George Akerson's Legacy: Continuity and Change in White House Press Operations

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The growth and structural evolution of the White House press office have been primarily responses to the burgeoning and diversification of the mass communications media. As the White House press corps has grown, the press office adapted through expansion and structural elaboration. At the same time, the emergence of an increasingly complex media culture, partly a result of technological changes, called into question the role of traditional press and press relations within the overall White House communications and public outreach apparatus. As a consequence, while the press office has remained a central component of the White House Office and has evolved to meet new demands, its organizational location and, to some extent, its influence have varied within and across administrations. Meanwhile, organizational precedents and the institutional memories of those in and out of the White House have helped dampen major changes in structuring for communications.

> "Organization cannot make a genius out of an incompetent. On the other hand, disorganization can scarcely fail to result in inefficiency." Dwight Eisenhower (quoted in Walcott and Hult, 1995, 24)

> "Throw the organizational charts out. It's relationships among people that make government work." Robert M. Gates (quoted in Ferris, 2008, 9)

The White House staff, once commonly envisioned as a hardy band of policy and politics generalists, is now widely understood to be a formal organization. It is an unusual one to be sure, but one that can be analyzed productively with the conceptual tools used to study more stable and bureaucratized entities (see, e.g., Burke 2000; Dickinson 1996;

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Rudalevige 2002). Indeed, organizational analysis has proven valuable in understanding the development of units within the White House organization (e.g., Pika 1991; Hult and Walcott 2004; Walcott and Hult 1995; Weko 1995). Nevertheless, the press office is a hard case. It is small, staffed by people who typically do not value organizational constraints, and exists in a turbulent, crisis-to-crisis environment that defies neat planning, careful division of labor, and orderly processes. As a result, one might question how valuable it is to look at this particular part of the White House from an organization theoretical standpoint.

Here, we will explore this question by starting at the beginning with the first full-time White House press secretary and tracing how the office itself and its location in the web of hierarchy, influence, and communication have evolved since then. The tools we will use are those that we have used before—especially the "organizational governance" approach (see, e.g., Hult and Walcott 2004). Thus we will examine the influences that have provoked growth and change in the press operation (the task environment, the preferences of the president, the influence of precedent, and conventional wisdom) and the resulting activities, arrangements, and outcomes. Yet we will remain sensitive throughout to the fact that the press office also is a relatively small group whose interpersonal dynamics matter greatly and that the relationship between the press secretary and the president may matter more than anything else.

Structuring for Press Relations: 1929 to 1968

Before 1929, presidents were aided by a single "secretary to the president" (with the exception of Abraham Lincoln, who had two) whose duties typically included dealing with reporters (cf. Grossman and Kumar 1981, 21ff). It was not until Herbert Hoover brought what one critic derisively called "the era of the Super-Administrator . . . (when) Efficiency came to the White House" (A Washington Correspondent 1929, 385) that staff help expanded, and one individual was designated as the press secretary. The pioneer in this role was George Akerson, a veteran journalist who previously had worked under Hoover in the Commerce Department. There, Hoover had cultivated the press, so the job of press secretary seemed to hold promise. However, things turned out badly when Akerson and fellow secretary to the president Lawrence Richey fought over who controlled access to the president, who himself proved to be unforthcoming with the press. Akerson was blamed by reporters, lost the internal battle to Richey, and resigned midway through Hoover's term (Walcott and Hult 1990). The team dynamic was not there. Things improved after a fashion under Akerson's successor, Theodore Joslin, although he was unpopular with his colleagues and was derided by one fellow journalist as "the only known example of a rat joining a sinking ship" (Burner 1979, 256). At least Joslin and Richey got along.

Despite the rough start, the idea of a press specialist in the White House was one whose time had come. Franklin D. Roosevelt emulated Hoover in designating one of his three secretaries, Stephen Early, as press secretary. In a White House characterized by conviviality and loyalty to the boss, Early thrived and FDR's press relations did likewise

(Walcott and Hult 1995, 62). It helped, of course, that Roosevelt's magic touch with the press was the antithesis of Hoover's reclusiveness and suspicion. But it helped almost as much that Roosevelt and Early had a strong relationship. They met daily and FDR trusted Early as a political operative. As the federal government expanded, so did its impact on the public imagination and, with that, the demands of the press on the White House. FDR's response was to add an assistant for Early, initially William Hassett. This structure endured to the end of the administration, even as Early and Hassett were replaced by Jonathan Daniels and Eben Ayers (Walcott and Hult 1995, 56).

