

# White House shift realigns influence in foreign policy

## NSC seen taking a backseat role

By Tom Diaz  
 THE WASHINGTON TIMES

The appointment of Vice Adm. John M. Poindexter as White House national security adviser is being viewed by conservatives as a sign that there won't be a strong, independent conservative voice on military and foreign policy in the president's inner council.

Most conservative leaders interviewed yesterday said the Poindexter appointment signals a less important role for the National Security Council. But they said they would take a "wait-and-see" attitude toward Mr. Poindexter, who is not widely known.

A less prominent role for the NSC will mean more head-to-head clashes between Secretary of State George Shultz and Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger, and more power for White House chief of staff Donald T. Regan, the conservative sources said.

"Regan will be the swing vote," said one congressional source who works closely with the NSC.

"I don't know a great deal about Adm. Poindexter," said Rep. James A. Courter, New Jersey Republican. "I thought Bud

McFarlane did a good job and I was disappointed he stepped down ... but I have every reason to believe that he [Mr. Poindexter] is going to follow the type of positions that McFarlane did."

However, Mr. Courter said, "It is also obvious that, with the selection of another career military officer, they really are not looking for an independent voice."

"I guess they feel comfortable enough that George Shultz and Cap Weinberger are going to be the policy recommenders, and they want a good technician," he said.

Mr. Poindexter, whom one former co-worker described as "the blandest, most cautious man I ever met," has kept a low profile since his

original appointment to the National Security Council in 1981 as "military assistant to the assistant to the president for national security affairs."

Another source said Mr. Poindexter "has no opinions but simply expresses both sides of an issue."

The 49-year old Indiana native, who graduated at the head of his U.S. Naval Academy Class in 1958, earned a Ph.D. in nuclear physics from the California Institute of Technology.

Described by one former associate as a "real black-shoe sailor" who has "done everything you would expect a career naval officer to do," Mr. Poindexter commanded a guided missile cruiser and a destroyer squadron and served in several Navy staff jobs. But former associates do not regard Mr. Poindexter as an expert in any particular field of weaponry or foreign affairs.

"Everything he knows about foreign affairs he learned sitting outside Bud McFarlane's office," said a former NSC staff member.

One source said Mr. Poindexter has often expressed concern that his Navy career would suffer as a result of his service on the NSC staff.

"He was considered the Navy's godfather on the NSC," the source said.

But in spite of — and indeed, in some cases, because of — Mr. Poindexter's low profile, several other conservatives were outspoken in their criticism of the appointment. Some said the selection of a quiet technician for the job virtually assures that Mr. Reagan won't get a strong conservative voice on national security matters independent of the State Department.

"Poindexter is the last one who can put up any kind of fight against Don Regan," said a former NSC staff member. "He's a follower, not a leader."

"Part of the problem is that no national security adviser in the Reagan White House has been able to survive between the secretaries of State and Defense and the CIA direc-

tor" said James Hackett, editor of the Heritage Foundation's National Security Record. "The main concern we have is that the State Department follows the policies normally pursued by the bureaucracy ... an approach more moderate than President Reagan has articulated."

Sen. Gordon J. Humphrey, New Hampshire Republican, said he also knew little of Mr. Poindexter, but was concerned about the quality of the NSC staff in general.

"I honestly don't know the man, but I think who the staff are is just as important as who the head is," Mr. Humphrey said. "Presently, the Foreign Service corps State Department 'twinkies' dominate the staff. Without some change there, I am not optimistic that we will see more effective policy, for example, in Afghanistan."

"It's a net loss for conservatives," said Howard Phillips, national director of the Conservative Caucus. "Even though McFarlane wasn't a conservative's conservative, he was able, because of his personal relationship with the president and Mrs. Reagan, to be a counterweight to Shultz."

"We'll have to wait and see how Poindexter is going to turn out, but the fact that he doesn't have any constituency of his own diminishes his ability to look over Shultz's shoulder," he said. "That diminishes the NSC as a force in its own right and makes it much harder for staff members who have independent views to survive and retain their independence."