

With reference to items D and E and other information compare and contrast the power of cabinet in the UK and the USA.

In the USA the cabinet is not very important—they are not really leaders but are seen to be Presidential assistants. Source D states that Lincoln was famous for saying “Seven nays and One aye, the aye has it” this shows that the US has a single executive and cabinet which is subordinate to the President. However Colin Powell is a very powerful Secretary of State showing that cabinet members with experience can influence policy. In the UK cabinet would be seen as a much more important body to the PM is *primus inter pares* and cabinet consensus is required. Thatcher was able to undermine this however “she enhanced the informal structure and downgraded the formal structure.” (Source E) This allowed her to gain much more power for herself with “pre-cooked” policies and perhaps her cabinet had the same powers as the US cabinet. But this led to her downfall when she was removed as PM in 1990.

Appointments to cabinet appear to be a guide to how powerful that cabinet can be. The appointment systems in the US and UK are clearly different. In the US appointments are not always from the same party, Albright as Secretary of State and Republican Senator Reno as Attorney General. Leon Panetta was a former senior member of the House Budgetary Committee and he was appointed by Clinton “Its the economy stupid” This man would seem to have been a powerful member of cabinet and could he have made the decisions for Clinton? In the UK the PM has to appoint cabinet from a broad spectrum of their own party and many of their rivals can be found in their cabinet. Heseltine was a key rival to Major as Brown is to Blair. These types of appointments will ensure the UK cabinet has more power than the US cabinet because in the US with a fixed term the President can not be overthrown by a subordinate cabinet but the PM has no fixed term and can indeed be overthrown by cabinet because they aren't elected by the people as PM. However a PM in circumstances can pick a weak cabinet with Thatcher she chose “yes-men” and because of a divided opposition was able to make cabinet subordinate to her. The power of cabinet then would seem to have been on a par to the US cabinet but she was finally overthrown by her cabinet which possibly shows that the UK cabinet is more powerful than the US cabinet.

In the US the President will aim to have an experienced cabinet for a good image and reward those who helped him to get elected. These people from the outside would seem to have considerable power as they could provide the funds for a president seeking re-election. However public opinion will be what the president will base most of his decisions on he will not do things that are unpopular with the people. An example would be the oil companies they clearly have power in the Bush cabinet and were influential in the war in Iraq. In the UK the PM will also want to have an experienced cabinet, this is to keep party faith and ensure public confidence. He will have to be seen to be giving power to these people. I would argue that in the UK and the US the power of cabinet is dictated by the personality of the leader- in the US the Roosevelt cabinet would have had very little power due to the charisma and public confidence in the leader but the latest Bush administration would have much more power because he lacks the experience to have full public confidence and in the UK the Blair cabinet would have less power he is the driving force but see the recent problems with this? What about Major whose cabinet had more power and was consultative as he was not the same driving force.

The cabinet could have less power because there are limitations on choice in the US. Members of Congress are not prepared to give up powerful legislature positions for an executive job- this could mean that you don't have the best people doing the job so a President is less likely to give his President more power. In the UK the PM has a wide choice it is seen as a more prestigious and powerful position than in the UK and is perhaps another reason cabinet is more powerful here than in the US.

In conclusion it would appear that the UK cabinet is a more powerful body than the US cabinet due to the fact the President is a singular executive and the UK is supposed to be a collective executive but under Blair it would appear the executive is becoming more singular and power in the UK would decrease to the level in the US.