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The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Security

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THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF AND NATIONAL SECURITY

A lecture delivered
at the Naval War College
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by

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The topic I have been asked to discuss is "The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Security." I understand that you are already familiar with the organization of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Joint Staff, the Department of Defense, and the Unified Command system, and with the formal relationships between these various agencies. Therefore, I will not spend a great deal of time on the mechanics of the system as such. My principal attention will be devoted to telling you something about how the Joint Chiefs of Staff actually operate, in practice, within the established system as a whole.

However, as a background, I want to say something about how the Joint Chiefs of Staff system evolved. In doing so, I will review some of the system's high lights which I believe are especially important.

What some people fail to remember is that our Joint Chiefs of Staff system is the product of experience in actual war. Our Joint Chiefs of Staff were established as the United States component of the British-American *Combined* Chiefs of Staff. That body was created, you remember, to co-ordinate the combined British-American military effort in World War II.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff held their first meeting in February, 1942. While their original purpose had been to represent the United States in

dealing with the senior British military authorities, they soon began to function as the corporate leadership for the entire United States military structure. They became the principal agency for the co-ordination and strategic direction of the Navy and Army, including the Army Air Forces.

This body was immediately and directly responsible to the President. It advised him with regard to strategy, requirements, manpower, production and allocation of munitions and shipping, and other matters of joint policy.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff also were the source of the broad strategic guidance on which Theater Commanders based their detailed operational plans. Furthermore, they allocated the resources and shipping required to support these plans.

This system worked so well for directing global military operations that it clearly deserved to be continued, especially in view of the world-wide military responsibilities which faced the United States after World War II. But it was also felt necessary to give it a legislative basis to formalize the working arrangements that had evolved. The result was the National Security Act of 1947. While this involved the substantial reorganization which established the Department of Defense and a separate Air Force, it also provided, among other things, a full-time Joint Staff of one hundred officers under a Director. An amendment of 1949 created the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Experience showed the need for revision, and the basic law was in fact amended several times. The major change, of course, took place with the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958.

I think it is important to understand clearly the specific intent of the Congress in this revision.

The Congress was concerned particularly with setting up a simple, clear-cut chain of command for all of our operating forces in the field. Also, it wanted to establish authoritative co-ordination and unified direction of all elements of our Armed Forces. At the same time, these goals had to be achieved within a framework of civilian control, and without suppression of the specialized military skills and outlooks which are essential elements in the over-all complex of modern military operations. Putting it another way, the object was a system which, under civilian control, would have centralized direction, common doctrine, and decentralized execution.

Centralized direction is essential for consistency and effective co-ordination between our many areas of military effort throughout the world.

Common doctrine is necessary for flexibility in grouping—and regrouping—the elements of our forces, wherever we may need them.

Decentralized execution is required because only the commanders on the spot can have the detailed familiarity with local conditions that is essential for prompt and effective action.

The 1958 Reorganization Act gave clear-cut authority to the commanders of Unified Commands over all elements of their component forces. This provided for *decentralized execution* by the various Unified Commands, and for *centralized direction* within each Unified Command.

The Act also set up a direct chain of command from the President and the Secretary of Defense through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the Unified and Specified Commands. This provided *centralized direction* of our military effort world-wide.

The Act retained the authority of the various Services over such matters as doctrine, training, and equipment. This preserved *common doctrine* within each of the major functional areas of warfare—sea, land, and air.

Finally, the 1958 Reorganization Act kept the Joint Chiefs of Staff in their advisory role. This insured the preservation of *civilian control* by keeping the authority for final *decision* with the President and the Secretary of Defense.

The changes in the chain of command to the Unified and Specified Commands had a direct effect on the scope of activity of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff. Previously, their responsibilities had been confined to planning. With the simplified chain of command, they became concerned with operations as well. This brought added responsibility, which the Reorganization Act recognized by authorizing an increase in the size of the Joint Staff to 400. Experience under the new system caused the Joint Chiefs to review their administrative procedures, which led to a recent change in the method of operation of the Joint Staff. By this change, the Chiefs delegate to the Joint Staff authority to take action in their name, within specifically established guidelines and under circumstances when a decision by the Chiefs themselves is either unnecessary or would cause delays that would detract from the effectiveness of the action.