The same formal structure and informal interaction patterns characterized Harry Truman and his three press secretaries: Charles Ross, Joseph Short (both of whom died in office), and Roger Tubby. Under Short the office expanded again, to two assistants. Irving Perlmeter handled domestic press matters, while Tubby, who came to the White House from the State Department, specialized in international affairs. The key to Truman's success seems to have been what we have called informal governance structuring. Daily meetings with the president and closeness to the policy process characterized the relationship between Truman and all of his press secretaries. This is distinct from the interpersonal dimension. Ross was a childhood friend of Truman's ("as close as any man" to the president), while the others were not personally close to the president, but the professional relationship worked well in either case (Farrar 1969, 191).

Such patterns of informal governance were common in the Truman White House, where formal structuring was relatively minimal and informal structuring exceptionally effective. The Dwight D. Eisenhower White House was quite different, but in the instance of the press office, it was still informal structuring that dominated. Ike went back to the simple model of a single assistant to the press secretary, James Hagerty. Where Hagerty enlarged the office—indeed, in one account, "probably launched the modern growth of the office" (Spragens 1989)—was in his expansion of the unit's responsibilities. Moving beyond the routine duties of briefing the press and supervising Eisenhower's press relations, Hagerty controlled the appointment of press officers in key cabinet departments and maintained close liaison with information directors in all departments, seeking to control and coordinate what would now be called the president's "message." Hagerty also formalized the process of briefing the president prior to press conferences, using these meetings on occasion to air out tactical and substantive differences among the staff (Hagerty 1968, 442-43). Finally, during Eisenhower's presidency television cameras were admitted to press conferences for the first time. Coverage, however, was not live, and Hagerty decided what parts of each conference would be available to the networks to air. Conscious of the need to adapt to the new medium, Eisenhower invited actor Robert Montgomery (who had volunteered during the 1952 campaign) to the White House as a special consultant to advise Ike on how to present himself on television (Allen 1993, 34-35).

Like his predecessors, John F. Kennedy turned to a print journalist for his press secretary, selecting *San Francisco Chronicle* and *Collier's* writer Pierre Salinger. Salinger's operation was structured much like its predecessors as well. He began with one assistant, later adding another who specialized in dealing with the international press. Salinger maintained Hagerty's structures for working with other executive branch press offices,

though he dropped the formal staff meetings in deference to Kennedy's dislike of meetings (Walcott and Hult 1995, 58-59). Salinger and Kennedy's most notable innovation was to capitalize on JFK's compelling television presence by allowing press conferences to be shown live.

Salinger continued for a while after Kennedy's assassination, then gave way to George Reedy, the first of three press secretaries (the others were Bill Moyers and George Christian) that Lyndon Johnson would appoint. All three were close LBJ associates and regulars at staff meetings and routine presidential briefings, although only Moyers was an important policy advisor. Efforts to harmonize the White House message with the work of departmental press representatives continued as well. The model that Hagerty had introduced evidently was robust enough to reemerge and thus become an element of the organizational repertoire of both political parties (Walcott and Hult 1995, 59). Moreover, in line with a general trend in the LBJ White House toward reintroducing formal structuring, the press operation expanded to as many as four assistants to the press secretary as well as a handful of lower-level aides. Greater specialization was also introduced, with Robert Fleming, formerly of ABC News, becoming the first in the office to be responsible for electronic media, while others specialized in domestic or international issues and media.

Analysis: Structure, Strategy, and the Early Modern Press Office

Although the professional staff of the press office grew from one person under Hoover to as many as five under Johnson, structural growth and complexity were certainly modest throughout this period. (Table 1 includes estimates of total staff numbers in the press office.) Nonetheless, it is clear that the increasing demands of a larger media armed with more sophisticated communications technology was a central factor in making the specialized press office a routine feature of White Houses after 1929. Still, structuring was hardly the key element in determining the success or failure of press secretaries and presidents as they met the press. The personal relationship between press secretaries and presidents and the skills each brought to their dealings with the media were far more consequential. Rather, structuring is of interest here mostly as it reflects the changes going on in the political and technological environments surrounding the White House and the adjustments they compelled.

