

**The Role and Influence of the Chairman:
A Short History**

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Since 1949 the presiding officer at meetings of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) has been the Chairman, a statutory position with statutory duties and responsibilities. Like the JCS themselves, the Chairman's role and influence have changed and matured over time. American military tradition and political practice argue against investing great power in one individual. But from World War II on, the expanding American role in world affairs and increased national security demands have compelled Congress and the Executive to rethink the military's participation in the policy process. One result was a steady enlargement of the role and importance of the JCS Chairman. The path was not always straightforward, and personalities as much as circumstances often determined the outcome. But the results are self-evident and unmistakable in the form of a more active and influential Chairman in lieu of the Joint Chiefs of Staff themselves.

Early Evolution of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

The decision to appoint the first Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff was nearly a decade in the making. Established at the beginning of World War II, the JCS were an outgrowth of the ARCADIA summit conference between President Franklin D. Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston S. Churchill. The immediate goal was closer Anglo-American cooperation and coordination in the war against the Axis under an organization known as the Combined Chiefs of Staff (CCS). British representation on the CCS consisted of the Chief of the Imperial General Staff, the First Sea Lord, and the Chief of the Air Staff. Together, these three officers comprised the Chiefs of Staff Committee which had been meeting as a body for almost twenty years. Since the United States had no comparable organization, those officers with corresponding positions formed the US portion of the CCS. Known as the Joint Chiefs of Staff, they held their first formal meeting on 9 February 1942. The JCS assumed responsibility for

planning and direction of the US war effort and gradually developed a supporting organization called the Joint Staff.

The philosophy underlying the creation of the JCS was that of a committee of coequals who operated directly under the commander in chief. As such there was no apparent need for anyone other than the President to oversee their activities. JCS membership initially consisted of General George C. Marshall, Army Chief of Staff, Admiral Harold R. Stark, Chief of Naval Operations, Admiral Ernest J. King, Commander in Chief, US Fleet, and Lieutenant General Henry H. Arnold, Chief of the Army Air Forces. In late February 1942, seeking to strengthen day-to-day coordination, General Marshall suggested that the President appoint “a single Chief of Staff,” someone free of service responsibilities, to act as liaison between the JCS and the President. At first, Roosevelt resisted the idea, but after Admiral Stark departed in March for a post in London, he reconsidered. At Marshall’s urging, he asked Admiral William D. Leahy, USN (Ret), currently the US ambassador to the French Vichy government, to be his “Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief.” A former Chief of Naval Operations, Leahy’s presence would restore balance to the JCS, with two members from the War Department and two from the Navy. Leahy reported for duty on 20 July 1942; the next day President Roosevelt announced his appointment.

Admiral Leahy’s wartime responsibilities were complex and varied. Working out of offices in the White House, the War Department Building, and the Pentagon, he operated (like the Joint Chiefs of Staff themselves) without a formal directive or terms of reference. Often, his seniority solved what could have been awkward problems of precedence for other JCS members. According to his biographer, he advised “on everything the commander in chief needed to know, without burdening him with thousands of details.”¹ His most important function was maintaining daily liaison between the President and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. “It was my job,” he recalled, “to pass on to the Joint Chiefs the

¹ Henry H. Adams, *Witness to Power: The Life of Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1985), 183.

basic thinking of the President on all war plans and strategy. In turn, I brought back from the Joint Chiefs a consensus of their thinking.”² Many on the British side thought of and referred to Leahy as “chairman” of the Joint Chiefs. In fact, however, his position was in no way comparable to that of the Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff as it came to be defined in 1949. A scrupulously impartial presiding officer, he performed his tasks expeditiously and efficiently but freely offered his opinions as a coequal of his JCS colleagues. As seen by the British, he brought “a dry if circumscribed intelligence to bear upon the problems,” and when necessary exercised “a somewhat surprising restraint upon other members of the Committee.”³

The last few years of Leahy’s tenure as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, from 1945 until his return to retired status in March 1949, witnessed wholesale changes in the policy process that would, over time, decisively alter the role and importance of the JCS as a corporate body. As World War II ended, the Joint Chiefs of Staff entered a period of uncertainty brought on by the emerging debate over service unification. One of the issues on the table was whether to preserve the JCS as a permanent organization. While acknowledging their indispensable contributions to winning the war, President Harry S. Truman wanted to replace them with a new organization in line with a War Department plan to unify the services under a civilian secretary of defense and a single military commander or chief of staff in charge of a military high command. A less ambitious competing plan offered by the Navy recommended improved coordination rather than outright unification under a series of interlocking committees that included the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

In the summer of 1947, Congress opted for a compromise and passed the National Security Act which leaned more in the direction of the Navy’s plan than the Army’s. In addition to creating a series of high-level policy committees,

² William D. Leahy, *I Was There* (New York: Whittlesey, 1950), 101.

³ John Ehrman, *History of the Second World War: Grand Strategy, October 1944-August 1945* (London: HMSO, 1956), 341.

the new law unified the services under a loose hybrid organization known as the National Military Establishment (NME), headed by a secretary of defense with limited powers and authority. Giving the JCS statutory standing, the Act specified their responsibilities, authorized a Joint Staff and the appointment of a director, and designated membership to include the Army Chief of Staff, the Chief of Naval Operations, the Air Force Chief of Staff, and the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, "if there be one."⁴ Thus, even though Leahy was assured of staying on, it was unclear whether the President would elect to appoint a successor or what his assigned duties might be.

The National Security Act entered into force on 18 September 1947, with former Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal as the first Secretary of Defense. Initially, Forrestal expected to have limited responsibilities in managing the NME's affairs. But he soon found that repeated disagreements among the Joint Chiefs over roles and missions, the allocation of resources, and basic strategy forced him to become "more of a commander than a coordinator."⁵ In May 1948, with Admiral Leahy indicating an interest in resuming retirement, Forrestal approached Army Chief of Staff General Omar N. Bradley about joining his staff as "principal military adviser." Bradley declined on the grounds that he could not be spared from the Army, "particularly in view of the possibility of a change in administration next November," a reference to the upcoming presidential election which many expected Truman to lose.⁶ Undeterred, Forrestal refocused his efforts on improving the performance of the Joint Chiefs and in his first annual report he recommended designating a "responsible head" to oversee JCS deliberations, an action that would require amending the National Security Act. As a temporary measure, Forrestal persuaded General of the Ar-

⁴ National Security Act of 1947 (PL 253, 8th Cong.), in Alice Cole, et. al. (eds.), *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944-1978* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 1978), 45.

⁵ Steven L. Rearden, *History of the Office of the Secretary of Defense: The Formative Years, 1947-1950* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1984), 38.

⁶ Walter Millis (ed.), *The Forrestal Diaries* (New York: Viking Press, 1951), 433-34.

my Dwight D. Eisenhower to serve for a short period as presiding officer of the JCS, until Congress could enact enabling legislation to give the Joint Chiefs a permanent chairman.

In early February 1949, following a “long conversation” with Truman, Eisenhower agreed to act as “chairman of joint chiefs of staff for a brief . . . period pending change in the law or formal arrangements for getting ‘unification’ on the rails.”⁷ In announcing Eisenhower’s appoint, the White House indicated that he would advise both the President and the Secretary of Defense on military matters, while acting as JCS presiding officer. Between February and June 1949, Eisenhower participated in over twenty-four JCS meetings. Concentrating on bringing strategy into line with the military budget, he proposed several sets of force levels at various levels of expenditures but was unable to persuade the services to limit their combined requests to projected spending ceilings. In late March, Eisenhower fell ill and thereafter played a much less active role. In mid-July, just before relinquishing his duties, he recommended an allocation of funds favoring strategic air power because he believed that nuclear bombardment should be the linchpin of US military strategy.

Creating the Position of Chairman

Eisenhower’s appointment as temporary chairman was only the first step. Arguing that the position should be made permanent, the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, headed by former President Herbert Hoover, endorsed having a full-time high-level military adviser to oversee the JCS.⁸ On 5 March 1949, President Truman asked Congress to amend the National Security Act accordingly. At the same time, he requested further changes in the law to convert the NME into a full-fledged executive de-

⁷ Diary entry, 8 Feb 49, in Robert H. Ferrell (ed.), *The Eisenhower Diaries* (New York: Norton, 1981), 157.

⁸ Report to Congress on National Security Organization, Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, 15 Feb 49.

partment, the Department of Defense, to strengthen the powers and authority of the Secretary of Defense, and to increase the size of the Joint Staff as a means of improving its effectiveness.⁹

By and large, the Senate accepted the administration's proposals with little reservation. In the House, however, Representative Carl Vinson (D., GA) raised strenuous objections. Known as a strong proponent of the Navy, Vinson wanted to head off further centralization of power that might impinge on the Navy's interests. He wanted it stipulated that the Joint Chiefs as a corporate body, not the Chairman, would act as high-level advisors and that the Chairman would not be a full-fledged member of the JCS. A House-Senate conference committee reconciled the differences and produced a bill providing for a Chairman who, as presiding officer, would be a non-voting member of the JCS. In fact, the bar against voting meant very little since the JCS operated on a consensus basis rather than by majority rule, and since the chairman could give the Secretary or the President his personal opinion on any matter at any time should he so choose. Much more important was a provision in the final bill that the JCS as a body and not the Chairman alone should be principal military advisers to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. House conferees had insisted upon these changes to preclude the Chairman from becoming de facto chief of staff over the military services.¹⁰

President Truman signed the National Security Act amendments into law on 10 August 1949. As finally approved, the Chairman became the ranking officer in the armed forces, his duties to include presiding at JCS meetings, providing the agenda for JCS meetings, assisting the Joint Chiefs in prosecuting their business "as promptly as practicable," and informing the Secretary of Defense and the President, when appropriate, of issues on which the Chiefs could not agree. The Chairman's term was set at two years, with an additional

⁹ "Special Message to the Congress on Reorganization of the National Military Establishment," 5 Mar 49, *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: Harry S. Truman, 1949* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1964), 163-166.

¹⁰ US, *Congressional Record*, 95, Pt. 5, p. 6879 and Pt. 7, p. 9526.

two-year appointment possible. In time of war, however, there would be no limit on the number of reappointments.¹¹

The First Chairman

The first Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar N. Bradley, USA, assumed office on 16 August 1949. Almost immediately, he faced a major challenge to the role and authority of the Joint Chiefs from senior naval officers who feared that their service would have no place in a national strategy that relied on nuclear weapons in a war with the Soviet Union. Naval planners had hoped that by building of a new generation of “super carriers” the Navy would establish a claim on part of the nuclear mission and assure itself a role in future strategy. On 23 April 1949, however, Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson had sided with recommendations from the Army and the Air Force and had canceled construction of the Navy’s first super carrier, the USS *United States*. Incensed by Johnson’s cancellation order, senior naval officers had counterattacked by denigrating the Air Force’s B-36 bomber. This “revolt of the admirals” prompted an investigation by the House Armed Services Committee. Navy witnesses condemned recent strategic and budget decisions and attributed them, in part, to misapplication of the JCS system. By extension, they challenged the entire unification effort.

As the revolt intensified, it fell increasingly to General Bradley as Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to defend the credibility of the JCS system. Bradley knew that, in JCS discussions, the Navy had been striving to gain a role in nuclear war plans even though Navy spokesmen publicly denigrated strategic bombing. Navy officers criticized Air Force concepts and weapons but claimed that only naval officers were qualified to judge their own unique contributions. Testifying before Congress on 20 October 1949, Bradley set the record straight.

¹¹ Cole, et. al., *Documents on Defense Organization*, 94-95.

