal processes, information and actions, and the views and interests of concerned agencies or ministries. In this role, the NSC serves to aggregate and integrate data and then provide the most accurate and comprehensive information on which to base policy, a function that is especially important during crises. The second role of the NSC is to co-ordinate among the players, establish consensus and see the policy through to implementation. Any policy, if it is to be effective, requires careful co-ordination for both its development and, just as importantly, its implementation. If any of the likely players are not involved, or some degree of consensus achieved, implementation will not take place. Third, and of importance

mainly in presidential or semi-presidential systems (e.g., Romania), the NSC is normally the point of contact that facilitates communications with the legislative branch on security policies coming from the executive. In all political systems, except those with extremely weak legislatures, the legislature plays a role in passing laws that define policy, passing budgets to implement policy, and conducting oversight to ensure that the policy is implemented. Thus, an NSC should play a central co-ordinating role for policies that have to do with national security and defense.

Fourth, most countries have multiple intelligence agencies. Even if there is a director of the main civilian intelligence agency, such as the Director of Central Intelligence – now Director of National Intelligence – in the United States, the Director of the Brazilian Intelligence Agency, or the directors of the Romanian Intelligence Service and Foreign Intelligence Service, there are typically other intelligence agencies within the military and police. An NSC or similar organization is needed to see that the intelligence product is made available to what are mainly civilian decision-makers within the executive, in a form that is useful to them. Intelligence that has not been sufficiently evaluated and integrated will be of less value to policymakers.

Fifth, if a government is to produce documents such as decision memoranda as does the United States, or national security strategies (NSS) as the United States and Romania (and several other countries rhetorically aspire to), the most likely place to develop them is in an NSC. Security assistance donors put emphasis today on the creation of NSS by recipient countries, yet very few are able to do so because they lack viable NSCs.

Sixth, a policy, even one developed through a robust inter-agency process resulting in consensus, is unlikely to be implemented unless there is some organization with the power to demand information and penalize agencies and individuals if they do not provide the information in a complete and timely manner. An NSC, with the power of the chief executive behind it, can ensure some level of co-operation and implementation.

Seventh and last, an NSC can handle foreign relations beyond the generally diplomatic and formal level that is the purview of foreign ministries or US Department of State, who tend to follow their own bureaucratic agendas. This is particularly important in the area of security, as there may be many tracks involved (e.g., military, political, multinational); having an organization such as an NSC at the center can best co-ordinate them. Furthermore, an NSC can help prepare the chief executive for meetings with foreign officials and handle foreign trips so that the meetings are optimally useful.

Obviously, no NSC in the real world can completely fulfill all of these roles, but if a government wants any or all of them dealt with, it is normally an NSC that does it. In view of these seven possible roles, it seems clear that the main contribution of an NSC, from the perspective of civil–military relations as a trinity is, first, effectiveness, then democratic civilian control, and finally, at a much lower level, efficiency. Effectiveness is primary because all seven of the roles lead towards developing and implementing the best possible national security and defense policies. Or, as Hew Strachan says with regard to the United States, “. . . the National Security Council exists to make strategy, to align policy with operational capabilities.”¹⁴

The NSC enhances democratic civilian control in terms of providing the elected

chief executive the tools, structure and personnel to keep track of what different actors, including the military, police and intelligence organizations are about, especially if they are working in secret. An NSC might play a role in efficiency by defining, in an NSS, an administration's goals for national security and defense. It is difficult for us to imagine how a country can have an effective and efficient policy, especially one under democratic civilian control, without an NSC or equivalent organization or organizations. In this regard, it is useful to look at the experience of different countries as they develop, or fail to develop, these organizations.