When Hoover took office, about 350 White House press credentials were outstanding. By the time Johnson left there were 1,260. Hoover dealt with no accredited correspondents from the electronic media; by Johnson's time, television and radio were represented by about 300 journalists (Kernell 1986, 68-69; Kirschten 1981, 180). Clearly, the growth and qualitative change in media demands on the presidency required organizational as well as tactical responses, and they received them in the form of more assistance to the press secretaries and greater specialization by type of media.

Meanwhile, presidential activities also expanded as administrations sought to take advantage of advances in communications and transportation in pursuing their political and policy objectives. Presidential travels grew more frequent and wide ranging, and

TABLE 1
Size of Office of Press Secretary: 1929-2007

Year	*Number of Staffers in Press Secretary's Office*
2007[1]	12
2006	10
2005	12
2004[2]	13
2003	11
2002	11
2001	11
2000	22
1999	24
1998	24
1997	19
1996	21 [includes 9 "media affairs" aides]
1995	23 [includes 10 "media affairs" aides]
1994	12
1993	14
1992	15
1991	15
1990	15
1989	15
1988	16
1987	16
1985-86	15
1985	14
1983	18 [includes 5 in "news summary and audio services"]
1981	20 [includes 4 in "news summary and audio services"]
1977-80	17/24[3]
1974-76	10[4]
1969-74	13[5]
1964-68	9[6]
1961-64	7[7]
1953-60	3
1945-52	6 (Ross)/4 (Short)[8]
1933-45	2
1929-32	1

[1] From 1981 through 2007, staff numbers are from National Journal, *The Capital Source*, which is published annually. From 1987 through Fall 2004, both spring and fall editions were published. Here, only the Fall editions are included. Before 1987, publication was less frequent.
[2] The figures for 1987 through 2004 are from the Fall editions.
[3] Respectively, these are the estimates of Bonafede 1977, 986; Grossman and Kumar 1981, 143.
[4] Osborne 1975, 1; Nessen 1978, 15.
[5] Osborne 1975, 10.
[6] Reedy 1973, 10.
[7] Salinger 1966, 75.
[8] Numbers are, respectively, six under Charlie Ross, from Handwritten note, n.d., Ayers Papers, Box 10; four under Joseph Short, from "White House Office," 20 March 1951, White House Central Files, Box 7; Truman Presidential Library.

speeches, remarks, and other appearances began to increase in volume both inside and outside Washington (cf. Kernell 2007). In addition, beginning in late 1953, presidential press conferences "moved from being off-the-record events to ones open for broadcast and reporting for all media" (Kumar 2007, xxviii).

Such changes also made evident the need and opportunity for presidents to use communications media proactively in getting their message to the public. Thus, alongside the press operation an apparatus for communication and public relations gradually grew in early modern White Houses. In the beginning these efforts were modest and tended to involve resources beyond the White House, as when FDR enlisted the National Emergency Council to assist Steve Early in formulating strategies for promoting New Deal ideas and achievements (Walcott and Hult 1995, 63). Later, one of Roosevelt's newly approved administrative assistants, Lowell Mellett, assumed the role of "overseeing administration public relations," a job that became more crucial as war impended. Mellett and Early were prominent among many who worked to coordinate administration public relations and propaganda efforts during the war. The boundaries between the press office and communications more generally were highly flexible in the face of the national emergency.

Public relations activity declined somewhat under Truman, whose press secretaries were only sporadically involved, but stepped up again under Eisenhower. As Kumar highlights, by the 1950s the emergence of television and growing demands for presidential coverage, combined with a more specialized staff, led White House aides to aggressively mobilize administration officials to promote presidential positions around the country and to maintain liaison with the Republican National Committee. As press secretary, Hagerty expanded the press office's portfolio to include "planning communications strategies and coordinating activities for the entire executive branch" (Kumar 2007, xxviii), taking on tasks much like those of contemporary communications units. Even so, the press secretary occasionally found himself protecting turf from others in the White House who participated in public relations activities. For example, he was among the staffers who allegedly had a difficult relationship with TV consultant Montgomery (Allen 1993, 35). In 1959 Hagerty's chief competitor in the communications area, Howard Pyle (a former governor whom Chief of Staff Sherman Adams had hired to improving the publicity efforts of executive branch departments) left the White House and was not replaced (Hagerty 1983, 193). This was a small victory for Hagerty, and it underlined the problematic nature of dividing labor in this area of White House operations.