“While listening to presentations by some Navy officers before the Joint Chiefs of Staff,” he said,

I have heard high-ranking Navy men arrive at conclusions that showed they had no conception whatsoever of land operations. This may account for the fact that in joint planning . . . Navy men frequently find their suggestions ‘outvoted’ 2 to 1. This feeling may persist until more Navy men, through the education available under unification, have a broader understanding and perspective of war. . . .

Despite protestations to the contrary, I believe that the Navy has opposed unification from the beginning, and they have not in spirit as well as in deed accepted it completely to date.

Bradley had promised to be an unbiased Chairman. But impartiality for him did not mean minimizing differences or seeking lowest-common-denominator consensus. In this dispute, the outcome of which he deemed vital to the success of unification, Bradley delivered a blunt judgment about who was right and who was wrong.¹²

As the presiding officer at JCS meetings, Bradley adopted Leahy’s practice of exercising unscrupulous neutrality. By so doing he often obscured his own influence and importance in determining the outcome of JCS deliberations. Following the outbreak of the Korean War in the summer of 1950, the most active and influential JCS member was actually the Army Chief of Staff, General J. Lawton Collins, not Bradley. According to Collins’ deputy, General Maxwell D. Taylor, who occasionally attended JCS meetings at this time, Bradley “simply steered the debate and the argumentation.”¹³ It was his way of shaping decisions. In 1951, for example, the Joint Chiefs became deadlocked for months over an Air Force proposal to expand to 140 wings. Bradley worked with Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert A. Lovett to make it clear that this scale of aircraft production would not cripple Army and Navy modernization

¹² Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, 507-12; US House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings: The National Defense Program: Unification and Strategy*, 81:1, 528-29, 535-36.

¹³ Maxwell D. Taylor, “Reflections on the American Military Establishment,” in Paul R. Schratz (ed.), *Evolution of the American Military Establishment Since World War II* (Lexington, VA: George C. Marshall Research Foundation, 1978), 11.

and, eventually, the Air Force expansion prevailing in winning JCS endorsement.¹⁴

The Korean War was Bradley's biggest test. In effect, it established the Chairman as the military's principal spokesman and confirmed his role as a key advisor in his own right. Bradley briefed President Truman frequently on the course of the war and accompanied the Secretary of Defense to meetings of the National Security Council. In the summer of 1950, hoping to improve efficiency and confidentiality, Truman limited attendance at NSC meetings and curbed JCS participation to the Chairman alone.¹⁵ He thus established the practice that the Chairman would represent the JCS to the President and the NSC. Bradley was initially uncomfortable with this arrangement and felt that it required him to address problems from something other than "a military point of view." But according to Secretary of State Dean Acheson, he gradually came to realize that political, diplomatic, and military issues at the NSC level were often indistinguishable and needed to be dealt with accordingly.¹⁶

During Marshall's tenure as Secretary of Defense, from September 1950 to September 1951, he and Bradley were on one mind that the Korean commitment needed to stay limited in scale and scope. Both recognized that the Soviet Union, not North Korea or Communist China, was the principle enemy and that Western Europe was the main strategic prize. In mid-January 1951, shortly after the Chinese had intervened in Korea, Bradley assured British officers that "even if the United States had 30 divisions more on hand, he would not recommend that a single one should be sent to Korea. There was already too much locked up there and the Far East was no place to fight a major

¹⁴ Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1950-1952* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1998), 49-53.

¹⁵ Rearden, *Formative Years*, 122; Ltr, Truman to Acheson, 19 Jul 50, *FRUS 1950*, I, 348-49.

¹⁶ Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: Norton, 1969), 441.

war.”¹⁷ At the time, Bradley was in the process of trying to distill each service’s assessment of its effectiveness into a comprehensive strategic assessment. The Army emphasized its lack of readiness. The Air Force appraised matters largely in terms of strategic air power. The Navy, confident of its superiority at sea, had an aggressive attitude. Bradley concluded that, while the United States probably would not lose a world war that began in the next two years, “we would have a hell of a time winning it.” Delaying a great power confrontation, Bradley concluded, therefore worked in the free world’s favor.¹⁸

Bradley was a key figure throughout the controversy surrounding President Truman’s decision to fire General of the Army Douglas MacArthur early in 1951. As MacArthur became increasingly outspoken and critical of the President’s policies, Truman’s senior civilian advisors were practically unanimous in urging that he be fired for challenging the commander in chiefs’ authority. Bradley, however, was skeptical whether MacArthur’s behavior constituted insubordination as defined in Army regulations, and persuaded Truman to give him time to discuss the matter with the service chiefs.¹⁹ The JCS assembled on Sunday afternoon, 8 April 1951, in Bradley’s Pentagon office rather than the “Tank” where they conducted official business. Though informal, the proceedings resembled those of a court of inquiry. Weighing the evidence, with Bradley acting as moderator, they talked for two hours. In the end, they concluded that, while MacArthur may have been guilty of poor judgment, the case against him for insubordination did not stand up. Even so, they believed the President would be fully within his rights as commander in chief to remove MacArthur in the interests of upholding the principle of civilian control of the military. If the

¹⁷ British Joint Services Mission, “Record of Meeting in Pentagon at 1630 hours, 15 Jan 51,” 17 Jan 51, copy in Joint History Office files.

¹⁸ SM-202-51 to JCS, “State-JCS Discussions on 24 Jan 51,” 24 Jan 51, CCS 337 (1-24-51) sec. 1.

¹⁹ Truman, *Years of Trial and Hope*, 447, says Bradley agreed that MacArthur’s actions were a “clear cut case of insubordination.” Bradley and Blair, *A General’s Life*, 631-32, corrects the record. See also Acheson, *Present at the Creation*, 521-22.

President wanted to fire MacArthur, the JCS would not object. The next morning Bradley and Secretary Marshall conveyed the Chiefs' views to the President. Two days later, on 11 April, the White House press office revealed that MacArthur was being recalled and that General Matthew B. Ridgway, USA, would replace him as commander of US and United Nations forces.²⁰

MacArthur at this time was still a popular and widely respected figure in the United States—a national hero in some circles—and his firing provoked a good deal of outrage and indignation. Bradley proved invaluable as an equally distinguished soldier who publicly rebutted MacArthur's contention that "there is no substitute for victory." Bradley's "substitute" strove to avoid either appeasement or an all-out showdown by rearming, strengthening alliances, and pursuing limited, yet attainable, objectives in Korea. Republican Senator Robert A. Taft of Ohio, the minority leader and a presidential aspirant, said he had lost confidence in the Chairman. But in the end it was Bradley's views that had the strongest impact on public opinion.²¹

Bradley was the only Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, to attain five-star rank. Appointed General of the Army on 22 September 1950, he shared this honor with a handful of other notable military and naval leaders who had served in World War II. The special legislation promoting him emphasized that the advancement resulted from Bradley's "many distinguished services" to his country and "not because of the position he holds as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff." The same could be said about Bradley's influence on national security policy. His reputation, more than his position, made him important and set a high standard for his successor to follow.

²⁰ Schnabel and Watson, *JCS and the Korean War, 1950-51*, 247-48; "Statement and Order Relieving GEN MacArthur," 11 Apr 51, *Truman Public Papers, 1951*, 222-23.

²¹ US Senate, Committees on Armed Services and Foreign Relations, *Hearings: Military Situation in the Far East*, 82:1 (1951): 729-34; Bradley and Blair, *A General's Life*, 653-54.

Radford: The Chairman as Advocate

No President equaled Dwight D. Eisenhower for his familiarity with military affairs and national security issues. For Bradley, who served his final seven months as Chairman under Eisenhower, it was an difficult period in his life. Despite their close personal friendship, Eisenhower was far less deferential to Bradley than Truman had been, a reflection of the President's determination to give American defense programs a "New Look" and to use the CJCS more as a tool than an advisor for achieving his objectives. In Eisenhower's view, the Chairman needed to be something other than a benevolent presiding officer. Indeed, he saw the Chairman as the President's direct link to the Joint Chiefs of Staff and through them to the military services. As such, it was up to the Chairman not only to assist the Chiefs in prosecuting their business, but also to serve as an advocate for the administration's policies and to bring military programs into harmony with whatever direction the President and the NSC might set.

Eisenhower selected the next three Chairmen less for the quality of their advice and military expertise, than for their presumed ability to overcome service prejudices, translate administration policies into action, and inculcate unbiased judgments into day-to-day service behavior—something later generations would call "jointness." In achieving lasting results, the President was only partially successful. Though the Chairmen who served him dutifully advocated his policies before the JCS, their effectiveness in this regard was mixed and limited, undercut by the Chiefs' perception of the CJCS as little more than a "party whip." The Chairmen could coax and cajole but they could not order the Service Chiefs to follow and obey. One result was the nagging persistence of JCS "splits" (i.e., divided recommendations) over major issues, especially those dealing with the allocation of resources and roles and missions. Unable to attain consensus on key matters, the Chairmen began bypassing the JCS forum and working out solutions directly with the Secretary of Defense, a process that

further strengthened the de facto power and authority of the Secretary while diminishing JCS corporate unity.²²

Though mindful of the pitfalls, Eisenhower was committed to preserving the JCS system and making it work. Abolishing it and starting over were never serious options and would, in any case, have provoked exceedingly adverse reactions from Capitol Hill. Yet about all the President could do by himself was to tinker with the system and hope that the problems would iron out themselves. On 30 April 1953, using administrative powers granted by Congress earlier, Eisenhower announced a reorganization of the Defense Department that included strengthening the Chairman's ability to "manage" the Joint Staff. A seemingly small step, the Chairman's increased authority over the Joint Staff actually gave him greater influence over the JCS "paper trail" and hence the content of measures up for discussion.²³

Additional changes included the appointment of a new set of Service Chiefs under a new Chairman, Admiral Arthur W. Radford, who assumed office on 15 August 1953. Prior to becoming Chairman, Radford had been the Commander in Chief, Pacific, on paper a unified combatant command but in reality a Navy satrapy that covered nearly half the globe. Years later, as the Joint Chiefs moved to give the combatant commands a more "joint" appearance with fully interservice commands, the Navy stubbornly—and successfully—resisted relinquishing control of CINCPAC. In December 1952, Radford had accompanied Eisenhower to Korea and had favorably impressed the President-elect. Radford's Pacific experience seemed to complement Eisenhower's expertise in European affairs.

²² Maxwell Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Row, 1959), 21(quote); Paul R. Schratz, "The Military Services and the New Look, 1953-1961: The Navy," in David H. White (ed.), *Proceedings of the Conference on War and Diplomacy, 1976* (Charleston, S.C.: The Citadel, 1976), 141; and Richard K. Betts, *Soldiers, Statesmen, and Cold War Crises* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1977), 52-74.

²³ Cole, et. al., *Documents on Defense Organization*, 155-56.

Still, Radford's appointment seemed a odd choice, given the active role he had taken in the 1949 "revolt of the admirals." A stubborn critic of unification, Radford had also been in the forefront of the Navy's opposition to the Air Force and the Truman administration's growing commitment to a nuclear-first defense strategy. By 1953, however, his views had apparently changed, in large part due to the military's growing overall claim on resources. Like Eisenhower, Radford was a fiscal conservative who believed that military spending had gotten out of hand during the Korean War and needed to be brought into line for the "long pull." Radford deemed it "obvious that the organization that would evolve would have to be heavy in air power (both Air Force and Navy), and that the other services . . . would have to adjust to organizations that would be fleshed out rapidly in case of emergency. . . . In short, after the deterrent forces were decided upon, almost every other activity had to give to a certain extent."²⁴ Almost overnight, Radford emerged as the administration's leading spokesman for the "New Look" and its corollary, "massive retaliation."

