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Although proposals to unify the military chain of command under one officer (a "top officer") have been a perennial feature of defense reform debates since World War II, the idea has not received a full hearing. In the future, it should. Through the decades, three barriers have frustrated debate over the idea of a top officer. First, debate participants have poorly defined and often oversimplified the idea. Second, debates have frequently dealt with the idea in the abstract rather than with concrete proposals for reform. Third, the idea is undeservedly controversial. These barriers to debate are interrelated and exacerbate one another. Participants in future defense reform debates should work to overcome these barriers and give top officer proposals a full hearing, for two reasons. First, the growing challenges of global integration and all-domain conflict may require reorganization of the chain of command. As a result, the pros and cons of a top officer should be the subject of frank and open debate, grounded in concrete proposals for reform that address clearly identified problems and their causes. Second, the failure to give the idea a full hearing may have contributed to an unintended consequence: the evolution of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff into a top officer-like figure.

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MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

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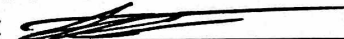
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## Executive Summary

**Title:** Why the Idea of Unifying the Chain of Command under One Officer Should Get a Full Hearing—and How to Give It One

**Author:** Major Nathan Wood, United States Marine Corps Reserve

**Thesis:** Although proposals to unify the military chain of command under one officer (a “top officer”) have been a perennial feature of defense reform debates since World War II, the idea has not received a full hearing. In the future, it should.

**Discussion:** Through the decades, three barriers have frustrated debate over the idea of a top officer. First, debate participants have poorly defined and often oversimplified the idea. Second, debates have frequently dealt with the idea in the abstract rather than with concrete proposals for reform. Third, the idea is undeservedly controversial. These barriers to debate are interrelated and exacerbate one another.

**Conclusion:** Participants in future defense reform debates should work to overcome these barriers and give top officer proposals a full hearing, for two reasons. First, the growing challenges of global integration and all-domain conflict may require reorganization of the chain of command. As a result, the pros and cons of a top officer should be the subject of frank and open debate, grounded in concrete proposals for reform that address clearly identified problems and their causes. Second, the failure to give the idea a full hearing may have contributed to an unintended consequence: the evolution of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff into a top officer-like figure.

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THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## Preface

From 2018-2020 I worked in the Pentagon on the Marine Corps staff. I saw firsthand the challenges of coordinating plans and operations across the many seams that split the military, including those that divide the services, the combatant commands, and the Joint Staff from one another. From where I sat, deep in the bowels of the building, the process of coordinating across these seams was one of laborious consensus building and negotiation, often at a glacial pace. That dynamic was unfamiliar. Like other junior officers, I was used to working for a commander, one individual with the power of decision. But the nation's highest-ranking officer, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, is not in the chain of command. Instead, there are many independent chains of command within the military, each topped by a four-star general or admiral who reports to the Secretary of Defense (in the case of the services, via the service secretaries). That got me thinking. Why wasn't there a single military officer at the top of the chain of command? Would such an officer help close the seams that divide the military? What was the history of that idea? What is its future? How did we get here?

I am deeply grateful to my wife, Emma, for enabling me to tackle this project. She is a wonderful wife, mother, and Marine, and she displayed loving patience as I wrote and rewrote. I am lucky. My parents, Frank and Charlotte, read my drafts and provided thoughtful and encouraging input. They continue to be my biggest supporters—thanks Mom and Dad. I am also grateful to Jim Thomas and Jim Locher. They generously sat for interviews and commented on my drafts. Jim Locher, in particular, provided extensive feedback and shared with me his unsurpassed knowledge of defense organization. My thesis mentors, Dr. Lon Strauss and Lieutenant Colonel Brian McLean, patiently shepherded this paper to completion and sharpened my thinking along the way. All mistakes are mine.

## Introduction

Proposals to unify the military chain of command under one officer (a “top officer”) have been a perennial feature of defense reform debates since World War II. Under the Constitution, the chain of command is unified in the President, the Commander in Chief. Congress modified that structure after the war, when it created the position of Secretary of Defense and unified the chain of command in that office. The idea of a top officer (“the idea”) contemplates an alternative model: unifying the chain of command in a single military officer subordinate to those civilian officials. Although the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) (“the Chairman”) has been the nation’s highest-ranking military officer since Congress created the position in 1949, the Chairman is not in the chain of command.<sup>1</sup> While some reformers have proposed making the Chairman a top officer, others have envisioned a different arrangement.

The idea of a top officer was a central issue in the postwar debate over military unification that resulted in the 1947 National Security Act, which created the National Military Establishment. (Two years later, Congress renamed the NME the Department of Defense.) It was again a hot topic in 1958, when Congress passed the Department of Defense Reorganization Act. The idea featured prominently in the debate over the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act and again during Senator John McCain’s effort in 2015-2016 to reform Goldwater-Nichols. In each of these eras, some reformers saw a top officer as the solution to difficult problems, including the challenges of coordinating among the services, integrating operations across regions and

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<sup>1</sup> 10 U.S. Code § 152, “Chairman: appointment; grade and rank,” prohibits the Chairman from “exercis[ing] military command over the Joint Chiefs of Staff or any of the armed forces.” Under 10 U.S. Code § 163, “Role of Chairman of Joint Chiefs of Staff,” the President may “direct that communications between the President or the Secretary of Defense and the commanders of the unified and specified combatant commands be transmitted through the Chairman” and may “assign duties to the Chairman to assist the President and the Secretary of Defense in performing their command function.” Additionally, the Secretary “may assign to the Chairman...responsibility for overseeing the activities of the combatant commands,” though “[s]uch assignment by the Secretary to the Chairman does not confer any command authority on the Chairman[.]” Subject to the Secretary’s direction and control, the Chairman “serves as the spokesman for the commanders of the combatant commands, especially on the operational requirements of their commands.”



domains, and improving strategic thinking. Just as reliably, opponents of the idea have disagreed, often bitterly. Among other objections, they saw a top officer as a threat to civilian control of the military, an infringement on service prerogatives, and an unnecessary layer of additional bureaucracy. (See Appendix C for a full list of arguments for and against a top officer.) Although advocates and opponents of the idea have explained their positions in terms of carefully reasoned arguments, their stated justifications likely also reflect a deeper dispositional preference: whether a top officer fits their understanding of how the world works, or should. Regardless of how they arrived at their stances on the subject, the opposing camps have clashed repeatedly since World War II.

Although the idea of a top officer has been a perennial issue for decades, it has not received a full hearing. Three barriers have stymied debate. First, debate participants have poorly defined and often oversimplified the idea. Second, debates have frequently dealt with the idea in the abstract rather than with concrete proposals for reform. Third, the idea is undeservedly controversial. These barriers to debate are interrelated and exacerbate one another.

Through analyzing these barriers, this paper seeks to furnish participants in future defense reform debates with a comprehensive understanding of the top officer idea: what it is, where it originated, what forms it has taken, and why people disagree over it. Readers should be mindful that a top officer, in some form, is just one possible fix for the many problems of defense organization. This paper does not take a position on whether a top officer is the best solution. Rather, it seeks to improve understanding of the idea so that it can be subjected to the full hearing it deserves. Whether a top officer is the right answer is a question for future defense reform debates.

## The first barrier

Other than unifying the chain of command under one officer in some fashion, proposals for a top officer may have little else in common and can be sharply dissimilar. Additionally, the idea is confusingly entangled with the concept of a “general staff” for the U.S. military.

Although top officer proposals can vary significantly, participants in defense reform debates have often treated the idea as if it were just one thing, erasing distinctions between proposals. Oversimplification hinders debate because it inhibits understanding and causes confusion.

There have been many proposals for a top officer over the decades, and they have varied considerably (see Appendix B). The position of the officer who would sit atop the chain of command has had many names. Early on, some used the terms “supreme commander”<sup>2</sup> or “Commander of the Armed Forces”<sup>3</sup> to describe it. More commonly, people have used a variation of “chief of staff,” including “Chief of Staff of Common Defense,”<sup>4</sup> “Chief of Staff of the Department of National Defense,”<sup>5</sup> “Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces,”<sup>6</sup> “Chief of the General Staff,”<sup>7</sup> “Defense Chief of Staff,”<sup>8</sup> or “Chief of the Joint General Staff.”<sup>9</sup> Others have

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<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security: Hearings before the Committee on Military Affairs*, 79th Cong., 1st sess., October 24, 1945, 145 (testimony of General Alexander A. Vandegrift).

<sup>3</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense, *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense* (April 1945), in Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, 411-439.

<sup>4</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Common Defense: Report* (to Accompany S. 2044), 79th Cong., 2d sess., May 13 (legislative day, March 5), 1946, S. Rep. 1328, 3.

<sup>5</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Recommending the Establishment of a Department of National Defense,” December 19, 1945, accessed November 25, 2020, <https://www.trumanlibrary.gov/library/public-papers/218/special-message-congress-recommending-establishment-department-national>.

<sup>6</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 155-180 (testimony of Lieutenant General J. Lawton Collins).

<sup>7</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., S. Hrg. 114-316, November 10, 2015, 27 (testimony of Jim Thomas).

<sup>8</sup> Maxwell D. Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1960; Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1974), 176. Citations refer to the Greenwood Press edition.

<sup>9</sup> Michael G. Vickers, “Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy and Plans,” written statement to the Senate Committee on Armed Services, December 8, 2015, 6, accessed February 21, 2021, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/hearings/15-12-08-improving-the-pentagons-development-of-policy-strategy-and-plans>.

proposed putting the Chairman in the chain of command without changing the office's title.<sup>10</sup>

The wide variety of terms has had an equally wide variety of meanings. The many variations of “chief of staff,” for example, say little on their face about the powers of the top officer. At one end of the spectrum, a chief of staff could be a supreme commander by another name, with command authority over all military forces.<sup>11</sup> At the other end, the chief could be a senior staff officer who exercises some amount of “executive”<sup>12</sup> or “directive”<sup>13</sup> authority on behalf of the Secretary of Defense. There are many possibilities between those poles. The chief could be in the chain of command for all military forces, including the services,<sup>14</sup> or just for operational forces.<sup>15</sup> The chief could be an adviser to the President,<sup>16</sup> or not.<sup>17</sup> The chief could decide among competing requests for resources,<sup>18</sup> or could be more directive in how forces are used.<sup>19</sup> Instead of operational matters, the chief could focus on establishing overall policies for the military,<sup>20</sup> or on some other combination of duties. A top officer's powers could also be conditional, activated only in certain circumstances or when the Secretary delegates authority.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services*, 114th Cong., 1st sess., S. Hrg. 114-540, December 10, 2015, 9 (testimony of retired Admiral James G. Stavridis).

<sup>11</sup> William J. Lynn, “The Wars Within: The Joint Military Structure and Its Critics,” in *Reorganizing America's Defense: Leadership in War and Peace*, eds. Robert J. Art, Vincent Davis, and Samuel P. Huntington (Washington, DC: Pergamon-Brassey's International Defense Publishers, 1985), 195.

<sup>12</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 157 (Collins testimony).

<sup>13</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 5 (testimony of retired General Norton A. Schwartz).

<sup>14</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 27 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>15</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 11 (Stavridis testimony). Although Stavridis did not use the term “chief of staff,” he proposed creating a general staff and putting the Chairman in charge of it.

<sup>16</sup> Harold Brown, *Thinking about National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1983), 210.

<sup>17</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 28 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>18</sup> Brown, *Thinking about National Security*, 210.

<sup>19</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 26-28 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>20</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 161 (Collins testimony).

<sup>21</sup> For example, the Senate version of the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act contained a provision that would have “allow[ed] the Secretary of Defense to delegate some authority to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff for

As these examples show, reform proposals have differed sharply when it comes to the scope of the top officer's power and relationship with civilian officials. Additionally, the many names for a top officer, by themselves, convey little. Given the wide range of possibilities, participants in future defense reform debates should draw clear distinctions between proposals and avoid sweeping generalizations about the idea.