The more entrepreneurial environment of the Kennedy administration produced a multitude of aides who were involved one way or another in producing public relations or communications strategy, including Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Brooks Hays, and most notably the president himself. Yet Pierre Salinger was generally not among them. The boundary between press and communications seems to have been relatively firm, which had the beneficial effect of helping to avoid conflict. On the other hand, a coherent, sustained communications strategy never emerged in JFK's White House (Walcott and Hult 1995, 67-68). Much the same can be said of the Johnson presidency, where many actors, including the first White House poll analyst, Fred Panzer, participated in shaping

strategy and President Johnson played an active role. While LBJ's press secretaries participated in these efforts, they were not major players and did not contest with others over turf (e.g., Grossman and Kumar 1981, 97, 165, and passim; Walcott and Hult 1995, 69-71). Again, the casualty was coherence of overall strategy. The demands and opportunities of the revolution in communications technology still awaited a full presidential response.

Press and Communications, 1969-1989

No U.S. politician was more intimately and painfully aware of the perils and potentials of the media than Richard Nixon. Having suffered a setback in his first televised debate with Kennedy in 1960 and having told reporters they would not have him to "kick around" anymore in 1962, Nixon was justifiably wary of the media as well as convinced of its potential for advancing his purposes. His White House press office, headed by Ron Ziegler, greatly resembled Johnson's, conforming to the basic model that had evolved over recent decades. Nixon's major innovations were to supplement the press operation with a variety of carefully organized, aggressively managed public relations structures, no doubt informed by his observations of Hagerty's operations and his own vice presidential activities (e.g., Grossman and Kumar 1981, 119-20). He formalized the Office of Communications, initially under former journalist Herb Klein, charged with outreach to non-Washington media. Later, he developed a prototype of the Office of Public Liaison, under Charles Colson, to deal with interest groups (Hult and Walcott 2004, 59-62; Maltese 1994, 82-84). Much like Kennedy and Johnson, Nixon was at the center of these processes, as was Chief of Staff H.R. Haldeman. For the most part, all this activity caused minimal friction with the press office. Ziegler was, like Haldeman and several others in the White House, an alumnus of the J. Walter Thompson advertising agency. He understood the importance of public relations and tended to keep to his own turf, while interacting cooperatively where necessary.

The organizational battles around communications strategy in the Nixon administration largely were contested between Klein's and Colson's offices, with the former pursuing a relatively media-friendly approach and the latter a hardball, confrontational one. Ultimately, as Nixon grew frustrated with press criticism, Colson won the turf war and overall control of communications through 1972. Ziegler, meanwhile, tended his own turf and largely stayed out of the conflicts, although he did on occasion express frustration at being left out of the loop (Hult and Walcott 2004, 63). After the 1972 election, Nixon and Haldeman had planned to move a weakened communications staff under the press office and Ziegler. However, as controversy over Watergate rose and Ziegler came under increasing criticism for his handling of it, this plan was abandoned, and communications, under Ken Clawson, continued to report directly to Haldeman and then Alexander Haig (e.g., Maltese 1994, 104-08).

One enduring outcome of Nixon's investment in communications was a significant increase in the size of the staffs working in this area. Under LBJ, the press staff had numbered no more than five professionals. Under Nixon, the combined staffs of press and

communications reached about 13. Although these staffs would undergo periodic reorganization, with communications disappearing and then reemerging as a separate entity, the size of the professional staff in press and communications never again fell below 10 (see Table 1).

When Gerald Ford assumed the presidency, he appointed journalist Gerald ter Horst as his press secretary. Ford also approved a reorganization whereby the communications office was eliminated and its "media outreach and public information functions" were placed under ter Horst and his successor Ron Nessen (the first television reporter to serve as press secretary) in the press office (Hult and Walcott 2004, 70). The clear cause of this move was the fact that the communications office, led by Ken Clawson and heavily influenced by Charles Colson, had become implicated in the Nixon administration's self-defense during the Watergate period; its credibility had suffered badly, and it was determined that Ford would be better off without it. As a result, in a short time the press office had gone from being just another participant in the overall communications operation under Nixon to the center of most of it under Ford. This arrangement, however, was short-lived. Ronald Reagan's challenge to Ford's 1976 nomination emphasized the urgency of message control and led to staff coordinator Dick Cheney's move to make the Office of Communications independent once again, this time under the leadership of former Nixon speechwriting head David Gergen. Gergen soon took the lead in forming a "communications group" to oversee the process of formulating and executing "news plans," in a manner similar to what had been done under Nixon. Ron Nessen participated, but leadership clearly had passed to Gergen and his staff (Hult and Walcott 2004, 73).