So much for the formal organization. The fact is, of course, that the way an organization actually functions depends even more on the personalities and relations of the people who comprise it than on the way the lines are connected to the boxes on the charts.

I am particularly aware of the differences that personalities make even within identical organizational

structures, because I happen to have served in close association with every Secretary of Defense—Forrestal, Johnson, Marshall, Lovett, Wilson, McElroy, Gates, and now McNamara—and every Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff since those offices were established. Each of these men has tended to operate in his own individual way, partly due to his individual personality and partly due to the reaction of each Secretary and his JCS Chairman to each other.

This can be most clearly illustrated in describing the way that disagreements among the Joint Chiefs of Staff—or "splits"—have been handled. Broadly speaking there have been three general approaches.

One has been for the Secretary to deal solely with the Chairman, without the Joint Chiefs being present. This approach is predicated on the assumption that the Chairman will always be able to present both sides of the disagreement with equal objectivity.

A *second* has been for the Secretary to call in the Chairman and the particular Service Chief who has nonconcurred in the proposal or policy in question. This permits the Secretary to hear both sides at firsthand.

The *third* method was initiated by Secretary Gates and continued by Secretary McNamara. That is, when a disagreement among the Joint Chiefs develops, the Secretary is notified. He then meets with the Joint Chiefs of Staff, listens to the arguments, takes part in the discussion, and makes his decision on the basis of a thorough understanding of all the points of view involved.

In connection with this question of disagreements in the Joint Chiefs of Staff, there is a point which I want to make very emphatically. The charge is sometimes made that disagreement is so normal that the Joint Chiefs of Staff organization is completely

hamstrung when it comes to taking effective action. In fact, it has been argued that the only way to get authoritative action is to replace the Joint Chiefs with a Single Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.

The basic premise here is simply not valid. The fact of the matter is that the Joint Chiefs of Staff reach agreement in something like ninety-eight per cent of the host of questions coming before them. Of course, there is *some* disagreement, and often it involves questions of fundamental importance. However, I cannot see that this is unique to military problems. Nor can I see that it is particularly deplorable because it is in the military field. Finally, I do not think that military unanimity is necessary for decisive action. A basic principle in the governmental philosophy of the United States is civilian control over military activities. Unless the Secretary of Defense actually exercises his authority for decision—and decision implies a choice between courses of action—the principle of civilian control would be nothing but a meaningless rubber stamp.

Almost as a paradox, there has also been some public criticism that the Secretary of Defense has been exercising his authority too freely. There have been allegations that Secretary McNamara in particular has been "overriding" the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and that friction and resentment exist between the military and civilian authorities in the Pentagon. These views overlook some fundamentally important circumstances. I can assure you that they have no basis in fact.

The key factor is that at the time *any* new Administration takes office, one of its first actions must be to submit the National Budget for approval by Congress, which authorizes the funds to carry out the Budget. This must be done by February or March each year. But a Budget takes months of preparation. A new Administration, which takes office late in January,

does not have time to go through the normal process of drawing up the Budget. All the detailed work on the Budget which it must present will have been done by the preceding Administration.

Now, a new Administration could simply accept the Budget as it was inherited. But in doing so, it would be postponing for a whole year the chance to put its own programs into operation. Its other choice is to undertake a rapid review, necessarily using short cuts and crash programs, to decide—in time for the Congressional hearings—what changes it may want to make.

This is what happened last year. For that matter, it happened in 1953 also, when the Eisenhower Administration took office, and I presume it happened whenever an Administration was changed in the past. I believe that the close timing of the Presidential inauguration and the annual Budget hearings makes the same sort of thing inevitable whenever *any* new Administration takes office.

The conditions which required hasty review a year ago no longer exist. Also, during a year of association, the military and civilian authorities in office have learned to know and understand each other as individuals. The result has been mutual accommodation, achieving a degree of teamwork which I believe is at least as harmonious and effective as any ever attained in the past.

I am certainly not suggesting that the Secretary and the Joint Chiefs are always in one hundred per cent agreement from the outset. But, when all views have been expressed, there is never any question about accepting the decision which is reached, or about who it is that makes that decision.

