

1977

## The Joint Chiefs of Staff--The Twenty-five Years

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### Recommended Citation

Baldwin, Hanson W. (1977) "The Joint Chiefs of Staff--The Twenty-five Years," *Naval War College Review*: Vol. 30 : No. 1 , Article 22.  
Available at: <https://digital-commons.usnwc.edu/nwc-review/vol30/iss1/22>

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despotism (it really has turned out not to be oriental at all but Western in origin where extreme idealism—whether religious or political—seems to breed unmitigated cruelty) with Western scientific knowledge has been realized in the Soviet Union.

A popular bit of wisdom, frequently repeated in America, is that one should learn the lessons of history. Reading Custine, one wonders if that is ever taken seriously, for how many thousands of times has his journey been repeated and will be repeated before its significance will replace the popular notions about that strange land? Perhaps it is not true that we learn from history; we can only learn by our mistakes or through experience. Certainly about the present, Custine could say, "I told you so!"

Phyllis Kohler's translation is extremely readable. We must all be grateful to her for making this important work available in English. The new edition (which does not appear to differ from the old one under the title, *Journey for Our Time*) is enriched with an introduction by Foy Kohler, formerly the U.S. Ambassador to the Soviet Union and now one of our oldest and most venerated Russian hands. His introduction emphasizes the importance of this book for those who are interested in strategic and military questions.

For an exciting intellectual experience, after reading Custine, one should reread Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, which was written at about the same time by another extraordinary Frenchman who also was trying to find arguments against the democratic form of government. The two works by two such penetrating minds make convincing evidence that there are constants in human behavior that appear and reappear through all manner of circumstances. With Custine, one can contemplate the Russians and then through Tocqueville the Americans. Then one can contemplate the Americans trying

to understand the Russians and in the end, you come up with a reaffirmation of the old French saying, "plus ca change, plus ca la meme chose"—the more things change, the more it is the same old thing.

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Korb, Lawrence J. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff—The First Twenty-five Years*. Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 210pp.

Mr. Korb's book—the first to attempt a history and a critique of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—their accomplishments and their failures—is, to this reviewer, bivalent. It is ambitious, instructive and frustrating, occasionally perceptive and knowledgeable, but also simplistic and superficial, and at times, woefully wrong.

The book's strengths are the author's clear descriptions of the organization and methodology of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their first quarter century and an examination of their professional background. Mr. Korb also contributes a good account, in a chapter entitled "The Battle of the Potomac" of some of the politics of the defense budget and he stresses the synonymous relationship between dollars and military policy. The book's weaknesses stem from the inadequacy of the author's sources, all of them, except for interviews, public, and some of them unreliable as a basis for history; from compression and abbreviation (which lead to sweeping generalizations and inadequate explanation), and to the author's attempts to play global Monday-morning quarterback.

What Mr. Korb has really attempted in the short space of 210 pages (including notes and index) is nothing less gargantuan than a kind of bird's eye survey of the nation's security policies in the last 25 years. The focus is the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but as the author

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indicates time and again their influence upon policy cannot be considered in a vacuum. The Defense Department and its ever-growing civilian bureaucracy, the State Department, the President and the Bureau of the Budget, the Congress and the American electorate all have a part in the process. And the continuing changes—many of them profound—in men and organization, methodology and psychology—have had a major influence upon the product, the kind of defense the nation has supported. The author touches base on all these issues, but in a book of his length—compressed and often too tightly focused on the Joint Chiefs—it is impossible to do justice to the multiple factors that influence the defense budget.

*The Joint Chiefs of Staff* is organized in five chapters. The first deals with the JCS as it exists today, its organizational history and the mechanics of its operation. The second looks at the men behind the corporate image and the stiff formal photographs—as a group, as service representatives, as individuals and as composites. The Marine Corps Commandants are—surprisingly—omitted, presumably (but mistakenly) because the author accepts the letter of the law as his guide, that the Marines are represented only when “matters pertaining” to the Corps are discussed. This omission overlooks the contributions and the important influence of men like David Shoup and Wallace M. Greene, Jr. This chapter focuses on the professional background and career patterns of the JCS—a useful survey—but unfortunately makes no attempt to evaluate the far more important intangible of character or to assess the individual relationships of the chiefs to the President and the Secretary of Defense. The third chapter, dealing with “The Battle of the Potomac,” traces, from the Truman administration through the first Nixon administration, the part the Joint Chiefs played in the formulation of the military budget and hence in military

policymaking. Mr. Korb's (debatable) conclusion is that the Joint Chiefs, in their corporate role, “had virtually no impact upon determining the actual size of the military budget,” but he adds a somewhat contradictory caveat that the *service* chiefs—the individual members of the Joint Chiefs—“have been free to request (*italics mine*) nearly anything they want . . . the preparation and submission of the monetary requests.”