All of this changed when Jimmy Carter won the presidency. His press secretary, Jody Powell, was among a handful of key presidential advisors—one of the "spokes" in Carter's initial spokes-of-the-wheel organizational design—and all communications activity was placed under him. This arrangement guaranteed that press and communications issues would be heard in the highest administration councils. Yet it also arguably overloaded Powell, who not only served as a top advisor, but was charged as well with administering the press, communications (mainly in the form of the Office of Media Liaison), and speechwriting functions.

Some of the administrative work associated with dealing with the media did not always get done (see, e.g., Maltese 1994, 151; cf. Powell 1981). Perhaps the most important element that initially was neglected was long-range communication planning. By the spring of 1978, with Carter's approval rating at 41%, the need for greater attention to communications strategy was apparent. Communications then was moved out of the press office and placed under Carter confidant and media strategist Gerald Rafshoon. Although this arrangement was satisfactory, it only lasted until August of 1979 when, with the election approaching, Rafshoon left the White House to work full time with the campaign and the Office of Communications was once again abolished and media liaison returned to the press office (Hult and Walcott 2004, 72-77).

Throughout all of this organizational turmoil, the press office itself functioned well under Powell, who became one of the more respected press secretaries. The primary reason for this, of course, was his closeness to Carter and to the policy and political decision processes he had to explain and defend. Largely unaffected by the redrawing of

organizational boxes and arrows, the work of the press secretary and his immediate staff continued to depend upon human relationships and presidential access.

Under Ronald Reagan press secretaries did not flourish. Organizationally, the press office remained where it generally had been in prior administrations, with the press secretary reporting directly to the chief of staff and without responsibility for the communications office. The latter assumed a higher-than-usual profile under the leadership of David Gergen and the overall supervision of Deputy Chief of Staff Michael Deaver, one of Reagan's original "troika" of top advisors. Reagan's first press secretary, James Brady, was not close to Reagan and, for instance, had "little knowledge of President Reagan's responses to Congressional reactions, nor was he empowered to discuss the President's thinking on legislation" (Kumar and Grossman 1989, 311). Brady, of course, was felled by a bullet aimed at the president by a would-be assassin and was effectively replaced by Larry Speakes. The latter had no better luck, failing during the first Reagan term to even achieve walk-in privileges to the Oval Office (Speakes 1988, 113).

In most respects, Reagan's second term, which began under the White House leadership of new Chief of Staff Donald Regan, was far less successful than the first. For Speakes, however, the Regan regime represented an upgrade. Not only was he now welcome in the Oval Office, but he oversaw even Regan's press appointments and gradually was included in policy meetings from which he had been barred in the first term. Regan also tried to restrict other White House officials' access to the media, making the press office more clearly the focal point than it had been. Still, Speakes was caught out of the loop with some regularity, including on such momentous events as the invasion of Grenada (Speakes 1988, 188-92). Neither Speakes nor his successor, Marlin Fitzwater, was a major player in the development of White House communications strategies. That task fell mainly to the Office of Communications (cf. Kumar 2007, 144).

During the Reagan years, the press office staff itself grew slightly from its size during the Carter years, generally having seven or eight people at the rank of deputy or assistant press secretary, a level at which it would remain through successive administrations. Moreover, especially since Nixon, the press office had acquired diverse supporting responsibilities such as preparing a daily news summary for the president, providing advance services to the press and otherwise making arrangements for event coverage, in addition to coordinating press relations across government agencies. Operating units for these tasks have become a routine part of the White House landscape, mostly reproduced from one administration to the next, even though their exact locations within the press or communications offices may vary (see Kumar and Sullivan 2003, 224-78).

More than anything, the problem for Reagan's press secretaries was a lack of strong relationships with, and thus access to, the president. This is important for credibility both within the White House and with the media (Kumar 2007, ch. 5, esp 212-15). This was compounded by competition, especially during the first term, from other top White House aides for the attentions of the press, as well as by the president's desire to hold the media at arm's length. Much of this would change in the administration of George H.W. Bush, even as press secretary Marlin Fitzwater stayed on.