Throughout his tenure as Chairman, Radford enjoyed a close and cordial relationship with President Eisenhower. Some have rated his influence on defense and foreign affairs as second only to that of Secretary of State John Foster Dulles.²⁵ Even so, he clashed repeatedly with the Service Chiefs while trying to line them up behind the President's policies. The most difficult task was to gain their acceptance of the administration's increased emphasis on nuclear weapons in lieu of conventional forces. The only JCS member to offer anything approaching consistent support for the administration's position was Air Force Chief of Staff General Nathan F. Twining who in mid-1957 became Radford's successor as CJCS. As Radford expected, the Air Force suffered the least in cutbacks under the New Look, the Army the most. The result was a running conflict between Radford and the Army Chiefs of Staff over the size and compo-

²⁴ Arthur W. Radford, *From Pearl Harbor to Vietnam: The Memoirs of Admiral Arthur W. Radford*, Stephen Jurika, ed. (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1980), 181-82, 317-19.

²⁵ Adam Yarmolinsky, *The Military Establishment: Its Impacts on American Society* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 30.

sition of the Army, culminating in 1956 in a battle royal over the allocation of resources. Convinced that the services' force-level recommendations were unattainable under any realistic set of budgetary assumptions, Radford proposed to reduce Army deployments overseas to small nuclear-armed task forces. General Maxell D. Taylor, the Army Chief of Staff, objected vehemently. Leaked to the press, Radford's proposal drew so many protests that he did not pursue it.²⁶ The next year, however, when the Chiefs again deadlocked over force levels, Radford quietly sent Secretary of Defense Charles E. Wilson recommendations for less dramatic reductions. Wilson endorsed them as did the President, thus paving the way for the New Look to advance a further step forward.²⁷

In addition to his missionary work among the services, promoting the administration's defense policies, Radford dutifully supported responses to problems abroad in accord with the President's preferences. During the Indochina and Taiwan Strait crises of 1954-1955, he was a leading proponent of using tactical nuclear weapons to protect American interests, arguing that the time had come to treat nuclear weapons like any other weapon in the arsenal. In theory, Eisenhower agreed, even observing at one point during the Taiwan Strait crisis that Communist China's fleet of junks would make "a good target for an atomic bomb" if the Communists tried to invade Taiwan.²⁸ But as the showdown loomed (during this and a similar episode in 1958) the President side-stepped decisions that might have put his nuclear policy to a test and relied instead on a show of conventional force to deter a Communist attack. The net effect was a defense program that continued to arm US forces with nuclear weapons at an increasingly rapid pace, but with no firm policy on if or when

²⁶ Kenneth W. Condit, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1955-1956* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1992), 32-37.

²⁷ Byron R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957-1960* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2000), 11-14.

²⁸ Memo of Discussion, NSC Meeting, 5 Aug 54, *FRUS 1952-54*, XIV, 519.

those weapons should ever be employed. While Radford remained a loyal proponent of the administration's position, it was

While Eisenhower respected Radford's advice, it was mainly as an advocate and supporter of administration policies that he found the Chairman most useful and effective. During both the Indochina and Taiwan Strait crises, the Chairman's eagerness to use nuclear weapons was too belligerent for the President's tastes. On the other hand, a defense establishment top-heavy in nuclear weaponry was precisely the posture that Eisenhower wanted, and toward this end Radford proved to be a determined campaigner, with results that would reverberate throughout the Defense Department for decades to come. Radford retired on 15 August 1957, but as a sign of his confidence in the admiral's assistance, Eisenhower called him back two years later as a civilian consultant to perform some of the same duties that Eisenhower himself had carried out as acting chairman in 1949.²⁹

Twining and the 1958 Reorganization

The next Chairman, General Nathan F. Twining, USAF, was also an ardent New Look advocate but did not arouse the same antipathy among the Service Chiefs to administration policies as Radford had. Nor was the advice he offered during major crises nearly as bellicose. Whether he was any more effective and influential is a matter of conjecture. As a rule, he got along better with the Army Chiefs of Staff than Radford had, but experienced more frequent run-ins with the Navy. During one of these—a confrontation in August 1960 over nuclear targeting policy in the Oval Office—Twining and Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh A. Burke seemed on the verge of coming to blows.³⁰ Yet

²⁹ Goodpaster Memo, 14 May 59, "Conference with the President on 13 May 59," Ann Whitman File, Eisenhower Diary, Staff Notes, May 59 folder, Dwight D. Eisenhower Library; *New York Times*, 19 May 59: 19.

³⁰ Robert J. Watson, *Into the Missile Age, 1956-1960* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1997), 487-88.

overall, Twining seemed to enjoy a somewhat better and more productive working relationship with his JCS colleagues than Radford had had.

One advantage that Twining had over Radford was that he operated for most of his tenure under a somewhat more favorable set of ground rules, the result of legislative changes requested by the President in 1958 that demonstrably strengthened the Chairman's authority. While assessing the JCS concept as "essentially sound," Eisenhower asked for changes to increase the size of the Joint Staff, to give the Chairman full authority over it and to select its director, and to be allowed to participate as an equal in JCS deliberations.³¹ Testifying in support of the President's proposals, General Twining affirmed that, as a practical matter, he already exercised many of the increased responsibilities being requested, including control of the Joint Staff. Yet without legislative action, he saw the Chairman's powers and authority potentially open to potential challenge.³²

Congress approved the President's proposals and on 6 August 1958 the Department of Defense Reorganization Act entered into force. Broadly speaking, the 1958 amendments stretched the powers and authority of the Chairman about as far as they could go while keeping the basic structure and philosophy of the JCS corporate system intact. The impact of these changes, however, proved to be less than expected. The Chairman's main problem lay not in assigning tasks but in overcoming service objections and bringing issues to decision, a matter that the 1958 amendments neglected to address. In consequence, the Secretary of Defense rather than the Chairman continued to be the final arbiter of JCS disputes.

As it affected the role and functions of the Joint Chiefs themselves, the most important reform among those enacted at this time lay in removing the Service Chiefs from the chain of command. Henceforth, the operational chain of

³¹ *Public Papers of the Presidents: Eisenhower, 1958* (Washington, DC: GPO, 1959), 274-90.

³² Twining testimony, US House, Committee on Armed Services, *Hearings: Reorganization of the Department of Defense*, 85:2 (1958): 6176-77.

command would run from the President and the Secretary of Defense directly to the unified and specified (i.e., combatant) commands rather than through the military departments. In line with this shift, the Chairman became the de facto point of contact between the Secretary and the combatant commands, and the Joint Staff an advisory organization to the CJCS and the Secretary on those commands' activities and missions.

In some respects, Twining proved more useful to the President than Radford had been. Late in 1957, the launching of the Soviet space satellite "Sputnik" aroused fears that the Soviet Union was winning the race to deploy intercontinental ballistic missiles. Suddenly, Eisenhower's military expertise faced widespread criticism. Members of Congress and some senior Air Force officers lobbied for a huge, crash program to close the alleged "missile gap." Eisenhower dismissed such action as wasteful and unnecessary, and turned to Twining to help convince Congress. Similarly, during the 1959 Berlin confrontation with the Soviet Union, Twining distanced himself from the Service Chiefs and endorsed Eisenhower's judgment that a major mobilization was unnecessary.

In the critically important area of allocating resources, Twining was less assertive and abrasive than Radford had been, but only moderately more successful in achieving results. Despite the 1958 reforms, Eisenhower continued to complain privately that he could not "figure out what is causing the trouble with the Joint Chiefs of Staff. The organization seems to be failing to do its job." In the President's judgment, Radford and Twining had risen to be broad-minded leaders, free of service prejudices, but the Service Chiefs remained mired in parochialism.³³ A headache for Eisenhower at the start of his presidency, getting the JCS to cooperate and work together remained a no less intractable problem at the end.

³³ Goodpaster Memo, "Conference with the President, 14 Jul 59," Staff Notes, July '59 (3) folder, Eisenhower Library.

The 1960s: Chairmen on the Defensive

Eisenhower's third and final choice for Chairman of the Joint Chiefs was General Lyman L. Lemnitzer, USA, who took office on 1 October 1960. Assigned to Eisenhower's staff near the outset of World War II, Lemnitzer had helped plan the invasions of North Africa and Sicily and, after the war, had served as a member of the Joint Strategic Survey Committee and as head of foreign military assistance in the Office of Secretary of Defense. During 1959-1960 he was Army Chief of Staff. Well liked and admired among his peers, Lemnitzer impressed Eisenhower as both an able military leader and one of the few who could rise above service concerns and provide objective, unbiased assessments. Not surprisingly, he and the President quickly established a close rapport. Less than four months later, however, Lemnitzer found himself working in a completely different environment, dominated by a new President, John F. Kennedy, who had completely different ideas about American defense policy and how the JCS should figure in. In place of massive retaliation, Kennedy wanted a strategy of flexible response and increased capabilities for counterinsurgency warfare. At the same time, the new President dismantled much of the Eisenhower-era policy-making machinery on which the JCS had relied, and instituted more informal mechanisms for developing policy. Accustomed to working through established bureaucratic mechanisms, Lemnitzer never could fully adjust.

Uneasy from the start, relations between the Kennedy White House and the Joint Chiefs of Staff deteriorated rapidly during the new administration's first six months in office. A key turning point was the Bay of Pigs episode, the ill-fated attempt by the Central Intelligence Agency, using Cuban expatriates, to overthrow Fidel Castro's budding communist regime in the spring of 1961. After the JCS reviewed the invasion plans, President Kennedy made crucial changes without consulting the Chiefs. Lemnitzer did not take full account of Kennedy's style, in which decisions were subject to change up until the moment of execution. Unfamiliar with the restrained language the JCS used in their assessments, Kennedy later complained that the JCS had let him down

by not giving him full warning of the risks and pitfalls. On both sides, there was a residue of bitterness and mistrust.

In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs affair, Kennedy sought to clarify what he expected of the Joint Chiefs in the future, admonishing them to be “more than military men” and to offer their views on a “direct and unfiltered” basis.³⁴ But it was too little too late, and in trying to mend their differences, Kennedy and the Chiefs only made matters worse. As if to signal his lack of confidence in JCS advice, President Kennedy persuaded former Army Chief of Staff General Maxwell D. Taylor to come out of retirement and become his White House-based “military representative.” Though Kennedy insisted that Taylor would have limited duties, his presence was an obvious embarrassment for the JCS, Lemnitzer especially. Almost immediately, Taylor began expanding his writ and delving into matters that normally should have been the function of the Joint Chiefs, including a review of the deteriorating security situation in Vietnam and the development of fresh proposals for countering the growing Soviet pressure on Berlin.

If being forced to compete with Taylor were not enough, Lemnitzer found his authority and influence undercut even further by the managerial innovations of Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara. Accorded *carte blanche* by the President to streamline Pentagon procedures, McNamara recruited a team of young and eager civilian “systems analysts” who scrutinized every aspect of military strategy and planning, even delving into sensitive areas like strategic nuclear targeting, heretofore the exclusive domain of military planners. McNamara’s Draft Presidential Memorandums (DPMs) containing force recommendations buttressed by increasingly elaborate supporting data and rationales, grew in number from two in 1961 to sixteen by 1968. In contrast, the vehicle for the Joint Chiefs’ recommendations—the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan, or JSOP—remained a very imperfect instrument that critics likened to a “Christmas wish list.” Though Lemnitzer intensified efforts to improve the

³⁴ NSAM 55, 28 Jun 61, “Relations of the JCS to the President in Cold War Operations,” *FRUS 1961-63*, VIII, 109-10.

Chiefs' performance and make their recommendations more timely and realistic, his methods were too slow and ponderous to suit McNamara. As one official history of the period described it, Lemnitzer and his JCS colleagues "found themselves providing sounding boards for positions [McNamara] and his OSD staff were advocating."³⁵ Frustrated and disappointed, Lemnitzer was not offered a second term. On 30 September 1962 he stepped down, awaiting a new job as NATO supreme commander in Europe.

