

Influence of Joint Chiefs Is Reported Rising



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Members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, from left: Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Army; Gen. John P. McConnell, Air Force; Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, Chairman; Adm. Thomas H. Moorer, of the Navy; and Gen. Leonard C. Chapman, Marine Corps.

By NEIL SHEEHAN

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Although the lines of power within the Nixon Administration's Defense Department have not yet been definitively drawn, the influence of the Joint Chiefs of Staff appears to have grown appreciably.

The new Secretary of Defense, Melvin R. Laird, has substantially vitiated the effect of the elaborate machinery constructed by former

Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara to impose aggressive civilian management and control over the military from the top, knowledgeable sources say.

Mr. Laird is not dismantling the machinery, but he has weakened its impact by changing the character and role of two of its major components, the sources say.

The changed components are the Office of International Security Affairs, which is the Pentagon's foreign policy

section; and the Office of Systems Analysis, created to oversee all weapons programs and strategic planning.

The counsel of the Joint Chiefs is being heard and considered as it has not been since the end of the Eisenhower era, well informed sources say. The chiefs are initiating proposals instead of reacting to those initiated by the civilian staffs of the Secretary of Defense.

In general, military leaders are pleased with the way

things are going under the Republican Administration.

One example of the increased influence of the chiefs cited by military sources is the rate at which American troops are being withdrawn from Vietnam. Although Mr. Laird is pushing for disengagement as quickly as possible, the Joint Staff, the operating agency of the chiefs, is understood to be controlling the detailed plan-

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ning involved. Gen. Creighton W. Abrams, the American military commander in Vietnam, is being allowed, after review and concurrence by the chiefs, to determine more or less the rate at which South Vietnamese forces can take over responsibilities from the Americans and thus free United States troops for withdrawal.

Another example is the reversal of the civilian defense position on the Spanish base issue after Mr. Laird took over. Under Paul C. Warnke, the former head of the Office of International Security Affairs, the office had adopted a position paper that expressed considerable skepticism about the military value of the air bases in Spain and recommended that

no further commitments be made to retain them.

This position was subsequently reversed at the request of the Joint Chiefs. The old agreement and its commitment was extended until September, 1970, and Spain was given a \$50-million arms aid grant and a \$35-million credit from the Government of Export-Import Bank to purchase weapons here.

The commitment to Spain is unclear, but the prolonged agreement contains a provision that "a threat to either country, and to the joint facilities that each provides for the common defense, would be a matter of concern to both countries and each country would take such action as it may consider appropriate."

The extent to which the newfound influence of the

chiefs will affect politico-military policy and defense spending is still unclear, however. The organizational check on their power within the Pentagon has been replaced to some degree by the growing antimilitary mood in Congress and the country.

This climate is exerting pressure on President Nixon to hold down military spending and is strengthening the ability of outside agencies like the Bureau of the Budget to do the cutting.

Laird Economy Move

And despite the public compatibility with military views that Mr. Laird has displayed on such issues as the antiballistic missile controversy, he is said to be very conscious of the need for economy.

The defense secretary is understood to have quietly

warned the chiefs that Congress simply will not accept any major increases in the current \$80-billion defense budget and that for the first time since the Eisenhower era the Defense Department will have to do its planning for the 1971 fiscal year budget with a preconceived ceiling in mind.

Informed observers do not believe that Mr. Laird intends to relinquish civilian control over the Pentagon to the military.

They think that as a professional politician he means to retain control by establishing cordial working relationships with the military and thus to be able to work out mutually acceptable compromises on key problems.

Mr. McNamara, the professional manager, believed that only a hard-nosed civilian staff responsive to his direction could achieve real civilian

control.

Conversations with senior and working level officials in and outside the Pentagon disclose several reasons for the increased weight of the Joint Chiefs in the bureaucratic equation.

The two principal reasons are:

1. A personal inclination by Mr. Laird and his chief civilian aides to seek and carefully listen to military judgment in decision-making.

2. The new National Security Council machinery that provides a clearly defined channel for the Joint Chiefs to express their views.

Five Service Leaders

The Joint Chiefs of Staff consist of five armed forces leaders, including the chairman. They are Gen. Earle G. Wheeler, chairman; Gen. William C. Westmoreland, Army Chief of Staff; Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, Chief of Naval Operations; Gen. John P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, and Gen. Leonard C. Chapman, Commandant of the Marine Corps.

The conversations with Pentagon officials reveal that while the power of the Joint Chiefs has increased, the influence of the Pentagon's civilian-run Office of International Security Affairs has declined both within and outside the Defense Department.

Its decline is attributed to the fact that Mr. Laird, unlike his predecessors, has not actively sought a foreign policy role



Associated Press

Defense Secretary Melvin R. Laird has enhanced Joint Chiefs of Staff's status.

and to the loss of the maverick independence on foreign policy matters that the International Security Office preserved under former Secretaries McNamara and Clark M. Clifford.

The office then played a key role in turning around the Johnson Administration's Vietnam war policy and often outweighed the State Department in formulating foreign policy.

Now, under the new Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, Warren Nutter, a former foreign policy adviser to Barry Goldwater, and men of like political views he has brought in to assist him, the office inclines to positions similar to those of the Joint Chiefs on foreign policy questions.

Systems Analysis Decline

As a result, the State Department pays much less attention to it in the interagency bargaining through which policy documents are drawn up for eventual submission to the National Security Council.

