

ABOUT THAT HILLARY AS SECRETARY OF STATE THING

Say. Did you notice how successful Colin Powell was at pushing the Bush Administration to adopt his less-horrible foreign policy solutions, like peace in Israel and a government in Iraq that included all factions?

Oh wait. I remember now. In spite of his national stature, in spite of the skills learned in a career of negotiating the bureaucracy and politics of the military, he was profoundly unsuccessful at influencing the direction of policy in the Administration.

There's something missing from the discussions about whether Obama will indeed name Hillary his Secretary of State: a discussion of how that position has become much weaker in the last half century, as compared to the National Security Advisor or the Defense Secretary. Here's the closest we get to an acknowledgment of this issue.

Friends said the potential loss of her independence, hard won by her election to the Senate from New York in 2000, caused Clinton to waver last week as she considered Obama's offer. But advisers said the discussions got back on track after he promised she would have considerable input on staffing decisions and plenty of access to him.

[snip]

Indeed, perhaps as a counterweight to the Clinton pick, Obama is likely to name James L. Jones, a widely respected former Marine Corps commandant and NATO commander, to be his national security adviser. Jones would lend a powerful voice on foreign policy matters right in the White House, while Clinton was at

the State Department or overseas.

National Security Advisor

The Secretary of State has lost power for two different reasons. The National Security Advisor has had proximity and—increasingly—operational means. As the person who convenes the National Security Council, the NSA has some ability to guide the agenda. She also would help the President balance the competing views of the other members of the NSC, so would have more sway over final decision-making. And, as the staff of the NSC at the White House grows, the NSA increasingly has the ability to implement presidential foreign policy plans directly, without the cooperation of the State Department (the best example of this was Iran-Contra, in which Ronnie and Poppy implemented entire foreign policy programs through NSC).

While Condi was a disaster at this role and Hadley only slightly better, that role of internal foreign policy advisor was basically taken over by Cheney in this White House—but there, too, the lesson of an internal force setting policy—including much of the war on terror—remains valid. Colin Powell got effectively shut out of key discussions about torture even though it was a key issue for the international community. And Cheney always was the last one giving Bush advice.

Given the way Clinton's consideration for State has foreclosed certain other appointments in the national security team, I do wonder the degree to which Jones' consideration is meant to ensure the decision making remains inside the White House.

Secretary of Defense

And then there's the power that the Secretary of Defense has, both because in budgetary terms he has all the toys, and because some of the functions that used to be done at State are now largely being done by Defense.

One of the reasons why Powell's attempts to bring sanity to the Iraq reconstruction failed is because every time a representative of State tried to set up meetings between stake-holders in Iraq, Defense would make it tough to find the logistical support for such a meeting, even while ferrying Chalabi and his team into place to pre-empt the meeting (this is also the reason State became so dependent on Blackwater as diplomatic guards, so as to rely less on Defense). Rummy's control over the means to implement policy on the ground was a powerful tool.

And, even in times of peace (ha!), the regional structure of the military supplants a good deal of the diplomatic infrastructure. Dana Priest's *The Mission* showed how the regional commanders conducted a lot of day-to-day diplomacy, not least because they've got planes ready to fly to meetings, but also because when the US searches for international solutions—such as disaster aide—frequently the military is the most ready hammer in our tool box to throw at the problem.

It's worth noting, of course, that Bob Gates—who most observers think will stick around for a while after Obama is sworn in—has been a big proponent of increasing the military's capacity to provide these nation-building services. And that Anthony Zinni—who stars in Priest's book as he played diplomat-General from his time as head of CentCom and who was a special envoy to address the Palestinian issue under Bush—is an outside candidate to take over at Defense when Gates is done (he wouldn't be able to do so until sometime in 2010, though). In other words, by all appearances, Defense will continue to expand its soft power functionality, and it will continue to have the logistical capacity to do things that State cannot now do.

Now, obviously, Hillary is no dummy, and in discussions of their negotiations, it sounds like he has agreed to give her big influence over who gets hired at State and lots of direct access to him. She won't take this if it appears

to consign her to a Powell-like figurehead position. But until the structure of the White House and the structure of the State Department changes, she'll still be at a structural disadvantage to the NSC and DOD.