GLOBAL EXPERIENCES: EIGHT CASE STUDIES

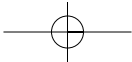
This section draws upon research conducted by the authors in eight countries where the issue of a National Security Council, or one or more of an NSC's roles, are being discussed. They are in different regional areas, at different stages of democratic transition or consolidation, and confront different national security and defense challenges. Each case will be discussed with an eye to drawing lessons regarding both the roles of an NSC and the obstacles to developing an organization that can fulfill one or more of these roles.¹⁵ It must be emphasized from the very beginning that in most countries with which we are familiar, there is absolutely no discussion at all about NSCs and their potential roles.¹⁶

Mongolia

There is an NSC in Mongolia, created early in that country's transition to democracy in the mid-1990s.¹⁷ The NSC is composed of the popularly-elected president, the prime minister, and the speaker of the Great State Hural, or parliament. There is also an Office of the NSC with its own secretary and director, but the office is not powerful and mainly does research for the three primary members.

After a good deal of questioning of Mongolian officials during visits spanning several years, the authors finally determined that the NSC was created in the aftermath of the long Soviet experience to balance off the positions with the greatest power in the Mongolian new democracy – the president, PM and speaker – so that no single office, or person, can monopolize power.

With pressure on Mongolia from the United States to develop national security documents, there is currently interest in strengthening the Office of the NSC, if not the NSC itself, in order to better co-ordinate the large number of agencies (the armed forces, border guards, disaster relief agency, foreign ministry, etc.) involved in national security and defense. Officials are also concerned with reforming the domestic intelligence agency, the GIA, and better linking the intelligence product to policy: the emphasis is on roles two, four and five. Therefore, if resources are made available, it will fulfill at least three of the main functions of co-ordinating policy, fusing and co-ordinating intelligence, and developing documents.



Chile

Although there has been much discussion in Chile over many years in the post-Pinochet era regarding national security councils, the civilian leaders do not want a formal NSC. During the military regime of General Augusto Pinochet (1973–1989), the government established a large set of organizations dominated, if not wholly owned, by the military.¹⁸ These included the COSENA (Consejo de Seguridad Nacional), the CONSUSENA (Consejo Superior de Seguridad Nacional), and CONSUDENA (Consejo Superior de Defensa Nacional)¹⁹ that deals with the income from copper exports. Part of the transition from authoritarian to democratic government involved neglecting these holdovers and creating new, largely informal, mechanisms of control and co-ordination.

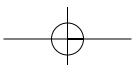
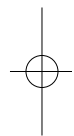
In November 2004, the government and opposition reached agreement on 48 constitutional reforms, most of which had been pending since they were first proposed in 1990. Changes to Article 95 transformed the COSENA from a decision-making body into a purely advisory entity, balanced the number of civilians (the presidents of the Republic and of the Senate, the Supreme Court chief justice, and the comptroller general) and military personnel (commanders in chief and the general director of the Carabineros – uniformed national police) serving on it, and reserved for the President the power to call the Council into session.²⁰

Policy co-ordination and implementation is exercised at Cabinet level by the Ministry of the Presidency and the Cabinet itself. The so-called “Political Committee”, which includes the ministers of the interior, presidency, government (spokesman), and finance, is in charge of co-ordination, including issues related to security or defense. In sum, Chile’s civilian and military leaders have worked out a series of understandings, which have been or are in the process of being implemented in constitutional amendments and in law, which seek to institutionalize democratic civilian control and maximize effectiveness, purposely without an NSC.

Spain

Spain is a semi-parliamentary regime with a largely symbolic king. The Popular Party government of Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar (1996–2004) placed much emphasis on issues of national security and defense. This not only applied to domestic issues, as in the on-going battle against the terrorism of Basque Fatherland and Liberty (ETA), but also in Spain’s close collaboration with the United States and Great Britain in the invasion and subsequent war in Iraq. These internal and external demands, and the awareness that the intelligence system was not up to the government’s demands, led to proposals to create an NSC organization and general inter-agency system that would fulfill one, four, five and six of the roles highlighted above.²¹ These are informing and advising the executive, co-ordinating policy, fusing and co-ordinating intelligence, overseeing policy implementation, and enhancing foreign security relations.

Due to their loss in the elections on 14 March 2004, however, and the coming to power of the Socialist Party of Jose Luis Zapatero (re-elected in 2008), who is not at all



interested in national security and defense issues, these proposed laws lapsed. The lesson drawn from the experience of Spain is that when a country seeks to establish a robust and dynamic policymaking process in national security and defense, it will want to create institutions similar to those of other countries. This assumption is validated in the cases of El Salvador and Japan, although it must be noted that El Salvador is a presidential system.