A third major development has been the very noticeable weakening in bureaucratic muscle of the Office of Systems Analysis, which held a pivotal position under Mr. McNamara and Mr. Clifford.

Like the international security office, the systems' analysis office has a combined civilian-military staff but is run by civilians and is an operating arm of the Secretary of Defense.

The cost effectiveness and strategic analysis in the systems analysis office, irritably dubbed "the whiz kids" by the military, review all weapons proposals by the military.

Very frequently under Secretaries Clifford and McNamara, the reviews were so different in content from the original proposals that they constituted independent weapons programs, and the systems analysis office

also often instituted its own strategic studies on both conventional and nuclear war.

The systems analysis technique compares alternative weapons systems and strategies in terms of their cost in money and manpower and their military effectiveness in meeting potential enemy threats and the nation's foreign policy commitments. The comparisons are made primarily through the use of statistical and mathematical data.

Reversal of Roles

The Joint Staff, the chief's operating arm, and the individual armed services, which each of the chiefs except the chairman heads in a separate capacity, found themselves continually reacting to papers initiated by systems analysis personnel.

"The whole system was designed to keep the chiefs off balance," one well-informed source said.

Now the roles have been reversed. The Joint Staff and the services are initiating most of the position papers and the sys-

tems analysis office has been largely reduced to commenting on the papers.

"If you can initiate the paper, that gives you one leg up in the bureaucracy," the source commented.

Secretary Laird and his Deputy Secretary, David Packard, have indicated some skepticism about the value of the systems analysis approach by paying considerably less attention to its reviews than Mr. McNamara did, knowledgeable officials say.

Significantly, they have also continued to delay nominating a permanent Assistant Secretary to head the office and have reduced its work load. Where systems analysis formerly did a sizable number of major studies each year, it is scheduled to do only two this year—one on nuclear forces and the other on general purpose (conventional warfare) forces.

"Hopefully we can do it right the first time and save some money," Mr. Packard was quoted as saying in a recent interview to explain the reversal of roles between systems analysis and the Joint Staff. "Now an awful lot of people are going over the same thing time after time," he added.

Some informed observers speculate, however, that the downgrading of the systems analysis office may prove somewhat temporary, a kind of internal public relations effort by Mr. Packard and Mr. Laird to mollify the Joint Chiefs and to establish cordial working relations, and that they may later come to rely on it more as a tool to exert civilian control.

But the McNamara era also taught the military to establish its own capability in this field by educating officers in this quantitative analytical technique. The Joint Staff and the individual services are now

Reported Rising Under Nixon



Former Secretary Robert S. McNamara put civilian control above the military.

much better equipped to counter systems analysis arguments.

Mr. Laird and Mr. Packard have clearly created an atmosphere within the department in which the chiefs feel much more comfortable and efficacious, knowledgeable sources say.

The civilian staffs at the working level are under implicit instructions to try to work out compromise solutions with the military and to arrive at what Mr. Laird refers to as common "defense positions." Under Mr. McNamara, "the marching orders were to be tough and skeptical," one informed observer noted.

Consequently, the chiefs are understood to feel a lessening

of over-all bureaucratic pressure. They were glad to see the departure of Mr. Warnke, the former Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs, whom some are said to have regarded as "a unilateral disarmer."

Now senior civilian officials in international security, before arriving at their own positions, will sometimes telephone their counterparts on the Joint Staff and ask for advice on foreign policy questions.

Where there is disagreement with the chiefs on a specific issue, the dissenting views are now included in the basic document, instead of being footnoted, as they often were under Mr. McNamara—an important bureaucratic distinction. "It's easy to overlook footnotes," one officer said.

The National Security Council system also has precise machinery for the chiefs to present a formal separate view to the President. They do not have to hope that the chairman, General Wheeler, will manage to work it in at the Tuesday lunches that constituted President Johnson's policy-making group.

Mr. Laird has also expanded the Secretary's regular Monday morning meeting with his Assistant Secretaries, the service secretaries and the chiefs. Under Mr. McNamara these meetings tended to be formal half-hour sessions that dealt with technical items, like 500-pound bomb production, and the civilians did most of the talking.

Now the meetings last an hour to an hour and a half and range over all issues facing the department that week, such as the strategy to be adopted at

committee hearings on Capitol Hill, major weapons programs, manpower, training or the latest analysis of the situation in Vietnam. "There's no end to what's discussed," one source said.

The chiefs have been encouraged and join freely in the discussion, offering their advice.

Mr. Laird meets again separately with them each Monday afternoon, and he frequently spends other long hours with them in the chief's council chamber in the bowels of the Pentagon, colloquially referred to as "the tank," talking over such matters as the nuclear threat posed by the Soviet SS-9 missile, the conditions under which Okinawa should revert to Japan and other matters of current concern.

Informed sources say that the chiefs, as separate heads of their services, also now have direct access to Deputy Secretary Packard on major budget and weapons program management questions, the details of which he usually handles. They normally see him accompanied by their civilian service secretary.

Mr. Packard has made clear in these meetings that he wants to be as "helpful" as possible, sources say, and the chiefs are said to find this "a much quicker and clearer" way of doing business than through the complicated staff procedure Mr. McNamara insisted upon.

Mr. Laird and Mr. Packard have coined a term for their approach to relations with the military. They call it "participatory management."

But the question remains: Which side will participate most?