The top officer concept is confusingly entangled with the idea of a general staff for the U.S. military. Proposals for a general staff have typically envisioned a top officer in the form of a single chief of staff.<sup>22</sup> As a result, "general staff" is best understood as implying a top officer, unless a reform proposal distinguishes the two. There are, however, two different understandings of "general staff," which leads to confusion.<sup>23</sup> The first is the general staff-type organization that has long been standard in militaries worldwide, organized by function, with sections for intelligence, planning, logistics, and the like.<sup>24</sup> The U.S. Army adopted this model

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the worldwide reallocation of limited military assets on a short-term basis, consistent with the Secretary's policy guidance and the national defense strategy." That provision did not make it into the final bill. *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017: Conference Report to Accompany S. 2943*, 114th Cong., 2d sess., November 30, 2016, H. Rep. 114-840, 1164.

A further element of confusion regarding the term "chief of staff" is that there was a military Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief during and just after World War II, Fleet Admiral William D. Leahy. President Franklin D. Roosevelt called Leahy out of retirement and appointed him to the position in July 1942. Leahy's position, however, was unlike the chief of staff role that top officer advocates have proposed. Leahy served as a military adviser to Roosevelt and presided over meetings of the JCS, but he was not in the chain of command and had no executive authority. In addition to not being a top officer, "[i]n no way was his position comparable to that later accorded to the Chairman[.]" See Steven L. Rearden, *Council of War: A History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff 1942-1992* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 2012), 7.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix B. There has been occasional support for a general staff without a top officer. See, for example, House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization of the Department of Defense: Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services*, 85th Cong., 2nd sess., May 2, 1958, 6453-6454 (testimony of General Thomas D. White). White envisioned a staff that would work for the JCS as a corporate body rather than for a single officer. There has also been occasional support for a top officer without a general staff. See, for example, Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 33 (Schwartz testimony).

<sup>23</sup> See generally, Robert L. Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff in the 20th Century* (Washington DC: Congressional Research Service, August 30, 1985) in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change: Staff Report to the Committee on Armed Services*, 99th Cong., 1st sess., October 16, 1985, Committee Print 99-86, 244-274.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 246-250.

during the First World War, modeling it after the French General Staff.<sup>25</sup> Today's Joint Staff is similarly organized. This type of general staff is common and uncontroversial.

The other version—the controversial and uncommon one—is the General Staff of the Prussian (and later German) Army. That general staff “was not a functional general staff...but a separate branch of the German Army career officer corps. It was the military-intellectual elite of the German Army from the mid-19th Century through 1945.” The General Staff branch provided “both senior staff officers for the Great General Staff in Berlin and commanders and staff officers for the German Army’s major field units.” A single officer, the Chief of the General Staff, led it.<sup>26</sup>

Proposals for a general staff for the U.S. military have mixed elements of both versions, but have typically envisioned a national headquarters staff of the very best officers, selected early in their careers from across the services, who would join the staff permanently, occasionally rotating through other assignments. No proposals have called for a separate General Staff branch in the German mold; rather, they have envisioned something akin to the Great General Staff in Berlin, but for the U.S. military as a whole. Proposals for a U.S. general staff have used the terms “Armed Forces Staff,”<sup>27</sup> “armed forces general staff,”<sup>28</sup> “Joint General Staff,”<sup>29</sup> or just “General Staff.”<sup>30</sup> Others have envisioned turning the Joint Staff into a general

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<sup>25</sup> Mark Skinner Watson, *Chief of Staff: Prewar Plans and Preparations* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Department of the Army, 1950; Washington, DC: Center of Military History, United States Army, 1991), 61-62, accessed March 19, 2021, [https://history.army.mil/html/books/001/1-1/CMH\\_Pub\\_1-1.pdf](https://history.army.mil/html/books/001/1-1/CMH_Pub_1-1.pdf). Citation refers to the 1991 edition.

<sup>26</sup> Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff* in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 250-251. For more on the German general staff, see generally, T. N. Dupuy, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945* (London: MacDonald and Jane's, 1977).

<sup>27</sup> *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*, 428.

<sup>28</sup> Lynn, “The Wars Within,” 195.

<sup>29</sup> Brown, *Thinking about National Security*, 210.

<sup>30</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 203.

staff without changing its name.<sup>31</sup>

As with proposals for a top officer, reformers have had sharply different conceptions of what an American general staff would do. At one extreme is a staff that “would assume the role of the military’s global brain,” with the authority to direct subordinate commanders to act.<sup>32</sup> Others have envisioned a more circumscribed role, such as a staff that would continue to perform the same duties as the Joint Staff it would replace.<sup>33</sup> Still others have used “general staff” and, especially, “Prussian-style” or “German-style” general staff, as accusations—as if the concept was a self-evidently bad, even un-American, idea.<sup>34</sup> These contrasting visions have major implications for how a general staff would be structured and operate. Like “chief of staff,” the term “general staff,” by itself, says little.

The close and confusing relationship with the general staff concept further hinders debate over the idea of a top officer. “General staff” often serves a proxy for the idea of a top officer, and it is just as ambiguous and variable. Proposals for a general staff for the U.S. military have typically borrowed elements of both understandings of the general staff concept, adding to the confusion. Participants in future defense reform debates should be precise about terms and definitions, and clear about the relationship between the ideas of a top officer and a general staff.

The idea of a top officer originated during World War II. Until then, the idea would have been nonsensical. Since the late 1700s, the War and Navy Departments had been independent, Cabinet-level organizations, with their own chains of command that terminated in the Secretary of War and Secretary of the Navy. A top officer made little sense in that structure. But after the

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<sup>31</sup> Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, 176. For Taylor’s plan as a modified version of a general staff, see Lynn, “The Wars Within,” 196.

<sup>32</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 27 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>33</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 204.

<sup>34</sup> See generally, Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff* in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*.

United States entered the war, in December 1941, reformers began suggesting changes that would bring the services closer together.<sup>35</sup> The shortcomings of the status quo jolted reformers into action. “Below the level of the President, inter-Service coordination at the outset of World War II was haphazard. Officers then serving in the Army and the Navy were often deeply suspicious of one another, inclined by temperament, tradition, and culture to remain separate and jealously guard their turf.” Among other things, “[i]ssues such as the deployment of forces, command arrangements, strategic plans, and (most important of all) the allocation of resources invariably generated intense debate and friction.”<sup>36</sup> As a result, when the United States was “[t]hrust suddenly into the maelstrom of World War II, [it] found itself ill-prepared to coordinate a global war effort with its allies or to develop comprehensive strategic and logistical plans for the deployment of its forces. To fill these voids, President Franklin D. Roosevelt established the JCS, an ad hoc committee of the Nation’s senior military officers,” in January 1942.<sup>37</sup> Throughout the war, the military continued improvising ways to cooperate and achieve unity of effort. For example, the JCS established the Joint Strategic Survey Committee in late 1942 in an effort to improve planning and catch up with the better-organized British, who “had been appalled by the disorganization” of the Americans.<sup>38</sup>

Some saw a top officer as a solution to these problems. The Chief of Naval Operations (CNO), Admiral Harold Stark, first broached the idea.<sup>39</sup> In January 1942, the same month

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<sup>35</sup> Following World War I, reformers had suggested similar changes in an effort to improve interservice coordination, but with little result. See Laurence J. Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces* (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1951; New York: Garland Publishing, Inc., 1988), 69-127. Citations refer to the Garland Publishing edition.

<sup>36</sup> Rearden, *Council of War*, 3.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, xi.

<sup>38</sup> Mark A. Stoler, *Allies and Adversaries: The Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Grand Alliance, and U.S. Strategy in World War II* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 103-105.

<sup>39</sup> Edgar F. Raines, Jr. and David R. Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Evolution of Army Ideas on the Command, Control, and Coordination of the U.S. Armed Forces, 1942-1985* (Washington, DC: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 1986), 6.

Roosevelt established the JCS, Stark “proposed a Joint General Staff, under a single Chief responsible directly to the President[.]”<sup>40</sup> Stark envisioned a staff that would “prepare general military plans and issue directives to implement them.”<sup>41</sup> More proposals for a top officer followed. In January 1943, Army planners proposed reorganizing the JCS into “a combined General Staff with three services under a single Secretary[.]” A JCS committee “recommended a United States General Staff, with a single Chief of Staff answerable to the President[.]” In October 1943, a different JCS committee “offered another plan for a unified Joint General Staff.” In the same month, the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall, approved the service’s plan for a single department with a secretary above a single chief of staff.<sup>42</sup>

To sort out these proposals and other organizational issues, in May 1944 the JCS established the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense, known as the Richardson Committee after its senior member, retired Admiral James Richardson. The JCS directed the committee, “consisting of two officers of the Navy and two officers of the Army...to make a detailed study and recommendations to the Joint Chiefs of Staff as to the most efficient practicable organization of those parts of the executive branch of our Government which are primarily concerned with national defense.”<sup>43</sup> In conducting the study, the committee interviewed “fifty-six top-ranking American officers in the war theaters around the world”<sup>44</sup> plus 24 more in Washington.<sup>45</sup> Interviewees included Generals of the Army Douglas MacArthur and Dwight Eisenhower, Fleet Admiral Chester Nimitz, Admiral William Halsey, and Marine

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<sup>40</sup> Demetrios Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification: A Study of Conflict and the Policy Process* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1966), 23. See also Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 197-201. According to Legere, the Navy developed the idea in the summer of 1941, but “[n]o action was taken [on it] until after the war had begun[.]”

<sup>41</sup> Raines and Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, 6.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Y. Hammond, *Organizing for Defense: The American Military Establishment in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961), 187 and 189-190.

<sup>43</sup> *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*, 413.

<sup>44</sup> Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 197.

<sup>45</sup> *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*, 439.



Lieutenant General Holland “Howlin’ Mad” Smith, among other notables. The committee submitted its report in April 1945, with Richardson dissenting.

The report put forward the first of three major top officer proposals that shaped the 1945-1946 debate. According to the committee, “[a]t the outset of the war the Army and Navy were far apart in their thinking and planning” and “were organized along cumbersome and inefficient lines which hindered rather than facilitated cooperation.” Since then, “great strides have been made in bringing the services together,” but “even in areas where unity of command has been established, complete integration of effort has not yet been achieved because we are still struggling with inconsistencies, lack of understanding, jealousies and duplications which exist in all theaters of operations.”<sup>46</sup> The committee proposed sweeping changes to fix these problems.

It recommended a single Department of the Armed Forces because “unity of effort in the field, which is so essential to the success of joint operations, can be achieved most effectively by uniting the components of the armed forces in a single department.” A civilian secretary would “be head of the [department] and responsible to the President and Congress for its direction[.]” Under the secretary would be a top officer, the Commander of the Armed Forces. “[C]ommand decisions of a military nature [would] flow from the Secretary through the Commander of the Armed Forces to [subordinate commanders].” According to the committee, “only through a single military commander of the Armed Forces can effective military teamwork be achieved. The greatest efficiency and effectiveness in an organization can be obtained where a single qualified individual has complete authority.”<sup>47</sup> A single military commander would have been a radical change to the structure of the military and a major departure from past practice. But it was not entirely unfamiliar, given that one officer commanded most military units. The

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 412-413.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid, 417, 419, and 421-422.

Richardson Committee's proposed innovation was to extend the model of unified command to the military as a whole.

The Commander of the Armed Forces would also perform the role of Chief of Staff to the President, advising the President on military matters. (At the time of the report, Admiral William Leahy was serving in a similar role as Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief under Roosevelt. See footnote 21.) An Armed Forces Staff, "composed of officers drawn from each of the components" would support the commander through "strategic planning and the development of broad aspects of the military program." This staff "of highly trained and experienced officers" would "advise the [commander] in order that he may effect coordination between the several components" and "see the military picture objectively and as a whole." An advisory body, the United States Chiefs of Staff, would "advise the President on broad matters of military strategy and the over-all estimated expenditures[.]" Its members would "consist of the Secretary of the Armed Forces, the Commander of the Armed Forces, the Commanding General of the Army, the Admiral of the Navy and the Commanding General of the Air Force." It would be "an advisory group only, with no deciding or voting powers[.]"<sup>48</sup> The structure of the proposed U.S. Chiefs of Staff closely resembled that of the JCS.

