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American Strategic Culture and Civil-Military Relations: The Case of JCS Reform

Mackubin Thomas Owens

Reformers have a broad menu of candidates to blame for deficiencies in American defense policy. For some it is the very constitutional framework of the American government itself, which leads to competition and even conflict between the legislative and executive branches. For others it is the increasing bureaucratization of the Defense Establishment, the decline of military professionalism, interservice rivalry, or the organization of the Defense Department all of which result in an inability to develop an effective military strategy. But the target highest on the reformers' list is the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) which serves as the focus of civil-military relations in the United States. "Reform" is in the air and the 99th Congress has promised to do something about the Defense Establishment if it cannot put its own house in order.¹

For the most part the reformers are military "purists" who, rightly, seek to address the issues of military effectiveness. Their error is to ignore what has been called the American "strategic culture" and act as if reform can be accomplished in a vacuum.² Contemporary reformers seem to ignore the broad context of American history, tradition, and institutions. As Allan Millett and Peter Maslowski have observed, "national military considerations alone have rarely shaped [American] military policies and programs. The political system, the availability of finite . . . resources and manpower, and societal values have all imposed constraints on defense matters." In addition, "the nation's firm commitment to civilian control of military policy requires careful attention to civil-military relations. The commitment to civilian control makes military policy a paramount function of the federal government where the executive branch and Congress vie to shape policy."³

Throughout American history, would-be reformers have ignored these principles at their peril. A case in point was Emory Upton. From a strictly military point of view, Upton's proposals to reform the U.S. Army after the

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Civil War had a great deal of merit. But like many of today's reformers, he paid insufficient attention to the character of his countrymen or to their political traditions and institutions. In the words of Millett and Maslowski: ". . . Upton [did not] understand that policy cannot be judged by any absolute standard. It reflects a nation's characteristics, habits of thoughts, geographic location, and historical development. Built upon the genius, traditions, and location of Germany, the system, he admired could not be grafted onto America. In essence, Upton wrote in a vacuum. He began with a fixed view of the policy he thought the U.S. needed, and he wanted the rest of society to change to meet his demands, which it sensibly declined to do."⁴

The purpose of this paper is to address the relationship between American strategic culture and civil-military relations, as manifested in the Joint Chiefs of Staff. In doing so it will deal with the following issues: the nature of strategic culture and its relationship with military policy; the components of American strategic culture and how the pattern of U.S. civil-military relations has arisen from American strategic culture; and JCS as a reflection of American strategic culture.

Strategic Culture and Military Policy

A nation's strategic culture, in the words of Carnes Lord, is comprised of the "fundamental assumptions governing the constitution of military power and the ends they are intended to serve." These assumptions "establish the basic framework for, if they do not determine in detail the nature of, military forces and military operations." In other words, strategic culture is the framework within which military policy is debated and decided.

According to another writer it is "a set of general beliefs, attitudes and behavioral patterns," regarding strategy which have "achieved a state of semipermanence that places them on the level of *culture* rather than mere *policy*. Of course attitudes may change as a result of changes in technology and the international environment. However, new problems are not assessed objectively. Rather, they are seen through the perceptual lens provided by the strategic culture." Strategic culture, says Colin Gray, refers "to modes of thought and action with respect to force, derives from perception of the national historical experience, aspiration for self-characterization, . . . and from all the many distinctively [national] experiences . . . that characterize [that nation's] citizen."⁵

Influences on strategic culture include geography, political philosophy, civic culture, and socio-economic conditions. These interact with traditions and institutions to create what may be called the "character of a people" from which strategic culture is finally derived.

Military policy is inextricably linked to strategic culture. It is the aggregate of the plans, programs, and actions taken by the citizens of a nation

through their government to achieve security against external military threats and domestic insurrection. Military policy manifests itself in two primary ways, both of which are connected to civil-military relations: through the instrumentalities by which military forces are organized and controlled; and through the development and implementation of military strategy. Military policy must be consistent with national policy, and with the underlying purpose and fundamental perspective of the nation. It thus transcends purely military tasks and ultimately encompasses the nation's *civilian* goals.

American Strategic Culture and Military Policy. I would suggest that there are four primary factors that influence strategic culture:

- the geopolitical situation,
- political culture and ideology,
- international relationships, and
- weaponry and military technology.⁶

The interaction of these factors creates the strategic culture from which military policy arises. Since the influence of the different factors may vary with differing conditions, strategic culture in general is dynamic. But in the American case, certain of these factors have seen very little change since the founding of the Republic, resulting in a fairly constant strategic culture. Those more stable factors are the geopolitical setting, and political culture and ideology.