While I am on the subject of widespread misconceptions, it might be a good thing for me to say

something about the President's appointment of General Maxwell Taylor as his military representative on the White House Staff. There have been suggestions that General Taylor was being interposed between the President and the JCS, or between the President and Secretary McNamara.

Such statements are simply not true. The function General Taylor was chosen to perform—and which he *has* performed—is to provide the President with a highly qualified military professional, immediately available to look at selected problems from the Presidential point of view. General Taylor's mission to South Viet-Nam last fall, as the chief of a group representing all interested Government Departments, is an example of the very valuable contributions his position enables him to make. Such a mission required a very senior military officer to head it up, but no member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff could have filled this slot without detriment to his primary responsibilities.

As a matter of fact, Secretary McNamara and I, and frequently the Joint Chiefs, meet with the President two or three times a week. From the amount of work we have to do, I can assure you that neither the Joint Chiefs nor I feel that we are being by-passed in any way whatsoever!

In what I have said about the advisory role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, I do not want to overstate the case. I certainly do not want to imply that unless we can convince the Secretary and the President, our views on the military aspects of a major problem will not be available to other officials who are entitled to have them.

For example, one way that this is provided for through our organizational system is that, as Chairman, I attend meetings of the National Security

Council. I am not, of course, a *member* of the NSC, but I am its professional military advisor. In that capacity, I speak for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and advance their views on the military considerations which apply to the questions the NSC considers. As this group is composed of the Secretaries of all Executive Departments concerned with national security activities, the JCS views get a wide hearing.

Even more important is the relationship between the Joint Chiefs and Congress. The 1958 Defense Reorganization Act is specific in requiring the members of the JCS to reply fully to the questions of Congress on military matters, regardless of whether the views they express coincide with the official position held by the Department of Defense. In a sense, what this amounts to is that the JCS serve as the senior military advisors not only to the Secretary of Defense and the President, and through the Chairman to the NSC, but also to the Congress—particularly to those Congressional Committees which are concerned with areas on which military factors have a bearing.

To get back to the matter of Defense organization, however, there have been a few rather major changes during the past year which I want to mention.

One of these was the establishment of the United States Strike Command. This combined the Strategic Army Corps and the combat forces of the Tactical Air Command located in the United States. What it did, in essence, was to place under a single command two elements of our strategic reserve which previously had worked together largely on the basis of co-operation.

The other organizational changes I have in mind concern the centralization of certain functions common to all the Armed Forces. Specifically, I am referring to the establishment of the Defense Communications Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, and the Defense Supply Agency.

These moves are consistent with a trend that has been going on for some time. As a matter of fact, while the first of these, the Defense Communications Agency, was activated after Secretary McNamara took office, the decision to activate it and most of the preliminary arrangements took place under Secretary Gates. I think that with regard to common functions, where centralized direction can add to efficiency and economy, we will see further centralization in the future.

I want to stress, however, that the changes which have been made do not affect the performance of functions unique to any given Service, and that they have been made within the existing authority given to the Secretary of Defense by the National Defense Act of 1958. They have not extended to the types of changes that would involve amendment or revision of that Act. Most specifically, they have not impaired the separate identity of the individual Armed Forces, or detracted from their capability to perform the functions assigned to them by law.

Now, to conclude, I would like to offer, very briefly, my assessment of how the Joint Chiefs of Staff system is working.

As a general verdict, I would say without qualification that it is working well. I do not mean that we cannot see details where improvements could be made. Also, I recognize that as we go along, experience will dictate certain changes. But the present system not only permits certain vital qualities to be preserved, but in fact is indispensable if those qualities are to be safeguarded.

One of these qualities is that *all* the varied and complex aspects of military effort are considered, and are given proper weight before a final recommendation is made. I know of no better way to accomplish this than for the Joint Chiefs of Staff to be made up of the senior officers of each of the military services.

This composition of the JCS also serves another very valuable purpose. As the uniformed Chiefs of their respective Services, they share in the responsibility for *carrying out* the decisions resulting from the recommendations which they make as a corporate body. This is about as sure a way as can be devised to keep those recommendations realistic, and to make sure that they are consistent in terms both of the limitations and capabilities of the Services.