Richardson dissented from the report because, "[a]fter considerable objective study, and after careful consideration of the views of many officers, I am convinced that it is not now in the best interests of the Nation to adopt a single department system of organization of the armed forces." Although he dissented, Richardson delivered a backhanded endorsement, writing that "[i]f those in authority decide to establish a single department system I can, at this time, conceive of no better plan than that proposed by the special committee. It is theoretically better than any

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 417-419 and 428-430. The Richardson Committee's plan had many other features; only those aspects related to a top officer are recounted here.

yet proposed, but from a practical point of view it is unacceptable.” Among the reasons that Richardson dissented were that he thought “it unwise to give power...to one Secretary and one Commander of the Armed Forces” because “there is real danger that one component will be seriously affected by the decisions of one man to the detriment of the effectiveness of the armed forces as a whole.”<sup>49</sup>

The committee’s proposal would have resulted in momentous change to the structure of the military. Although it was a drastic departure from the past, the plan was detailed, carefully reasoned, and based on thorough study of the problem. It identified tradeoffs and thoughtfully addressed counterarguments. But whatever its merits may have been, the plan went nowhere. After the committee submitted its report in April 1945, tension between the War and Navy Departments began to mount over unification. For that reason, and because the war was still raging, the report “was not substantially acted upon by [the] JCS until September 1945, five months after it was submitted,” and it was not until October 16 that “the Joint Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the President the report...and the views of each Chief” concerning it.<sup>50</sup> The report was soon overtaken by events—a day later, the Senate Military Affairs Committee (SMAC) opened a series of hearings on unification.<sup>51</sup>

At the hearings, the War Department put forward the second of the three top officer plans. The department’s proposal was known as the Collins Plan because Lieutenant General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, Army Ground Forces, briefed it to the SMAC. “Collins was acting as spokesman for a board of senior Army officers which had been created four weeks earlier for the purpose of drafting” the plan.<sup>52</sup> The Army had adopted a chief-of-staff model of

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 434-435.

<sup>50</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 288 and 298.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 304.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 307.

its own in 1903, and by World War II the norm of one-man decision-making was deeply ingrained in its service culture. The Army's institutional view was that there was an optimum solution for every situation that only a single individual with the power of decision could implement.<sup>53</sup> "Naturally, the Army viewed its own model of staff organization as the most efficient and recommended that it be extended over the other services."<sup>54</sup> The Collins Plan was also motivated by "far more parochial concerns. The War Department had little doubt about who would benefit from its proposed changes to the [JCS]. For one thing, chances were good that the new chief of staff [of the armed forces] would be partial to the Army."<sup>55</sup> Both conviction and self-interest drove the War Department's stance on a top officer.

The approach of the Army planners "had been to mesh General Marshall's views as completely as possible with the report of the [Richardson Committee], both majority and minority views." Marshall was opposed to both "a single military commander [and] a large central general staff," so the Collins Plan differed from the Richard Committee's proposal in both respects.<sup>56</sup> In addition to a single Department of the Armed Forces, the plan envisioned a Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, subordinate to a civilian secretary, who would be "[t]he principal military adviser and executive for the Secretary[.]"<sup>57</sup> Collins presented an organizational chart showing the Chief of Staff "in the chain of command between the Secretary, on the one hand, and the military chiefs of the Army, Navy, and separate Air Force, [as well as] the theater field commanders...on the other."<sup>58</sup> The Chief of Staff role would rotate among the

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<sup>53</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 63-64.

<sup>54</sup> Aaron B. O'Connell, *Underdogs: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012), 119.

<sup>55</sup> Amy B. Zegart, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 112.

<sup>56</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 307-308.

<sup>57</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 157 (Collins testimony).

<sup>58</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 46.

components “[i]n order to insure that no one component of the armed forces should dominate[.]” According to Collins, the chief would “have a small staff to assist him in the establishment of over-all policies on military personnel matters, military intelligence, joint training, and logistics. But this staff need not, and should not be permitted to, develop into a large operating staff.”<sup>59</sup> This was an explicit rejection of the “large central general staff” that Marshall was known to disfavor.<sup>60</sup> But Collins’s vision for a small, non-operational staff “did not agree” with his organizational chart, which showed the field commanders reporting to the Chief of Staff, “suggesting that he alone would control operations in the field[.]”<sup>61</sup> This inconsistency led to some confusion about the precise extent of the chief’s powers.<sup>62</sup>

A different senior officer, the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, would be the President’s adviser and liaison to an advisory body, the United States Chiefs of Staff. That body, consisting of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, and the chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, would advise the President on “the development of a balanced military program with which budgetary requirements are thoroughly integrated.”<sup>63</sup> Although it echoed some of the Richardson Committee’s proposals, the Collins Plan was more modest in its vision for reform, reflecting Marshall’s views. More than anything, the War Department’s plan was an attempt to “forge a Department of Defense and [JCS] in its own image, with clear lines of authority [and] a hierarchical decision-making structure[.]”<sup>64</sup>

The SMAC concluded its two-month-long unification hearings on December 17, 1945.

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<sup>59</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 161 (Collins testimony).

<sup>60</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 308; Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 48.

<sup>61</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 48.

<sup>62</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 308-309.

<sup>63</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 156-157 and 164 (Collins testimony).

<sup>64</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 113. The Collins Plan had many other features; only those aspects related to a top officer are recounted here.

Two days later, in a special message to Congress, President Harry Truman endorsed the general contours of the War Department's plan. He called for a Department of National Defense and a secretary superior to a single chief of staff.<sup>65</sup> In siding with the Army, "Truman's overriding aim was not the preeminence of any service but national survival. As president, he sought a new military apparatus that would provide superior strategy and advice, better performance, and bigger bang for the buck. These goals, he thought, would be reached only with a Joint Chiefs of Staff that could not be held captive by any one of its members...and that would be led by a senior military chief of staff."<sup>66</sup>

In late December, the SMAC began drafting a bill that featured the third and final top officer proposal of the 1945-1946 debate. In April 1946, the committee favorably reported the bill—known formally as S. 2044 and informally as the Thomas-Hill-Austin bill, after the Senators who drafted it—to the full Senate.<sup>67</sup> Eleven of the 13 committee members supported it. According to the committee report that accompanied the bill, "[t]he experience of World War II established firmly the doctrine of unified command in the theaters of military operations as an unquestioned prerequisite for successful operations. This unity of command, partially attained only after we were plunged into war, must be developed in time of peace, and must be extended to operate over the entire Military Establishment at the top level of strategic planning and direction."<sup>68</sup> The proposed legislation "set up the single military department, the single secretary, and the single chief of staff advocated by the President and the Army." The bill also included a number of features "apparently [intended] to please the Navy," including civilian

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<sup>65</sup> Truman, "Special Message to the Congress Recommending the Establishment of a Department of National Defense."

<sup>66</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 117.

<sup>67</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 126-127 and 252.

<sup>68</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Common Defense: Report*, 3.

secretaries for each service and several coordinating bodies.<sup>69</sup>

Under S. 2044, the “Chief of Staff [would be] responsible for executing the orders of the President and Secretary on military matters” and would have “all of the authority and responsibility for issuing directives for and in the name of either the President or the Secretary.” The committee intended the “office of Chief of Staff [to be] the unifying element” that would “remove the separatism, conflicting actions, waste of manpower and matériel, and delays” that had plagued the military during the war. Echoing the Collins Plan, the committee envisioned the Chief as having “a comparatively small military staff to assist him.” The Chief of Staff would also “be the principal military adviser of the President and the Secretary” and would serve on an advisory body, “the Joint Staff,” along with “the Commanding General of the United States Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commanding General of the United States Air Force[.]” This body would “carry great weight and influence on military policy, strategy, and the budgetary requirements of the armed forces[.]”<sup>70</sup> When it came to the role and powers of the Chief of Staff, S. 2044 closely resembled the Collins Plan and Truman’s message.

On April 30, 1946, a week after the SMAC approved S. 2044, the Senate Naval Affairs Committee convened a series of hearings on the bill. At the hearings, for reasons discussed below, Navy Department witnesses staunchly opposed the legislation.<sup>71</sup> “By the beginning of May it was becoming increasingly clear that a bill to which the Navy and the Marines were so bitterly opposed would have great difficulty passing Congress[.]”<sup>72</sup> Even after the SMAC revised the bill—in part by eliminating the single Chief of Staff provision—the Navy Department continued to oppose it. As a result, in July 1946 Truman “decided to put off any

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<sup>69</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 127-129.

<sup>70</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Common Defense: Report*, 3 and 10. S. 2044 had many other features; only those aspects related to a top officer are recounted here.

<sup>71</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 131-135.

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*, 135.

request for further consideration of unification legislation until the next Congress.”<sup>73</sup> It was not until a year later, “in July, [sic] 1947, after nearly four years of almost continuous conflict, [that] ‘unification’ was enacted into law with the passage of the National Security Act.” The final bill “deviated considerably from the original War Department coalition proposals,” including by omitting a top officer.<sup>74</sup>

As these three examples from the 1945-1946 reform era show, top officer proposals can vary considerably. Yet debates over the idea have often erased distinctions and oversimplified the issue. One example comes from the 2015-2016 debate. In November 2015, Dr. John Hamre, President and CEO of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), a think tank, was one of three witnesses who appeared at a hearing before the McCain-led Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC). The hearing—which kicked off the SASC’s effort to reform Goldwater-Nichols—covered a variety of defense reform issues, including whether Congress should put the Chairman in the chain of command.<sup>75</sup> Over the course of the fall and spring, the SASC held a dozen more hearings and heard from 50 other witnesses.<sup>76</sup> Four of them proposed establishing a top officer in one form or another.

In March 2016, with the debate still underway, Hamre wrote an article for *Defense One* entitled “Keep America’s Top Military Officer Out of the Chain of Command.” Observing that “[t]oday people again are debating whether we should put the chairman into the chain of command,” Hamre wrote that “[p]utting the chairman in the chain of command [under the Secretary of Defense] and creating an American version of a general staff would have astounding

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 140-143.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 182.

<sup>75</sup> Colin Clark, “‘First, Do No Harm:’ SASC Begins Goldwater-Nichols Review,” *Breaking Defense*, November 9, 2015, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://breakingdefense.com/2015/11/first-do-no-harm-sasc-begins-goldwater-nichols-review/>.

<sup>76</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017* (bill summary), 1, accessed February 22, 2021, <https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/press-releases/senate-armed-services-committee-completes-markup-of-national-defense-authorization-act-for-fiscal-year-2017>.



political implications, and none of them are good.” Among other things, Hamre argued that “[g]roups of people collectively make better decisions than individuals” and that “[n]o chairman could be in the chain of command and render genuinely objective military advice to the president.” He warned that the “chairman could become too strong politically if he were in the chain of command” and that “[t]he Joint Staff would become an autonomous political force, threatening the fundamental condition of civilian control[.]”<sup>77</sup> As the head of CSIS, a longtime defense hand, and one of the first witnesses the SASC invited to testify, Hamre’s voice was influential. But his sweeping statements about putting the Chairman in the chain of command and creating a general staff erased the significant distinctions between the four top officer proposals that were on the table at the time, and thus hindered debate.