Fitzwater was one of a relatively new breed of press secretaries whose principal experience was in government public affairs jobs rather than journalism (Kumar 2007,

192). He was by all accounts one of the most successful in the job as well. Indeed, Fitzwater's standing within the White House was such that President Bush put him in charge of strategic planning for communications, making him rather than Communications Director David Demarest the key player in this area. This arrangement, with its echoes of the central role Jody Powell had played, was not one that Fitzwater sought or relished. Kumar quotes him as telling the Bill Clinton transition team, "I had been forced to take the communications job over my objections and finally just got out of it six, eight months later because it was a total failure" (Kumar 2007, 131). As had been evident under Powell as well, the job of press secretary is at least a full-time commitment in and of itself. This, of course, became even more true with the advent of satellite television transmission, 24-hour cable news networks, and the resulting "24-hour news cycle" that required that the White House be prepared to respond to events anywhere on the globe at any time of the day or night. The first administration to feel the full brunt of this pressure was that of Bill Clinton.

The Press Office in the Era of the 24-Hour News Cycle

When Clinton assumed the presidency, the ever-shifting relationship between the press office and the office of communications changed yet again. Clinton's campaign press secretary, George Stephanopoulos, was named director of communications and, reminiscent of the role Michael Deaver had played under Reagan, also served as a major voice in media relations. Press Secretary Dee Dee Myers, mirroring the experience of Reagan's press secretaries under such arrangements, was somewhat overshadowed—Stephanopoulos often chose to brief the press—and not always in the decision-making loop, to the detriment of her credibility and effectiveness. Also reminiscent of the Reagan years was the competition among other White House entities, including the chief of staff's office and various project-oriented "communications clusters" to communicate the administration's message. In addition, in the early years, the president himself generally was available to talk policy with reporters. "Which leaders dominated any particular [communications] effort depended not only on the issue but also on time, personalities, expertise, and ultimately, on the wishes of the president himself" (Kumar 2007, 44). From a distance, such flexibility could present the impression that nobody, least of all the press secretary, was fully in charge.

After a short shakedown period, Clinton moved Stephanopoulos upstairs to be counselor to the president, installing Mark Gearan as the first of a series of communications directors. The diffusion of responsibility for dealing with the media, however, remained a feature of the Clinton presidency, although the president himself did become more disciplined and less readily available. The problem of message control was thus partly organizational, and Clinton's second and longest-serving press secretary, Mike McCurry, recounted to Martha Joynt Kumar how this interacted with the omnipresence of cable TV coverage:

> When the president and the staff were thinking through how they were going to respond to a situation, they would find that CNN had gotten ahead of them. They would look up

> at their television sets and "here would be Wolf Blitzer . . . based on God knows who he had talked to, beginning to shape the story that you were still trying to think through." (2007, 48)

The White House adapted tactically, continuing to try to manage the message and to be heard clearly in the media. Regular meetings involving the president, the press secretary, and other communications staff continued, reflecting a pattern that by this time had become so routinized in White Houses that it could be described as a structural feature. Clinton's press secretaries after Myers evidently did not have problems staying connected to and adequately informed by the policy decision processes in the White House.

At first glance, the George W. Bush White House resembled Ronald Reagan's, with a troika of senior aides: Andrew Card, Karen Hughes, and Karl Rove. While Card served as chief of staff, Hughes and Rove shared responsibility for the public relations and political aspects of the presidency. If Hughes's tasks were closest to Michael Deaver's, including overseeing the communications and press operations, Rove and Card, respectively, focused on the political and management features of Baker's job. This signaled to many that "George W. Bush raised public relations to unprecedented prominence in his presidency" (Kumar 2007, 87).

As counselor to the president, Hughes oversaw several units, all of which had been present in previous administrations. They included the offices of the press secretary, communications, media affairs, and speechwriting, totaling 45 staffers when she left the administration in July 2002 (Allen 2002, A19). Kumar contends that, although the size of these units changed rather little, their emphasis noticeably shifted: "the Bush White House invested heavily in long-range planning operations, while the Clinton White House focused on daily press operations" (2007, 87).

Nonetheless, the structuring and primary activities of the press office remained quite stable. Like the late-term George H.W. Bush and Clinton press operations, for example, George W. Bush's press unit (under press secretaries Ari Fleischer, Scott McClellan, Tony Snow, and Dana Perino) was fully staffed around the clock. Press secretaries presided over an office with between 10 and 13 staffers, including at least two deputy press secretaries; the Bush press office was somewhat smaller than under Clinton, where the press secretary also oversaw the Office of Media Affairs (Kumar 2007, 97).

