

Toward A Stronger Secretary of Defense

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The Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, General E. C. "Shy" Meyer is the first Chief since George C. Marshall to propose a national military authority above the Army, beyond veto by his service. Accompanying his April article for the Armed Forces Journal entitled "The JCS-How Much Reform is Needed," there is a list of studies on restructuring the high command, some 20 of them over a period of 38 years. And that list is by no means exhaustive. There is probably no aspect of military reform which has had more prestigious or persistent advocacy, and yet General Meyer, like so many other senior military leaders who have sought reorganization, is probably doomed to being ignored. We need to ask why it is that repeatedly throughout the history of the United States proposals for such military reform have so often been disregarded, or if adopted at all, so adulterated as to vitiate the purpose of the reformers.

"WICKED"
PROBLEM

The usual explanations are that proposals like General Meyer's seem to foster a stronger military at the expense of civil authority, and to add super-structure without improving substance. In short, Congress is once more being asked to accede to a most un-American shift in policy, one which renders civilian control more problematic, and which assures more brass, but no more bang-for-the-buck.

I propose to answer these charges by drawing on past reports and studies. But first, let's review the bidding: as before on occasions since 1900, senior officers, both serving and retired, among them the most prestigious in the military profession, have gone public with a series of proposals designed to enhance the quality and continuity of the military advice to their civilian

Secretary for his pivotal decisions on defense policy and on resource allocation.

They point out that the Secretary is serviced for these purposes mainly by bureaucracies which, albeit staffed by fellow military professionals, are insulated one from another, and fiercely competitive for mission and money.

They argue that however patriotic and well motivated the leaders in these vertical conduits to the Secretary may be, the wants and needs of their own bureaucracy are inevitably in tension with overall military requirements. Hence, the Secretary would be better serviced by a reorganization providing for a supervening horizontal military staff free to monitor and critique their plans and undertakings, and to influence the readiness of the armed forces as a whole. They hold that this staff should be headed by one senior military officer designated as the principal military adviser to the Secretary and the President. This reorganization would, therefore, provide for the well-founded military analyses which the Secretary requires to decide on issues of efficiency cutting across the several compartments within his department, or on the opportunities and risks entailed in deciding what forces to maintain ready for war.

To portray the currently proposed reforms as "augmenting the role of the Chairman" or "strengthening the authority of the Joint Chiefs of Staff" is to obscure the essential principles espoused by General Meyer and General Jones, which are consistent with those of virtually every other reformer of defense organization back to Elihu Root and Alfred Thayer Mahan at the turn of the century: it is the civilian Secretary not the military head-of-staff who is the intended beneficiary. The reformers argue that civilian control would be better assured both by virtue of a better-advised Secretary, and by adding checks and balances to the military bureaucracies. Military options adduced for the Secretary

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would be more numerous and more sharply delineated. Most importantly, these changes would assure that the nation would, by being more ready to wage war, be more likely to preserve peace.

To illuminate these issues in the present controversy, I invite you to revisit those which arose late in the Presidency of Theodore Roosevelt when prominent naval officers, including Admirals Steven B. Luce and Alfred T. Mahan, aided and abetted by a group of more junior officers, among them Commander William S. Sims, petitioned the President to bring about a reorganization of the Navy Department. Mahan perceived military administration as "embracing opposites"--reconciling the different perspectives on the one hand of military professionals who have to ready and to fight the force, and, on the other, of civilian leaders who by law superintend them, and of politicians who represent the people for whose security the force is raised and supported--and held that existing organizations were unbalanced toward the civil. Roosevelt finally acted, and on February 25, 1909, his special message to the Senate set forth general principles for naval organization, followed up shortly thereafter with specific legislative recommendations.* His report stated that the office of the Secretary was executive in nature, and that law should preserve that official's full authority and responsibility. But, the division between the civil and military functions of the department should be recognized and more clearly defined. While the existing organization, which dated back to laws of 1842, provided for the peacetime administration of the department, there were no comparable provisions in statute for preparation for war or operations therein. The problem was exactly that the eight existing bureaus within the Department of the Navy, however well-suited for civil administration or for mollifying politicians, were an impediment to the

*Senate Documents 740 and 743, 60th Congress, 2d Session.

prosecution of war. "Independent authority, with undivided responsibility, though in principle proper, suffers historically from intrinsic inability to cooperate where a number of such independent units are present. The marshals of the first Napoleon--especially in Spain--in the absence of the Emperor, offer a familiar illustration. The bureau system as at present constituted by law contains no remedy for this inherent defect."