The day after Lemnitzer's departure, Taylor moved from the White House into the Pentagon to become the CJCS. As Army Chief of Staff in the mid-1950s, Taylor had often clashed with Redford over the latter's role as advocate for the Eisenhower administration's policies and his attempts (unwarranted and misguided, in Taylor's view) to impose discipline on the Chiefs and bring them into line. Now, as Chairman in his own right, he cast himself in a similar advocacy role, but anticipated no repetition of the disharmony and friction that had plagued the JCS in the 1950s. Slowly but surely, he expected Kennedy's "reconstitution" of the Joint Chiefs to yield an organization of like-minded men steeped in the President's values and point of view.³⁶ The results, however, were almost wholly different. In fact, the number of JCS papers with "split" recommendations jumped from 13 during 1962 (the last year of Lemnitzer's tenure) to 42 in 1963 (the first full year of Taylor's) and to 47 in 1964.³⁷

Two weeks after becoming Chairman, Taylor found himself in the midst of the Cuban Missile Crisis, which threatened a nuclear exchange between Washington and Moscow. By this time, Kennedy rarely met with the JCS as a corporate body and preferred dealing only with Taylor who sat on the President's NSC Executive Committee, or ExCom, an ad hoc body hastily formed to handle the crisis. Only once during the course of the crisis did Kennedy meet

³⁵ Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961-1965* (Washington, DC: GPO, 2006), 537.

³⁶ Maxwell D. Taylor, *Swords and Plowshares* (New York: Norton, 1972), 252.

³⁷ JCS Decision Statistics, 1958-1982, JCS "Splits" Folder, JHO 14-003.

face-to-face with the JCS. Normally, it was through the ExCom that Taylor presented the Chiefs' corporate views, but since the ExCom was preoccupied with discussing diplomatic solutions rather than military plans, Taylor spent most of his time listening rather than talking. Taylor's job, as Kennedy saw it, was to make sure the JCS faithfully carried out his decisions. After weighing the options, the President resolved against direct military action, as the JCS were recommending, and imposed a naval blockade (called a "quarantine" for diplomatic purposes). "I know that you and your colleagues are unhappy with the decision," Kennedy told Taylor, "but I trust that you will support me. . . ." The Chairman assured him that the JCS would.³⁸ After the Soviets had withdrawn their missiles and the crisis ended, Kennedy privately expressed a "forceful . . . lack of admiration" for the Service Chiefs but called Taylor "absolutely first class."³⁹

The Cuban Missile Crisis was one of the few occasions during his tenure when Taylor functioned predominantly in the role of JCS corporate spokesman, conveying and arguing the views of the Joint Chiefs to their civilian superiors. (Exactly how forcefully Taylor argued those views is a matter of debate. Some of the Chiefs felt he could have done a better job.) Most of the time Taylor saw himself the other way around—as the administration's trusted agent. His role in arms control was typical. The JCS consistently opposed a treaty banning nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and under water. On 16 July 1963, just after US negotiators arrived in Moscow, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved but held in abeyance a statement that the proposed treaty contained so many significant disadvantages that only overriding nonmilitary considerations could render it in the national interest. Eight days later, after a treaty had been initialed, Kennedy asked the JCS to "base their position on the broadest political considerations." It fell to Taylor to convince the Service Chiefs to endorse

³⁸ Quoted in Walter S. Poole, "The Cuban Missile Crisis: How Well Did the Joint Chiefs of Staff Work?" (Paper presented to the Colloquium on Contemporary History, Washington, DC, 22 Sep 2003); and editorial comments in Naftali and Zelikow (eds.), *Presidential Recordings*, II, 614.

³⁹ Benjamin C. Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy* (New York: Pocket Books, 1976), 117.

the treaty, subject to important safeguards. While appearing before Congress, the JCS gave the treaty their lukewarm support, but that was all it needed. Had the Joint Chiefs opposed the treaty, on the other hand, it almost certainly would have failed of adoption.

Unlike his predecessor, Taylor admired McNamara and often copied his methods, even to the extent of redesigning the JSOP to contain supporting rationales comparable to those in the Secretary's DPMs. Some of the Service Chiefs, however, saw Taylor as too closely allied with McNamara and came to regard him more as an adversary than as a colleague; suspicions surfaced that in his one-on-one meetings with the Secretary, Taylor misrepresented or toned down their criticisms of civilian strategy. Though the momentum was still with him, his influence suffered a critical setback when in December 1963 Carl Vinson, head of the House Armed Services Committee, turned down an administration proposal (offered at Taylor's instigation) to create a deputy JCS chairman. As far as Vinson was concerned, the CJCS had enough power already and the appointment of a deputy would dangerously extend that authority. A "leak" to the press indicated that only the Army Chief of Staff, General Earle G. Wheeler, had endorsed the Chairman's proposal.⁴⁰ During 1964, a spike in enemy activity in Vietnam left Taylor increasingly uneasy as he struggled to defend the administration's strategy of graduated response against calls by the Service Chiefs for a more aggressive US effort. His effectiveness at the Pentagon fading, Taylor accepted President Johnson's offer to step down as Chairman a few months early, before the expiration of his term, and become ambassador to Saigon. By all accounts, Taylor's departure was a relief to his JCS colleagues.

Taylor's hand-picked successor, General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, took office on 3 July 1964, the third army officer in a row to serve as Chairman. A former Director of the Joint Staff and Army Chief of Staff since 1962, Wheeler was intimately familiar with the ins and outs of the JCS system which in recent

⁴⁰ *Congressional Quarterly Almanac*, 1963, 442; Theodore W. Bauer and Harry B. Yoshpe, *Defense Organization and Management* (Washington, DC: Industrial College of the Armed Forces, 1971), 45.

years had undergone a significant transformation as the impact of the 1958 reforms took hold. By the time Wheeler became CJCS, a tour as Chairman gave the man who held that position, by virtue of his ability to concentrate his time and attention on joint issues, a unique perspective that no Service Chief could duplicate. Once they were dropped from the chain of command, the Service Chiefs found themselves relegated to a relatively narrow management role, in which their main concern was to assure that the forces under them were properly trained and equipped for the combatant commands. As a direct result, service-oriented concerns pushed joint matters to the bottom of their agendas. No longer did a Service Chief dominate JCS discussions as General Collins had during the Korean War. If the Service Chiefs were to stay abreast of joint developments, it was up to the Chairman to keep them informed.

In contrast to the trusted agent role played by Taylor, Wheeler saw himself more as the JCS corporate representative and spokesman, serving as the Chiefs' go-between with the Secretary of Defense, the President, and the NSC. While he acknowledged his obligations to the Secretary and the President, Wheeler also put a premium on encouraging JCS collegiality. He worked hard to hold the Service Chiefs' confidence and to keep them informed. As corporate spokesman, he felt it his duty to convey JCS advice as clearly and effectively as possible to his civilian superiors. But with the escalation of the Vietnam War came growing pressure from McNamara and the White House to keep the Service Chiefs in line in support of administration policy. All in all, it put Wheeler in a frustrating and difficult position.

Though often described as a member of President Lyndon B. Johnson's "inner circle," Wheeler was in fact an outsider for much of his tenure. The dominant figure, both in the Pentagon and at high-level meetings with the President, continued to be Secretary of Defense McNamara who consistently overshadowed the Chairman. Not until October 1967 (after a falling out between Johnson and McNamara) did Wheeler become a regular attendee at the President's "Tuesday Lunch," the focal point of all serious policy discussions and decisions. A short time earlier Wheeler had suffered a mild heart attack and

began talking of possible retirement. Johnson refused to let him go. "I can't afford to lose you," the President told him. "You have never given me a bad piece of advice."⁴¹ On 22 March 1968, as a sign of his appreciation, Johnson announced that Wheeler would serve an unprecedented fifth year as Chairman.⁴² Yet proximity to power did not equate with influence and, as was often the case as the Vietnam War dragged on, Wheeler returned to the Pentagon from his meetings with the President appearing drawn and dispirited.⁴³

Wheeler's dilemma was that he could not be an effective agent for the administration and an equally effective spokesman for his JCS colleagues at the same time. In Vietnam, as a rule, the JCS wanted a stronger military response than the administration was willing to authorize. Even so, the JCS could never fully agree among themselves on how US military power should be applied, with the Army favoring emphasis on land operations, the Air Force arguing for a more intensive air campaign, and the Navy and Marine Corps somewhere in between. It fell to Wheeler to try to reconcile these conflicting views, a feat he never completely mastered. Limited in combat experience, he was hard pressed to make independent judgments of how the war was going and wound up relying on information the command in Saigon provided, some of it of dubious accuracy and reliability.

In 1968, the shock of the enemy's Tet offensive turned much of the American public against the war. Still committed to an independent, noncommunist South Vietnam, Wheeler launched a desperation effort to seize the initiative. Pointing to the enemy's heavy losses during the Tet offensive, he urged a buildup of forces in the South and an intensified bombing campaign against North Vietnam to deal the enemy the coup de grace. It was not the advice Pres-

⁴¹ Interview by Dorothy P. McSweeney with Gen Earle G. Wheeler, 7 May 1970, pp 21-22, Oral History Collection, Johnson Library.

⁴² "President's News Conference," 22 Mar 67, *Johnson Public Papers*, 1968, 430.

⁴³ Interview with Lt. Gen. John B. McPherson, USAF (Ret.), 3 Apr 1990, JHO Collection. See also Cosmas, *MACV: Years of Withdrawal*, 94.

ident Johnson wanted to hear. Committing himself instead to a negotiated settlement, Johnson now sought ways to wind down the war, not enlarge it, and pave the way for an American withdrawal. For Wheeler as for the other Chiefs, the time had come to reconcile themselves to a losing cause.

The 1970s: Retrenchment and Reassessment

The failure of the American effort in Vietnam left the Joint Chiefs of Staff and, in particular, the Chairman, in a state of agony and disarray. Though it was not the strategy they had recommended, the JCS had gone along with the Johnson administration's war plan in the belief that sooner or later the President and his advisors would see the light and come around to their point of view. But after Tet and the precipitous drop in public support for the war, the Joint Chiefs' position was weaker than ever, their credibility as advisors at an all-time low. Offering a much-needed morale boost, President Richard M. Nixon gave Wheeler a sixth year as Chairman soon after the new administration took office in 1969. Yet to those who dealt with him on a regular basis, Wheeler seemed tired, disillusioned, and broken. As the President's national security assistant, Henry A. Kissinger, recalled: "Wheeler had participated in a series of decisions any one of which he was able to defend, but the cumulative impact of which he could not really justify to himself."⁴⁴

A transition period, Wheeler's last year as Chairman saw real authority pass gradually to his heir-apparent, Admiral Thomas H. Moorer, the Chief of Naval Operations. Taking over officially as CJCS in July 1970, Moorer operated in a porous bureaucratic environment, where his de facto influence tended to exceed his legal powers, especially in handling the draw-down in Vietnam. Not until passage of the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act would the Chairman formally acquire as much power and authority as Moorer took for granted. Though Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense during Nixon's first term, frowned on direct con-

⁴⁴ Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1979), 35.

tacts between the White House and the Chairman's office, Moorer often ignored such prohibitions or worked around them. Most of the time he dealt directly with Kissinger with whom he enjoyed a close, often fruitful, but frequently uneasy relationship. Still, it would be an exaggeration to say that Moorer was part of the White House "team" or the President's inner circle. Nixon and Kissinger had their own agenda and their own special channels for conducting negotiations. Often, in launching major initiatives, they left Moorer completely in the dark. Only inadvertently, for example, did he learn about Kissinger's forthcoming trip to China in July 1971, the first step toward a radical restructuring of the Far Eastern security system.⁴⁵

While Moorer's operating style and exercise of power pointed more toward the future than the past, many of the problems he faced were familiar ones that had vexed the JCS since 1947. Even though the number of "splits" had dropped off sharply since Taylor's departure, interservice rivalry and competition for missions and resources remained a day-to-day fact of life. With the approaching end of the Vietnam War, the competition threatened to become even more intense as the Services sought to recoup their losses and rebuild their forces. In facing up to this situation, Moorer could not do much more by way of reconciling interservice differences than his predecessors. In short, a more powerful and influential Chairman, without the legislative authority to back him up, did not automatically translate into a more efficient and effective JCS system.