El Salvador

El Salvador has had an NSC, or Consejo de Seguridad Nacional, since 1992. It includes the president, the ministers of defense, foreign affairs, interior and finance, the director of the National Civilian Police, and the director of the State Intelligence Organization. It meets routinely every other week and can be called into special session if necessary. This NSC had some life, and filled mainly roles one and two, until 2005. Then, after El Salvador furnished troops to the US-led coalition in Iraq, the Salvadoran leadership received threats, supposedly from al-Qaeda, which they took seriously. They thus amended the original decree that had created the NSC, and established a Permanent Secretariat to, in the words of the then (since deceased) secretary, “provide integration, co-ordination, and continuity of the NSC.”²²

With the Permanent Secretariat, which is composed of five seconded officers, mainly intelligence specialists, they also broadened the liaison function to include other governmental agencies as well as other countries and international organizations. Therefore, in addition to doing more in roles one and two, the leaders’ goal was also to better integrate intelligence (role four) by including the intelligence officers, develop an NSS (role five), and enhance international liaison (role six). El Salvador is an excellent case study of a country that perceived a threat, in this case from international terrorism, and concluded that it had to create an NSC to most effectively respond to the threat.

Romania

In Romania, the NSC equivalent is the National Supreme Defense Council (CSAT), established as the body that co-ordinates all national defense and security related activities, as well as Romanian participation in international security efforts, collective defense within military alliances, and peace and reconstruction operations.²³

CSAT is composed of ten members: the non-partisan president as chair (who is also the supreme commander of the armed forces), the prime minister as deputy chair, the minister of industry and trade, the minister of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, the minister of interior, the head of the Political Analysis Department of the Presidency, the director of the Romanian Intelligence Service, the director of the Foreign Intelligence Service, and the chief of general staff. The goal of the CSAT is to achieve political balance; some members are directly subordinated to the president (the security adviser and the directors of the intelligence agencies), and some members are directly subordinated to the prime minister (the cabinet ministers and the chief of staff), while the chief of staff is also indirectly subordinated to the president, who is supreme commander of the military. This enables CSAT to ensure that responsibilities are shared between the

presidency and the cabinet, preventing the president from having a monopoly on security issues.²⁴

The Council has a permanent secretariat to organize meetings and act as an interface between CSAT and all relevant authorities working in the national security field. The Secretariat functions within the presidential administration, is headed by a secretary (who also serves as an advisor) appointed by the president, and has ten permanent members transferred from other public agencies (two from the Ministry of Defense, including the head of the Secretariat, between one and three from the Ministry of Administration and Home Affairs, between one and three from the Romanian Intelligence Service, one or two from the Foreign Intelligence Service, one from the presidential administration, and one from the Special Telecommunications Service.²⁵

The CSAT's responsibilities include all of the seven roles of an NSC. More specifically, among other roles, the CSAT informs and advises the president on issues pertaining to national security and defense; co-ordinates the activities of all security institutions; produces security-related documents (for example, the national security strategy and military strategy); integrates all information provided by the intelligence agencies and other national security institutions; initiates measures *vis-à-vis* declaring a state of siege and/or emergency, declaring and canceling a state of war and initiating, suspending or terminating specific military actions; co-ordinates policies developed by the executive branch with the legislative branch (for example, in the event of war the CSAT will submit a plan to mobilize the national economy and a budget for the first year of war for parliamentary approval). In addition, the CSAT endorses various draft policies initiated by the government on national security topics; the organization of all security institutions; the organization and functions of the CSAT itself; preparation of the populace, economy and territory for defense; and drafts budget proposals and allocations for the security institutions; handles foreign relations (for example, CSAT approves the circumstances in which foreign troops are allowed to enter, pass through, or deploy on Romanian territory, and endorses draft international treaties and agreements relevant to Romania's national security); monitors the implementation of CSAT decisions; and fulfills other functions with regard to national security and defense.²⁶