Appearing alongside Hamre in November 2015, Jim Thomas, Vice President for Studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, a think tank, put forward the first of the four proposals. He recommended replacing the Chairman with a Chief of the General Staff and converting the Joint Staff into a General Staff. Thomas argued that the military lacked “an effective central control entity” and that “no military leader in our current system is empowered to prioritize efforts across regions[.]” As a result, staff processes were “cumbersome and time-consuming,” and frequently led to “lowest-common-denominator outcomes that everyone can live with” instead of good decisions. Under Thomas’s plan, “[t]he Chief of the General Staff would be principally responsible for formulating military strategy, developing concept plans, and directing global force allocation and application” and “would play the critical role of global integrator and decider between competing military demands consistent with guidance from the President and Secretary of Defense.” The Chief would have “decision and directive authorities”

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<sup>77</sup> John Hamre, “Keep America’s Top Military Officer out of the Chain of Command,” *Defense One*, March 15, 2016, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.defenseone.com/ideas/2016/03/keep-americas-top-military-officer-out-chain-command/126694/>.

over all military forces, including both the combatant commands and the services. The General Staff under the Chief would serve as “the military’s global brain[.]” In order “[t]o address Congress’ historical concerns about the over-concentration of power invested in [one] individual,” Thomas proposed that “the Chief of the General Staff should not be the principal military adviser to the President (unlike the current Chairman) but should be under the direction and control of the Secretary of Defense[.]” By Thomas’s own admission, his proposal would have resulted in “major organizational changes, not modest, inoffensive tweaks to the system.”<sup>78</sup> Implementing his plan would have required significant alterations to the law, to the structure of the military, and to bureaucratic processes. In proposing a chief with directive authority over all military forces, Thomas’s plan hearkened back to the proposals from the 1945-1946 debate. Thomas’s top officer would certainly be powerful. But by stripping him or her of the role of principal military adviser to the President, Thomas introduced a significant check on that power.

A month later, in December 2015, retired General Norton A. Schwartz, a former combatant commander and Air Force Chief of Staff, put forward the second proposal. He recommended a different variation on a top officer: putting the Chairman in the operational chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders. Unlike Thomas’s plan, Schwartz’s top officer would have no authority over the services; the service chiefs would continue reporting to the service secretaries. Schwartz told the SASC that, based on his “experience as a former member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, I have come to the conclusion that the Chairman’s informal role in supervising the Combatant Commanders and the JCS is insufficient for the demands of our times.” He recommended that the Chairman be given “directive authority...for force employment, deciding force allocation tradeoffs between Combatant Commands and establishing strategic priorities for the Armed

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<sup>78</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 22 and 27-29 (Thomas testimony).

Forces[.]” According to Schwartz, these decisions “should not be the result of bureaucratic negotiation or the exquisite application of personal suasion but, rather, the product of strategic leadership. That capacity is constrained by the Chairman’s inability to exercise executive authority on behalf of the Secretary of Defense.” Unlike Thomas, Schwartz did not propose changing the Chairman’s advisory role.<sup>79</sup> Also unlike Thomas, Schwartz recommended against a general staff, arguing that the Joint Staff should remain “a creature of the Joint Chiefs” in order to “minimize concern about a rogue individual.”<sup>80</sup> This was a reference to Hamre’s concern that the Chairman “could become too strong politically if he were in the chain of command” and threaten civilian control of the military. In recommending a top officer but not a general staff, Schwartz hoped to obtain the benefits of empowering the Chairman while guarding against the risks of doing so. Schwartz’s plan was far more modest than Thomas’s and would have required fewer changes to implement.

Testifying alongside Schwartz, retired Admiral James Stavridis, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and a two-time combatant commander, put forward the third proposal. Like Schwartz, Stavridis recommended “making the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the senior operational commander, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense.” In Stavridis’s view, the effects of Goldwater-Nichols “ha[d] been overwhelmingly good. But three decades is a long time, and it makes a great deal of sense to look at new ways to think about how [the Department of Defense] is run.” Under Stavridis’s plan, the combatant commanders would report to the Chairman. Unlike Thomas’s proposal, the service chiefs would not report to the top officer, but would continue reporting to the service secretaries. In contrast to Schwartz’s plan, a general staff would support the Chairman. The staff would be made up of

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<sup>79</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 7 (Schwartz testimony).

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

“mid-grade military officers of extraordinary promise [pulled] from their services and more or less permanently [assigned] to [it].” According to Stavridis, putting the Chairman, at the head of a general staff, into the operational chain of command would be efficient and would avoid duplication by “reduc[ing] a great deal of what happens in the combatant commands today.” Stavridis characterized his proposal as a modest change, noting that it was “how the system largely works in practice anyway; and it would merely codify the existing custom into a sensible, linear chain of command.” Unlike Thomas, Stavridis did not recommend changing the Chairman’s role of principal military adviser to the President.<sup>81</sup> Stavridis’s plan differed from Thomas’s in several important respects, including the magnitude of reform, the scope of the top officer’s authority, and the top officer’s advisory role. It also differed from Schwartz’s plan with respect to a general staff.

Michael G. Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence, put forward the fourth and final proposal. At a different SASC hearing in December 2015, Vickers argued that the military’s main problem was bad strategy. In order to improve strategy-making, Vickers recommended “transforming the Joint Staff into a Joint General Staff” headed by the Chairman, who would be “dual-hatted as the Chief of the Joint General Staff[.]” The staff’s officers would be subject to “a rigorous selection process that would seek to identify those with potential to serve as strategists[.]” They “would [then] spend the remaining two-thirds to three-quarters of their careers in the Joint General Staff, rotating back to their Services of origin periodically to maintain operational currency.” The “Joint General Staff would be focused exclusively on the conduct and preparation for war at the strategic and operational levels as opposed to the wide and

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<sup>81</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 9-12 (Stavridis testimony).

duplicative range of broad policy and staff functions the current Joint Staff engages in.”<sup>82</sup>

Vickers did not say exactly how the Chief/Chairman would fit into the chain of command, but the clear implication was that he or she would have some amount of executive authority, given the Joint General Staff’s focus on the “conduct” of war.

Vickers did not make clear whether the Chief/Chairman would exercise authority over all military forces, to include the services, or just the combatant commands. By virtue of being “dual-hatted” as both the JCS Chairman and the Chief of the Joint General Staff, the Chief/Chairman would retain the role of principal military adviser to the President. Vickers’s plan was like Thomas’s in that it would have created a new position with authority over (potentially) all military forces. It was different in that it did not strip the chief of his or her advisory role, as Thomas’s plan did. Vickers’s proposal was similar to Stavridis’s plan for a general staff, but had little in common with Schwartz’s more modest plan to simply put the Chairman in the operational chain of command.

Although Thomas, Stavridis, Schwartz, and Vickers all proposed a top officer, their plans differed significantly, including over the magnitude of reform, the scope of the top officer’s authority, the wisdom of a general staff, and the role of principal military adviser to the President. In making a generic argument against putting the Chairman in the chain of command and establishing a general staff, Hamre ignored these distinctions. He also overlooked the possibility that these nuances could have assuaged some of his concerns about creating a top officer. As a result, he oversimplified the issue. As this example shows, sweeping generalizations about the idea are of little benefit. Worse, they can inhibit understanding of the differences between proposals, as Hamre did, and thus hinder debate. Given the wide range of possibilities within the idea of a top officer, participants in future defense reform debates should

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<sup>82</sup> Vickers, “Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy and Plans,” 4 and 6.

carefully distinguish between reform proposals and refrain from generalizations.

### **The second barrier**

Although proposals for a top officer can take many forms, debates have often morphed into fruitless arguments about the idea in the abstract. Abstraction harms debate by ignoring the details of reform proposals and their practical effects. An example comes from the 1945-1946 reform era. Although there were three detailed reform proposals on the table at that time—the Richardson Committee’s plan, the Collins Plan, and Senate bill 2044—debate was often about abstractions rather than the specifics of the proposals. The 1945 SMAC hearings are a case in point. Although the hearings are now remembered for the battle between the War and Navy Departments over the Collins Plan,<sup>83</sup> the proceedings were frequently consumed not by an assessment of the plan, but by arguments over unification and a top officer in the abstract.

Secretary of War Robert Patterson and Marshall were the committee’s first two witnesses. “Their approach—followed by the other War Department witnesses—was to refer to allegedly unsatisfactory aspects of wartime organization...and to assert that reorganization into a single military department would cure all the existing and potential defects of the two-department system.”<sup>84</sup> Patterson appeared on October 17, the first day of the hearings. He did not present the War Department’s plan or explain how its features would address problems with the status quo. Instead, he expressed his “earnest advocacy of the principle of unification” and argued in favor of abstract ideals, including “integration,” “economy,” and “efficiency.” Patterson urged the committee “not [to] permit the great objectives of unification at this time to be obscured by a cloud of details.” He also preemptively defended the War Department’s pro-

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<sup>83</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 44. The hearings were “purportedly” about two unification bills unrelated to the Collins Plan, but “these bills were ignored during the hearings and were hardly mentioned even by their sponsors[.]”

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

unification position against possible objections, including “that a single department of the armed forces would concentrate too much power in one man and that such power would tend to develop militarism.” But instead of explaining how the department’s plan would avoid such an outcome, Patterson dismissed the concern out of hand, claiming that there would not “be any threat in the future from the creation of a single department to unify our military policies” and that it was “absurd to think that...military leaders will control the entire administration and the running of the Government[.]”<sup>85</sup> This was an argument about abstract concepts—centralization, unification, and militarism—rather than the practical effects of his department’s proposal.

Marshall also framed the debate in terms of abstractions divorced from detail. A day later, on October 18, Marshall told the SMAC that “[t]he important consideration is recognition of the soundness of the principle of a single executive department responsible for the national security. There are, of course, evident complications to be resolved in bringing the War and Navy Departments under one directing head, but most of these are matters of detail.”<sup>86</sup> By focusing on abstractions instead of details, Patterson and Marshall failed to explain what the Collins Plan was, why it was the right response to the military’s organizational problems, or how it would achieve the purported benefits of unification.

Without a detailed proposal to debate, Navy Department witnesses also dealt in abstractions, making “general objections to unification,” including the idea of a top officer.<sup>87</sup> Among other things, Navy officials argued against centralization and a top officer in principle, arguing that “every [historical] case of unified command told the same story: an overall

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<sup>85</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 10, 12-13, 15, 19, and 22 (testimony of Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson).

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 51 (testimony of General of the Army George C. Marshall).

<sup>87</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 50-51.

commander who favored ground forces, ignored the Navy, and went down to defeat.”<sup>88</sup> It was not until “Collins presented the War Department’s specific proposals to the [SMAC] on October 30,” at the committee’s seventh hearing, that the abstract was finally made concrete.<sup>89</sup> But by then the tone had been set, and abstraction continued to hinder debate for the rest of the hearings.

In his SMAC testimony on November 7, H. Struve Hensel, Assistant Secretary of the Navy, pointed out the problems with debating abstract concepts instead of concrete proposals. Hensel told the committee that he did “not think we can profitably carry on this discussion [over unification] any further as a general abstraction” and that “it is tremendously difficult to discuss this problem in abstractions.” Although Hensel, like other Navy officials, strongly opposed unification and a top officer, he praised the Collins Plan as “very helpful” because “[a]ssertions of advantages and disadvantages can now be promptly tested.” Pointing out that “[m]ethods do not exist apart from detail,” Hensel recommended that “when a witness suggests a goal or claims an advantage, he should be promptly asked to show how it can be accomplished.”<sup>90</sup>

Instead of arguing over abstractions, Hensel presented a detailed criticism of the Collins Plan to the committee, in “what amounted to a lawyer’s brief” against it.<sup>91</sup> Rather than debating the theoretical virtues of unification, Hensel analyzed the specifics of the War Department’s proposal, including the role of Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces.<sup>92</sup> As he put it to the committee, “there are advantages and disadvantages in every form of organization. It is a mistake to portray either the [current organization or the Collins Plan] as all good or all bad. A proper decision requires a listing and a balancing of the advantages and disadvantages of the

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<sup>88</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 115.

<sup>89</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 46.

<sup>90</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, November 7, 1945, 241-242 (testimony of Assistant Secretary of the Navy H. Struve Hensel).

<sup>91</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 52.