The report concluded that while it clearly was the responsibility of the Secretary to coordinate the work of the bureaus, his tenure of office was short, and his military knowledge inevitably limited; hence, a reorganization was required to provide military continuity, and "knowledge and experience, digested formally," from a body designed to provide "the weightiest and most instructed counsel," a group "equipped not with advice merely, but with reasons." Here the hand of Admiral Mahan is especially evident. Mahan had written the President in January, 1909, that the Secretary of the Navy needed a full-time, knowledgeable military staff with mastery of all information domestic and foreign, that bore on naval policy:

"The only means by which such consecutive knowledge can be maintained is by a corporate body continuous in existence and gradual in change. That we call a General Staff."

Such a body should be endowed with coherence and force by fixing upon its head sole responsibility for advice rendered to the Secretary, "solemnly charged that in all he recommends he is sowing for a future he himself may have to reap." Further, since the purpose of the Navy is war, that body "should be taken entirely from the class to which belongs the conduct of war, and upon whom will fall, in war, the responsibility for the use of the instruments and for the results of the measures which they recommend." Hence, a staff of naval officers should be maintained to provide the Secretary "a clear understanding and firm grasp of

leading military considerations. Possessed of these he may without great difficulty weigh the recommendations of his technical assistants, decide for himself, and depend on them for technical execution of that which he approves." Thus, such a staff would help, not hinder the Secretary, and shed new light on technical issues, not obfuscate them.

The National Security Act of 1947, as amended in 1949, 1953, and 1958, establishes a Secretary of Defense with intradepartmental challenges not unlike those of the Secretary of the Navy in Roosevelt's era. In some respects at least, he is in an even weaker position. After all, Secretaries of the Navy then had to contend only with eight semi-autonomous bureaus. Today the Secretary of Defense has to cope with three military departments, four Services, and a plethora of independent Defense agencies, and to do so advised militarily only by a committee, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, with their ineffectual Joint Staff. I will not take the time to detail for this audience the deficiencies of these latter organizations in that these have been well documented in the Report of the Blue Ribbon Defense Panel of 1970, the Ignatius and Steadman reports of 1978, the Brehm report of 1980, and the recent Brehm-Kerwin study for the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff. What I wish to stress is that divisions within the Department of Defense today are far more dysfunctional than were the divisions within the Department of the Navy at the turn of the century. After all, those Navy bureaus were headed by naval officers, each of whom, in one sense or another, was pursuing the needs of his service. Today the Secretary of Defense has to accommodate Service differences so deep and so divisive as to warrant reference to them as "cultural." By the latter term I mean that corpus of ideas, suppositions, traditions, customs, prejudices, and obstancies which distinguish

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one of the uniformed Services from another. These cultural differences go beyond distinctive weapon systems, dress, forms of speech, and life style, to dictate functional asymmetries among the Services in their approach to command control and doctrine, and in their attitudes toward the functions of staffs for planning and operations. More importantly, since members of the JCS are products of their culture par excellence, much that has been reported as disjointed in the Joint Staff, often deplored, can best be understood as cultural clash.

Join me for a moment in some comparisons. Array in your mind, if you will, the four Services side by side, starting on the left with the Navy, then the Air Force, then the Marine Corps, and on the right the Army. As categories of comparison, one might select strategic mobility, and observe that the four Services, so arrayed, are in proper order from left to right with respect to their intrinsic capabilities for force projection: the Navy has the greatest strategic independence, while the Army is wholly dependent on other services for strategic mobility. Similarly, one might observe that the base operations of the Navy and the Air Force are more like large scale industrial undertakings, while those of the Marine Corps and the Army are closer to cottage industry. But for the purposes for which we are met here, to inquire into doctrine, and into higher echelon staff functions, we must probe more deeply.