The Bush press secretaries typically meet with the president daily and have had walk-in privileges to the Oval Office. They evidently participate in many major meetings in the White House (e.g., McClellan 2008, 193). Former press secretary McClellan adds, however:

> [T]here would be limits to my access. Like Ari, I probably would not be included in some key decision-making discussions, particularly some informal, very small meetings when Bush wanted information compartmentalized and restricted to as few people as possible . . . The press secretary was excluded from "strategery" meetings. In addition, Bush did not feel the press secretary needed to be a regular invitee to National Security meetings. (McClellan 2008, 153-54)

Nor did the press secretary typically participate in the daily early morning meeting in the Oval Office that included President Bush, Vice President Cheney, Card, Hughes, Rove,

and, if foreign policy was involved, Condoleezza Rice (Kumar 2007, 89-90; McClellan 2008, 154). Indeed, McClellan comments that "few among the president's top policy advisers took a proactive stance when it came to keeping the press secretary informed about behind-the-scenes policy changes and the reasons behind them" (2008, 155; cf. Burke 2004, 79). At least for McClellan, "more troubling than the press secretary's access limitations was the overall mind-set of secrecy within the administration, its negative attitude toward the national media, and the limited support given to the press secretary as a result of such thinking" (2008, 154).

At the same time, within the general White House communications arrangement, the press operation was relatively independent. Ari Fleischer reports, for instance, that although "he consulted with Hughes," she did not "micromanage" his work (Kumar 2007, 96); similarly, Scott McClellan recalls that "the press secretary had plenty of autonomy to run the office as he saw fit" (2008, 82). Press secretaries or their deputies participated in the morning communications meetings that the communications director held, along with the directors of the television production and media affairs units.

The media environment in which the press office operated continued to change throughout the administration. As Kumar notes (2007, 92), the speed of the news cycle accelerated with the "rapid growth of internet news sources" and growing numbers of White House journalists with "the information need of wire reporters" as correspondents took on multiple reporting tasks (e.g., in print, on blogs, on television). During the second term, the White House developed a rapid response unit in the communications office responsible for firing out "e-mail messages carrying the administration's positive and defensive messages" (Kumar 2007, 137). Pushed by a volatile and rapidly changing environment, the structural response again blurred the once-clearer distinctions between the shorter-term press office tasks and the longer-term perspective of the communications operation.

Another, albeit rather short-lived, change was the emergence of a different sort of press secretary. Although previous White House press secretaries have had experience in print journalism, governmental public affairs, or presidential campaigns, the third Bush press secretary, Tony Snow, came out of television and radio "where he did opinion broadcasting" (Kumar 2007, 192). Particularly appealing to an administration confronting dropping public approvals and concerns about administration competence and credibility in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the revelations in the Valerie Plame case, Snow brought strong television skills and considerable knowledge about and credibility in the Washington community. Yet he had a short and somewhat difficult tenure. Inside the White House, Snow's "insistence that he be included in key Oval Office meetings failed to endear himself to his colleagues" (Draper 2007, 369), and his deputies reportedly "spent considerable time explaining away errors or missed nuances in administration policies" (Abramowitz 2007, A2). Meanwhile, having become used to different relationships with press secretaries, some journalists evidently found him "less effective at the more mundane . . . aspects of the job—tracking down facts for reporters and making sure they have what they need for stories and television spots" (Abramowitz 2007, A2).

In any event, faced with the recurrence of colon cancer and reported financial obligations, Snow resigned in September 2007. Given the changing nature of journalism

and of presidential coverage, it remains to be seen whether the sort of background he brought to the job may be among the portfolios of future press secretaries.

Conclusions and Observations

We indicated at the outset that our analysis would examine the importance of three variables—environment, presidential preference, and organizational inertia—on the shaping and performance of the White House press office. The brief summary of organizational arrangements for press relations suggests that all of these matter, but in different ways and some more than others.

Environment

In previous research on White House organization (Walcott and Hult 1995; Hult and Walcott 2004), we reached the general conclusion that, in matters of presidential outreach (as opposed to policy decision making or management), environmental factors provided the greatest impetus to change. That seems to hold true here. The proliferating and increasingly demanding media environment first dictated the necessity of a press relations specialist in the White House, then suggested the value of a separate communications unit to, in effect, go around the Washington press corps, and finally, in the form of the 24-hour news cycle, dictated a 24-hour workday for the press office. In such a dynamic environment, it is all presidents can do to keep up. Accordingly, they have tapped a wider pool of expertise for leadership, including television reporters and anchors.