From a geopolitical standpoint, the United States has always been an island, as opposed to a continental power. Like the earlier island powers of England and Athens, American national security requirements have been intermittent rather than continuous—the nation has relied primarily on naval forces and citizen soldiers or militia to meet its requirements, and the national attitude toward war has been greatly influenced by commercial attitudes.

Throughout its history the United States has had essentially friendly and/or benign neighbors. The resulting isolation from most direct threats to national security has enabled the nation to enjoy the advantages of insularity, the most important of which is the freedom to choose involvement in international affairs as it suits the national purpose. This advantage is clearly articulated in Washington's Farewell Address: "Our detached and distant situation invites us to a different course and enables us to pursue it. If we remain a united people under an efficient Government the period is not distant when we may defy material injury from external annoyance—when we may take such an attitude as will cause the neutrality we shall at any time resolve to observe to be violated with caution—when it will be the interest of belligerent nations under the impossibility of making acquisitions upon us to be very careful how either forced us to throw our weight into the opposite scale—when we may choose peace or war College Digital Commons, 1986 by justice shall dictate."⁷

With the development of the intercontinental and submarine launched ballistic missile much of that advantage has been lost, but unlike continental states in Europe or Asia, the United States does not face the threat of a land invasion.

As important as the geopolitical factor has been in the development of the American strategic culture, it is less significant than the political-ideological one. The United States is a liberal democracy, and the political institutions and traditions of the nation have, more than any other influence, formed the American strategic culture.

The American political tradition is the result of the confluence of Lockean liberalism, radical Whig republicanism, and Puritan political philosophy, as modified by modern theories of progress. As such, it has always been strongly antimilitarist, primarily with regard to standing armies. The founders—steeped in the history of classical Greece and Rome, well aware that a military dictatorship had arisen out of the English civil war, and having just won their independence from a British monarch who had, in their view, violated his powers—were very concerned to diffuse power sufficiently widely to prevent its abuse. As a result of these concerns the founders paid particular attention to the standing army—“that engine of arbitrary power,” in the words of Luther Martin, “which has so often and so successfully been used for the subversion of freedom.”⁸ At the same time, the classical liberal political theory that served as the basis of the American Republic treated war as being fundamentally unnatural, and hence illegitimate, since it constituted a threat to the principles that the American Republic was designed to protect: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Yet, the founders realized that a military establishment was necessary. As Madison wrote in *Federalist* 41: “How could a readiness for war in time of peace be safely prohibited, unless we would prohibit in like manner the preparations and establishments of every hostile nation? This means of security can only be regulated by the means and danger of attack. They will, in fact, be ever determined by these rules and by no others.”⁹

But they saw such an establishment as at best a necessary evil, and did all in their power to ensure that it could never become an instrument of despotism in the executive branch. In the words of John Taylor of Carolina: “An army is the strongest of all factions, and completely the instrument of a leader, skillful enough to enlist its sympathies, and inflame its passions. It is given to a president, and election is the only surety that he will not use it . . . the precept ‘that money should not be appropriated for the use of an army, for a longer term than two years,’ is like that which forbid Caesar to open the treasury.”¹⁰ The President was to be constrained by legislative prerogatives. What we call *civilian* control of the military meant for the founders *legislative* control.

Harry Summers has pointed out that it was not the French revolution but the American that laid the basis for the transformation of the army from an

instrument of executive power to one reflecting the national will—the will of the people at large as expressed through the deliberations of their representatives in the congress.¹¹ As Clausewitz wrote: “In the eighteenth century . . . war was still an affair for governments alone, and the people’s role was simply that of the instrument . . . the executive . . . represented the state in its foreign relations . . . the people’s part had become extinguished . . . war thus became solely the concern of the government to the extent that governments parted company with their peoples and behaved as if they were themselves the state.”¹²

The founders consciously rejected an army based on the eighteenth-century model, one answerable only to the executive. The purpose of the constitutional safeguards that they created was to ensure that the American *people* would ultimately control the military instrument.

Article I, Section 8 of the Constitution makes explicit the bond between the American people and the army: “The Congress shall have power . . . to declare War . . . to raise and support Armies . . . to make Rules for the Government and Regulations of the land and naval forces”

In *Federalist* Numbers 24 and 69, Alexander Hamilton made very clear the complete American break with the eighteenth-century model: “The whole power of raising armies [is] lodged in the *Legislative*, not in the *Executive*, this Legislature [is] to be a popular body, consisting of the representatives of the people, periodically elected . . . a great and real security against the keeping of troops without evident necessity.”¹³

“ . . . The power of the President would be inferior to that of the Monarch . . . that of the British King extends to the *Declaring* of war and to the *Raising* and *Regulating* of fleets and armies, all which by the Constitution . . . would appertain to the Legislature.”¹⁴

Such limitations on the executive branch address the founders’ fear of concentrated power and are clearly in consonance with the “Whig pessimism” about human nature. But, likewise, they were responsible for setting up obstacles to the efficient use of military power. Thus, the most important legacy of the political-ideological factor in American strategic culture was the division of control over the military between the legislative and executive branches. The complex nature of American civil-military relations arising from this division has made military reform, particularly of the sort desired by military “purists,” unusually difficult in the United States and should provide a warning signal for the current crop of reformers.

