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The Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Files, 1953–1961

Part 1: Subject Files

Part 2: Presidential Files

Part 3: Correspondence Files

These documents give new perspectives on the Cold War, American political and military maneuverings worldwide, development of a national security policy-making apparatus, and many other topics.

The presidency of Dwight D. Eisenhower represents a significant period in the history of U.S. foreign policy. The Cold War was the dominant event of this period. The Eisenhower presidency marked the beginning of post-World War II U.S. globalism. During the 1950s America's worldwide obligations grew tremendously, creating a host of complex problems and the apparatus for dealing with these problems and crises.

Under President Eisenhower, the National Security Council (NSC) system evolved into the principal arm of the President in formulating and executing policy on military, international, and internal security affairs. With his military background, Eisenhower had a penchant for careful staff work, and believed that effective planning involved a creative process of discussion and debate among advisers compelled to work toward agreed recommendations.

The genesis of the new NSC system was a report prepared for the President in March 1953 by Robert Cutler, who became the President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs. Cutler proposed a systematic flow of recommendation, decision, and implementation that he later described as the "policy hill" process. At the bottom of the hill, concerned agencies such as State and Defense produced draft policy recommendations on specific topics and worked for consensus at the agency level. The top of the foreign policy-making hill was the NSC itself, chaired by the President, which met regularly.

The President's Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, a post held by Robert Cutler, Dillon Anderson, William H. Jackson, and Gordon Gray, oversaw the flow of recommendations and decisions up and down the policy hill, and functioned in Council meetings to brief the Council and summarize the sense of discussion. The Special Assistant was an essential facilitator of the decision-making system, but, unlike the National Security Adviser created under Kennedy, had no substantive role in the process. The NSC staff managed by the Special Assistant grew during the Eisenhower years, but again had no independent role in the policy process.

The strength of the NSC system under Eisenhower was that it provided for regular, fully-staffed, interagency review of major foreign and national security issues, culminating in discussion and decision at the highest level of government. The resulting Presidentially-approved NSC documentation provided policy guidance at every level of implementation. Eisenhower felt that the regular policy discussions kept his principal advisers fully informed, in step with one another, and prepared to react knowledgeably in the event of crises.

Crisis situations, however, such as the Suez crisis of 1956, the off-shore island crises of 1955 and 1958, and the Lebanon crisis of 1958, were typically managed through telephone conversations between Eisenhower, Dulles, and other principal advisers, and through small meetings with the President in the White House, normally involving Dulles and other concerned advisers. Eisenhower sometimes used trusted NSC staffers to serve as an intermediary to gain information outside the chain of command as he did with Colonel Goodpaster during the Quemoy crisis in 1955. There was great similarity between this process of crisis management and that adopted by subsequent Presidents, such as Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon.

Drawn from the files of Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs at the Eisenhower Library, the *Dwight D. Eisenhower National Security Files, 1953-1961* include documents for use at the highest levels of government, particularly the president, on the major foreign and national security policies, as well as many trade, economic, and political issues facing the Eisenhower administration.

Part 1: Subject File. 30 reels. ISBN 1-55655-960-7.
Film available now. Guide forthcoming.
Part 2: Presidential Files. 17 reels. ISBN1-55655-961-5.
Film available now. Guide forthcoming.
Part 3: Correspondence Files. 21 reels. ISBN 0-88692-678-5.
Film available now. Guide forthcoming.

The following are descriptions of the major and sub-categories of the documentation in this collection:

Part 1: Subject Files

NSC Status of Projects subseries: consists of four primary components: status of projects reports, state of U.S. national security programs, current policies of the U.S. relating to national security, and records of actions by the NSC for 1960.

NSC Subject subseries: alphabetical listing of national security topics, including government agencies and committees, and policies and studies. Topical concentration on atomic energy; continental defense; nuclear testing; President's Board of Consultants on Foreign Intelligence Activities; and capabilities.

OCB Subject subseries: alphabetical listing of national security topics, including atomic/nuclear energy; cultural/educational exchanges; missiles; space/satellites/rocketry; countries; policies; government agencies, and committees; and the National Aeronautics Space Council.

Special Assistant Subject subseries: alphabetical listing of national security-related topics, including government agencies, committees, and organizations; policies and programs; and countries.

Part 2: Presidential Files

NSC Briefing Notes subseries: alphabetical listing of Cold War topics, including government agencies; organizations; countries; and policies and programs. There is data on presidential commissions, authority, and emergency action capabilities.

Special Assistant Presidential subseries: consists of "President's Papers 1953–1957" on a wide variety of national security-related topics, including countries, NSC activities, intelligence activities, and capabilities. Also, "Meetings with the President 1958–1961" documenting a wide variety of topics is included.

Part 3: Correspondence Files

NSC Administrative subseries: consists of Richard L. Hall chronological correspondence series; consultants' comments on policies, projects, and organizations; NSC general materials, including budget, personnel, and publications; intelligence directives; and organization and functions.

OCB Administrative subseries: consists of chronological correspondence files of F. M. Dearborn and Karl G. Harr; organization and functions; projects; and minutes of meetings.

Special Assistant Chronological subseries: consists of correspondence files between April 1955 and January 1961.

Special Assistant Name subseries: alphabetical arrangement of correspondence generated by or about a particular individual.

Source Note: Papers of Dwight D. Eisenhower, Papers as President, Office of the Special Assistant for National Security Affairs, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library, Abilene, Kansas.

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