<sup>92</sup> See generally, Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, November 7, 1945, 241-256 (Hensel testimony). See also, Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 52-53.



various proposals.”<sup>93</sup> As Hensel observed, abstract concepts must be fleshed out before they can be assessed. In the 1945 SMAC hearings, both advocates and opponents of unification too often debated abstractions instead of details, hindering evaluation of the Collins Plan and its features, including the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces. Participants in future defense reform debates should avoid arguing about abstractions and instead focus on the merits of specific proposals.

Another example of unhelpful abstraction came from a 1984 op-ed war in *The Washington Post*. A potential amendment to the 1985 Department of Defense Authorization Act triggered the exchange. The amendment—a bill that the House of Representatives had passed in 1983—would have removed the limit on the size of the Joint Staff and put the Chairman in the chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders, among other things.<sup>94</sup> The 1983 bill was a response to “[t]he unsettling message revealed” during 1982 House Armed Services Committee (HASC) hearings “that organizational flaws mar the performance of the present Joint Chiefs of Staff.” Those flaws included the lack of “a single military individual in the chain of command” and restrictions on the Joint Staff that “adversely affected” its work.<sup>95</sup> But instead of debating the pros and cons of the amendment and its practical effects, the op-eds were about the idea of a top officer and general staff in theory.

Gary W. Anderson, a Marine Corps officer, published the first op-ed on May 21, 1984. Anderson attacked the “recent reform initiative” to replace the JCS system with “the old Prussian-German model” of a general staff. He claimed that “[s]trong general staffs, as they evolved in Russia and Germany, are manifestations of autocratic political systems that are

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<sup>93</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, November 7, 1945, 255 (Hensel testimony).

<sup>94</sup> See generally, House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report* (to Accompany H.R. 3718), 98th Cong., 1st sess., September 27, 1983, H. Rep. 98-382. See also, James R. Locher, III, *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon* (College Station, TX: Texas A&M University Press, 2002), 110-112 and 184-186.

<sup>95</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report*, 3-5.

essentially alien to the way we do things in our democratic republic.”<sup>96</sup> A few weeks later, on June 9, retired Army Colonel T. N. Dupuy responded to Anderson. Dupuy was the author of a 1977 book about the German general staff, *A Genius for War: The German Army and General Staff, 1807-1945*. In his op-ed, Dupuy argued that Anderson was wrong and that “there is absolutely no evidence that general staffs have in any way eroded civilian control of the armed forces in any nation.”<sup>97</sup> The following day, June 10, Secretary of the Navy John Lehman joined Anderson’s attack. Lehman wrote that “creating a Prussian-style general staff reporting to a strengthened chairman is, like most bad ideas, an old one.” He argued that “[p]utting the chairman’s new joint staff in the chain of command...violates every sound military axiom” and would subvert civilian control of the military.<sup>98</sup>

Representative Ike Skelton answered Lehman. Skelton was a HASC member and a sponsor of the bill at issue. In an op-ed dated June 16, Skelton tried to bring the debate back to the legislation. “What exactly would the Joint Chiefs reorganization measure do if adopted in conference and enacted into law?” he asked. “Would it really create a ‘Prussian-style general staff’ undermining civilian control of the military?” Skelton argued that “[t]he proposed changes are in fact quite modest” and then made a brief case for each of them.<sup>99</sup> On June 24, William S. Lind, President of the Military Reform Institute, fired the final salvo. Lind argued that “Prussia is not the issue” and that talk of a Prussian-style general staff was a distraction in “what should be a serious debate” about how to fix the shortcomings of the JCS.<sup>100</sup> But Lind, too, dwelled on the virtues of the “Prussian model” of a general staff instead of examining the merits of the amendment that had triggered the argument.

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<sup>96</sup> Gary W. Anderson, “The Military Reformers’ Prussian Model,” *The Washington Post*, May 21, 1984.

<sup>97</sup> T. N. Dupuy, “Military Reform: The Case for a Centralized Command,” *The Washington Post*, June 9, 1984.

<sup>98</sup> John Lehman, “Let’s Stop Trying to Be Prussians,” *The Washington Post*, June 10, 1984.

<sup>99</sup> Ike Skelton, “We’re Not Trying To Be Prussians,” *The Washington Post*, June 16, 1984.

<sup>100</sup> William S. Lind, “Prussia Has Little to Do With It,” *The Washington Post*, June 24, 1984.

By focusing on the idea of a top officer and a general staff in the abstract, the op-ed war did little to illuminate the pros and cons of the legislation at issue. Instead of enhancing the debate, the op-eds detracted from it, turning what could have been a critical assessment of the amendment into an academic argument over the Prussian general staff's legacy. The argument was about principles, rather than particulars. In order to avoid dead-ends of this sort, participants in future defense reform debates should focus on concrete reform proposals and their real-world implications.

### **The third barrier**

The idea of a top officer is undeservedly controversial. The controversy is rooted in a particular understanding of the idea's history: that there has always been a longstanding American aversion to a top officer and that fighting the Axis powers in World War II cemented that conviction. But that is inaccurate. During and just after the war, the idea of a top officer was mainstream and uncontroversial. Beginning in late 1945, for self-serving reasons, opponents of defense reform manufactured the controversy by attacking the idea on the grounds that it was dangerous and un-American. The unwarranted sense of controversy, which still lingers today, is a barrier to debate because it chills dialogue and discourages the frank exchange of ideas.

The sense of controversy is rooted in the belief that the idea has long been verboten, and never more so than just after World War II. In 1982 Senate testimony, for example, retired Admiral James L. Holloway, former CNO, claimed that “[h]istorically the Congress has assiduously protected the principle of civilian authority and rejected any proposals that would encourage the development of a general staff style organization dominated by a single powerful

military man.”<sup>101</sup> In 1983 Senate testimony, James R. Schlesinger, Secretary of Defense under Presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford, remembered that “[a]t the close of World War II, we sought, above all, to avoid the creation of a dominating general staff—reflecting a fear of the German General Staff[.]”<sup>102</sup> A 1985 Congressional Research Service report, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes toward a General Staff in the 20th Century*, framed World War II as a watershed event, after which “[t]he extent and vehemence of negative attitudes toward a general staff increased immeasurably” because of concerns about “militarism and subordination of civil authority to the military.”<sup>103</sup>

The understanding of the 1980s—that the idea of a top officer was controversial and had been since World War II—was carried forward into the 2015-2016 debate. In his 2015 SASC testimony, Thomas noted that “[i]n the 1980s, broaching the topic of a General Staff was considered taboo—too radical, ‘un-American,’ and a political non-starter,” and that the idea of a general staff headed by a chief had “long been seen as heretical[.]”<sup>104</sup> Likewise, Stavridis acknowledged that his recommendations to establish a general staff and put the Chairman in the chain of command were “highly controversial, bordering on heretical.”<sup>105</sup> He also noted that the topic of a general staff “rattles old ghosts in our memories[.]”<sup>106</sup> In his 2016 article, Hamre wrote: “Back in 1947 when the National Security Act was adopted, the same question [about a top officer and a general staff] came up. The United States was fresh off the horror of World

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<sup>101</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Structure and Operating Procedures of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services*, 97th Cong., 2nd sess., December 16, 1982, 38 (testimony of retired Admiral James L. Holloway, III).

<sup>102</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense: Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services*, 98th Cong., 1st sess., S. Hrg. 98-375, pt. 5, November 2, 1983, 186 (testimony of Dr. James R. Schlesinger).

<sup>103</sup> Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff* in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 260.

<sup>104</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 26 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>105</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 12 (Stavridis testimony).

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

War II, and no one wanted a powerful military organization that could dictate to civilians.”<sup>107</sup>

As these examples show, the idea of a top officer has been considered controversial for decades, rooted in the belief that the war against the Axis powers had rendered the idea anathema.

But that is inaccurate: during and just after the war, the idea of a top officer was mainstream and uncontroversial. As discussed above, the Richardson Committee, the War Department, President Truman, and the SMAC favored a top officer in some form. Marshall and Eisenhower also supported the idea. Additionally, the public favored the War Department’s vision for a top officer, “with 60 percent of those polled [in October 1945] endorsing the Army’s plan for ‘unified command’ of all the services.”<sup>108</sup> As these examples show, during and just after the war the idea of a top officer was unremarkable.

Today, however, the idea’s history is remembered quite differently. Why? In the closing months of 1945, the Navy and Marine Corps became increasingly concerned that postwar reform would weaken the Navy relative to the Army and result in the elimination of the Marine Corps.<sup>109</sup> Preventing unification became a matter of preservation and survival for the Naval services.<sup>110</sup> Additionally, the Navy opposed the Army’s plan because it “challenged fundamental principles of Navy organization and decision making.”<sup>111</sup> Of the services, the Navy “had the most decentralized bureaucracy” with “numerous bureaus and semi-autonomous communities[.]”<sup>112</sup> As a result, while “there had been a tradition favoring a single Chief of Staff in the War Department since 1903, the dominant tradition in the Navy Department since the turn of the [twentieth] century had been against such an officer.” In contrast to the Army, the Navy’s

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<sup>107</sup> Hamre, “Keep America’s Top Military Officer out of the Chain of Command.”

<sup>108</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 120, citing Gallup Organization, “Gallup Poll 1945-0358: Transportation/Inflation/Military Service/World War II,” question qn8b.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 119-121; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 115-117.

<sup>110</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 86; O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 119-121; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 115-117.

<sup>111</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 116.

<sup>112</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 133.

institutional view was that strategic decisions “were extremely complicated and were not susceptible to optimal determination” by one person.<sup>113</sup>

Despite this longstanding clash of worldviews, the Navy Department did not turn against unification until the war was nearly over. It had not directly opposed unification during congressional hearings on the subject in 1944.<sup>114</sup> And of the dozens of high-ranking officers the Richardson Committee interviewed in late 1944, “almost exactly half of the Navy officers whose views were heard favored the single department[.]”<sup>115</sup> But by October 1945, when the SMAC opened its unification hearings, the battle lines had been redrawn, with the Army and the Naval services on opposing sides.<sup>116</sup>

Attacking the idea of a top officer as dangerous and un-American was a way for the Navy and Marine Corps to fight unification.<sup>117</sup> In the 1945 SMAC hearings, “Navy officials darkly warned that the War Department’s unification plans threatened civilian control of the military.”<sup>118</sup> One example was King, the CNO, who argued against a top officer in dramatic terms. He testified that there were “positive dangers in a single command at the highest military level,” calling it “potentially, the ‘man on horseback.’” He told the committee that “a general staff, suggestive of the German ‘great general staff,’” did not have “any place in the armed forces of this country; and there is no point in deliberately establishing a group of men whose powers, even though they would fall short of the extremes in militaristic countries would nevertheless be incompatible with our concept of democracy.”<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 99 and 101.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 28-30.

<sup>115</sup> *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*, 415.

<sup>116</sup> Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 203-204.

<sup>117</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification* 51-52; O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 132-141; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 114-115.

<sup>118</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 114.

<sup>119</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 23, 1945, 121-122 (testimony of Fleet Admiral Ernest J. King). Especially just after World War II, opponents of a

King's blistering language was all the more remarkable given that he did not seem to believe the argument he was making. King "did not share the dominant Navy tradition against an Army-chief-of-staff" organizational model, but he attacked the idea of a top officer anyway, "having probably calculated that [the] benefit to the military generally [of] a powerful single Chief of Staff, was outweighed by the probable harm to the Navy [of potentially having] a non-Navy Chief of Staff." Any sympathy for a top officer was submerged because "[a]n open split within the [Navy] Department...might critically weaken its ability to block any of the War Department's proposals and also give up the tactical advantage of maintaining the 'civilian control' position in the overall conflict."<sup>120</sup>

Nimitz echoed King. A year earlier, in December 1944, the Richardson Committee interviewed Nimitz in Pearl Harbor, and he enthusiastically supported the committee's plan for unification and a top officer.<sup>121</sup> But in his November 1945 SMAC testimony, with the Navy's future at stake, Nimitz changed course and attacked unification on the grounds that it would threaten civil-military relations. He told the Senators that creating a "civilian Secretary of the Department, a man not elected by the people," would result in "a lessening of civilian control" of the military. According to Nimitz, the civilian secretary would have "a political power and an importance that our form of government has always, and I believe correctly, withheld from the military services." Nimitz said the same thing about a top officer:

I do not now believe that the alternative of one-man decisions would work as well in the long run [compared to the JCS]. For an example of how they did not work too well we may recall Germany's experience in the war just ended...If such

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top officer warned of "the man on horseback," a powerful military leader who could seize power and become a dictator.