For Moorer's two immediate successors—General George S. Brown, USAF, and General David C. Jones, USAF—the challenge was two-fold: to help guide the Service Chiefs through a period of crippling austerity brought on by reduced defense budgets, and to restore JCS credibility with Congress and the American public. Brown and Jones were both competent, respected officers, yet outside the Pentagon they were barely known. Of the two, Brown seemed the

⁴⁵ Interview, 29 Jun 90, with ADM Thomas H. Moorer, USN (Ret), by members of the JCS Historical Division.

most likely to succeed. Having served in a succession of important staff assignments and as military assistant to two Secretaries of Defense, Brown's credentials marked him out as the perfect Chairman, as if groomed for the job. But in the aftermath of Vietnam, with the military's reputation at its lowest ebb in history, he seemed to flounder in the job. Worst of all was the further damage he inflicted on the services' already tarnished image with intemperate public remarks, some with racial and ethnic overtones, concerning US friends and allies. President Gerald R. Ford admitted to both anger and embarrassment. Learning from Brown's experience, Jones adopted a lower public profile but in the process ceded even more of the high ground to the military's critics.

The Movement for JCS Reform

By the time Jimmy Carter entered the Oval Office in January 1977, pressuring was building for a top to bottom reexamination of the JCS, with a view toward bolstering the role and authority of the Chairman. Representing a cross-section of the political spectrum, the reform movement was a loose amalgamation that brought together liberal Democrats bent on curbing the military's power and claim on resources, with moderate-to-conservative Republicans who lamented the failure of the Joint Chiefs to come up with a more effective and coherent strategy for winning the cold war. All agreed that the original corporate structure was deeply flawed and that the debacle in Vietnam pointed up the need for a new, more responsive and robust organization. Still, opinions diverged over the details of what should be done. An ardent advocate of improving governmental efficiency, President Carter sided with the reformers and saw a stronger Chairman as crucial to improving JCS performance. But needing the Joint Chiefs' support for passage of the Panama Canal Treaty and a SALT II agreement with the Soviet Union, he deferred recommending new legislation and expected to revisit the matter in his second term.

Ronald Reagan's victory in the 1980 presidential election seemed to take much of the steam out of the reform movement. Professing satisfaction with the

current setup, the new President preferred to concentrate his energies and political capital on an across-the-board military buildup, soon to become the largest and most costly expansion the armed forces had seen since Korea. By now, the Secretary of Defense was at the height of his powers, the undisputed authority within the Department of Defense. Reagan and Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger liked it that way and saw no reason to change. But with defense spending once again on the rise, many members of Congress—remembering the Johnson administration’s subtle efforts to hide the costs of Vietnam—wanted institutionalized reassurance that the money would be used properly. Almost overnight, the reform movement found itself rejuvenated.

The ensuing legislative battle lasted until 1986 and left hard feelings all around. Unlike previous reorganizations, the impetus for reform this time came from Capitol Hill rather than from the Executive Branch. Against the background of a growing list of military misadventures (the 1975 Mayaguez affair, the abortive 1980 Iran hostage rescue mission, and the near-simultaneous Grenada and Beirut bombing incidents in 1983), the reformers argued the need for a more streamlined system of command and control, with stronger military leadership at the top. A decisive factor in the thinking of some was the change of heart on the part of General David Jones, as he stepped down from the chairmanship in the summer of 1982. A few years earlier, Jones had been a stalwart supporter of the JCS system. But by the time he returned to civilian life, he professed to be fed up with the search for “lowest common denominator” solutions that drove JCS deliberations, simply to accommodate Service parochialism. “The tough issues,” he complained, “got pushed under the rug.” Like a growing number of reformers Jones favored enhanced powers for the Chairman and the appointment of a full-time deputy to assist with the chores.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Interview with Gen David C. Jones, USAF (Ret), by Walter S. Poole and Steven L. Rearden, 4 Feb 98, Arlington, VA.; David C. Jones, “Why the Joint Chiefs of Staff Must Change,” *Armed Forces Journal International* (Mar 1982): 62-72.

The administration's response was lame and half-hearted. Preoccupied with the buildup, Weinberger failed to take the reform movement seriously until it was too late. He countered, not with a positive program of his own, but with delaying tactics and promises of non-legislative initiatives to improve JCS effectiveness. To carry out these measures, he relied on Jones' successor as Chairman, General John W. Vessey, Jr., USA. A combat veteran of three wars, Vessey was well regarded by his colleagues and worked hard to generate closer cooperation and collaboration between the administration and the Service Chiefs. For Vessey, the very essence of the JCS system was its corporate character, which he was loath to tamper with in the name of progress and reform. But he had no appetite for bureaucratic or congressional politics and became frustrated in the job to the point of requesting early retirement, nearly a year before the expiration of his term.

Meanwhile, the legislative juggernaut moved on, leaving in its wake increasingly frayed relations between Weinberger and the congressional reformers. As the debate intensified, the emerging consensus within the reform movement held that the Secretary of Defense had become too powerful and that a stronger Chairman was needed, if nothing else, to counterbalance that authority. Some believed that what the reformers were trying to create was an organization akin to a modern corporation, with a chief executive officer (the Secretary of Defense) carrying out his duties and responsibilities through a chief operating officer (the Chairman). Others saw it as trying to turn back the clock and establish a strong chief of staff, much as the War Department had proposed after World War II. Recognizing that the tide had turned, the new Chairman, Admiral William J. Crowe, Jr., USN, acknowledged his readiness to deal, though he insisted as he did so that he hoped changes would be kept to a minimum. With Vessey gone and Crowe angling for compromise, defenders of the status quo rallied behind Chief of Naval Operations Admiral James D. Watkins and Secretary of the Navy John Lehman. But it was too little, too late. All but ignoring the pleas coming from the Pentagon, the reformers drafted legislation

as they saw fit and, in the autumn of 1986, brought the JCS corporate system to an end.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act of 1986

The main difference between the old arrangements and the new was the degree of power and authority vested in the Chairman. No longer a *primus inter pares*, he now became, under the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986, the principal military advisor to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. As such, he replaced the Joint Chiefs of Staff who had previously exercised this responsibility in a corporate capacity. In addition, all the statutory functions that the JCS had once performed collectively passed en toto to the Chairman. While the law called for the Chairman to meet regularly with the Service Chiefs, their only clear-cut role as JCS members was to serve as military advisors to the Chairman. For assistance, the CJCS acquired a Vice Chairman (designated the second ranking military officer in the armed forces) and unfettered control over the Joint Staff and its Director.

In some ways, Goldwater-Nichols was as unique for what it failed to do as for what it did. Despite talk in Congress of putting the Chairman in the chain of command, the final legislation skirted this issue by keeping the existing line of authority intact, with the added proviso that the Chairman could direct communications to the combatant commanders and be responsible for “overseeing” their activities. In fact, the CJCS had been performing these functions on a non-statutory basis for years. Still, there was not requirement in the law that either the President or the Secretary of Defense needed to consult with the Chairman before ordering military action and, in years to come, especially during the Global War on Terror, they often dealt directly with the combatant commanders, cutting out the Chairman and the Joint Staff.

The most controversial feature of the new law was its treatment of military personnel policy, making “jointness” the accepted norm throughout the

armed forces. Admiral Crowe and others had tried to persuade Congress not to include these provisions or, at least, to tone them down. But by the time the final legislation came to be written, relations between the Pentagon and Capitol Hill had become so strained that few members of Congress were in the mood to listen. The result, designated Title IV, was a highly prescriptive set of regulations for joint duty, education, and promotion, all aimed at improving professionalism and eradicating alleged service parochialism. Although Congress dropped the idea of a joint officer corps that some of its members favored, it decreed that officers should be encouraged to develop a “joint specialty” and affirmed a practice (already in use) of requiring new flag officers to attend a “Capstone” course to prepare them for joint assignments with senior officers from other services.

While Goldwater-Nichols clearly enhanced the Chairman’s statutory powers and authority, it remained to be seen how much the new law would bolster his actual influence within the military and the policy process. Obviously, the days of “splits” and consensus recommendations resting on “lowest common denominator” solutions were over. Yet as experience demonstrated, the Chairman’s influence often depended as much upon circumstances and personalities as on his statutory authority. All the same, with the impediments of the past removed, the CJCS now had opportunities that had never presented themselves to his predecessors.

Launching the New System

Initial implementation of the Goldwater-Nichols Act fell to the serving Chairman, Admiral Crowe. Embracing an “evolution-not-revolution” philosophy, Crowe hoped to complete the process with “as little trauma and disruption as possible.”⁴⁷ For help, he moved quickly to clarify the role of the Vice Chairman (VCJCS) whose only assigned duty under the law was to preside at JCS

⁴⁷ Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 160.

meetings in the Chairman's absence. Secretaries of Defense had customarily regarded their deputies as their "alter ego" since Forrestal coined the phrase in 1948; Crowe believed that the Vice Chairman should be prepared to function in a similar capacity.⁴⁸ The first Vice Chairman, General Robert T. Herres, USAF, took office on 6 February 1987 but did not receive a specific assignment of functions until April when the Secretary of Defense, at Crowe's suggestion, directed that the VCJCS should concentrate on acquisition and resource management issues, in order to free up time for the Chairman to deal with military policy and strategic matters.⁴⁹

Some of the toughest adjustments were those of redefining the Service Chiefs' relationship to the Chairman. Operating initially under a modified version of the old system, Crowe affirmed existing procedures allowing his colleagues to present divergent views to the Secretary of Defense.⁵⁰ But since the JCS were no longer bound by the corporate unanimity rule, Crowe could pass along recommendations as he saw fit. As required by law, he held "regular" (i.e., weekly) JCS meetings. In considering cross-service matters like arms control and the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), he routinely sought the collective advice of the Service Chiefs and made it a practice to submit recommendations to the Secretary on a corporate basis. Crowe's caution and restraint disappointed those in Congress who expected the new law to have an immediate and dramatic impact on the way the JCS conducted business.⁵¹ But it seemed to Crowe the right thing to do. "I started gently," he said, "but as time passed and

⁴⁸ Ibid., 159.

⁴⁹ CM-660-87 to SecDef, 6 Apr 87, "Duties of the VCJCS," U, JHO 15-0012; Memo, SecDef to CJCS, 15 Apr 87, "Duties of the VCJCS," U, in notebook labeled "OCJCS Restructuring Nov 1987," JHO.

⁵⁰ CM-465-86 to CNO, 5 Dec 86, "Implementation of the Special Operations Command," U; DJSM 226-87 to SecDef, 6 Feb 87, "Timely Advice," U, both in OCJCS Restructuring Nov 1987 Notebook, JHO.