Samuel Huntington went to the heart of the problem of U.S. military reform arising from dual control over national forces when he wrote in *The Soldier and the State* that: “The principal beneficiaries of this spreading of power have been organized interest groups, bureaucratic agencies, and the military services. The separation of powers is a perpetual invitation, if not an irresistible force, drawing military leaders into political conflicts.”¹⁵ He

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further observed that by defining the President's power as "Commander in Chief" in terms of an *office* rather than a *function*, the founders broadened the area of conflict between the President and the Congress, since presidents have used the clause to "justify an extraordinarily broad range of nonmilitary presidential actions largely legislative in nature"¹⁶ and, by definition, at the expense of the Congress.

This conflict is exacerbated further by the fact that the constitutional separation of *powers* undermines the constitutional separation of *functions*, inviting the Congress and President to each "invade the constitutional realm of the other in any inajor substantive area of governmental activity."¹⁷ One may easily understand why military purists, who wish to see military considerations alone shape military policies and programs, would lament such a system resulting in duplication of functions and inefficiency in government. But the fact of the matter is that the central goal of American republican government is the widespread distribution of power and not functional efficiency. It is such an arrangement that best allows the United States to protect its citizens in their rights to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness"—given the choice between liberty and efficiency, the founders chose liberty.

Despite the criticism of the military purists, the constitutional system created by the founders was designed to defend the Republic against threats to its security while remaining true to the principles and character of the American regime of liberal democracy. Though always weighted toward the latter, throughout history this system has been amazingly adaptable and responsive to changing conditions, allowing the nation for the most part to correctly evaluate the degree of danger and risk to the nation and to allocate resources accordingly. According to Millett and Maslowski: "When gauging America's strength against potential enemies, policymakers realized that the nation could devote its energies and financial resources to internal development rather than to maintaining a large and expensive peacetime military establishment. However, mobilizing simultaneously with a war's outbreak has extracted high costs in terms of speed and ease with each new mobilization."¹⁸

Since the end of World War II, changed geopolitical realities, as manifested in the growth of a militarily powerful and ideologically hostile Soviet Union and the increasing importance of nuclear weapons, have dictated that U.S. military policy be substantially changed. The peacetime Military Establishment has grown, and the United States has become a major player in international affairs. Yet, even in these dangerous times, military policy must be developed and implemented within certain constraints. These constraints may not please the purists among the military reformers, but even here they must acknowledge that the political system of the United States has created the conditions necessary for great economic growth, and it is the

economic potential of the nation that has in the past, and at present, undergirded its military might. At the same time, the American political system has produced generally courageous, clever and adaptable soldiers. The American soldier, backed by the economic power of the nation and employed to achieve clear war aims and political objectives, has generally performed well.

All of the factors enumerated and discussed above have created a unique strategic culture that has important implications for the future of national security and defense reform. In short, there exists an American strategic culture in which:

- the strategic defensive is fundamentally favored over the offensive (although tactically and operationally, preference for the offense prevails);
- reliance is placed on economic power and superior technology, rather than on "military art";
- seapower (and airpower) are favored over the employment of land forces (with the exception of the Marine Corps, which according to doctrine only represents the projection of seapower ashore);
- there is a predisposition against the use of force, but a tendency to emancipate the conduct of war from political goals, once force is employed; and
- fundamental decisions regarding war and peace and military policy in general are the result of a competition between civilian and military imperatives and competition and conflict between the executive and legislative branches, as well as among the agencies of the former and committees of the latter.

In light of American strategic culture, let us now return to the opening question of this paper: there are many who suggest that changed circumstances have rendered the existing system of civil-military relations in the United States obsolete. Samuel Huntington suggested that this might be the case as long as three decades ago, "Previously the primary question was: what pattern of civil-military relations is most compatible with American liberal democratic values? Now this has been supplanted by the more important issue: what pattern of civil-military relations will best maintain the security of the American nation?"¹⁹ Echoing what they take to be Huntington's point, the current reformers suggest that a wholesale and radical revision of American civil-military relations is necessary if we are to confront the military power of the Soviet Union.

As mentioned at the outset, the most prominent target for reformers is the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Yet, if what I have suggested up to this point is true, if the JCS, like other manifestations of American military power, is merely a reflection of prevailing and evolving attitudes about military affairs, themselves reflecting the American strategic culture, then to attempt to change the JCS without recognizing the pervasiveness of the underlying strategic culture is as risk-making things worse.

