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Opening Statement of the Honorable **Ed Royce (R-CA), Chairman**  
House Foreign Affairs Committee Hearing:  
“Reforming the National Security Council: Efficiency and Accountability”  
September 8, 2016

(As prepared for delivery)

This hearing will come to order. In recent years, there has been increasing bipartisan concern over the size and role of the President’s National Security Council. In too many cases, its traditional role of “honest broker” has evolved to a policy-making role –it has even undertaken secret diplomatic negotiations – all done out of Congress’ view.

Indeed, one observer recently wrote, “the national security advisor and his or her staff remain among the most influential entities in the federal bureaucracy that are not subject to direct congressional oversight.” This has proven to be a problem for this Committee.

While concerns about the NSC aren’t new, they’ve reached new heights, leading to current proposals before Congress to statutorily restrict the size of the NSC staff. This is a staff that has increased from 100 persons at the start of President George W. Bush’s presidency to reportedly over 400 today. Such a large staff sends the message that the President intends to run foreign policy and military operations out of the White House to the exclusion of the Cabinet.

It also makes for more meddlers. Indeed, former Defense Secretary Gates has complained that the “micromanagement” of the Obama White House “drove me crazy.” A smaller staff would more likely empower cabinet secretaries to do what they have been selected and confirmed by the Senate to do: run their departments.

More staff means more meetings and often paralysis. According to a report in the Washington Post last year, on some issues, NSC meetings of the Cabinet deputies “grew so repetitive” that “deputies stopped coming, sending assistant secretaries and below in their stead.” How many hearings has the Committee held on Ukraine at which State Department officials have told us that the White House is still debating Kiev’s request for heavy defensive weapons?

Also of concern, the profile of an NSC staffer has changed from a seasoned professional doing a stint at the White House as the capstone of their career, to that of junior professionals just off the campaign trail. As one interviewed for the Atlantic Council’s study we will hear about today said, “This is no place for on-the-job training of bright, young, but inexperienced people.” Especially at the expense of the State Department...

Take the President's move to normalize relations with Cuba, secretly run out of the White House by two NSC staffers. Secretary of State Kerry was not informed of these negotiations until the discussions were well underway, and State Department officials in charge of the region found out only as negotiations were all but done.

Why do we care? When the Committee requested that these NSC staffers testify, we were told "no," and given a separation of powers excuse. But our role and responsibility is to conduct oversight of U.S. relations with foreign nations. And if the Committee can't hear directly from those most involved in these negotiations, our role and influence – and that of the American people we represent - is significantly minimized.

This morning, we will hear from several witnesses who have direct experience with the growing size and role of the President's NSC. While today's focus is about process, process is important to good policy. We hope that our discussion will lead to recommendations for the next Administration to improve the efficiency of this important body.

I now turn to the Ranking Member for any opening remarks.