Brazil

Unlike much of Latin America, Brazil's foundation in laws is comprehensive and robust, the bureaucracy is strong, and there is a true civil service based on exams and merit.²⁷ Although the Ministry of Defense and the ABIN (Brazilian Intelligence Agency) are new (the former was founded in 1999 and the latter in 2001) and still nascent bureaucracies, and the government lacked a national security strategy until 2008, it does have the main component of a real NSC called the Secretariat for Institutional Security (GSI) in the Office of the Presidency. This council is physically located next to the president's offices, and the Minister Chief has ready access to the president. The GSI serves as the permanent secretariat for a national defense council. It conducts studies, monitors and provides policy guidance on crises, develops position papers, and decree laws, among other functions, for the presidency under the leadership of the Minister Chief of State (Ministro de Estado Chefe). The ABIN is situated under the

GSI, as are the offices for Military Affairs and the National Anti-Drug Secretariat; the various intelligence services are also under the umbrella of this office.

The GSI grew out of the Military Household (Casa Militar) of the military regime (1964–1985), which had evolved into the Secretariat for Strategic Issues; GSI was formally established by President Fernando Henrique Cardoso in 1999. Therefore, in contrast to the ABIN and MoD, the GSI was built on prior institutions rather than created entirely from scratch out of very different organizations. Even though the MOD was also founded in 1999, its relations with the strong and autonomous military services are still being worked out, while the former regime's National Information Service was abolished in 1991, long before the ABIN came into being.

Unexpectedly for its staff, the GSI took on a greater role with the democratic change of administration from Fernando Henrique Cardoso to Luis Inacio "Lula" da Silva in 2003, when the latter discovered that it was not enough to issue orders, draft decrees and the like, since the strong bureaucracies in Brazil would not automatically act or respond. Increasingly, the GSI oversees the implementation of policy (role seven on our proposed list). This is particularly onerous as there are, for both symbolic and political reasons, between 30 and 37 separate ministries and other agencies, and any issue in national security and defense will involve, at a minimum, six of them. The members of this large and diverse cabinet are political appointees who represent some or all of the 20 political parties in Congress; thus, neither the cabinet nor a smaller NSC group meet regularly or get much done. There are some 300 officers and officials in the GSI, all of them seconded from the services, ministries, ABIN, Federal Police, universities, etc. Nobody, as in the presidency in general, is a permanent employee. In terms of the seven possible roles of an NSC, the Brazilian GSI fulfills them all.

Japan

Behind the policymaking apparatus of the government of Japan, though not apparent on organization charts and legislation, is a political system that has remained largely unchanged for decades.²⁸ The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) of Japan, formed in 1955, has maintained a dominant political position as the party in power, and has largely set the path for policymaking in both economics and security affairs over the last half century. With few exceptions, the LDP and Tokyo's career bureaucrats have formed the core of Japan's policymaking apparatus. Decades of public acceptance for this arrangement provided democratic legitimacy. In addition, the government's heavy-handed – in some cases overbearing – civilian control of its military has severely restricted the size, capabilities, roles and missions of Japan's Self-Defense Forces, thereby sharply limiting the use of the military as an instrument of national power.

Japan has a formal "Security Council", composed of the prime minister, the ministers of Defense and Foreign Affairs, and the Chief Cabinet Secretary. This body authorizes security issues to be presented to the Cabinet – where executive authority lies – for decision. The body that functions more closely to our concept of an NSC, however, is the prime minister's staff, or *Kantei*. The *Kantei* is the Prime Minister's official residence, where a staff of seconded government officials is located to support the flow of information from Japan's ministries and agencies, and between the Chief

Cabinet Secretary and Prime Minister. Although the *Kantei* staff attempt to coordinate policies, they primarily maintain communications between the different ministries and the prime minister. When Prime Minister Shinzo Abe came into office in September 2006, one of his main agenda items was to establish a real national security council to better formulate and implement a more robust national security and defense policy. The effort to create a real NSC stalled with the departure of Prime Minister Abe in August 2007.