⁵¹ See Paul Y. Hammond, "Fulfilling the Promise of the Goldwater-Nichols Act in Operational Planning and Command," in James A. Blackwell, Jr., and Barry M. Blechman (eds.), *Making Defense Reform Work* (Washington, DC: Brassey's, 1990), 127-29.

the chiefs grew used to the idea of the new arrangements, I exerted my authority more and more.”⁵²

Still, it was not until Crowe’s successor, General Colin L. Powell, took charge on 1 October 1989 that the Goldwater-Nichols Act began to blossom. Seeking to give the Joint Staff a more up-to-date mission, he shifted the emphasis from long-range planning to current affairs and insisted on truly joint assessments to assist the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense in the policy process. Determined to exercise the powers given him under Goldwater-Nichols, Powell siphoning off the best officers from the services. In so doing he vastly enhanced the stature, influence and effectiveness of the Joint Staff over not only the service staffs but also OSD.⁵³ From this point on, the Joint Staff assumed an increasingly preeminent position within the Pentagon’s bureaucracy. By the time he returned to civilian life, Powell considered it “the finest military staff anywhere in the world.”⁵⁴

Like Crowe, Powell wanted a constructive partnership with Service Chiefs, realizing that it was better to have their cooperation and support than their opposition. But with the strength of Goldwater-Nichols behind him, he knew that he was under no obligation to seek their views before making recommendations. Though required under the law to hold “regular” JCS meetings, he dropped the practice of formal sessions in the “Tank” and moved deliberations as often as possible into his office. By so doing he erased all doubt about who was in charge. Still, he wanted to establish an air of collegiality and sought to work with the chiefs as a team. He often referred to the JCS as the “six brothers.” Yet he was also not averse to acting on his own when he deemed it necessary, to win the approval of the Secretary of Defense and the President.⁵⁵

⁵² Crowe, *Line of Fire*, 161.

⁵³ Charles A. Stevenson, “The Joint Staff and the Policy Process” (Paper for 1997 Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association, Washington, DC, 28-31 August 1997), 8.

⁵⁴ Powell, *My American Journey*, 445.

⁵⁵ Jaffe, *Development of the Base Force*, 49-50; Powell, *My American Journey*, 438-39; and Peter J. Roman and David W. Tarr, “The Joint Chiefs of Staff: From Service Parochialism to Jointness,” *Political Science Quarterly* 113 (1998): 104-06.

The heart of Powell's philosophy on the Chairman's role was the military doctrine that came to bear his name concerning the use of force. Modeled on six "tests" put forth by Secretary of Defense Weinberger in 1984, the Powell Doctrine laid out broad guidelines to help shape any decision committing US military forces to combat, the aim being to avoid open-ended commitments or "unwinnable" wars like Vietnam. A restrained approach to foreign intervention, Powell's caution in committing US troops to combat often frustrated and irritated his superiors. Some called him the "reluctant warrior." As Chairman with the Goldwater-Nichols reforms behind him, however, Powell was in a strong position to argue his case. Military force, he believed, should be applied in careful and deliberate ways toward achieving identifiable political objectives, and once involved in a conflict the United States should use all the power at its disposal to bring the campaign to a swift and successful conclusion.⁵⁶

As his doctrine on the use of force suggests, Powell saw military and political strategy inextricably intertwined. Not everyone agreed, least of all his immediate superior, Secretary of Defense Richard B. Cheney. A former congressman from Wyoming, Cheney impressed Powell as incisive, smart, and tough—qualities that Powell admired. Even so, an underlying strain marred their relationship. According to one account there was "an intellectual divide and a residue of mistrust" between them that lasted for years.⁵⁷ Cheney took a narrow view of the Chairman's advisory role and on more than one occasion he rebuked Powell for offering what he regarded as unsolicited political opinions, as during the planning in the autumn of 1990 for Operation DESERT STORM, the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein. Applying his doctrine of overwhelming force, Powell pressed for a large-scale military buildup to intimidate Saddam into withdrawing from Kuwait or, failing that, to oust his

⁵⁶ Powell, *My American Journey*, 434; Colin L. Powell, "US Forces: The Challenges Ahead," *Foreign Affairs* (Winter 1992): 32-45.

⁵⁷ James Mann, *Rise of the Vulcans: The History of Bush's War Cabinet* (New York: Viking, 2004), 184. See also Powell, *My American Journey*, 464.

forces with a minimum of bloodshed. While Cheney agreed with Powell on the need for a buildup, he questioned some of the Chairman's strategic concepts and, taking matters into his own hands, sought advice from outside normal channels.⁵⁸ As military analyst Bernard E. Trainor described it: "Cheney adroitly and informally bypassed Powell for additional military opinions to assure himself of differing views. . . . This technique did not sit well with Powell and, although he never challenged Cheney's right to solicit advice from others, it angered him."⁵⁹

Despite his differences with Cheney, Powell remained a key figure in the Bush administration. The most charismatic Chairman in decades, Powell was also, in the words of journalist Rick Atkinson, "the most politically deft" CJCS since General Maxwell D. Taylor, in the mid-1960s.⁶⁰ As Weinberger's protégé and Reagan's national security advisor, Powell had come to know the ins and outs of power as well as anyone and moved easily in the rarified atmosphere of high-level policymaking. Under Bush he was welcomed immediately into the President's inner circle or "core group" of advisors.⁶¹ One of the assets he brought with him as Chairman was a personal familiarity with many senior administration members, including the President himself. Even though Bush wanted his administration to be distinct and separate, not merely an extension of his predecessor's, there were still many familiar faces from Reagan's presidency. Powell knew practically all of them by first name. As much as anything,

⁵⁸ Dick Cheney, with Liz Cheney, *In My Time: A Personal and Political Memoir* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2011), 185-86.

⁵⁹ Bernard E. Trainor, "Jointness, Service Culture, and the Gulf War," *Joint Force Quarterly* (Winter 1993-94): 72.

⁶⁰ Rick Atkinson, *Crusade: The Untold Story of the Persian Gulf War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993), 123.

⁶¹ Peter W. Rodman, *Presidential Command* (New York: Knopf, 2009), 181.

Powell's influence derived from the thorough-going sense of professionalism he projected and what President Bush described as a "quiet, efficient" manner.⁶²

Impact of the Clinton Administration

The comfortable atmosphere and easy access to power that Powell enjoyed as CJCS under George H. W. Bush began to disappear with the election in November 1992 of William Jefferson Clinton as the forty-second President of the United States. As a candidate for the White House, Bill Clinton had stressed domestic issues over foreign and defense affairs, a reflection of his personal preferences and the shifting interests of the country at-large now that the Cold War was over. Once in office, he followed the mantra of his political campaign—"It's the economy, stupid!"—and laid out an agenda that stressed economic and social reforms, paid for in part by cuts in military spending. Powell was well aware that with the Cold War receding into the history books, it was hard to justify the heavy investment in defense of years past. His own plan, known as the Base Force, which President Bush had approved in the summer of 1990, called for a twenty-five percent cut in military strength but only a ten percent cut in spending by the end of the decade. Clinton was convinced that the savings could be bigger.

Clinton was the first commander in chief since Franklin D. Roosevelt who had not done military duty. A quasi-pacifist as a young man, he was part of the generation that had come to maturity in the 1960s during the social and political upheavals of the Vietnam War. While Powell was doing two tours as a junior officer in Vietnam, earning two purple hearts in the process, Clinton was honing his credentials as a Rhodes scholar, laying the foundations of his political career, and attending anti-war rallies. Looking back, he felt proud "to be counted in the ranks of those working to end the war."⁶³ Many of his closest

⁶² George Bush and Brent Scowcroft, *A World Transformed* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 23.

⁶³ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 109.

advisors came from similar backgrounds, with similar outlooks. Middle class liberals, they viewed the military with suspicion if not outright hostility and disdain. Former Wisconsin congressman Les Aspin, who became Clinton's first secretary of defense, was a striking exception, one of the few who had served in the armed forces. As related by columnist Elizabeth Drew, there was one incident in which a member of the White House staff reproached an unnamed senior officer with the comment: "I don't talk to the military."⁶⁴

Relations between Powell and the Clinton administration were prickly from the start. Still basking in the success of the First Gulf War, Powell projected an image of American power, prestige, and supremacy that left some of Clinton's followers uncomfortable and wary. Given his close association with Presidents Reagan and Bush, they considered Powell suspect and would have preferred the immediate appointment of a new Chairman. Even though the pressure to replace Powell subsided, he found his role and influence closely circumscribed in keeping with the President's desire (and that of his advisors) to downplay the military and keep the CJCS on a short leash.

No issue more typified the deep divide that existed between Powell and the new administration than the confrontation over homosexuals (i.e., "gays") in the armed forces. Prior to Goldwater-Nichols, the Joint Chiefs of Staff had rarely involved themselves in personnel issues. They considered such matters to be outside their purview and left them to be resolved between the military services, the Secretary of Defense, and the President, and Congress, much as the issue of racial integration of the armed forces had been handled after World War II. But under the changes brought about by Goldwater-Nichols, the Chairman found himself functioning as an all-purpose military advisor and, as such, required to delve into problems that heretofore had not been part of the normal JCS agenda. "Gays in the military" was one of those issues.

The policy in effect at the time Clinton took office summarily banned homosexuals from serving in the armed forces. During his campaign for the White

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Drew, *On the Edge: The Clinton Presidency* (New York: Touchstone, 1995), 45.

House, however, Clinton, had promised to lift the ban in deference to the support and endorsements that homosexual political activists had given him. Emotionally, as an African-American who had experienced discrimination firsthand, Powell was sympathetic to the gay community's concerns. But based on informal soundings, he knew that the Service Chiefs, the combatant commanders, and key members of Congress would do everything possible to prevent lifting the ban. Anticipating a bitter fight, Powell eventually persuaded the President to embrace a policy known as "don't ask, don't tell," under which gays could serve in the armed forces as long as they did not reveal their sexual orientation. Though not the sweeping change that Clinton had promised, it was better than nothing and became official policy in December 1993. It remained so for nearly two decades. Still, as the "don't ask, don't tell" episode revealed, Powell and Clinton were off to a rocky start. "In the short run," the President recalled, "I got the worst of both worlds—I lost the fight, and the gay community was highly critical of me for the compromise."⁶⁵

Powell's success in steering Clinton toward the "don't ask, don't tell" policy was the high point of his influence within the new administration. At the Pentagon his prestige, respect, and authority had never been greater. But "across the river" it was a different story. While Clinton continued to solicit Powell's military advice, it was clear that he had little use for the Chairman's political ideas or his methods. As National Security Advisor to President Reagan in the late 1980s, Powell had run a tight operation. But under Clinton's stewardship, he saw near-chaos reign at NSC meetings and indecision follow. He rated Les Aspin's management of the Pentagon no better. He blamed this situation on Clinton's lax leadership and the absence of discipline in the policy process.⁶⁶ Defenders of the President's easy-going style likened it to the give

⁶⁵ Clinton, *My Life*, 486.

⁶⁶ Powell, *My American Journey*, 575-79.

and take of a college seminar and faulted Powell for failing to appreciate the nuanced qualities of the deliberations.⁶⁷

Behind these disagreements over form were fundamental conflicts of substance. A Wilsonian idealist at heart, Clinton hoped to conduct his foreign policy without recourse to the use of force; yet he also wanted to demonstrate that the United States remained an active leader in world affairs by lending moral and political support to a growing list of UN-sponsored humanitarian and peacekeeping missions. Powell, as a rule, resisted even nominal US involvement in these operations, seeing in them the seeds of “another Vietnam.” Though he had gone along with the Bush administration’s decision in 1992 to intervene in Somalia, he had done so reluctantly and with the President’s promise that US participation would be limited to delivering relief supplies, not “nation building” or police-keeping. As Chairman, his customary practice was to present worst-case scenarios to underscore the difficulties and possible consequences of a military commitment. According to Nancy Soderberg, a senior member of Clinton’s NSC Staff, Powell’s caution had an inhibiting effect on US policy and “hindered the new team’s efforts to think creatively about how to use America’s overwhelming military might in new conflicts.”⁶⁸ One such instance occurred during the Balkans crisis in the spring of 1993 when an interagency fact-finding body endorsed a US contribution of troops to help the UN stop “ethnic cleansing” in Bosnia. Weighing the pros and cons, Powell warned that a force of 200,000 might be needed and laid down tough preconditions for intervening. UN Ambassador Madeleine Albright became exasperated. “What are you saving this superb military for, Colin,” she asked, “if we can’t use it?”⁶⁹ Powell,

⁶⁷ See David J. Rothkopf, *Running the World: The Inside Story of the National Security Council and the Architects of American Power* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2005), 322-23.