I would suggest that to illuminate more surely the asymmetries among the Services, we might use the foregoing scale to compare four members of the JCS in chrysalis. Let's take four three-star commanders each from a different Service, operating afield: Each of these would dispose of a quite different number of movable subordinate entities, an order of magnitude different number. By "movable subordinate entities" I mean groupings of personnel and material responsive to a

single human intelligence: ships, planes, tank crews, infantry squads, supply detachments, survey parties and the like. The Navy three-star would probably have at his disposal something on the order of 10^1 to 10^2 movable subordinate entities. The comparable Air Force three-star would have perhaps 10^2 to 10^3 movable subordinate entities, the Marine some 10^3 to 10^4 , and their Army counterpart, a corps commander, would have 10^4 to 10^5 movable subordinate entities. These numbers are tyrannical, but probably less so than the communication systems and command mechanisms which would be available to each. The Navy commander would have the most assured communications, the Army commander the least. The Navy commander would be dealing on the average with relatively high-ranking officers, and the average rank of subordinate leaders of the movable subordinate entities would decline as one proceeded across the array from Navy to Air Force to Marine Corps to Army. The Navy commander's information concerning his subordinates would be quite precise and real-time, that of the Army leader vague and slow-arriving. The Navy commander would have, as a concomitant of all of the foregoing, the greatest tactical flexibility, the Army commander the least. The Navy command principle would be centralization, while that of the Army commander would be, per force, decentralization. The Air Force would be much closer to the Navy in all these respects, the Marine Corps closer to the Army.

These cultural realities dictate very different attitudes toward doctrine. For Marine and Army forces afield, doctrine is important for cohesion of effort: in the best sense of the term, it is consensus on how to fight. A consensus powerful enough to concert action amid the chaos and uncertainty of land combat, to facilitate decentralized yet complementary operations, must be nurtured by years of careful training.* Moreover, land force doctrine mainly focuses on

*Title 10 USC Sec 141(C): "...the Joint Chiefs of Staff shall...(5) formulate policies for the joint training of the armed services; (6) formulate policies for coordinating the military education of members of the armed services.

human behavior, while that for air and sea warfare centers on weapon system performance. Changes of Navy and Air Force doctrine are more readily absorbed by those cultures, and usually stem from the infusion of new materiel. Marine and Army doctrine, on the other hand, can undergo transformation without major changes in equipment--the last several versions of the FM 100-5 to point. No responsible leader of any service would disagree with the proposition that weapon system development should be subservient to operating doctrine, but as a practical matter, absent exogenous influence, this is less likely to occur in USN or USAF, and more likely in USMC or USA.

As for planning, the classic function of higher echelon staffs, the Navy commander would be mainly interested only to the point of orchestrating deployment schedules, determining load-out criteria, and maintaining readiness for a surge to high operating tempo. Once a ship is loaded for combat, in general, it doesn't much matter where it is then sent, one part of the hydrosphere being like another. The Air Force commander would have his staff pay serious attention to deployment, but would probably regard employment as a matter of make-it-up-as-you-go along, since one segment of aerospace is like another, and a targeted Soviet column on a road presents about the same problem for suppression and strike whether in Central Europe or anywhere in Asia. The Marine Corps commander would want the staff to concentrate heavily on deployment planning, especially for amphibious assault. Both the Marine and the Army commanders would want staffs to dig deeply into all aspects of employment to anticipate proper force mix and logistics, since their units would have to contend with all the clutter of the earth's land surface, and would have to deal with all the variables and uncertainties induced by climate or enemy. And the Army commander would feel the need for detailed advance planning even more than the Marine, since he would want to prepare for sustained combat on land,

and usually would have to provide most of the theater logistic infrastructure. These attitudes and convictions constitute part of the mental baggage each of these commanders would carry into the "tank" were he subsequently to become one of the JCS.

It is only natural then that some manifestation of these cultural differences often dominate JCS recommendations and actions. Moreover, since each Chief of Service carries heavy personal responsibilities for research, development, and procurement, he often finds Service interests at odds with joint interests. These tensions occur not only within the JCS itself, but engender counterpart tensions in the Unified Commands, and throughout the multi-layered Joint Staff structure where joint issues are addressed. But they occur within the JCS especially because four of the five members are charged with the responsibility to maintain the traditions, esprit, morale and capabilities of their Services--they are Temple Dogs, personal guardians of their culture. Such tensions spill over to the combatant commands and within Pentagon staffs because officers assigned to joint billets come from and return to the culture which conditions them before joint duty, and which exercises complete control over their subsequent promotions and assignments. An officer champions at hazard to his career causes that lead to greater joint effectiveness at the expense of the institutional interests of his own Service. These are persistent flaws in the "system":

• JCS Special Committee, 1945:

"...even in areas where unity of command has been established, complete integration of effort has not yet been achieved because we are still struggling with inconsistencies, lack of understanding, jealousies and duplications which exist in all theaters of operations."