The Case of the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

The charges against the JCS are fairly straightforward: the JCS provides military advice of a questionable quality; the members of the JCS, who are also the Chiefs of their respective services, are unable to set aside their parochial biases in order to provide objective military advice; since unanimity is required before the JCS can take a position, log-rolling is inevitable; the JCS will not address contentious issues for fear of bringing interservice rivalry into the open; the JCS decisionmaking process is cumbersome and unwieldy; JCS staff work is poor, because of Service parochialism and because the Services do not assign their best officers to the Joint Staff.²⁰

Among other things, say the critics, the JCS cannot agree on a coherent military policy or on the material requirements to support it. According to former Secretary of Defense Harold Brown, the JCS "would list as equally essential virtually all the programs each individual service wanted for itself When everything has 'top' priority, nothing does."²¹

The cure for the shortcomings of the JCS, say the reformers, involves curbing the independent powers of the Services. This is to be done either by replacing the JCS with a central defense staff or at least strengthening the Chairman so that he can make decisions in his own right and overcome the log-rolling that characterizes the decisions of the corporate JCS. Some proposals also place the Chairman in the chain of command.

The first, and more radical approach was recently proposed by Edward Luttwak, in his inside-the-Beltway-best-seller, *The Pentagon and the Art of War*. Another took the form of legislation initiated by Rep. Ike Skelton, which seeks to abolish the JCS and create a "single Chief of Staff for the National Command Authorities," still another was in the form of a staff report of the Senate Armed Services Committee, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*. The general purpose or goal, in the words of Representative Skelton, is to remove "the built-in conflict between service interests and joint interests," which currently forces the JCS to "serve two masters."²²

A second approach is recommended by two recent think tank studies: the report of the "Defense Organization Project" of Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); and the "Defense Assessment Project" of the Heritage Foundation. It has taken legislative form in a bill offered last year by Rep. Bill Nichols. This approach seeks to address the problem succinctly identified by Rep. Les Aspin, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee: "The Chairman of the JCS is a eunuch." In Aspin's view, the JCS is "a bureaucracy that can't make decisions" and are forever ". . . bogged down in the need for unanimity." As a result, says former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger, the advice

*This section of the article is based substantially on Mark Kubijewski and Thomas Owens, "The Hollow Promise of JCS Reform," *International Security*, Winter 1985-86, pp. 98-111.

proffered by the JCS "is generally irrelevant, normally unread, and almost always disregarded."²³

The current structure of the Department of Defense and the JCS has arisen from the interaction among: political institutions based on the constitutional separation of powers; Service institutions and traditions; the exigencies of the international environment; assumptions about the role of the United States in that environment; the quality of leadership at different times within the executive and legislative branches and within the military; and the imperatives of organizational theory. The complaints of Representative Skelton about the present system are typical of those who assess the JCS with no regard for the political institutions of the nation. At the close of World War II, he says, President Truman and General Marshall wanted a truly unified Department of Defense. "But resistance, particularly by the Navy, led to compromises. Many of the structural flaws in today's Joint Chiefs of Staff system stem from these compromises, which had the effect of preserving autonomy for the individual services."²⁴

Of course Representative Skelton is correct, but he seems to miss the point. His complaints amount to an attempt to wish away the American political system which, after all, frequently results in compromise. Representative Skelton seems also to ignore the substantial role of his own body, the U.S. Congress, in insuring that the Truman-Marshall defense organization plan was soundly defeated. The point that the good Congressman misses is that any reform proposal must take account of the factors mentioned above. Representative Skelton's attitude, to ignore them, is indicative of the tendency among so many reformers. As Upton discovered, policy cannot be made without regard to the American political environment.

JCS Reform in the Light of American Strategic Culture. Although it has not been comprehensively presented, there is a persuasive case against the proposal to reorganize the JCS. This case takes account of political and strategic realities in a way that the reformers do not. To begin with, the proposed reforms are simply at odds with the character of American political institutions and traditions. There is a strong antimilitarist strain in the American experience, and whether correctly or not, a central military staff is perceived as an instrument of militarism. Secondly, proposals for JCS reform are based upon the questionable assumption that the major obstacle to sound military planning and execution is interservice rivalry and not the lack of civilian-military interagency coordination within the executive branch. Finally, reform proposals depend upon a further questionable assumption: that a Chairman with enhanced powers, or a "purple suit" national general staff, or central military staff will provide higher quality advice than is presently available. That the advice would be different, there can be little doubt. But would it be better? An Adm. James Holloway, former Chief of Naval

Operations and a critic of JCS reform, has remarked, bad advice is frequently a euphemism for not providing the desired answer.²⁵

In many respects the JCS face a double jeopardy: on the one hand, too much is expected of the JCS; on the other, the organization is blamed for decisions it had no part in making. The advocates of JCS reform simply need to make a more persuasive case than they have to date, i.e., would their reforms produce a more effective system, and would the costs, seen and unseen, outweigh the advertised benefits.