With regard to intelligence, there is no authorized means to provide classified information to the Diet, Japan's parliament, other than to those parliamentarians who hold executive branch positions, nor is there a procedural mechanism to conduct closed sessions of the Diet, thereby precluding a forum for legislative debate on classified matters.

The United States

The US NSC was created by Congress in the National Security Act of 1947, which also created the Department of Defense and the Central Intelligence Agency.²⁹ By all accounts it fulfilled the seven roles defined above extremely well during most of the post-Second World War era, under highly diverse chief executives. There is general agreement, however, that it has not been doing as well during the George W. Bush Administration, either in general terms or in most of the specifics. Personal interviews with high-level military officers and civilians involved in defense policy, as well as numerous "insider" books by journalists, make clear that the NSC did not function as it should in the lead-up to the 2003 war in Iraq.³⁰ The military historian Hew Strachan stated forcefully, ". . . the National Security Council exists to make strategy, to align policy with operational capabilities. But in the cases of Afghanistan and Iraq it did not do so . . . The clashes and competition between the State Department and the Department of Defense, like those between the Joint Chiefs of Staff and CentCom [US Central Command, *sic*], were not reconciled: strategy fell through the cracks."³¹

In terms of the specific roles of an NSC, all have been fulfilled at one time or another since its creation in 1947. Between 2000 and 2009, however, most of them were not. The authors understand from observers and participants that the main reason for this situation lies with the president, who did not empower his national security advisor sufficiently to force agreement between the strong personalities in the Defense Department, the unusually powerful vice president's office, and the State Department. The casualties were consensual policymaking and the development of policies that were both logical and practical. The NSC could not fulfill its designated roles or tasks because key actors, with the support of the president, failed to make it work.³² The main lesson here is that even an institution with 60 years of history, at the pinnacle of US government power, however well-structured and staffed, can work only if the chief executive creates the conditions for it to work.³³

The summary of the findings from the eight country studies is found in Table 1.

Table 1: The Functions of a National Security Council – Actual, in Abeyance, or Desired

Countries	1. Inform & Advise Executive	2. Co-ordinate Policy	3. Liaise with Legislature	4. Fuse and Co-ordinate Intelligence	5. Develop Documents Including NSS	6. Oversee Policy Implementation	7. Enhance Foreign Security Relations
Mongolia	N/a	Desired	N/a	Desired	Desired	N/a	N/a
Chile	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a
Spain	Desired	Desired	N/a	Desired	N/a	Desired	Desired
El Salvador	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	N/a	Actual	Actual
Romania	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual	Actual
Brazil	Actual	Actual	N/a	Actual	N/a	Actual	Actual
Japan	Desired	Desired	N/a	N/a	N/a	Desired	N/a
United States	Actual	In abeyance	In abeyance	In abeyance	Actual	In abeyance	In abeyance

ANALYSIS

Based on this survey of eight countries which have, have had, or desired to have, real NSC-like institutions, it can be briefly stated that they link to the two main dimensions of our trinity of CMR in the following way. Control, as the democratically elected executive uses an NSC to formulate, co-ordinate and oversee security and defense policy. They enhance effectiveness by developing strategies, guidance, mobilizing resources, and overseeing implementation.

Even in those democracies where there has been interest in developing (Spain and Japan) or reformulating (Mongolia) a National Security Council, there are impediments. In the eight countries described above, there has been interest in and discussion, at some level of the government, on developing an NSC or in achieving some of the functions that an NSC is designed to fulfill. Excluded, therefore, are the vast majority of countries where there is no interest at all, or the NSC is at times an instrument of military control (e.g., Thailand and Turkey). Included is Chile, where there has been discussion and there are organizations that might seem to be NSC equivalents, but due to its authoritarian past do not have a functioning NSC.

Although the US NSC has in the past fulfilled all seven of the functions, five were in abeyance during most of the George W. Bush Administration. What lessons can we draw from this initial, admittedly partial, review? At a minimum, the creation of an NSC requires a broad perception of the need to formulate and co-ordinate national security and defense policy. This perception continued from the past in Brazil, where the GSI evolved from the Casa Militar, and emerged in El Salvador and Romania with the perception of regional and international threats. In Mongolia there is interest, due to the vague awareness of some values in having an NSC, but so far the political resources in Mongolia are lacking. The initiative to create an NSC in both Spain and Japan disappeared with a change of government in which the leader with the political will was replaced by another lacking it.