- President Eisenhower, 1958:

"I know well, from years of military life, the constant concern of service leaders for the adequacy of their respective programs, each of which is intended to strengthen the Nation's defense...But service responsibilities and activities must always be only the branches, not the central trunk of the national security tree. The present organization fails to apply this truth.

While at times human failure and misdirected zeal have been responsible for duplications, inefficiencies, and publicized disputes, the truth is that most of the service rivalries that have troubled us in recent years have been made inevitable by the laws that govern our defense organization."

- The Symington Report, 1960:

"...the predominance of Service influence in the formulation of defense planning and the performance of military missions must be corrected. At present, defense planning represents at best a series of compromised positions among the military services. ...Nor can the Joint Staff become fully effective in developing the basis for clear military judgments unless the present degree of influence exercised by separate Service thinking is sharply reduced.

In short, there is a clear need for defense interest rather than particular service interest."

- The Steadman Report, 1978:

"The nature of the [JCS] organization virtually precludes effective addressal of those issues involving allocation of resources among the Services, such as budget levels, force structures, and procurement of new weapons systems--except to agree that they should be increased without consideration of resource constraints."

- The CJCS Special Study Group, 1982:

"A certain amount of Service independence is healthy and desirable, but the balance now favors the parochial interests of the Services too much and the larger needs of the nation's defenses too little."

To sum up: to ignore General's Meyer and Jones is to leave the Secretary of Defense without military recourse against the service bureaucracies.

But what about the danger of incipient militarism and presumptions that more numerous and influential generals will lead to four-star feather-bedding, to more overhead without an iota of added military efficiency? Many Americans, and their political leaders seem disinclined to believe that American military professionals are corporately capable of providing cogent advice on key military matters--many here have fostered such attitudes. This view is not based on *simple* disdain such as that of H.G. Wells, who opined that "the professional military mind is by necessity an inferior, unimaginative mind; no man of high intellectual quality would willingly imprison his gifts in such a calling." Rather, it reflects a conviction that military conservatism frequently inhibits proper choices among weapon systems, force structures, strategies, and tactics, so that reform if it be needed, must come from the civil leadership or the Congress. Alfred Thayer Mahan himself stated that no military service can or should undertake to reform itself, but must seek assistance from outside. As Roman naval authorities continued to build oar-powered ships long after conversion to sail was indicated, so the US Navy persisted with sail long after the era of steam had arrived. The U.S. Army spurned the machine guns of Gatling, Browning, Maxim, and Lewis, and ignored Christie's tank, forcing those American inventors to sell abroad, and the Army obstinately preserved large horse cavalry formations up until World War II, long after their operational relevancy had diminished. Public receptivity to present debates over doctrine for air-land battle, over force structure for strategic mobility, or over the kind and amount of ships for the Navy, reflects the opinion of many Americans that such matters are altogether too important to be left to any military staff.

Coupled with inherent suspicion of military conservatism is our ~~st~~avistic fear of military domination. This takes the form of staunch opposition to a General Staff, out of conviction that such a body, if empowered to arrange for the means of national security policy would be ipso facto in a position to determine its ends. Congress has often acted to preclude the creation of any such staff. Just prior to World War I, the redoubtable Josephus Daniels breasted the wave of naval reform succeeding the Roosevelt proposals, emasculating legislation which would have established a General Staff within the Department of the Navy by accusing sponsors of trying to "Prussianize" the navy. Today, the law of the land provides that "the Joint Staff shall not operate or be organized as an overall armed forces general staff and shall have no executive authority." *

I think the time has come to reconsider that legislation and the underlying prejudices which prompted it. Over the past 12 years, no official study on defense reorganization expresses doubts concerning the desirability of competent military advice; indeed, by identifying the absence of incisive military advice for the Secretary as a shortcoming, they endorse its usefulness. Moreover, none of these studies anticipate an uncontrolled military, a step toward militarism. As General Jones has put it aptly, he is not trying to set up a man on a horseback, only to provide a remedy for five men on a camel.