⁶⁸ Nancy Soderberg, *The Superpower Myth: The Use and Misuse of American Might* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2005), 46.

⁶⁹ Madeleine Albright, *Madam Secretary* (New York: Miramax Books, 2003), 182.

who was not used to being challenged so blatantly, was dumbfounded. “I thought,” he recalled, “I would have an aneurysm.”⁷⁰

President Clinton was still feeling his way and decided not to commit US military power to help Bosnia at this time. His reasoning, however, had little or nothing to do with Powell’s warnings. Instead, it reflected his belief that the UN’s whole approach to the Balkan situation “was bound to fail.”⁷¹ Sensing that his advice was falling on deaf ears, Powell became frustrated and less and less effective as a spokesman for the military viewpoint. Increasingly, JCS influence, as it came to bear during the Clinton years, was as much as anything a by-product of the interagency system—the network of subcommittees and ad hoc panels that fed data and recommendations to the NSC. With representation at practically every level, the Joint Staff was assured “a seat at the table” in every major policy discussion and could assert its prestige and power on a range of issues extending beyond those of the Chairman’s personal interest. In sharp contrast to the ponderous methods associated with it in years past, the post-Goldwater-Nichols Joint Staff, as Powell redesigned it, acquired a reputation for incisive and fast responses. The upshot was a more visible, active, and aggressive Joint Staff, with institutionalized influence placing it on a par with OSD, the State Department, the CIA, and other established agencies in the policy process.⁷²

Scaling Back the Chairman’s Role

With Powell’s retirement in September 1993, the role of the Chairman reverted to that of a senior military advisor operating in a subordinate capacity to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the NSC. Obviously, it would have been exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to find a successor with Powell’s

⁷⁰ Powell, *My American Journey*, 576.

⁷¹ Bill Clinton, *My Life* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 513.

⁷² Stevenson, “Joint Staff and the Policy Process,” 14-15.

standing. Yet even if someone with comparable credentials had presented himself, probably no one in the Clinton administration would have been interested. As idolized as Powell may have been within the Joint Staff and other military circles, he had not measured up to what the administration prized most of all—a team player. Henceforth, the unwritten rules would be different, the selection process for the Chairman careful to screen out officers who might overshadow their bosses or who seemed bent on pursuing their own agenda.

Like Eisenhower and Kennedy, Clinton wanted the CJCS to be, above all, a defender and instrument of his policies. He wanted sound and reliable military advice, to be sure, but he also wanted someone he and the Secretary of Defense could count on to carry out their decisions and not second-guess them along the way. Powell's two immediate successors—John M. D. Shalikashvili (1993-997) and H. Hugh Shelton (1997-2001), both Army generals—were ideal choices. Both were plainspoken, nose-to-the-grindstone types who stuck to advising on military affairs and who knew how to argue their case without appearing over-bearing or patronizing. Unlike Powell, both were barely visible outside the military, though of the two, “Shali,” as he was affectionately called, was the better known, having served in Europe as NATO supreme commander prior to becoming Chairman.

Shalikashvili's accomplishments as CJCS hinged on two factors. One was the good fortune of serving under an exceedingly capable Secretary of Defense, William J. Perry, who succeeded the ailing Les Aspin in February 1994. A PhD in mathematics, Perry had been Under Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering during the Carter administration. Mild-mannered and well liked by the military, he had guided the development of a new generation of advanced technology weapons that had given the United States a leg up in ending the Cold War and in preserving its military superiority amid the post-Cold War budget cuts. Together, he and Shalikashvili formed perhaps the most formidable leadership team the Defense Department had yet seen.

The other factor working to Shalikashvili's advantage was the growing realization at the White House that military power had a larger and more active

role to play in foreign policy than the President and his civilian advisors had originally imagined. Exactly when this change of thinking took place is hard to pinpoint, but within two years of taking office, following a succession of frustrating setbacks, embarrassments, and misadventures in Bosnia, Haiti, and Somalia and continuing friction with Iraq, Clinton began to turn more and more to the Pentagon for advice and to rely on military sanctions in conjunction with diplomatic initiatives. At the same time, Shalikashvili (and, later, Shelton) learned how to tailor proposals for military action that fit more comfortably within Clinton administration preferences stressing multilateral responses, restraint in the application of force, and negotiated settlements. Eventually, according to historian Walter LaFeber's count, President Clinton deployed US forces to more trouble spots abroad on more occasions during his eight years in office than any of his predecessors during a comparable period of time during the Cold War.⁷³

The administration's increased use of military power notwithstanding, the Chairman's overall influence remained fairly limited during the Clinton years. While the President routinely lauded their contributions and made sure Shalikashvili and Shelton were conspicuously present to lend their support to his policies and programs, he never included either of them in his inner circle, known as the FOB ("Friends of Bill"), which shaped the critical decisions. During the Kosovo War in 1999, General Wesley K. Clark, the NATO commander, pleaded with Shelton to provide him with insights into the thinking in Washington and to draw him into the decision-making process, much as Powell had done with General H. Norman Schwarzkopf in planning the First Gulf War. It was all to no avail. "Wes," he said, "I don't know." From this and other epi-

⁷³ Walter LaFeber, "Colin Powell: the Rise and Fall of the Powell Doctrine," in Anna Kasten Nelson (ed.), *The Policy Makers: Shaping American Foreign Policy from 1947 to the Present* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2009), 160.

sodes, Clark became convinced that Shelton was on the periphery of the policy process and that his main job was to relay decisions once others made them.⁷⁴

While Clark's assessment may underestimate Shelton's true role and importance, it is probably not far off the mark. Suspicious of the military to begin with, many if not most senior members of the Clinton administration were never comfortable dealing with people in uniform and rarely shared their confidences with them if they could avoid it. Though they used the military to help achieve their aims, they found doing so utterly distasteful. Many in the armed forces likewise resented and distrusted their civilian superiors. Not surprisingly, coordination between the Joint Staff and the military services, on the one hand, and the State Department, the NSC, and the White House, on the other, was haphazard and often ineffectual. As time passed, an unbridgeable gulf developed between the two sides that left them working in nominal partnership with one other, but rarely in unison or harmony.

Return of the Strong SecDef

While the Chairmen who served during the Clinton years struggled to hold their own, those who served under President George H. Bush and Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld from 2001 on, knew from the beginning that they functioned in a subordinate role. To be sure, the Goldwater-Nichols Act had been a stunning success in allowing the Chairman to consolidate his power and authority over the JCS organization: never had the Chairman been more in control of the Joint Staff and its output. But it had done relatively little to bring the CJCS out from under the shadow of either the President or the Secretary of Defense. Despite what some architects of Goldwater-Nichols hoped or expected would happen, the Chairman had not evolved into a *de facto* military chief of staff or a near-equal with the Secretary. A simple amendment to the

⁷⁴ Herspring, *Pentagon and the Presidency*, 369; Wesley K. Clark, *Waging Modern War* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2001), 229-31, 341-42.

law—placing the CJCS squarely in the chain of command—could have changed this situation. But at the time the law was drafted, there had been insufficient congressional support for giving the Chairman such power; after Powell, interest and enthusiasm for doing so lapsed altogether.

With the arrival of the second Bush administration, the CJCS faced new challenges from the return of a strong Secretary of Defense, something the department had not seen for quite a while. Prior to Rumsfeld, the strongest Secretary by far had been Robert S. McNamara whose exercise of direction, authority, and control had often been with little or no reference to the CJCS or the organization he headed. Even General Max Taylor, a man he liked, admired, and respected, had played a relatively minor role as CJCS in McNamara's overall scheme of things. Rumsfeld adopted a similar attitude. Although he accepted the necessity of soliciting the Chairman's inputs, he viewed the CJCS and the Joint Staff as second-tier, more useful for assisting in the execution of decisions than in shaping policy or developing fresh ideas.

Rumsfeld appeared on the scene at a critical juncture in the history of the Defense Department. While the Cold War had been over for a decade, its effects lingered in the form of a force structure and strategic concepts better suited for large-scale wars against an enemy like the Soviet Union, than the "small wars" in which the United States had found itself involved in the 1990s. Efforts from the late 1980s on to address these issues by reconfiguring the country's defense posture and acquisition policies had made limited headway in the face of entrenched resistance from the "iron triangle" of Congress, the community of defense contractors, and the Pentagon bureaucracy. As Rumsfeld saw it, what the department needed was a "transformation" to attain more efficient use of its resources and greater flexibility in the projection and use of military power. Normally, the CJCS might have played a key role in fleshing out these concepts. But as Secretary of Defense under President Gerald R. Ford in the mid-1970s, Rumsfeld had acquired a low opinion of the Pentagon bureaucracy, including the JCS, and its receptiveness to change. In presenting his ideas to President Bush, he warned "that military officers as well as

career civilian officials in Defense . . . would be wary of reforms that impinged on their acquired authority.”⁷⁵

Rumsfeld’s transformation reforms received an unexpected boost from the Islamist terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001. In a stroke, the country’s sense of security blew away. Within days, the Pentagon’s parking lots filled to over-capacity, as officers assembled from around the globe for the biggest military “push” since DESERT SHIELD-DESERT STORM. An alarmed Congress readily acquiesced to administration requests for additional defense funds, setting in motion a new military buildup. Meanwhile, Rumsfeld took personal charge of the emerging Global War on Terror (GWOT), both to assure a concerted effort and to minimize friction and competition for resources among the Services. Prodding the system, he issued a maddening stream of directives and inquiries, called “snowflakes.”

Despite the heightened level of activity, the quality of the military advice and support he received from the serving CJCS, General Hugh Shelton, left Rumsfeld disappointed. “The shock of 9/11,” he recalled, “had not provoked much originality or imagination from the Chairman or his staff.”⁷⁶ Under a previously planned change of leadership, Shelton relinquished the Chairmanship to General Richard B. Myers, USAF, the serving Vice Chairman, on 1 October 2001. By then, however, Rumsfeld had his own ad hoc team of civilians in place and was well along toward developing retaliation measures in collaboration with General Tommy R. Franks, USA, head of the US Central Command (USCENTCOM). Myers had been in on these discussions from day-one of the crisis, but like Shelton, Rumsfeld initially found him to be lacking in creativity and overly cautious. Only after they had worked together for several months did Rumsfeld begin to trust Myers’ advice and judgments.

As the GWOT gathered momentum, a pattern developed that saw the President and the Secretary of Defense routinely bypass the Chairman and the

⁷⁵ Donald Rumsfeld, *Known and Unknown: A Memoir* (New York: Sentinel, 2011), 280.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 358-59.

Joint Staff, in favor of dealing directly with the combatant commanders, a practice duly sanctioned under the National Security Act but rarely seen in the past. Ten years earlier, for example, during DESERT SHIELD-DESERT STORM, strategic planning had been largely a collaborative effort between Powell and Schwarzkopf, with inputs from time to time from the Services. But after the 9/11 attacks, it became primarily the product of a working partnership between the Secretary's office and the combatant commands, Frank's especially, which Rumsfeld found to be more responsive and closer to the problem than the CJCS and the Joint Staff. Later, as attention shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq, Rumsfeld turned more to Myers and the Joint Staff for planning and operational help, but only because USCENTCOM's staff resources had become severely overtaxed.