The first objection to JCS reorganization is a political-ideological one. The proposed reforms that place the JCS in the chain of command (as all except the CSIS study do) affect civilian control of the military. Advocates of JCS reform usually ridicule this concern, but the issue of civilian control of the military has been of constant concern throughout the history of the Republic.

By strengthening the Chairman (or creating a Chief of a national general staff) and placing him in the chain of command, reformers would give more power to a single U.S. military officer than has ever been given before. In addition, the attempt to place the CJCS in the chain of command confuses the necessary distinction between staff and line officers, and gives the Chairman and his supporting staff command authority without the commensurate *responsibility*. This is not a trivial matter, as John Kester, an advocate of JCS reform who nonetheless strenuously objects to the proposal to place the CJCS in the chain of command, understands very well. As he recently observed: "The premise of our free government, going right back to the 1787 Constitutional Convention, has been that our government institutions should be set up, not for the ideal people we may be blessed with at the moment, but for the distant and dimly foreseeable future—and for officials who are less than perfect, or careless, or even at times overly ambitious, or even unscrupulous."²⁶ (Anyone who wants to know why thoughtful individuals are loathe to provide an instrument that might be abused by a military man less than committed to a civilian government would do well to reread *Federalist* #51.)

The second political-ideological objection to JCS reorganization is that it creates incentives for bureaucratic warfare within the military that make the shortcomings of the present system look minor indeed. Bill Lind claims that the existing "bureaucratic model" establishes incentives for an individual in an organization to focus his attention and resources on his own "career success" at the expense of the organization's "external goals and purposes."²⁷ There is nothing in any of the proposed reforms that would, in and of themselves, modify existing bureaucratic incentives. However, things could be made worse.

Consider the sort of qualities an individually powerful Chairman would be likely to have. Would he not tend to derive more from conspiracy and intrigue than from leadership and command? And what of politicization? Would not an independently powerful Chairman have great incentive to be a

lapdog for a President or Secretary of Defense and to voice support for egregious policies in order to enhance his position? To give the Chairman power independent of the corporate JCS seems to invite the extremes in a way the present system does not—to increase the threat to civilian control of the military on the one hand; or to render the highest ranking American military officer a political toady. The two possibilities are not so much contradictory as complementary.

The advocates of reform must be aware that the political-ideological objections to JCS reorganization are serious and represent a real threat to the subordination of the military to civilian control. But they are not the most important reasons for resisting reform. More significant in the long run are the strategic-military objections to JCS reform.

As suggested earlier, JCS reorganization is predicated upon the claim that interservice rivalry is the root cause of most defense problems. It is the pervasive influence of the separate Services, claim the reformers, that renders the corporate JCS powerless. Since the members of the JCS are also spokesmen for their Services, no Service chief will allow any plan to go forward at the expense of his own Service. As a result, the advice provided by the corporate JCS is of little use to those who need it most. Thus, claim the reformers, a more powerful Chairman is needed in order to improve military advice.

But advocates of a strengthened CJCS have not made the case that the advice of a single officer will be superior to that of the corporate JCS. Given the geopolitical conditions faced by the United States, the variety of strategic opinions produced by the corporated JCS is a strength, not a weakness. To strengthen the Chairman in the interest of curbing interservice rivalry is to merely ensure that a *single* strategic view will be imposed upon policymakers. This would be at the expense of the corporate JCS' diverse and broad perspective on strategic and operational matters, and on service conditions and capabilities.

Interservice rivalry has the beneficial effect of spurring innovation in defense policy and in the development of doctrine and equipment in support of a strategic or tactical approach that may seem irrelevant at the time. When a single strategic view is forced upon a nation's policymakers, flexibility and adaptability to changing circumstances may suffer. A case in point is the recent Falklands crisis. According to Michael Hobkirk, a retired U.K. Ministry of Defense official and author of *The Politics of Defense Budgeting*, "the 1982 Defense Review planned to dispense with much of the specialized ships and equipment which proved so vital for landing on the islands. British Forces would probably have been unable to recapture them if the Argentine attack had been delayed for some five years or so, until these items had disappeared from the inventory."²⁸

Likewise, the major geopolitical challenge faced by the United States is to be able to respond to a variety of potential threats. The indeterminate nature

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of the threat requires that the United States maintain a wide variety of forces (general-purpose forces) able to respond to a variety of contingencies, and is the reason that a single strategic view imposed by a general staff is inapplicable to the United States.