Among the other qualities which are provided by our present system are those which I mentioned earlier as essential features—centralized direction, common doctrine, and decentralized execution. These are insured by the combination of the Joint Chiefs of Staff as over-all directors (under the Secretary of Defense and the President), the Unified Commanders as the operators in the field, and the individual Services as the custodians of their respective Service doctrine, training, and equipment.

Finally, I consider that the present system is the best way to insure the maintenance of civilian control which, while having access to balanced and complete military advice, is effective and authoritative.

To sum up very briefly, I believe that while there may be better organizations for carrying out the functions which our JCS system is performing, I do not know what they are. Certainly, as a device created by the human mind, our system is not perfect. But its details are continually being reviewed and improved. And its fundamental characteristics, to my mind, are viable and sound.

BIOGRAPHIC SKETCH

General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, U.S. Army

General Lemnitzer entered the U.S. Military Academy in 1918, graduating in 1920. His assignments from that time until the outbreak of World War II alternated between duty with troops and service as student and instructor at Army schools. He completed two tours at Fort Mills, Corregidor, P.I.; he was twice assigned to the U.S. Military Academy as an instructor in the Department of Natural and Experimental Philosophy; and, following his graduation from the Command and General Staff School in 1936, he served three years as an instructor of tactics at the Coast Artillery School, Fort Monroe, Va.

As a member of the last prewar class at the Army War College (1940), he began establishing a firm reputation as a thorough and imaginative planner. In consequence, with the beginning of the expansion of the U.S. Army, early in 1941, he was recalled from duty with an antiaircraft artillery brigade at Camp Stewart, Ga., to an assignment with the War Plans Division of the War Department General Staff, and during succeeding months with General Headquarters, U.S. Army and Headquarters, Army Ground Forces.

In August 1942, he became Commanding General of the 34th Antiaircraft Brigade, later assigned to General Eisenhower's Allied Force Headquarters, as Assistant Chief of Staff for Plans and Operations.

After a brief return to England, General Lemnitzer moved to North Africa as a member of General Eisenhower's staff. In January 1943, he was assigned as Deputy Chief of Staff to General Mark Clark in Morocco. Resuming active command of his brigade in late February 1943, he led it through the Tunisian Campaign and the early landing phases of the Sicilian Campaign.

General Lemnitzer's service during the remainder of the war was as U.S. Deputy Chief of Staff and Chief of Staff to General Sir Harold Alexander. In addition, General Lemnitzer served as Chief of Staff to the Commanding General of the (U.S.) Mediterranean Theater of Operations. Under Sir Harold Alexander, General Lemnitzer took part in the negotiations with Marshal Badoglio which led to the capitulation of Italy, in the discussion with Marshal Tito and with Soviet Marshal Tolbukhin for the co-ordination of the final military operations by the Yugoslav and Russian armed forces against the German armies in Southern Europe. In March 1945, General Lemnitzer entered Switzerland in civilian clothes, charged with management of the discussions with German representatives which resulted in the unconditional surrender of the German armed forces in Italy and Southern Austria.

Following the war he was designated as the Senior Army Member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He next became Deputy Commandant of the National War College. At this time, he also served as head of the U.S. Delegation to the Military Committee of the Five (Brussels Pact) Powers in London. He next was named the first Director of the Office of Military Assistance.

Returning to duty with troops, in 1950 General Lemnitzer qualified as a parachutist, at the age of fifty-one, and assumed command of the 11th Airborne Division. A year later he went to Korea, commanding the 7th Infantry Division.

Back in the United States in 1952, he was named the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans and Research. During this same period he was the Army's Associate Member of the Kelly Committee to Study the Defense of North America against Atomic Attack, and a member of the Secretary of the Army's Advisory Committee on Army Organization.

General Lemnitzer returned to the Far East in March 1955, assuming command of the U.S. Army Forces, Far East and the Eighth U.S. Army. He was named Commander-in-Chief of the United Nations and Far East Commands and Governor of the Ryukyu Islands. In July 1957 he took up new duties as Vice Chief of Staff, U.S. Army. In March 1959 General Lemnitzer was named to succeed General Maxwell D. Taylor as Chief of Staff, U.S. Army, and assumed his new duties on 1 July 1959.

President Eisenhower, on 15 August 1960, nominated General Lemnitzer as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and was sworn in as Chairman on 30 September 1960.