<sup>120</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 118-119.

<sup>121</sup> "Testimony of Fleet Admiral C. Nimitz, United States Navy, before the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense," Pearl Harbor, HI, December 8, 1944, in Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, 403-410.

power were conferred upon a single military commander, his position would be hard to reconcile with the authority and responsibility of the President, who is Commander in Chief under the Constitution.

In addition to attacking unification on the grounds that it was dangerous, Nimitz explicitly cast the debate in terms of the Navy's welfare. "I have come to the conclusion," Nimitz said, "that the yardstick by which we should measure any proposal to change our military organization should, [sic] be how does it affect our seapower?"<sup>122</sup>

Given Nimitz's enthusiasm for unification and a top officer the year prior, this was a stunning turn of events, and it did not go unnoticed. An editorial that ran in *The Washington Post* two days after Nimitz testified pointed out "that he [had] argued against himself" on unification and observed that "[t]he very fact that a famous admiral seems to be thinking of sea power first and of national security second is a powerful argument for the unification principle." According to the editorial, Nimitz's testimony "show[ed] how comparatively weak and inadequate the Navy's opposition to a unified defense system is."<sup>123</sup>

The Marine Corps, in a fight for its life, took the Navy's attacks on the idea of a top officer to another level. "Eschewing arguments of military strategy, where their position was weakest, [the Marine Corps] emphasized the domestic dangers of the proposed legislation" and argued that giving "too much power to one military officer... would lead invariably to dictatorship." The Marine Corps "framed unification as a departure from American values" and "as frightening, radical, improper, or even unnatural." Marines "argued that the Army wanted to institute a Prussian military system, which would change America into something much like the

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<sup>122</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, November 17, 1945, 386-389 (testimony of Fleet Admiral Chester W. Nimitz).

<sup>123</sup> "Nimitz versus Eisenhower," *The Washington Post*, November 19, 1945, in Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, 441-442.



militarized Nazi state it had just defeated.”<sup>124</sup>

These “charges were patently false, and some of the loudest Marine critics of the Army knew it.” But they “knew an effective argument when they saw one, and so they reiterated constantly that adopting the Army’s unification plan would lead the country toward Nazism and destroy American democracy.” Characterizing unification as a domestic threat “became the Marines’ greatest weapon for smearing the Army” and “in just a few short months after the end of World War II, the Marines were able to rebrand the Army as un-American and dangerous.”<sup>125</sup>

The Navy Department’s tactics may have been disingenuous, but they were effective. In May 1946, the War Department and President Truman yielded on the issue of a top officer as part of a legislative compromise with the Navy Department.<sup>126</sup> Their decision to yield was a surprise, given the support for the idea up to that point.<sup>127</sup> After Truman and the War Department dropped the issue, it all but disappeared from the debate over the legislation that would become the 1947 National Security Act.

The Navy Department’s Congressional supporters adopted its tactics. “Members of Congress who were strong partisans of the Navy and Marine Corps [and who were] opposed to the principle, or the anticipated degree, of service unification searched for arguments with which to oppose it. One was that unification would result in a ‘general staff’ system similar to that of the Germans[.]”<sup>128</sup> Congressional attacks on the idea of a top officer and a general staff were not just about supporting the Naval services, however. Some members also feared that a unified military would increase the power of the executive branch at Congress’s expense. Members who

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<sup>124</sup> O’Connell, *Underdogs*, 133-134, 136-137, and 139.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 134 and 138-139.

<sup>126</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 135-136.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*; Gordon W. Keiser, *The US Marine Corps and Defense Unification 1944-47: The Politics of Survival* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1982), 58.

<sup>128</sup> Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff* in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 265-266.

avored “maximum congressional control of executive branch agencies” were afraid that a unified department would hurt their ability to obtain information from the military and influence its programs and organization.<sup>129</sup>

A dozen years later, the possibility of a top officer again threatened Congress. “Faced by continuing inter-Service rivalry and competition over the development and control of strategic weapons, and under the impetus of the successful launching of the Sputnik satellite by the Soviet Union in October 1957, President Eisenhower in 1958 requested [that Congress make] substantial changes in the military organization.”<sup>130</sup> Among the changes Eisenhower sought were the “removal of the ceiling on the size of the Joint Staff” as well as “stronger powers for the Chairman, allowing him to vote in JCS deliberations and to select (subject to the Secretary’s approval) the Joint Staff’s director.”<sup>131</sup> The President also sought to have Congress appropriate some funds to the Department of Defense, instead of to the individual services, in order to give the Secretary some flexibility in how the money was spent.<sup>132</sup> Unlike in 1945-1946, no one proposed establishing a top officer in 1958, yet the idea was still a central issue. After the war, the question had been whether to *have* a top officer; in 1958, the question was whether the Chairman, if strengthened as Eisenhower requested, would *become* a top officer.

In the 1958 debate, interbranch, rather than interservice, competition drove opposition to the idea of a top officer. As was the case just after the war, some members of Congress feared the administration’s proposals would weaken their power by reducing their access to information within the military and their control over how funds were spent once appropriated.

“Eisenhower’s plans for 1958 put him in direct conflict with Congress, jealous of its influence

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<sup>129</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 189-194. See also, Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 155.

<sup>130</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 52.

<sup>131</sup> Rearden, *Council of War*, 185.

<sup>132</sup> Brian R. Duchin, “‘The Most Spectacular Legislative Battle of that Year:’ President Eisenhower and the 1958 Reorganization of the Department of Defense,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 24, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 245-246.

over defense policy and unlikely to loosen its grip on defense purse strings or to curtail its access to military testimony. The new debate would focus not on civilian control, but rather on which civilians would control.”<sup>133</sup> Unlike the 1945-1946 debate, when “legislators deferred to the executive branch on virtually every substantive and procedural issue,”<sup>134</sup> Congress fought the President in 1958.

As in 1945-1946, attacking the idea of a top officer and a general staff was part of a larger strategy to protect parochial interests. Congress’s main tactic was to characterize the concepts as alien and dangerous, just like the Navy and Marine Corps had a dozen years earlier:

President Eisenhower had the natural advantages in this contest. He spoke the language of modernity: speed, efficiency and cost-effectiveness. He had the knowledge, experience and reputation. Congress, jealous of its prerogatives and apprehensive about an unfettered executive, chose not to engage Eisenhower on his own ground. They evaded questions of prerogative in favor of the image of power. They sought to transform his plan into something unAmerican, hammering away at Prussians and Czars, General Staffs and men on horseback. Trying to regain the initiative, Congress sought to redefine the President’s initiative and defeat it.<sup>135</sup>

Although there were major differences between the 1945-1946 and 1958 debates, in both, attacking the idea of a top officer as dangerous was a key tactic in a larger strategy to defeat undesirable legislation.

As these examples from the postwar and 1958 debates show, opponents of defense reform manufactured the sense of controversy in the service of parochial interests. In the process, they permanently distorted the collective understanding of the idea and its history. Today’s memory is that the idea of a top officer was never more unpopular than just after World War II. In reality, the idea was mainstream and uncontroversial just after the war, until the Navy

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>134</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 118.

<sup>135</sup> Duchin, “‘The Most Spectacular Legislative Battle of that Year:’ President Eisenhower and the 1958 Reorganization of the Department of Defense,” 256-257.

Department began its anti-unification campaign. Given the controversy's origins, participants in future defense reform debates, on both sides of the issue, should recognize it for what it is—an undeserved anachronism—and reject it. That is not to say that all top officer proposals are necessarily benign: a top officer with too much power and too few checks *could* threaten civilian control of the military. But that depends on the details of a proposal and the powers and constraints it would create. The idea should not be reflexively controversial.

In addition to being unwarranted, the sense of controversy is a barrier to debate because it chills dialogue and discourages the frank exchange of ideas. For example, in 1983 Senate testimony, Dr. Harold Brown, Secretary of Defense in the Carter administration, recommended creating “a combined military staff, or general staff, headed by [a] single chief of military staff” that “would be responsible for the planning and execution of military operations.”<sup>136</sup> Brown’s testimony echoed the recommendations he made in a book published the same year, *Thinking about National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a Dangerous World*. In the book, Brown criticized the JCS for often producing “lowest-common-denominator [compromises] rather than making hard choices either between services or between operational theaters.” According to Brown, “[b]y far the best solution [to replace the JCS] would be to have a Chief of Military Staff” at the head of “a Joint General Staff” because it would “introduce a clearer and less parochial military view on issues of military strategy and capabilities[.]” The “General Staff would be able to review, compare, and suggest changes in the plans of commanders with different geographical or functional responsibilities and to decide among their competing demands for limited combat resources.” Additionally, “[t]he President, the Secretary of Defense, and Congress would be able to get much clearer and more accountable military advice” from a

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<sup>136</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense: Hearings before the Committee on Armed Services*, pt. 12, November 17, 1983, 522 and 531 (testimony of Dr. Harold Brown). Brown’s testimony is also cited in Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 137.

single Chief than from the JCS collectively. Under Brown's plan, the service chiefs would continue to report to the service secretaries, but "[t]he Chief of Military Staff would make an overall budget recommendation, including a ranking of priorities from among the programs of the different services."<sup>137</sup> Brown's plan, with its Chief at the head of a General Staff, was a direct descendant of the top officer proposals from the postwar era and a predecessor of the plans that Thomas and Vickers put forward in 2015.

While Brown was bold enough to voice his support for a top officer, few others were. Jim Locher, a key Senate staffer behind the Goldwater-Nichols Act and author of *Victory on the Potomac: The Goldwater-Nichols Act Unifies the Pentagon*, the authoritative history of the legislation, wrote that Brown's proposal for a general staff headed by a single chief had "raised a highly controversial subject. Since the Second World War, Congress and service supremacists had created a 'social myth' against the dangers of a 'Prussian General Staff.' Few reformers were prepared to challenge this bias."<sup>138</sup> Indeed, in *Thinking about National Security*, Brown felt obliged to address the "frequently expressed" concern that a top officer-led general staff would "produce something analogous to the German General Staff and threaten democratic principles."<sup>139</sup>

As this example shows, the sense of controversy is a barrier to debate because it chills dialogue and discourages the frank exchange of ideas. Even someone of Brown's stature—a respected former Secretary of Defense who had never served in the military, and who, in 1983, was a university professor with nothing to gain from the debate's outcome—had to defend his proposal from the charge that it was dangerous and undemocratic. As Locher noted, Brown was

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<sup>137</sup> Brown, *Thinking about National Security*, 209-210.

<sup>138</sup> Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 137, citing Goldich, *The Evolution of Congressional Attitudes Toward a General Staff*.

<sup>139</sup> Brown, *Thinking about National Security*, 211.

one of the few reformers in the 1980s willing to challenge that stigma. It is impossible to know how many others shared Brown's view but stayed silent. Participants in future defense reform debates should work to destigmatize the idea of a top officer so that would-be reformers are unafraid to voice their opinions.

Fortunately, the sense of controversy may already be dissipating. As discussed above, the SASC invited a handful of top officer advocates to testify during the 2015-2016 debate. (Stavridis and Thomas did, however, feel compelled to note that their recommendations were controversial and heretical.<sup>140</sup>) It has been decades since opponents of defense reform first branded the idea of a top officer as dangerous and un-American. As the years pass, the "old ghosts" that Stavridis referred to may no longer seem as scary as they once did. But even if the controversy may be fading, its demise should be accelerated.