A military staff headed by an independently powerful Chairman has worked primarily in the case of landpowers facing the threat of invasion by other landpowers. In such cases there has been a dominant service within the affected nation's military establishment—the Army. The examples favored by the advocates of JCS reform—Germany/Prussia, the Soviet Union, and Israel—clearly fall into this category.

And even when it is recognized that powerful military staffs have historically been most effective in those cases involving landpowers with dominant armies, the question of strategic competence remains an open one, often placing the reformers in a contradictory position. When their opponents charge that, e.g., the German General Staff provided disastrous strategic advice during the two world wars, or that the Israeli defense staff was not able to avoid the recent debacle in Lebanon, the reformers reply that it was not the function of these staffs to provide strategic advice. They were instead to plan and execute at the operational and tactical levels of war. Yet in the same breath, the reformers criticize the JCS for its inability to formulate strategy and claim that a more powerful chairman or strengthened staff will rectify this deficiency.

The most important point to be made is that the United States must plan to respond to crises around the globe. The United States is a seapower, but its primary adversary is an ambitious landpower which has been able to combine totalitarian ideology and military power in a way only dreamed of by ancient tyrants. At the same time, the great landpower has turned its attention to the sea and has made progress against the periphery of the Western defense area, attempting to outflank the West which has concentrated most of its landpower on the Central Front of Europe. How should the United States respond? By emphasizing or deemphasizing its contribution to the Central Front?

Although seldom mentioned, *this* is the centerpiece of the debate over the JCS. It is the reason that, from the beginning of the debate in 1942 until the present, the Army and the Air Force have generally favored a national defense staff approach, or at least a strengthened chief, and the Naval Services have opposed it. Supporters of the JCS reorganization have generally been advocates of what Samuel Huntington has called "strategic monism," with the opponents being defenders of "strategic pluralism." The former places primary reliance on a single strategic concept, weapon or service, or region. In the words of Gordon W. Keiser, strategic monism "presupposes an ability to predict and control the actions of possible enemies." Strategic pluralism on the other hand "calls for a wide variety of military forces (or services) and weapons to meet a diversity of potential threats."²⁹

In practice, strategic monism has lately manifested itself as an emphasis on NATO's Central Front at the expense of regional defense or U.S. interests in the Third World. Since the Army is the service primarily concerned with the defense of the Central Front, the budgetary consequence of adhering to a policy of strategic monism would be to reallocate resources away from the naval services and to the Army. It is no accident that most of the individuals who favor a concentration of military resources on the Central Front and who criticize the direction of the Navy's recent buildup, writers such as Robert Komer and Edward Luttwak, are also the most outspoken supporters of JCS reform, critics who complain of the inability of the JCS to provide good advice.³⁰

In fact, what many of the reformers object to is the fact that there is presently no one officer on the JCS empowered to tell the President what these reformers think he should hear: that resources should be shifted away from the Navy and allocated to the conventional defense of Western Europe. They support a strengthened Chief in the apparent belief that he would share their view that the heart of American military interest abroad lies in the Central Front of Europe. Perhaps this explains why, in the words of James Woolsey, "the Navy has historically been the most skeptical service of unifying moves in the U.S. defense structure."³¹

There should be no argument that the defense of Europe is critical to the survival of the West and that it is a strategic imperative for the United States to prevent the domination of Europe by the most powerful nation of Eurasia. But the advantage of strategic pluralism as manifest in the advice of the corporate JCS is that it suggests ways that the United States can defend Europe other than concentrating resources on the Central Front. An emphasis on using U.S. resources to deal with areas of interest to Europe, but which lie outside of Europe suggests itself. Jeffrey Record, who has offered the most coherent defense of this approach calls for "a transatlantic division of labor" in which the United States would tap its comparative advantage in providing naval and expeditionary "balanced" forces to deal with contingencies outside of Europe, while the Europeans would exploit their geographical and logistical advantages by providing heavy formations to defend the Central Front.³² It is a variation of this approach (maritime superiority and balanced forces in pursuit of strategic pluralism) that has prevailed during the current Administration over the strategic monism (emphasis on NATO, deemphasis of U.S. regional objectives) of the Carter administration.

Thus the debate over the reform of the JCS reflects a deeper debate over strategic doctrine. The pro-reform group has as its hidden agenda an emphasis on Europe and on the land forces to defend the Central Front. Reformers want a powerful military advocate for their own position, and hence criticize the advice of the corporate JCS because it does not. Antireform opinion generally supports the maintenance of a variety of balanced forces which can be called upon to deal with a diverse range of contingencies.