The case of the US during the George W. Bush Administration shows that even the model NSC will fulfill only those roles or functions that the chief executive is willing to put his political resources behind. In short, an NSC is an instrument of the chief executive. If he, or she, wants to demote it, as has President Alvaro Uribe in Colombia, or largely ignore it, as with President George W. Bush, it will not fulfill some or even any of its possible seven roles.³⁴ After taking office on 20 January 2009, one of the first important measures of the Barak Obama Administration, was to issue, on 13 February, Presidential Policy Directive–1 on “Organization of the National Security Council System”. According to some analyses, one of the major problems of the previous administration’s NSC was a lack of dissenting opinions. Consequently, PPD–1 expanded the NSC to include agency heads such as the Attorney General, Secretary of Energy, and Secretary of Homeland Security, along with the UN Ambassador.

There is currently a debate in the US regarding the NSC on whether or not it can be reformed in order to increase effectiveness. President Obama has expanded the NSC and appointed a retired Marine General to be his National Security Adviser. There has been much commentary in the media over how active, or inactive, the Adviser has been. The Congressional Research Service has focused on the organization of the system. And the very large, dynamic, and well-connected Project on National Security Reform (PNSR) recommends “. . . the establishment of a President’s Security Council (PSC) that would replace the National Security Council and Homeland Security Council . . . [and] the statutory creation of a director for national security (DNS) within the Executive Office of the President. The director would be responsible for tasks encompassing the high-level operation of the national security system . . . that go beyond those of the present assistant to the president for national security affairs.”³⁵

CONCLUSIONS

In line with recent scholarship on CMR, the authors believe that to understand better how civil–military relations actually work in the real world, scholars should look at institutions and study them comparatively. In their research the authors have found that it is not enough to look at democratic civilian control of the armed forces. Although necessary, control alone is not sufficient to our conceptualization of CMR. Indeed, in looking at how the armed forces, and the security sector in general, operate in such areas as peace support operations, intelligence and counter-terrorism, there has been an increasing awareness of the need for effectiveness. When the institutions nations create to achieve effectiveness are analyzed, some kind of inter-agency process, often centered in an NSC, is deemed necessary. This issue is deceptive, however, because many military dictatorships used, and still use, institutions with this name to coordinate their non-democratic policies.

Furthermore, while many countries include NSCs in their constitutions and governmental organization charts, these bodies have minimal roles. From our experience, there are only a handful of countries with NSCs that function as proposed in models, including Brazil, El Salvador and Romania, while the case of the United States demonstrates that past experience is no guarantee of continued success. Our study of CMR, through the prism of NSCs, suggests that politics must be at the center of any analysis

of how institutions are adopted and allowed to function, or not function, to enhance national security. The current attention and debate in the US on rejuvenating or restructuring the NSC further emphasizes the potential importance of an NSC.

