

1980

## The Fall and Rise of the Pentagon: American Defense Policies in the 1970s

Don Rightmyer  
*U.S. Air Force*

Lawrence J. Korb

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review>

---

### Recommended Citation

Rightmyer, Don and Korb, Lawrence J. (1980) "The Fall and Rise of the Pentagon: American Defense Policies in the 1970s," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 33 : No. 6 , Article 13.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol33/iss6/13>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Naval War College Review by an authorized editor of U.S. Naval War College Digital Commons. For more information, please contact [repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu](mailto:repository.inquiries@usnwc.edu).

## 102 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

II. In dealing with King Buell has made use of King's papers, dozens of interviews and oral history memoirs, and pertinent files at the Navy's Operational Archives and at the Franklin D. Roosevelt Library.

Buell's study thus gives the appearance of careful research. This, however, is not entirely the case. His book ignores, for example, such relevant sources as the files of Commander, Aircraft, Battle Force, available with other flag files of the 1930s at the National Archives. This reviewer in the course of working on his own planned biography of King has consulted this file and has found it of value for the study of aviation doctrine and King's role in it. Buell also neglected to consult such important sources as the papers of Adm. Charles M. Cooke (King's top planner and one of the two men closest to him throughout World War II) and the large holdings of the British Public Record Office. They are of value for a fuller understanding of some of the legendary disagreements King had with the British. The British, for instance, were so leery about dealing with King that the Admiralty, much to Prime Minister Churchill's annoyance, felt obligated to keep a four-star admiral in Washington to head the British Naval Mission lest King ignore the opinion of a lesser man. This is not to argue that an entirely different picture of King would have emerged had Buell made use of these records, but it is certainly not complete as it is.

More serious is the failure of Buell and his publisher to provide documentation. Although he frequently makes clear his source in his narrative and provides a useful bibliographic essay, he asserts far too much. For instance, of King's drinking Buell says "Whether he had been an alcoholic [prior to 1941] depends upon one's definition." Had King been an alcoholic in the clinical sense—the only sense in which this term should be used—rather than a man

who sometimes drank too much on shore and made a spectacle of himself, would he have been able, by act of will alone, to limit himself to an occasional beer or glass of wine for the duration of World War II? Buell's casual handling of the definition of alcoholism and his failure to provide satisfactory documentation for the weak case he does make about the extent of King's drinking needlessly raise doubts about the reliability of his portrayal of King. Furthermore, while his quotations seem generally accurate—and, I might add, quite effective—there is still reason to believe that the author has allowed minor inaccuracies to creep into them.

For those, however, who have no particular reason to be concerned with the apparatus of scholarship *Master of Sea Power* will make first-rate reading. It is praiseworthy in many ways. It is well written, contains forthright and challenging judgments that virtually demand a reassessment of much conventional wisdom about the Second World War, and brings its subject to life in a way that was missing from *Fleet Admiral King*, the memoir that King and Walter Muir Whitehill collaborated on after World War II. While Buell has not done all the research one could wish for, he has succeeded in producing an informative biography that will have to be consulted by anyone who wishes to understand Ernest J. King and American naval leadership in the first half of this century.

LLOYD J. GRAYBAR  
Eastern Kentucky University

Korb, Lawrence J. *The Fall and Rise of the Pentagon: American Defense Policies in the 1970s*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1979. 192pp.

The post-Vietnam war years have seen a decline in America's military strength, both in manpower and

## PROFESSIONAL READING 103

equipment, as in every previous postwar period. The most recent experience, however, has also included a sharp drop in the Defense Department's stock with the American public. From early 1968 when North Vietnamese and Vietcong forces launched surprise attacks throughout South Vietnam, the American public's confidence in the Military Establishment went on the skids. The ensuing years included painful defense budget cuts while recovery of public confidence in the U.S. military has been slow.

Dr. Lawrence Korb, who has written previous books on the Joint Chiefs of Staff, analysis of defense budgets and the system of American military education, attempts in this book to outline and analyze the decline of the Pentagon during the late sixties and the manner in which it dealt with the extremely hostile environment of the succeeding decade.

While the author maintains that domestic and international events played a large part in both the decline and resurgence of U.S. military prestige, he feels that the civilian and military leaders of the Pentagon have held the crucial role in both trends. Disenchantment with the Pentagon's management of the Vietnam war, advanced weapons procurement and domestic unrest all combined to turn the American people sour on defense matters. The author lays the blame for failure in Vietnam squarely at the feet of field commanders such as General Westmoreland and asserts the belief that the United States did not possess the power to insure an independent South Vietnam. While he later discusses Secretary of Defense McNamara's denigration of the Joint Chiefs' role in budget decisions, the author seems to overlook any connection with the decisions made on conduct of the Southeast Asian war.