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A Better Approach. To oppose JCS reorganization is not necessarily to oppose other reforms. There is much of value in both the CSIS and Heritage studies, particularly in the area of Defense Acquisition, both in the areas of policies and organizational structure. Unfortunately, the legislative focus remains on the influence of the individual Services on military decisionmaking and advice; thus the tendency to see the JCS as the problem.³³

But the premise upon which JCS reform is based is flawed—interservice rivalry is *not* the root cause of all U.S. defense problems as the reformers assert. A more reasonable explanation for U.S. military failures since the end of World War II is that they are the result of: 1) the confused statutory relationship and unclear functional responsibilities of different parts of the national defense structure; 2) the resulting lack of interagency coordination within the executive branch; and 3) the growth of the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) which has usurped more and more traditional military tasks at the expense of the JCS, while civilian expectations about what JCS should do have increased. Indeed, the JCS have been criticized for *not* giving advice that goes beyond military operational expertise and Service interests, and for *not* challenging the right of the President and Congress to make final policy decisions.

The first two problems could be addressed legislatively by amending Titles 50 and 10 of the U.S. Code in order to:

- clarify congressional purpose regarding organizational objectives and fundamental relationships;
- clarify the functions of the NSC regarding its role in developing and implementing U.S. security policy (Title 50);
- clarify the command authority of the President and the Secretary of Defense, and the status of the Secretary as executive agent of the President;
- clarify the functions of Military Departments and the corporate advisory functions of JCS; and
- replace the Armed Forces Policy Board with a Defense Policy Board, with expanded functions in the areas of policy planning integration and resource allocation (Title 10).

Clarifying statutory relationships and functional responsibilities and improving executive branch interagency coordination would solve only part of the problem. Changes in how OSD operates must also be effected. The OSD problem has been addressed very persuasively by Gen. Victor Krulak and Col. Harry Summers, among others. In his 1983 study, *Organization for National Security*, General Krulak charges that: "there has grown up, in the complex called the Office of the Secretary of Defense, a self-nourishing, self-perpetuating bureaucracy which impedes and diffuses the essential war-making functions—strategic planning, decision-making, weapons selection, preparation and execution—to a degree that gravely diminishes the ability of the United States to provide for its security."³⁴

Col. Harry Summers, author of *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War*, focuses the problem further: DOD (particularly OSD) has concentrated too much on "preparation for war" rather than the "conduct of war," to use the Clausewitzian distinction. According to Summers, from Lincoln to Truman, Presidents who prosecuted successful wars divided these functions between an operational military commander, e.g., Ulysses Grant, Tasker Bliss, and George Marshall; and a civilian Secretary of War to oversee administration and logistics, e.g., Edwin Stanton, Newton Baker, and Henry Stimson. Preparation for war was kept separate from and subordinated to the conduct of war. For both Summers and Krulak, the interposition of a civilian Secretary of Defense between the President and the military laid the structural framework for the Vietnam disaster, because of the tendency of a civilian Secretary to concentrate on the quantifiable aspects of war, which in practice means preparation for war, at the expense of actually fighting a war.³⁵

Krulak recommends getting OSD "out of the professional area of war-making, which is the proper province of the JCS" and guaranteeing to the President and Congress "the unfiltered counsel of the nation's military leaders, as represented in the corporate body of the JCS." Echoing Summers, General Krulak suggests that the "principal and regularized statutory task" of the Secretary of Defense should be "to make the logistic, fiscal budgetary and administrative side" of national security work and "to carry out his day-in day-out directive and supervisory functions related to the three Military Departments."³⁶

The issues raised in the JCS reform debate are extremely complex. Anyone who suggests that restructuring the JCS will cure the security problems of the nation is simply irresponsible. As suggested before, the current structure is the result of the interaction of political-ideological, economic, and strategic-military forces that make up American strategic culture. At the heart of the issue is the Constitution of the United States as a reflection of the character of the American people. The Constitution dictates that Congress and the President share responsibility for the defense of the nation. It may very well be the case that in the contemporary international environment, the roles of the Congress and the executive branch, which the founders intended to be complementary, have in many cases become competitive and even conflicting. But to attempt to restructure an agency such as the JCS, which arose out of the strategic culture of the United States, threatens to create new problems without really solving the old ones.

Notes

1. See e.g., U.S. Congress, Senate Armed Services Committee, 1st Session, 99th Congress, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1985). Hereafter S. Prt. 99-86. For a publication of this report as well as the text of floor statements by Senators Nunn and Goldwater, see the

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Armed Forces Journal "Extra" of October 1985. The most comprehensive hearings to date are found in U.S. Congress, Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, 2nd Session, 97th Congress, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1982). Hereafter HASC No. 97-47; U.S. Congress, Armed Services Committee of the House of Representatives, 1st Session, 98th Congress, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1983). Hereafter HASC No. 98-8; and U.S. Congress, Armed Services Committee of the United States Senate, 1st Session, 98th Congress, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense* (Washington: U.S. Govt. Print. Off., 1983-84). Hereafter S. Hrg. 98-375.

