

LIFE BOOK REVIEWS

A sober judgment on the Pentagon

THE MILITARY ESTABLISHMENT

Its Impacts on
American Society

by ADAM YARMOLINSKY

(Harper & Row) \$10.00

Back in the Kennedy-Johnson years, Adam Yarmolinsky, the brilliant and aggressively liberal aide to Defense Secretary McNamara, was a favorite target of Washington conservatives. Now he is about to receive fusillades from another direction. He has produced a study of the American military establishment—one so informed and incisive that it is certain to win wide attention—which violates a cherished attitude of the left. He writes of the military establishment not as a monolithic, inherently evil conspiracy against the public interest but as a multifaceted institution, quite capable of good and bad, developing in ways determined by a tangle of circumstances.

The book emphasizes that the armed forces, by design and otherwise, have done their own kind of social reforming. They have been well ahead of the nation in integrating whites and blacks, and have provided the job training, the health care

and the psychological breakthroughs which permitted millions, white and black, to gain greater income and status when they returned to civilian life. And all the while the military has burgeoned in size and power, it has been undergoing a marked if erratic civilianization, whether in the nature of the instruction at the academies or in the type of men influencing Pentagon decisions.

Yarmolinsky yields to no one in his fear of the gigantic arms establishment, and he details its perpetuation of American life all the way down to florists who take in \$6,000 a year for decorating battle monuments. His descriptions of the military role in making foreign policy and the sweetheart relationship of the Pentagon and many congressmen are chilling. In a particularly somber passage, he sees a possible "fatal" confrontation between a public disenchanted with its military leaders and an inward-looking Pentagon. But, constantly avoiding any easy devil theory about the arms establishment, he keeps asking, in a low-keyed, clinical way, just how did all this come to be? How can the dangers be lessened?

Adam Yarmolinsky

He explains what has happened by considerations ranging through the special nature of the cold war, the demands of modern weaponry and the structure and habits of the United States government. His recommendations are also of varied types, perhaps the most promising being the suggestion of a joint congressional committee on the military constructed to make it a watchdog over the Pentagon rather than a poodle for it. At times both the analysis and the recommendations are less persuasive because of Yarmolinsky's somewhat mechanistic handling of social trends; at his best, he is dealing with matters touching so many interests and emotions that he is likely to provoke irritated dissents from almost any reader. Yet it is difficult to gainsay his central point.

Yarmolinsky locates the root of the problem in the American people

themselves. Over the decades they have shown a persistent ambivalence, never really liking an arms establishment and shying away from serious bother with it, yet standing in a certain awe of the military and accepting its doctrine that it has first claim on the national resources whenever it cries peril. They have wanted the arms establishment off their backs but have been more than willing to take its economic rewards. During recent years, a dissidence has developed, much of which talks romantic notions of a "peace" America, as if a substantial military establishment were not here to stay, or speaks of controlling it in a haze of moralistic oversimplification. All along, few Americans have shown a readiness for the exacting thinking necessary really to put the military in its place, which would seek some coherent, broadly acceptable program of what the nation actually aims to achieve at home and abroad, brush aside the allegedly prior claims of the military and fit the armed forces—not to speak of the rest of us—into these larger purposes.

In the last analysis, as Yarmolinsky puts it, "the American people get the kind of military establishment they deserve."

by Eric F. Goldman

Mr. Goldman, a historian and White House consultant (1963-66), wrote The Tragedy of Lyndon Johnson.