Although White House response to changes in the media environment has been primarily reactive, the exact shape of those reactions has not been fully determined by environmental demand. Different presidents view the media differently and see problems and opportunities through the lenses of their values, experiences, and circumstances. Thus there remains plenty of room for the influence of presidents themselves.

Presidential Factors

As demands for presidential response (and proaction) have multiplied and organizational capacities have expanded, presidents have been required to make decisions about how to structure their outreach efforts. Especially problematic has been the relationship between the traditional press function and the newer, broader communications function. Solutions have ranged from Gerald Ford attempting to virtually eliminate the communications operation to Jimmy Carter placing it in the press office to presidents such as Reagan, George H.W. Bush, and Clinton (at least at the outset) putting communications in a privileged position near the apex of the White House hierarchy. The first two approaches proved wanting, as evidenced by the fact that both Ford and Carter would end up restoring an office of communications. The final approach has not always been effective either. To the extent that stressing the importance of public relations implicitly has

downgraded the press office's prestige and limited its access to the president and decision processes, this strategy has generated its own problems.

Nevertheless, as more new media, such as blogs and text messaging, and new communications technology develop, enhancing the capabilities and importance of communications has seemed necessary to all recent presidents with the possible exception of George H.W. Bush. Although press and communications need not be viewed as inevitable rivals, they do broadly represent alternative approaches to putting out the president's message and image. For the press office, the immediate constituencies are the president, of course, and the Washington-based journalistic community. These reporters tend to be the carriers of traditional journalistic norms about fairness, accuracy, and truth telling, and the symbiotic relationship between press secretaries and press typically is based upon at least a strong element of trust. For the press office, this represents constraints, albeit benign ones, on the extent to which press aides can go to advance and defend the president's interests.

Communications staffers, though they deal with journalists, are understood to be in the public relations business and tend not to be held to quite the same standard that press secretaries must meet. If Dana Perino spins too hard, she will be called to account professionally. The same did not apply to Karl Rove. In some ways, this makes communications specialists more valuable to presidents. Their loyalty can be unequivocal, uncompromised by external standards. Their freedom to advance the administration's point of view can be greater. Not surprisingly, then, the status of communications in recent White Houses has risen while that of the press office for the most part has not. One could argue that this helps to account for the observation that recent White Houses have exhibited a worrisome pattern of public relations concerns and their advocates having an edge over substantive policy concerns and their relevant specialists (see, e.g., Hult 2000).

Organizational Factors

When a political organizational structure, formal or informal, is congruent with the requirements of its task environment, in terms of managing controversy and/or uncertainty, it will tend to endure (Walcott and Hult 1995, 253-66). This seems clearly to have been the case for the press office throughout the modern presidency. However the fortunes of other offices might wax and wane, the press function has been performed in essentially the same way by press secretaries since the luckless George Akerson. The size of the office has grown, its staff has become specialized, and its hours have dramatically lengthened, but the basic work has changed mostly to the degree that technology has demanded.

At the same time, the office of communications likewise has become a White House institution and can be considered an element of the "standard model" (Hult and Walcott 2004, 45) of contemporary White House organization. With this, the problem of coordinating and balancing press and communications work persists, thus far evading a solution that can clearly be expected to stabilize over time. And although a panoply of staff meetings, formal and informal, has also come to characterize the modern White House, press and communications still suffer from two common maladies. The first is

"stovepiping," where somebody—usually the press secretary—is not well enough integrated into the processes of policy and political decision making to be fully informed and thus entirely able to accurately represent and explain the administration and its actions. The second, which can but need not occur simultaneously with stovepiping, is the lack of adequate centralization and control of the president's message. This tends to occur when too many people in the White House assume responsibility for informing (or spinning or leaking to) the press. Recent experience suggests that neither of these problems has an easy solution and therefore that they are apt to recur.

The Importance of Organization

Organizational factors can contribute to an explanation of how the White House press operation is designed and what it does. To a limited extent, at least, they can also provide insight into factors that shape performance and thus into strategies for effective management. None of this suggests that organization is everything. The relationships between a president and his top communications and press aides can and should be intimate ones and thus will turn on personal characteristics and interactions more than on formal, structural prescriptions or even informal patterns of organization. But neither is the human factor a fully sufficient explanation or guide to effective performance. Both have mattered in all presidential administrations. It is the complex interaction of patterns and personalities that makes up the organization and determines how it works.

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