While Myers was eager to play a leading part in the war on terror, he acknowledged his subordinate status to the Secretary and the limitations this imposed on his ability to take initiatives. The same was essentially true of the Secretary's transformation reforms and the Chairman's role in implementing them. As Vice Chairman from March 2000 to October 2001, Myers had presided over the Joint Requirements Oversight Council (JROC), an interservice panel charged with reviewing and validating major acquisition programs that would help to make transformation a reality. Having headed the JROC, Myers stepped into the Chairmanship with a keener appreciation than most for the potential of new weapons systems and their contributions to the military establishment of the future. As Chairman, however, he quietly abided by the practice the JCS had introduced in 1949 of staying out of major procurement decisions and left the fate of controversial weapons systems, like the Army's Crusader artillery piece, to be resolved by the Secretary of Defense. As far as Myers was concerned, new technologies could only go so far in changing the military. Transformation, he argued, was as much as anything a mental process, comparable to instilling "jointness" in Service behavior. "In my view," he insisted, "real transformation happened first 'between the ears,' not in a new technology or system. Abandoning stale approaches and embracing new ways to defend the

nation and support its armed forces were the keys to transforming the military.”⁷⁷

By the time Myers turned the Chairmanship over to his Vice Chairman, General Peter Pace (the first Marine Corps officer to serve in either capacity), in 2005, it was clear that the Chairman’s primary role in the 21st Century was to support the Secretary of Defense and serve as an advocate for his and the President’s policies and programs. Only in a secondary capacity was the CJCS expected to be a spokesman for Service interests. The ability to function successfully in these dual capacities—and to keep their relative importance in perspective—became the primary measure of Pace’s effectiveness as CJCS.

As Chairman, Pace continued to pursue many of the initiatives set in motion by his predecessor and Secretary Rumsfeld. Yet, after more than four years of conflict, America had grown weary of “The Long War” and change was imminent. In response to the 2006 election and a Congressionally-chartered assessment of the problem, President Bush appointed Dr. Robert M. Gates his new Secretary of Defense and presented the nation with a “New Way Forward in Iraq.”⁷⁸ Pace and the other JCS had initially advised against this strategic realignment, which sharply increased the number of US forces involved in counter-insurgency operations, believing that it could overburden the already strained strategic reserve and might compromise hard-won gains in Iraq.⁷⁹ Although he later acknowledged that the new plan could bring success, Pace also cautioned that it might impair the military’s ability to respond quickly and fully to another crisis.⁸⁰ Eventually, as Pace’s relationship with Congress con-

⁷⁷ Richard B. Myers, *Eyes on the Horizon* (New York: Threshold Editions, 2009), 119.

⁷⁸ President George W. Bush, “President’s Address to the Nation,” The White House: Office of the Press Secretary, 10 Jan 2007.

⁷⁹ David S. Cloud, “U.S. Considers Raising Troop Levels in Iraq,” *New York Times*, 20 Nov 2006; Robin Wright and Peter Baker, “White House, Joint Chiefs of Staff At Odds on Adding Troops,” *Washington Post*, 19 Dec 2006; Bob Woodward, “Outmaneuvered and Outranked, Military Chiefs Became Outsiders,” *Washington Post*, 8 Sep 2008.

⁸⁰ CQ Transcripts Wire, “Opening Statements at House Armed Services Committee Hearing on Iraq,” *Washington Post*, 11 Jan 2007; Lolita C. Baldor (AP), “Pace: U.S. Military Capability Eroding,” *USA Today*, 28 Feb 2007; Jim Garamone, “Pace Says Military Stretched but Able to Handle Any Threat,” *American Forces Press Service*, 21 Mar 2007.

tinued to deteriorate, the possibility of a second term became politically untenable for the administration.

Although Admiral Michael Mullen, Pace's successor, may have been more judicious in his public statements and firmer in defending administration policies, he articulated his own views and adapted to change with an eye toward the future. While pursuing a successful conclusion to the war in Iraq, he highlighted the lack of progress being made in Afghanistan, and forcefully advocated for a similar surge and counterinsurgency campaign in that country.⁸¹ At the same time, he questioned the military's readiness to fight a high-intensity conflict against a major adversary and requested additional funding to modernize the force.⁸² When recession challenged that effort, he acknowledged that the federal debt itself represented a major national security threat and worked with Secretary Gates to aggressively trim expensive, redundant, or failing programs in order to recapitalize funds for higher priority requirements.⁸³ This included concurrent efforts to redefine the role of America's military in a 'multi-nodal' world characterized by shifting interest-driven coalitions.⁸⁴ A long-time champion of diversity, and increasingly aware of the widening gulf between military and civil society, he supported President Obama's decision to repeal Don't Ask-Don't Tell, a policy which forbade gays from serving openly in the military.⁸⁵

⁸¹ Ann Tyson, Pentagon Critical of NATO Allies, *Washington Post*, 12 Dec 2007; Admiral Mullen, Prepared Testimony before Congress, 2 Dec 2009.

⁸² Admiral Mullen, "Interview with New Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff," Transcript, *New York Times*, 22 Oct 2007.

⁸³ Jim Garamone, "Gates says people take top priority in budget decisions," *American Forces Press Service*, 6 Apr 2009.

⁸⁴ Michael G. Mullen, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America, Redefining America's Military Leadership*, OJCS, 8 Feb 2011, p-2.

⁸⁵ "Hearing of the Senate Armed Services Committee; Subject...The Don't Ask Don't Tell Policy," *Federal News Service*, 2 Feb 2010.

Conclusion

The history of the Chairman's role and influence falls into two periods—before Goldwater-Nichols and after. During the first period, the Chairman's role developed haltingly, from that of a presiding officer, with limited powers, to a *primus inter pares* who guided and shaped JCS deliberations with his moral authority and his access to the President and the Secretary of Defense. Indeed, the whole idea of having a chairman did not sit comfortably with the original philosophic concept on which the Joint Chiefs of Staff were founded. Formed as a corporate body of coequals at the outset of World War II, the JCS served at the pleasure of the President with no assigned or statutory duties. Admiral Leahy's function during the war, as chief of staff to the commander in chief, was to provide liaison and coordination, not to direct or oversee JCS deliberations. During meetings with the President, it was the commander in chief who presided.

After the war, as the JCS acquired an assignment of statutory responsibilities, the need for a full-time chairman became more compelling. At issue was how much power and authority the Chairman should have. During the unification debate that followed the war, majority opinion in Congress held that a strong military figure as President Truman favored (i.e., a single chief of staff in place of the corporate JCS) would be the first step toward creation of a "Prussian-style general staff." As a result, Congress made no provision for a chairman in the original 1947 unification law. Though Congress changed its mind and bowed to the President's request for a JCS chairman in 1949, it did so reluctantly and imposed constraints that limited the Chairman's powers to those of a presiding officer. Subsequent amendments to the National Security Act progressively expanded the Chairman's realm of authority, but never in any way that might have jeopardized the JCS corporate structure. He was the Service Chiefs' senior colleague, not their boss.

Prior to the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the Chairman's true influence and authority derived from factors other than his statutory powers. His main

source of influence came from his titular status as the ranking officer of the armed forces, a position that made him the acknowledged spokesman for the military point of view. From the early 1950s on, he was also the only JCS member with a permanent seat at National Security Council meetings, even though technically the JCS functioned collectively as “military advisors” to the NSC. Needing military advice promptly in a crisis, Presidents and Secretaries of Defense routinely turned to the Chairman for his estimate of the situation in lieu of waiting around for the JCS to assemble and make up their minds.

A chronic problem that Chairmen faced over the years was deciding where their loyalties lay: Should they be advocates for the administration or proponents of the Services’ interests? Eisenhower and Kennedy both preferred the advocacy role and selected Chairmen who thought accordingly, with less than satisfactory results. All too often, Chairmen like Radford, Twining, and Taylor who operated as advocates, faced strong resentment from the Service Chiefs and lost their credibility. Wheeler, on the other hand, managed to preserve respect among his JCS colleagues as well as with the President. Yet in keeping with the tenor of the times, his views seldom carried much weight in high-level deliberations. Most Chairmen functioned as a bit of both—as advocates for the administration when they needed to be, and as spokesmen for the military the rest of the time.

What solidified the Chairman’s primacy within the JCS organization was the steady diminution of the Service Chiefs’ role and influence outside their respective military departments. Eliminated from the chain of command in 1958, the Service Chiefs became caretakers, charged with making sure their forces would be equipped, trained, and ready for the combatant commands. From this point on, service-oriented business invariably took precedence over JCS business in the Service Chiefs’ list of priorities. By the late 1970s there were grumblings of discontent from some JCS members that having to attend JCS meetings wasted their time. Not surprisingly, many were relieved to let the Chairman carry more of the load for joint affairs and to act in their stead.

The Goldwater-Nichols Act thus made official what in many respects had been emerging practice for some while. Though there were those who lamented the passing of the corporate system, most agreed that it was time for it to go. The most controversial issues when the law was passed were not those dealing with the transfer of power and authority to the Chairman, but rather its provisions relating to military personnel policy. Throughout the law, the emphasis was on achieving a higher level of interservice cooperation and collaboration and a greater degree of integrated effort in practically every area of military activity, a concept known as “jointness.” Though military leaders agreed by and large that these were laudable objectives, most would have preferred a less detailed and prescriptive piece of legislation.

Under Goldwater-Nichols, the Chairman’s role changed dramatically. No longer the first among equals, he was now the principal military advisor to the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the rest of the NSC. With the addition of a Vice Chairman and unhampered control of the Joint Staff, he had access to more assistance and a stronger support base than ever. While some in Congress had favored an even more powerful Chairman akin to the chief of staff concept proposed by the War Department after World War II, the vast majority still harbored aversions to a Prussian-style general staff and felt that keeping the JCS intact as an advisory body to the Chairman would have a salutary effect all-around. It would keep the Service Chiefs “in the loop,” so to speak, and give the Chairman access to a wider range of views. Lengthy JCS debates might still take place, but they would no longer end in ambiguous, watered-down, or split recommendations.

Though Goldwater-Nichols had obviously changed the Chairman’s role, its impact on his influence was less immediately apparent. As the first CJCS to test the full potential of his authority, Powell was eminently successful in consolidating his control of the Joint Staff and making his presence felt throughout the Pentagon. In the eyes of many he was the epitome of the “strong” Chairman that the authors of the Goldwater-Nichols Act had in mind. Yet he struggled to develop a productive relationship with Secretary of Defense Chen-

ey and enjoyed a comfortable, but not overly close, association with the first President Bush. Though Cheney and Bush usually wound up accepting Powell's advice, as during the planning for the First Gulf War, it was often after they had also canvassed other sources to make sure Powell had not overlooked something. With the advent of the Clinton administration, the notion of a "strong" Chairman became practically anathema. Those who followed Powell as Chairman were invariably picked for their compatibility, cooperative nature, and readiness to assist in furthering administration policies, rather than their charisma or gifted military insights.

All in all, with the exception of the brief interlude under Powell, the Chairman's influence in the policy process was about the same after Goldwater-Nichols as before. By the early 2000s, it had actually declined somewhat owing to a growing tendency on the part of the President and the Secretary of Defense to work around the Chairman and the Joint Staff and deal directly with the combatant commanders. But as the War on Terror dragged on, becoming more routine, this trend showed signs of playing out. The Chairman's role is set in law. What he makes of it is up to the individual serving in the job as opportunities present themselves.