Korb feels that the men who filled positions as Secretary of Defense or members of the JCS in the seventies

were well suited to the difficult task confronting them. Unlike their predecessors, Secretaries Laird and Rumsfeld had extensive legislative experience while Schlesinger was an economics professor before entering government service. The author points out that the Vietnam-era Joint Chiefs were predominantly from the South where support for the Vietnam war was strongest. He feels that the multi-regional makeup of the postwar Chiefs made them better able to handle antimilitary sentiment in the country. His comment that the Chiefs appointed from 1947 to 1969 lacked senior service school experience ignores the fact that most were promoted to flag rank during or shortly following World War II without benefit of such military education.

While this book's title claims to discuss defense policies of the seventies, it deals almost exclusively with data and events prior to 1976. As a result, the chapter on détente and national consensus on defense matters does not deal with the remainder of the last decade. Analysis of the condition of détente, the all-volunteer force and the U.S. military might appear differently today.

The last chapter lists three major unsolved defense problems: the Soviet threat, restraining Congressional inroads on DOD and the military pay system. While the author lauds the adroitness with which the defense secretaries delayed weapon purchases rather than have them cancelled by Congress, the lag time caused by postponement may now mean gaps in the strategic triad. He also feels that reforms in current retirement policies must be enacted to reduce the percentage of defense budgets taken by personnel costs.

Korb's work is well documented and contains a thorough bibliography and index. The greatest weakness is the shortness of the volume which

## 104 NAVAL WAR COLLEGE REVIEW

prohibits the author from fully developing the many issues and events that interacted during the decade. Nonetheless, this book provides a thought-provoking and challenging view of America's military since Vietnam and where it stands today.

DON RIGHTMYER  
Captain, U.S. Air Force

Korb, Lawrence J. *The FY 1981-1985 Defense Program: Issues and Trends*. Washington, D.C.: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1980. 63pp., and Pechman, Joseph A., ed. *Setting National Priorities: Agenda for the 1980s*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1980. 563pp.

Events in the Middle East during the past year have brought home to Americans the need for military forces and the fact that our current level of forces is not all that we need in today's world. Reflecting these concerns, the budget submitted by President Carter for fiscal year 1981 and the 5-year defense program for the FY1981-1985 period show a considerable increase in proposed defense spending, whether measured in total obligational authority or in outlays; defense spending is projected to exceed a trillion dollars over the FY 1980-1985 period. Are these proposed increases enough? Are they in the right areas? These questions and others are ably addressed by the volumes reviewed here.

Their authors, Lawrence J. Korb and William W. Kaufman for the chapter on Defense Policy in the Brookings' volume, are recognized authorities on defense programs. Korb is resident director of defense studies at the American Enterprise Institute and a former professor of management at the Naval War College. Kaufman is a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a consultant to the Secretary of Defense.

The works complement one another. Korb's monograph provides considerable detail on the FY1981-1985 defense program as well as on historical patterns of defense spending. His volume contains forty-two tables and two figures. Kaufman gives relatively little data of the type contained in Korb's study, but has an illuminating discussion of the policy issues for national defense in the decade of the 1980s.

Both authors see a need for a significant effort to increase U.S. military strength. Kaufman says that many people will argue that "the problems of the 1980s will not yield to military solutions." His reply to this criticism is to admit that military power may not be a sufficient condition for international stability in regions of concern to the United States, but military power is a necessary condition for stability. "It affords this country the opportunity and the time to use the other measures on which it prefers to rely—diplomatic, economic, legal, and administrative. Without it, nothing much is likely to work at all." (p. 315)

Kaufman and Korb each believe that even though U.S. defense spending is programmed to rise by a considerable amount in real terms over the next 5 years, it may not be enough. Korb thinks the proposed program is insufficiently funded because it has not allowed enough for higher energy costs, personnel costs, and general inflation and because "the FY 1981-1985 defense program slows down but does not arrest the deterioration of the U.S.-Soviet military balance." (p. 62) In his study Korb provides graphic detail to document how the military position of the United States has declined relative to the Soviet Union. Both the executive branch, which failed to propose large enough defense programs, and the Congress, which has consistently cut the overall defense appropriations of the President since the mid-1960s, have