### **Why the idea of a top officer should get a full hearing**

There are two reasons the idea of a top officer should get a full hearing in future defense reform debates. First, the growing challenges of global integration and all-domain conflict may require reorganization of the chain of command. In the three decades since Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Act, the world has changed, but the organization of the defense establishment has not. As a 2016 SASC report put it, "[w]e now face a series of multi-regional, cross-functional, multi-domain, and enduring strategic competitions that pose a significant challenge to the organization of DOD and the military, which is largely aligned around functional issues (policy, intelligence, acquisition, etc.) and regional geography (CENTCOM, AFRICOM, etc.)." As a result, "the challenge today is one of strategic integration—how DOD and the military

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<sup>140</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 26 (Thomas testimony); Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 12 (Stavridis testimony).

services align their efforts and resources across different regions, functions, and domains[.]”<sup>141</sup>

The SASC held hearings over the course of 2015-2016 to consider that challenge. As discussed above, a handful of witnesses endorsed some variation of a top officer as part of the solution. In deciding that a top officer was the right answer to novel problems, they echoed reformers from previous eras who had come to a similar conclusion (see Appendix B).

The idea of a top officer is a perennial issue in defense reform debates because circumstances change. As a result, the chain of command may also need to change, as it did in 1947, 1958, and 1986. Because circumstances change, future debates should reassess the costs and benefits of a top officer, grounded in concrete reform proposals, for the present moment and the foreseeable future. In his December 2015 SASC testimony, Stavridis recommended “at least hav[ing] a robust discussion about the pros and cons of a general staff, in addition to placing the Chairman atop it operationally.”<sup>142</sup> The barriers to debate stifle such discussion.

The second reason that participants in future debates should give the idea a full hearing is that the failure to do so may have contributed to an unintended consequence: the evolution of the Chairman into a top officer-like figure.<sup>143</sup> Paradoxically, even as proposals for a top officer have failed to gain traction since World War II, the Chairman has steadily grown more powerful.<sup>144</sup> In 1947, when Congress established the JCS as a matter of law, there was no Chairman; today, more than 70 years later, the Chairman is the nation’s senior officer, the principal military

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<sup>141</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, 1.

<sup>142</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 33 (Stavridis testimony).

<sup>143</sup> Every discrete action to empower the Chairman since 1949 has been intentional. But the totality of those actions—the evolution of the Chairman into a top officer-like figure—was unintended. “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 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.” Steven L. Rearden, *The Role and Influence of the Chairman: A Short History* (Joint History Office, Office of the Director, Joint Staff, Joint Chiefs of Staff, revised and updated September 28, 2011), 2, accessed March 21, 2021, [https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Institutional/The\\_Role\\_and\\_Influence\\_of\\_the\\_Chairman.pdf](https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/History/Institutional/The_Role_and_Influence_of_the_Chairman.pdf).

<sup>144</sup> The Chairman’s power mostly takes the form of de facto influence rather than hard authority. See generally, *ibid*.

adviser to the President, and the head of a Joint Staff that numbers in the thousands.

Despite the Chairman's growth in stature and influence since 1949, when Congress created the position, the Chairman is not in the chain of command and is therefore not the top officer some have proposed. But the Chairman's power has gradually come to approach top officer status. For example, according to Stavridis, the Chairman functions as if he is in the operational chain of command, despite not formally being part of it. In his 2015 SASC testimony, Stavridis—who had commanded both U.S. Southern and European Commands—told the committee that “putting the Chairman in the chain of command...is efficient, sensible, and frankly codifies what is in effect today in many ways.” Stavridis explained that “this is how the system largely works in practice anyway; and it would merely codify the existing custom into a sensible, linear chain of command.” He also said that, “[i]n today's world, the officers assigned to the Joint Staff in the Pentagon essentially function [as a general staff].”<sup>145</sup> In Stavridis's view, at least, the Chairman has become a de facto top officer for operational matters.

Additionally, the legislation that resulted from the 2015-2016 debate—the 2017 National Defense Authorization Act—expanded the Chairman's responsibilities (though not authorities) to make him or her the “global force integrator.”<sup>146</sup> In that role, the Chairman is “meant to be the ultimate authority on identifying where U.S. military resources, including the troops themselves, are needed most and who makes the final recommendation on where to dispatch them.” That “represent[s] a subtle but dramatic shift turning the position that was originally designed to be the ‘principal military adviser to the president’ into the principal official

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<sup>145</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 9 and 11 (Stavridis testimony).

<sup>146</sup> The 2017 NDAA amended 10 U.S. Code § 153, “Chairman: functions,” to expand the Chairman's responsibilities “relating to global military strategic and operational integration[.]” As a result of the NDAA, the Chairman is now responsible for “advising the Secretary on the allocation and transfer of forces among geographic and functional combatant commands, as necessary, to address transregional, multi-domain, and multifunctional threats.” See *National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017*, Public Law 114-328, December 23, 2016, 354, accessed March 19, 2021, <https://www.congress.gov/114/plaws/publ328/PLAW-114publ328.pdf>.



considering global tradeoffs, broadening the scope of advice the chairman was tasked with providing.”<sup>147</sup> The changes took effect during the Chairmanship of Marine General Joseph Dunford, who held the post from 2015-2019. According to Dr. Mara Karlin, now the Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, “Dunford felt the need to consolidate power because he didn’t really see the chairman’s role as sufficiently empowered, and he saw challenges as increasingly global, increasingly multi-domain, and thought there needed to be someone senior to make [decisions].”<sup>148</sup>

As Stavridis pointed out and as the new global integrator role suggests, the Chairman now functions like a top officer, at least in some ways, despite not being one. What to make of this paradox? One possibility is that the steady growth of the Chairman’s power has been a workaround to avoid the barriers to debate. Under this theory, it has been easier for legislators and policymakers to incrementally empower the Chairman than to squarely consider whether a top officer was the right answer to new problems. As a result, the Chairman has come to perform many of the functions that a top officer would, even though no one intended that outcome. The new global integrator role is an example of the workaround. The 2015-2016 debate made clear the need for better integration of military activities across regions and domains. Although the SASC entertained a handful of top officer proposals, the outcome of the debate was to give the Chairman more responsibility and influence, through the global integrator role, without formally increasing his or her authority.

The workaround theory is consistent with Amy Zegart’s argument in her 1999 book, *Flawed by Design: The Evolution of the CIA, JCS, and NSC*. In Zegart’s view, “[t]he Joint

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<sup>147</sup> Paul D. Shinkman, “The Joint Chiefs’ Power Surge: As a New Chairman Takes Over, the Military’s Outgoing Top Officer Has ‘Transformed’ the Way the Joint Chiefs Influence Top Leaders’ Decisions,” *U.S. News & World Report*, September 30, 2019, accessed November 27, 2020, <https://www.usnews.com/news/national-news/articles/2019-09-30/how-joe-dunford-quietly-changed-the-joint-chiefs-role-in-preparing-for-war>.

<sup>148</sup> Quoted in *ibid*.

Chiefs of Staff that emerged in 1947 was weak by design” and “ill designed to serve national needs” due to the Navy Department’s anti-unification efforts. Despite its obvious flaws, presidents “chose informal, low-cost ways of coping with JCS deficiencies” and “lived with and worked around JCS weaknesses” because reorganizing it was too hard. According to Zegart, “[c]ivilian Defense Department officials, the military services, and average legislators all stood to gain from a weak Joint Chiefs of Staff.” Only presidents had the incentive to reform the JCS, but with “bureaucrats and legislators supporting the status quo, there was little presidents could do.” For example, Truman would have preferred a top officer in the 1949 amendments to the National Security Act, but instead settled for legislation that created “a much weaker and more politically palatable JCS chairman[.]”<sup>149</sup> Eisenhower made a similar choice in 1958.<sup>150</sup> The barriers to debate are a symptom of these underlying political dynamics, and the evolution of the Chairman into a top officer-like figure is an example of a “low-cost” workaround.

The workaround dynamic has been evident for decades. Paul Y. Hammond took note of it in his 1961 book, *Organizing for Defense: The American Military Establishment in the Twentieth Century*. Hammond argued that Congress had been insufficiently critical of the JCS because debate had been “stymied by the dead end of opposition to a General Staff[.]” Rather than turning a critical eye on the JCS and “the growing dominance of the JCS Chairman,” Congress had been content to accept “general reassurances that a Prussian General Staff would not result” from incremental JCS empowerment. Hammond argued that “we ought to have a hard and candid look at a general staff system for the Defense Department, for it is about the only clear alternative to stretching the JCS as far as it will go.”<sup>151</sup> In the 60 years since Hammond’s book, the Chairman and the Joint Staff have been stretched even further.

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<sup>149</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 127, 133-134, 139, 148, and 160.

<sup>150</sup> Rearden, *Council of War*, 134.

<sup>151</sup> Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*, 382-383.

The incremental empowerment of the Chairman is not necessarily a problem. But it raises the possibility that the Chairman could become too strong by accident. In 1960, General Maxwell Taylor, who had served as Army Chief of Staff and would go on to serve as Chairman under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson, noted the potential hazards:

[I]t is not an overstatement to say that the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has come to assume much of the power of the dreaded single Chief of Staff who has been the bugbear of the Congress and of some elements of the public in past discussions of defense organization. This power is not bad in itself, but it is concealed power unaccompanied by public responsibility—which *is* bad.... This camouflaged status of the Chairman should be taken into serious account in any consideration of future changes in the structure and organization of the Department of Defense.<sup>152</sup>

Taylor was writing only a decade after Congress created the office. Since then, the Chairman's power has grown significantly.

Additionally, the fact that the Chairman is the principal military adviser to both the Secretary of Defense and the President “has created a situation where, *de facto*, the Chairman has two bosses, one of whom also serves at the pleasure of the other.” Arguably, that arrangement “inadvertently undermine[s] civilian control” because it diminishes the power of the Secretary over the Chairman.<sup>153</sup> If the Chairman was strictly an adviser, that might be merely awkward. But because of the Chairman's “concealed power,” to use Taylor's phrase, it could also be alarming. Ironically, by stifling debate over the idea of a top officer, the controversy may eventually lead to the very outcome that its conjurers warned against: a strong military figure subject to insufficient civilian control.

Even if the paradox of the Chairman's power is benign, it may be suboptimal. The Chairman was never intended to perform a top officer-like function. That the Chairman now does suggests there is a need for centralization beyond the Secretary of Defense alone. It seems

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<sup>152</sup> Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, 110-111.

<sup>153</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 24 (Thomas testimony).

unlikely that continuing to bolt new functions onto the Chairman is the optimal solution. By stifling debate, the barriers may have contributed to this outcome. In considering changes to the chain of command, participants in future reform debates should heed Taylor's advice to take "into serious account" the "camouflaged status of the Chairman" as a de facto top officer.

## **Conclusion**

The idea of a top officer has been a perennial issue for 75 years—and is likely to be of increasing interest in the future—but it has yet to receive a full hearing. Three interrelated barriers have frustrated debate through the decades: oversimplification, abstraction, and unwarranted controversy. These barriers exacerbate one another. The sense of controversy aggravates the problem of abstraction, as in the 1945 unification debate and the 1984 op-ed war. Likewise, the problem of oversimplification compounds the sense of controversy: when every proposal for a top officer, no matter how different, is lumped together, as in Hamre's 2016 article, they are all tarred with the same brush. Oversimplification also makes it more likely that debates will morph into dead-end arguments about abstract concepts.

These barriers are not unique to the top officer debate. The problems of oversimplification, controversy, and abstraction plague many—perhaps most—complex and contentious policy issues. The idea of a top officer is just one example of how these barriers can hinder legislating and policymaking. The lessons of the top officer debate may therefore be applicable more generally, beyond the narrow topic of defense organization.

Participants in future defense reform debates should work to overcome these barriers. The idea, grounded in concrete reform proposals that address clearly identified problems and their causes, should be the subject of frank debate because circumstances change. The growing challenges of global integration and all-domain conflict identified in 2015-2016 may require

revisions to the chain of command. New problems may require new solutions, as was the case in 1947, 1958, and 1986. Given the stakes, every option should be on the table. Additionally, the barriers to debate may have contributed to the Chairman's evolution into a top officer-like figure. Under the workaround theory, it has been easier for legislators and policymakers to gradually empower the Chairman than to squarely consider whether a top officer, in some form, would be a better answer. The Chairman's "camouflaged status" as a de facto top officer could weaken civilian control of the military and may be suboptimal.