NOTES

1. The views expressed here are those of the authors alone and do not necessarily represent those of the Department of the Navy or the Department of Defense.
2. See in particular Andrew Cottey, Timothy Edmunds and Anthony Forster, "The Second Generation Problematic: Rethinking Democracy and Civil – Military Relations", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 29 No.1, Fall 2002, pp. 31–56, who highlight the importance of effectiveness in their second generation, and James Burk, "Theories of Democratic Civil–Military Relations", *Armed Forces and Society*, Vol. 29 No. 1, Fall 2002, pp. 7–29 where, after an excellent review of the literature, he highlights the importance of transnational relations and ensuring appropriate collegial relations between military and civilian elites, p. 22.
3. For critiques, see for example Peter D. Feaver, "The Civil–Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz, and the Question of Civilian Control", *Armed Forces & Society*, Winter 1996, pp. 149–177; and Dale R. Herspring, *The Pentagon and the Presidency: Civil–Military Relations From FDR to George W. Bush*, Manhattan, Kansas: University Press of Kansas, 2005. This argument has been made in Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas, "Democratization as a Global Phenomenon and its Impact on Civil–Military Relations", *Democratization*, Vol. 13 No. 5, December 2006, pp. 776–790.
4. For detailed discussion with examples of the use of the "trinity" see Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas, *ibid.*, and Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas, "Global Trends and Their Impact on Civil–Military Relations", in Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas (eds), *Global Politics of Defense Reform*, NY: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008, p. 20.
5. By NSC we refer to any institution, regardless of name, that fulfills at least one of the functions we identify later in this article. In both Brazil and Romania it should be noted that the names of the organizations were chosen in order to avoid the term NSC for its negative legacy from the non-democratic past.
6. See for example, "National Security Council On Cards", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 8 March 2007.
7. On the background to the NSC in the United States, see in particular Amy Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999; and Alan Whittaker, Frederick Smith and Ambassador Elizabeth McKune, *The National Security Policy Process: The National Security Council and Interagency System*, Washington DC, Industrial College of the Armed Forces Research Report, updated April 2007, p. 6: <http://www.ndu.edu/icaf/>.
8. For the trinity concept in relationship to security sector reform (SSR) see Thomas Bruneau and Cris Matei, "Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil–Military Relations", *Democratization* Vol. 15 No. 5, December 2008, pp. 909–929.
9. See Thomas C. Bruneau and Scott D. Tollefson (eds), *Who Guards the Guardians and How: Democratic Civil–Military Relations*, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2006.
10. J. Burk, *op. cit.*, highlights the importance of the transnational dimension, pp. 20–22.
11. We have dealt with the concept of efficiency at length in Thomas Bruneau and Cris Matei, "Towards a New Conceptualization of Democratization and Civil–Military Relations", *op. cit.*, pp. 917–918.
12. It should be noted that the George W. Bush Administration published two national security strategy documents between January 2001 and December 2008. During its eight years in office, the William J. Clinton Administration published six.
13. These seven functions have been distilled from a variety of sources. They include interviews with past members of the US NSC, and with proponents in the other seven countries

reviewed here. We have drawn on a briefing by Fulton T. Armstrong, then a member of the National Intelligence Council, on “The National Security Council: Executive Office of the President. The White House”, dated July 2002 and presented to President-elect Alvaro Uribe on 30 July 2002. The most up-to-date report on the US is Richard Best, “The National Security Council: An Organizational Assessment”, *CRS Report for Congress*, Washington DC: CRS, 21 April 2008. Best discusses the NSC’s functions on pp. 27–34. The authors have also used Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler, “A New NSC for a New Administration”, *Policy Brief*, No. 68, Brookings Institution, November 2000; Whittaker *et al.*, “The National Security Policy Process”; and Ignacio Cosido y Rafael L. Bardaji, “Un Consejo de Seguridad Nacional para Espana”, GEES (Madrid), *Analisis*, Vol. 41, 20 October 2003.