In his fourth chapter, Mr. Korb discusses the operational role of the JCS. He points out that the “Joint Chiefs have very little authority in the operational realm” and “. . . are excluded from the chain of command,” but goes on to add, quite correctly, that the JCS “does play a role.” Actually the issue of whether the JCS do or do not command is somewhat like flogging a dead horse. Orders to the unified commanders, though issued in the name of the Secretary of Defense, pass ordinarily through, or are seen by, the Joint Chiefs (or the Joint Staff). Though the Joint Chiefs are, legally, only advisors to the President (the Commander-in-Chief) and the Secretary of Defense they do pull the strings behind the scenes—sometimes through “eyes only” messages, sometimes by direct “suggestion” or command. In the Dominican crisis, for instance, the then Chairman of the JCS ordered the field commander to *move one tank one block*.

The author's final chapter summarizes—far too succinctly and with too many generalizations—his conclusions about the successes and failures of the JCS in their first quarter century. He correctly absolves the JCS of the “absurd” charges that they have either dominated American foreign policy or that they have been “weak, divided and never consulted”—a valid judgment that, however, qualifies or contradicts some of the author's statements in preceding chapters. He points out, cogently, that the “National Security Act and its amendments did not create a unified

military establishment, and the JCS is not the cause but the reflection of that diversity." (Mr. Korb might have added and emphasized throughout his book that this "diversity" is not necessarily bad; that, indeed, the greatest security danger, politically and strategically, the country could face would be a unified, overriding military "party line.") Though today's Chiefs (at the time of writing they were Brown, Holloway, Weyand and Jones) face "an unfavorable and sometimes hostile environment," he sees them as highly fitted to "provide the leadership necessary" to adjust to post-Vietnam realities.

This book is both disappointing and provocative—good enough to be much, much better, bad enough to elicit (from this reviewer, at least) some expletives of emphatic disagreement and mild irritation. The author is given to pejorative words and phrases—"the battlefield disasters" of Westmoreland; the "madness of MacArthur"; the "strategic absurdities" of the Eisenhower administration. Mr. Korb focuses much of his examination upon the influence of the JCS in the Korean and Vietnam wars, and he is led, to my mind, to distorted or incomplete and sometimes false conclusions by inadequate sources, too much compression and sweeping judgments. All of his notes, except for 14 interviews—9 of them with former Chiefs—refer to published sources. Yet some of the most important documentation has not yet appeared in public print, and sources such as *The Pentagon Papers* and Halberstam's *The Best and the Brightest*—to which Korb repeatedly refers for his documentation on Vietnam—are at best incomplete, at worst entirely unreliable. Such material as the late Admiral Radford's unpublished manuscripts, the oral history tapes of the Naval Institute, and Admiral U.S. Grant Sharp's account of "Rolling Thunder" and other bombing operations have no place in this book.

There is no mention of the famous

(at the time) "Fortress America" speech by the late Senator Taft. General Omar Bradley, then Chairman of the JCS, undertook to answer the Senator publicly—instead of leaving this task, more properly, to the Secretary of Defense—and his action helped to lead to the so-called "politicalization" of the JCS, something that was probably inevitable, anyway, in the U.S. system of government. (In the United States, the JCS are called upon to defend the budget; in Britain, that responsibility rests upon the civilian ministers.)

In his treatment of Vietnam, in particular, and of Korea to a somewhat lesser extent, Mr. Korb seems to me to have been far "off-base" and unfair to both the JCS and to General Westmoreland. This reviewer shares the author's admiration for the late General Abrams, Westmoreland's successor in Vietnam and as Chief of Staff. I had known General Abrams ever since World War II, and I saw Westmoreland fairly frequently before, during (1965 and 1976) and after his command in Vietnam. Abrams, were he alive today, would be the first to point out that he built his temporary successes in Vietnam upon Westmoreland's hard-won, grinding achievements in what had become a war of attrition. It was under Westmoreland, not Abrams, that every major Vietcong sanctuary in South Vietnam was cleaned out; it was under Westmoreland that the indigenous Vietcong were virtually eliminated before, during and after the Tet offensive, and that the North Vietnamese regulars were severely mauled at Khesanh, in the Highlands and elsewhere. And the serious incidence of drugs, racial strife, "fragging" and mutiny—which almost tore our army apart and were the direct result of the antiwar attitudes of the home front—grew to gigantic proportions after Westmoreland's time in Vietnam. And, curiously, what might have been Abrams' greatest contribution, if the American people had not lost the will to

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win—Vietnamization—is not really mentioned.

Similarly much of Mr. Korb's appraisal of the role and the attitude of the JCS during Vietnam seems to me to be singularly wrong. I saw most of the Chiefs many times privately before, and during Vietnam and I cannot reconcile the author's brief and generalized critique of their role with my own experiences. In early 1965 before the United States had committed any combat ground troops to Vietnam I wrote in *The New York Times* that about a million men (including the Navy and Air Force) and years of war would be required for victory. I did not take these figures out of the blue; General Harold K. Johnson and General "Wally" Greene used them repeatedly as estimates in conversations with me, and in at least one instance, in a speech to a private group. These and similar figures were transmitted to both McNamara and to President Johnson. Both were also advised, early on, to mobilize the reserves, to give precedence to "guns," rather than "guns and butter," to blockade and/or mine North Vietnamese ports and to bomb consistently and continuously and heavily all lines of communication into North Vietnam. The policy of gradualism was anathema to the Chiefs. Certainly, as Mr. Korb points out, the JCS, General Westmoreland and the military must share responsibility for the defeat in Vietnam. But not as much of the blame as Mr. Korb seems to award them. Every historical guideline I know of makes it quite clear that—contrary to Mr. Korb—the military were "singled out unjustly for the failures of our policy" (in both Korea and Vietnam).

