

the policies so formed did not always meet with success and at times led to spectacular failures.

Most recently under President George W. Bush, a weak national security advisor faced with a powerful secretary of defense and a weak secretary of state resulted in a National Security Council that was ineffective in providing the president with informed national security advice. The outcome was a foreign policy blunder and a march to war based on one of the most significant intelligence failures in United States history.

Democratic and the non-democratic parallels

All in all, even in the most powerful country in the world, the NSC has been neither indispensable nor unquestionably successful. But what remains unquestionable is that in the US, the NSC's role has been restricted carefully to prevent military interference in elected authority. In contrast, in countries like Turkey and Pakistan, such councils are set up essentially to retain and exert military control over a wide range of policy. This is potentially dangerous: it creates an unaccountable authority, compromises the value of democracy, and undermines the professional purpose and integrity of the military by thoroughly politicising it. But one thing that Pakistan and Turkey have in common is that they both face troubling external security environments. Bangladesh faces a far less complex external threat environment; therefore, any perceived benefit of setting up a National Security Council should be weighed carefully.

Even in the United States, which faces the most complex external security environment in the world, the National Security Council remains a purely advisory tool for elected governments to use, with a focus on external, not domestic, issues, and commanded in both letter and spirit by civilians, not the military. In a country where power belongs to the people, national security policy has been no exception, even in times of turbulence and war.

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