The principal reason for moving beyond a national command advised by a committee of Chiefs of Services is that however useful that arrangement may be for justifying force structure and procurement funds for modernization, it is patently not useful for prosecuting war. The payoff for defense organization

*Title 10, US Code, Section 143

is readiness for war. The armed service, qua services, do not fight wars, anymore than the bureaus of the old Navy fought wars. By law, the President, through the Secretary of Defense, with the advice and assistance of the JCS, establishes combatant commands to perform military missions and prescribes the force structure of those commands. The Military Departments assign forces from the Services to these combatant commands for stated missions, and any force so assigned is to be under its full operational command. Moreover, as President Eisenhower--who of all Presidents was in a position to know--stated in his message to Congress on 3 April 1958:

"Separate ground, sea, and air warfare is gone forever. If ever again we should be involved in war, we will fight it in all elements, with all services, as one single concentrated effort. Peacetime preparatory and organizational activity must conform to this fact. Strategic and tactical planning must be completely unified, combat forces organized into unified commands, each equipped with the most efficient weapons systems that science can develop, singly led and prepared to fight as one, regardless of service. The accomplishment of this result is the basic function of the Secretary of Defense, advised and assisted by the Joint Chiefs of Staff and operating under the supervision of the Commander in Chief."

Eisenhower noted that, as of 1958, a decade after Truman's reorganization:

"The Unified Commanders authority over component [service] commands is short of the full command required for maximum efficiency... when military responsibility is unclear, civilian control is uncertain."

Once more, of course, a reform-minded President fell short of his expectations. The revisions of the law in 1958 which ensued did not significantly ameliorate Service divisions, or put the combatant commands in any better position to discharge their responsibilities. The 1978 Steadman report found that "...most CINCs have limited power to influence the capability of the forces assigned to them...the Service and the components thus have the major influence on both the structure and readiness of the forces for which the CINC is responsible." The most recent study, by the Chairman's Special Study Group, concluded that "the military

organizations given the responsibility for the planning and execution of joint activities--notably the JCS, the Joint Staff...and the various Unified Command headquarters--simply do not have the authority, stature, trained personnel, or support needed to carry out their jobs effectively." Within the past several weeks, most of the CINCs have backed the Chairman's proposals for reform.

General Jones has advanced five recommendations:

1. The Chairman, rather than the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a body, should be designated the principal military adviser to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council.

2. The Secretary of Defense or the President would continue to seek the corporate advice of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on subjects they deem appropriate.

3. Each Service Chief would have the right to submit his individual views and recommendations directly to the Secretary of Defense, and to the President as appropriate, on any joint issue on which that Chief had particularly strong feelings.

4. A Deputy Chairman of the four-star rank should be authorized to assist in carrying out the Chairman's responsibilities.

5. The Joint Staff should be made responsible directly to the Chairman rather than to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as a body.

In addition, he has advocated incentives for officers to seek Joint Staff duty and educational reforms designed to help officers transcend Service cultures.

What would be different were these proposals adopted? I think we could at least attain what President Eisenhower sought in his reorganization of 1958. To use his words of 24 years ago: "Strategic planning will be unified...The Joint Chiefs of Staff will be provided professional military assistance required for

efficient strategic planning and operational control. The control and supervision of the Secretary of Defense over military research and development will be strengthened...the new weapons and other defense undertakings are so costly as to heavily burden our entire economy. We must achieve the utmost military efficiency in order to generate maximum power from the resources we have available."

General Jones believes that his proposals would improve the efficiency of the Department of Defense by:

- Furnishing the Secretary the responsible, crisp, timely, responsive military advice he seldom now receives.
- Putting military strategy ahead of doctrine, and doctrine ahead of weapon systems, vice the inverse, as is now the practice.
- Giving the CINCs of the combatant commands the effective voice in Defense decisions they now lack.
- Preserving Service views within the JCS, but balancing these with joint perspectives.
- Assuring more time for each Chief, freed from nitty-gritty joint affairs, to shepherd manning, training, provisioning, and weapon systems development within his own service.

But the best explanation of what these proposals would accomplish was written 73 years ago in President Roosevelt's report to the Senate:

"The requirement of war is the true standard of efficiency in an administrative military system...Success in war and victory in battle can be assured only by that constant preparedness and that superior fighting efficiency which logically result from placing the control and responsibility in time of peace upon the same individuals and the same agencies that must control in time of war. There would be no shock or change of method in expanding from a state of peace to a state of war. This is not militarism; it is a simple

business principle based upon the fact that success in war is the only return the people and the nation can get from the investment of many [billions] in the building and maintenance of a great [defense establishment]."