The JCS and the armed services during both Korea and Vietnam were frustrated men; nearly all the men in uniform I knew recognized at the time the military stupidity of our policies. What then, should they have done? Mr. Korb says "in retrospect, it would have

been better for the JCS, the military and the nation if the Joint Chiefs had refused to support Johnson's war policies and resigned en masse to show their displeasure."

I, too, have long felt that some of the members of the JCS might have—indeed, should have—resigned in protest. Some months ago one of the wartime members of the JCS challenged what he termed the "debatable benefits of such a course." In correspondence with this reviewer he stated that "in my own case nothing would have pleased Messrs. Johnson and McNamara more than to have had me step out of the ring," and he added that the public results of his resignation would have been a "flash-in-the-pan."

Instead, I chose to stay in there fighting, where I felt I belonged, continually showing the facts into Johnson's unwilling face and fighting McNamara at every turn in his many ill-conceived ideas, projects and actions which in a major way brought about our eventual failure in Southeast Asia.

This point of view deserves discussion. But far more debatable is Mr. Korb's offhand reference to "resignation en masse," an option which could well be construed as a concerted action against proper authority—a kind of high-level form of the low-level mutinous conduct so familiar to the Navy in the Zumwalt days. The habit of obedience and the absolute primacy of civilian authority in the American system are—and should be—deeply engrained in military men. This principle may clash in some key matters of policy with the old dictum—"to thine own self be true"—but the conflict should be resolved by personal conviction, not by mutual concert.

In any case these and many other issues touched upon in this book deserve detailed and careful consideration and discussion—not generalized conclusions, summarized in a paragraph.

This is the basic trouble with Mr. Korb's book—a volume which whets the appetite but does not satisfy. *The Joint Chiefs of Staff* represents a valiant but flawed attempt to examine and evaluate a quarter century of troubled "security," but the author has compressed far too much into too little on the basis of inadequate sources.

HANSON W. BALDWIN

#### Professor Korb replies:

It is quite an honor to have such a distinguished and long-time follower of military affairs as Hanson Baldwin take the time to review my book on the JCS. As is the case with Mr. Baldwin's own writings over the years, his comments on my work are generally perceptive and well phrased. However, in his review, Mr. Baldwin makes a number of statements about my study which are simply inaccurate and misleading primarily because they are based upon a misreading of the book. In this reply, I would like to attempt to set the record straight in eight specific areas.

First, Mr. Baldwin accuses me of not adequately dealing with this nation's security policies over the past 25 years. In the preface (p. xii), I specifically noted this was beyond the scope of my study. An adequate treatment of this subject would require many books.

Second, Mr. Baldwin criticizes me for not assessing the relationships of the Chiefs to the President and the Secretary of Defense in Chapter Two which deals with JCS backgrounds. An overview of these relationships is presented in Chapter One while Chapters Three and Four describe JCS interactions with the President and Secretary of Defense in great detail. Discussing them in a chapter on JCS backgrounds would have been not only redundant but illogical.

Third, Mr. Baldwin states that my conclusion that the JCS as a corporate body had virtually no impact on the size

of, or the ceiling on, the defense budget is debatable, but he does not offer any evidence to counter the conclusion which is carefully documented in Chapter Three. He states further that the caveat about the service chiefs being able to request what they want within that ceiling is somewhat contradictory. It is not. Determining the size and distribution of the defense budget are separate evolutions and the role of the chiefs is different in each.

Fourth, Mr. Baldwin implies that I am ignorant of the fact that the JCS pull strings behind the scenes in the operational area. Nothing could be further from the truth. Specific examples of backstage maneuvers between the JCS and field commanders are given on page 154 (Taylor-Harkins) and page 167 (Wheeler-Westmoreland). Moreover, on page 12, there is an entire paragraph devoted to this facet of the policy process.

Fifth, Mr. Baldwin accuses me of being off base and unfair to General Westmoreland and the JCS in my discussions of their conduct during Vietnam. If my judgments about Westmoreland's strategy in Vietnam are harsh, I am in good company. In all my discussions with Westmoreland's contemporaries and superiors, I heard very few words of praise about his methods. Indeed many comments are unprintable. If General Westmoreland were as successful as Mr. Baldwin says he was, two questions arise. Why did President Johnson relieve him and why did he not achieve his goals?

Mr. Baldwin also argues that my appraisal of the role and attitudes of the JCS during the war in Vietnam is "singularly wrong." To substantiate this claim, he states that in early 1965, before the commitment of ground troops to Vietnam [sic], the JCS had advised their superiors that 1 million men and years of war would be required for victory in South Vietnam. The clear implication is that I did not mention