14. Hew Strachan, “Making Strategy: Civil–Military Relations after Iraq”, *Survival*, Vol. 48 No. 3, Autumn 2006, p. 69.
15. In each country the following questions oriented the research: 1. Is there an NSC–like institution? 2. If yes, which offices or individuals are members? 3. Does it have a permanent secretariat and with what facilities and personnel? 4. What are its functions? 5. Does it work?
16. In mid-2007, one of the authors conducted interviews in Bolivia regarding the Consejo Supremo de Defensa Nacional, COSDNA; in Colombia on the (now defunct) Consejo de Seguridad Nacional, CSN; and in Ecuador on the Consejo de Seguridad Nacional, COSENA. These are all supposed to be NSCs, but they are only formal and do nothing of value that the researcher could identify.
17. One of the authors conducts regular visits, the most recent from 21–25 May 2007.
18. For this process see Marcos Robledo, “Democratic Consolidation in Chilean Civil–Military Relations: 1990–2005”, in Thomas Bruneau and Harold Trinkunas (eds), *Global Politics of Defense Reform*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, pp. 95–126. The military junta after 1973 consolidated, deepened and expanded these prerogatives.
19. Created by Law No. 7.144, in 1942, during the Second World War.
20. Robledo, “Democratic Consolidation in Chilean Civil–Military Relations”, *op. cit.*
21. See Cosido and Bardaji, “Un Consejo de Seguridad Nacional para Espana”. One of the authors has long worked on Spanish civil–military relations and security and defense policy; he conducted interviews, including with Rafael Bardaji, in Madrid on 18–19 April 2007.
22. Author interview with Col. Miguel Antonio Mendez, Salvadoran Army (Ret.) in San Salvador on 24 March 2006.
23. The text of Law 39/1990 and Law 415/2002, Constitution of Romania, 1991 and 2003; http://csat.presidency.ro/index.php?page=lege_of. One of the authors is Romanian and has published extensively on intelligence reform and civil–military relations in Romania.
24. Sever Voinescu and Dudu Ionescu, “The Supreme Council of National Defense: The Main Instrument of Decision-making”, Institute for Public Policy, Bucharest, June 2005; <http://www.ipp.ro/altemateriale/CSAT%20en.pdf>.
25. *Ibid.*
26. Law 415/2002.
27. The information in this section on Brazil was obtained by one of the authors through interviews at the GSI on 9 November 2002 and 26 November 2006. In the latter period, J. A. de Macedo Soares, seconded from the Itamaraty, the Foreign Ministry, was especially helpful. He had been at the GSI for eight years by 2006.
28. One of the authors is a Japan expert and was working with the Japanese government in 2007 to assist in the establishment of a NSC prior to the change of government.
29. See Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, *op. cit.* See also Loch K. Johnson and Karl F. Inderfurth (eds), *Fateful Decisions: Inside the National Security Council*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2004. There are several recent publications on the US NSC. They include the following: Cody M. Brown, *The National Security Council: A Legal History of the President’s Most Powerful Advisers*, Project on National Security Reform, 2008. Available at www.pnsr.org, accessed on 25 May 2009; Ivo H. Daalder and I. M. Destler, *In the Shadow of the Oval Office: Profiles of the National Security Advisers and the Presidents They Served – From JFK to George W. Bush*, New

- York: Simon and Schuster, 2009; and, Gabriel Marcella (ed.), *Affairs of State: The Interagency and National Security*, Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute of the US Army War College, December 2008.
30. See Thomas E. Ricks, *Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq*, New York: The Penguin Press, 2006, especially p. 4.
 31. Strachan, "Making Strategy", *op. cit.*
 32. The weakness of the NSC, and of the National Security Advisor herself during the George W. Bush Administration, is widely acknowledged. See for example, the very positive "insider" account by Glenn Kessler, *The Confidante: Condoleezza Rice and the Creation of the Bush Legacy*, New York: St Martins Press, 2007, p. 3, where he states the following: "She was one of the weakest national security advisors in US history." Or, Fred Kaplan, "The Professional? SECDEF Robert Gates", *New York Times Magazine*, 10 February 2008, where, commenting on the first George W. Bush Administration, he writes the following: "All the major players were pushing their positions in end runs. Condoleezza Rice, then the national security adviser, lacked the ability to control them. Bush himself never laid down the law or demanded a stop to the game playing. As a result, on many vital issues, he never heard significant debate."
 33. For a very forceful analysis of the general problem, see Michele Flournoy and Shawn Brimley, "Strategic Planning for National Security", *Joint Forces Quarterly*, No. 41, 2006, pp. 80–86. They note "... the United States still lacks a comprehensive interagency process that takes into account both the character of the international security environment and its own ability to deal with future challenges and opportunities" (p. 80).
 34. President Uribe functions as his own Minister of Defense and national security advisor. In interviews in Bogota in February 2007 one of the authors was told by a perspective member of the then CSN that it had been abolished by presidential decree in 2003.
 35. See Catherine Dale, Nina Serafino and Pat Towell, "Organizing the US Government for National Security: Overview of the Interagency Reform Debates", CRS Report for Congress, Washington DC: CRS, 18 April 2008. Also, *Forging a New Shield*, Executive Summary, Washington DC: Project on National Security Reform, 2008, p. x.