2. On "strategic culture" see Colin S. Gray, "National Style in Strategy: The American Example," *International Security*, Fall 1981, pp. 21-47; Gray, "Comparative Strategic Culture," *Parameters*, Winter 1984, pp. 26-33; Ken Booth, *Strategy and Ethnocentrism* (London: Crooms, Helm, 1973); Carnes Lord, "American Strategic Culture," *Comparative Strategy*, forthcoming 1985.

3. Allan R. Millett and Peter Maslowski, *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (New York: The Free Press, 1984), pp. xi-xii.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 258.

5. Lord; Jack Snyder, *The Soviet Strategic Culture* (Santa Monica: RAND, 1977), p. v.; Gray, "National Style in Strategy," p. 22.

6. Lord identifies six factors, but two of his "military culture and history" and "civil-military relationships" seem derivative from "political culture and ideology."

7. Washington's Farewell Address of 1796, in Henry Steele Commager, ed., *Documents of American History*, 7th ed. (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1963), p. 174.

8. Cited in Stuart C. Gilman, "Philosophical Challenges and Historical Ironies," *The Bureaucrat*, Spring 1985, p. 8.

9. James E. Cooke, ed., *The Federalist* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1961), No. 41, p. 270.

10. John Taylor, *An Inquiry into the Principles and Policy of the Government of the United States* (1814) (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), p. 175.

11. Harry Summers, *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, Calif.: Presidio Press, 1982).

12. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. and trans. by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), Book VIII, Ch. 8, pp. 583, 589-591.

13. *The Federalist*, No. 24, p. 153.

14. *The Federalist*, No. 69, p. 465.

15. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1957), p. 177.

16. *Ibid.*, p. 179.

17. *Ibid.*, p. 402.

18. Millett and Maslowski, p. xii.

19. Huntington, p. 3.

20. A representative critique is that of John Kester, "The Future of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," *AEI Foreign Policy and Defense Review*, February 1980, pp. 2-23. Also see Samuel Huntington, *The Common Defense* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1961), pp. 162-166.

21. Harold Brown, "U.S. Military Leadership Needs Reform," *Long Island Newsday*, 14 April 1985, p. 1.

22. Edward Luttwak, *The Pentagon and the Art of War* (New York: Simon and Schuster/Institute for Contemporary Studies, 1984). Representative Skelton's first bill was HR 2560, introduced during the first session of the 98th Congress. It was reintroduced on 22 April 1985 during the first session of the 99th Congress as HR 2314. His comments are found in his testimony before the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, 14 June 1983. HASC No. 98-8, p. 51. For the Senate Armed Services Committee version see S. Prt. 99-86, pp. 139-274.

23. CSIS *Final Report*; "Defense Assessment" in Butler et al., *Mandate for Leadership II* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, 1984), pp. 431-448; James Schlesinger, "Reorganizing the Joint Chiefs," *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 February 1984, p. 32; Michael Ganley, "Hill Again Promises JCS, DoD Reform, But Timing for Legislation is Unclear," *Armed Forces Journal*, May 1985, p. 12.

24. HASC No. 98-8, pp. 49-50.

25. James Holloway, "The Quality of Military Advice," *AEI Foreign Policy and Defense Review*, February 1980, p. 26.

26. John Kester, "Thoughtless JCS Change is Worse than None," *Armed Forces Journal*, November 1984, p. 115.

27. Bill Lind, "De Fidelitate," *Marine Corps Gazette*, December 1984, pp. 11-12.

28. Michael Hobkirk, "The Hesletine Reorganization of Defense: Kill or Cure," *RUSI Journal*, March 1985, p. 46.

29. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State*, pp. 400, 418-427; Gordon W. Keiser, *The U.S. Marine Corps and Defense Unification, 1944-47: The Politics of Survival* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1982), pp. 121-122.

30. See in particular, Luttwak, pp. 258-265; and Robert W. Komer, *Maritime Strategy or Coalition Defense?* (Cambridge, Mass.: ABT Books, 1984).

31. S. Hrg. 98-375, Part 6, p. 257.

32. Jeffrey Record, *Revising U.S. Military Strategy: Tailoring Means to Ends* (Washington, D.C.: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1984).

33. For a critique of Congress in the defense debate, see Mackubin Thomas Owens, "Congress' Role in Defense Mismanagement," *Armed Forces Journal*, April 1985, pp. 92-96.

34. Victor Krulak, *Organization for National Security* (Washington, D.C.: United States Strategic Institute, 1983), p. 131.

35. Harry Summers, "How We Lost," *The New Republic*, 29 April 1985, p. 21.

36. Krulak, pp. 114, 117.



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