Through analyzing the barriers, this paper has sought to furnish participants in future defense reform debates with a comprehensive understanding of the top officer idea: what it is, where it originated, what forms it has taken, and why people disagree over it. To say that the idea should get a full hearing is not to say that a top officer is the best solution to organizational problems. That is a question for future defense reform debates. But the only way to answer it is to consider top officer proposals on their merits, free from the barriers that have historically frustrated debate on this important and enduring issue.

## Appendix A

### Suggested guidelines for future debates over a top officer

Participants in future defense reform debates should:

- Identify problems and their causes before considering solutions.<sup>154</sup> Whether a top officer is the right answer depends on what needs to be fixed. Reformers must be sure that proposals for a top officer, however elegant, are not solutions in search of a problem.<sup>155</sup>
- Assume that the idea of a top officer will be a central issue, as it has been since World War II.
- Be mindful that the idea is not one thing and that top officer proposals can vary considerably.
- Be mindful that the position of top officer has been described by a broad array of terms that are poorly defined and that, by themselves, say little.
- Be mindful that the ideas of a general staff for the U.S. military and a top officer almost always go together, and that the concept of a general staff is just as poorly defined and equally variable.
- Reject the unwarranted sense of controversy because it chills dialogue, discourages the frank exchange of ideas, and distorts the idea's history. Whether a top officer will threaten civilian control of the military is a case-specific inquiry that depends on the details of a given reform proposal. The idea should not be reflexively controversial.
- Focus on the merits of concrete reform proposals and their practical effects, rather than on abstract arguments about the idea in theory.
- Because circumstances change, reconsider the pros and cons of a top officer, grounded in concrete reform proposals that address clearly identified problems and their causes, for the current moment and the foreseeable future.
- Consider General Taylor's advice that the "camouflaged status of the Chairman should be taken into serious account in any consideration of future changes in the structure and organization of the Department of Defense."<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>154</sup> *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, the landmark 1985 SASC staff report that heavily influenced the Goldwater-Nichols Act, set the standard for identifying problems and their causes. Participants in future defense reform debates should aspire to replicate the depth and rigor of the report's root-cause analysis.

<sup>155</sup> James R. Locher, III in discussion with the author, November 10, 2020.

<sup>156</sup> Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, 111.

## Appendix B Notable proposals for a top officer

This is a chronological list of notable proposals for a top officer. Most were embedded in a larger package of reforms, of which a top officer was just one feature. Only the top officer-related aspects of the plans are recounted here.

**Date:** January 28, 1942

**Proposed by:** Admiral Harold Stark, Chief of Naval Operations

**Proposed in:** Meeting of the Joint Army and Navy Board

**Summary:** Stark proposed a single Chief of the Joint General Staff, responsible directly to the President, who would lead a Joint General Staff made up of officers from the Army and Navy. The Joint General Staff would prepare general plans and issue directives to the War and Navy Departments to execute them.

**Rationale:** To improve coordination between the Army and the Navy.

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*; Raines, Jr., and Campbell, *The Army and the Joint Chiefs of Staff*

**Date:** April 25, 1944

**Proposed by:** Lieutenant General Joseph T. McNarney, Army Deputy Chief of Staff

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the House of Representatives Select Committee on Post-war Military Policy (the “Woodrum Committee”)

**Summary:** The “McNarney Plan” called for “a Secretary for the Armed Forces, with Undersecretaries for Army, Navy, and Air, and a United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, responsible directly to the President and consisting of a Chief of Staff to the President, the Chief of Staff of the Army, a ‘Chief of Staff’ of the Navy, and a Chief of Staff of the Air Force.” Unlike Admiral William Leahy’s role (see footnote 21), “[t]he Chief of Staff to the President was ‘to head’ the USJCS, apparently with power of decision.”<sup>157</sup> Some have interpreted this plan as calling for a top officer.<sup>158</sup>

**Rationale:** According to Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson, who testified just before McNarney, “our experiences in the war have abundantly brought out that voluntary cooperation, no matter how successful, cannot under any conditions of warfare...be as effective in the handling of great military problems as some form of combination and concentrated authority at the level of staff planning, supervision, and control.”<sup>159</sup>

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; House Select Committee on Post-war Military Policy, *Proposal to Establish a Single Department of Armed Forces*; Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*

**Date:** April 1945

**Proposed by:** The Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense (known as the “Richardson Committee” after its senior member, retired Admiral James

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<sup>157</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 273-274.

<sup>158</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 121.

<sup>159</sup> House Select Committee on Post-war Military Policy, *Proposal to Establish a Single Department of Armed Forces: Hearings before the Select Committee on Post-war Military Policy*, 78th Cong., 2d sess., April 25, 1944, 31 (testimony of Secretary of War Henry L. Stimson). Cited in Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 273.

Richardson)

**Proposed in:** *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*

**Summary:** With the exception of Richardson, who dissented, the committee recommended a single Department of the Armed Forces because “unity of effort in the field, which is so essential to the success of joint operations, can be achieved most effectively by uniting the components of the armed forces in a single department.” A civilian secretary would “be head of the [department] and responsible to the President and Congress for its direction[.]” Under the secretary would be a top officer, the Commander of the Armed Forces. “[C]ommand decisions of a military nature [would] flow from the Secretary through the Commander of the Armed Forces to [subordinate commanders].” According to the committee, “only through a single military commander of the Armed Forces can effective military teamwork be achieved. The greatest efficiency and effectiveness in an organization can be obtained where a single qualified individual has complete authority.” The Commander of the Armed Forces would also perform the role of Chief of Staff to the President, advising the President on military matters. An Armed Forces Staff, “composed of officers drawn from each of the components” would support the commander through “strategic planning and the development of broad aspects of the military program.” This staff of “highly trained and experienced officers” would “advise the [commander] in order that he may effect coordination between the several components” and “see the military picture objectively and as a whole.” An advisory body, the United States Chiefs of Staff, would “advise the President on broad matters of military strategy and the over-all estimated expenditures[.]” Its members would “consist of the Secretary of the Armed Forces, the Commander of the Armed Forces, the Commanding General of the Army, the Admiral of the Navy and the Commanding General of the Air Force.” It would be “an advisory group only, with no deciding or voting powers[.]”<sup>160</sup>

**Rationale:** According to the committee, “[a]t the outset of the war the Army and Navy were far apart in their thinking and planning” and “were organized along cumbersome and inefficient lines which hindered rather than facilitated cooperation.” Since then, “great strides have been made in bringing the services together.” But “even in areas where unity of command has been established, complete integration of effort has not yet been achieved because we are still struggling with inconsistencies, lack of understanding, jealousies and duplications which exist in all theaters of operations.”<sup>161</sup>

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*; Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*; Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*

**Date:** October 30, 1945

**Proposed by:** Lieutenant General J. Lawton Collins, Chief of Staff, Army Ground Forces (acting as the War Department’s spokesperson)

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Military Affairs Committee

**Summary:** The “Collins Plan” attempted “to mesh General Marshall’s views as completely as possible with the report of the [Richardson Committee], both majority and minority views.” Marshall was opposed to both “a single military commander [and] a large central general staff,”

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<sup>160</sup> *Report of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Special Committee for Reorganization of National Defense*, 417-419, 421-422, and 428-430.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 412-413.



so the Collins Plan differed from the Richard Committee's proposal in both respects.<sup>162</sup> In addition to a single Department of the Armed Forces, the plan envisioned a Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, subordinate to a civilian secretary, who would be "[t]he principal military adviser and executive for the Secretary[.]"<sup>163</sup> Collins presented an organizational chart showing the Chief of Staff "in the chain of command between the Secretary, on the one hand, and the military chiefs of the Army, Navy, and separate Air Force, [as well as] the theater field commanders... on the other."<sup>164</sup> The Chief of Staff role would rotate among the components "[i]n order to insure that no one component of the armed forces should dominate[.]" According to Collins, the Chief would "have a small staff to assist him in the establishment of over-all policies on military personnel matters, military intelligence, joint training, and logistics. But this staff need not, and should not be permitted to, develop into a large operating staff."<sup>165</sup> This was an explicit rejection of the "large central general staff" that Marshall was known to disfavor.<sup>166</sup> But Collins's vision for a small, non-operational staff "did not agree" with his organizational chart, which showed the field commanders reporting to the Chief of Staff, "suggesting that he alone would control operations in the field[.]"<sup>167</sup> A different senior officer, the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, would be the President's adviser and liaison to an advisory body, the United States Chiefs of Staff. That body, consisting of the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, the Chief of Staff to the Commander in Chief, and the chiefs of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, would advise the President on "the development of a balanced military program with which budgetary requirements are thoroughly integrated."<sup>168</sup> Although it echoed some of the Richardson Committee's proposals, the Collins Plan was more modest in its vision for reform, reflecting Marshall's views. More than anything, the War Department's plan was an attempt to "forge a Department of Defense and [JCS] in its own image, with clear lines of authority [and] a hierarchical decision-making structure[.]"<sup>169</sup>

**Rationale:** The Army had adopted a chief-of-staff model of its own in 1903, and by World War II the norm of one-man decision-making was deeply ingrained in its service culture. The Army's institutional view was that there was an optimum solution for every situation that only a single individual with the power of decision could implement.<sup>170</sup> "Naturally, the Army viewed its own model of staff organization as the most efficient and recommended that it be extended over the other services."<sup>171</sup> The Collins Plan was also motivated by "far more parochial concerns. The War Department had little doubt about who would benefit from its proposed changes to the [JCS]. For one thing, chances were good that the new chief of staff [of the armed forces] would be partial to the Army."<sup>172</sup>

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; Hammond, *Organizing for*

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<sup>162</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 307-308.

<sup>163</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 157 (Collins testimony).

<sup>164</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 46.

<sup>165</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 161 (Collins testimony).

<sup>166</sup> Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*, 308; Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 48.

<sup>167</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 48.

<sup>168</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, October 30, 1945, 156-157 and 164 (Collins testimony).

<sup>169</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 113.

<sup>170</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 63-64.

<sup>171</sup> O'Connell, *Underdogs*, 119.

<sup>172</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 112.

*Defense; Legere, Unification of the Armed Forces; Senate Committee on Military Affairs, Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security; Zegart, Flawed by Design*

**Date:** December 19, 1945

**Proposed by:** President Harry Truman

**Proposed in:** Message to Congress

**Summary:** Truman endorsed the general contours of the Collins Plan. He called for a Department of National Defense and a secretary superior to a single chief of staff.<sup>173</sup> Within the department, “[I]and, naval, and separate air forces would retain their identities and exist as ‘branches’ under assistant secretaries and military commanders.” As for military advice, “[t]he overall chief of staff and the commanders of the three services would constitute an advisory group to the overall secretary and to the President.”<sup>174</sup> Truman’s message was in keeping with his previous stance on the subject. In an August 1944 article in *Collier’s* magazine, Truman, then a Senator and the Vice-Presidential nominee, had called for “a General Staff in full charge of tactics and strategy, viewing the Nation’s offense and defense as an indivisible whole, and totally unconcerned with service rivalries.”<sup>175</sup>

**Rationale:** In siding with the Army, “Truman’s overriding aim was not the preeminence of any service but national survival. As president, he sought a new military apparatus that would provide superior strategy and advice, better performance, and bigger bang for the buck. These goals, he thought, would be reached only with a Joint Chiefs of Staff that could not be held captive by any one of its members...and that would be led by a senior military chief of staff.”<sup>176</sup>

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Recommending the Establishment of a Department of National Defense”; Zegart, *Flawed by Design*

**Date:** April 1946

**Proposed by:** Senate Military Affairs Committee

**Proposed in:** Senate bill 2044

**Summary:** S. 2044, known as the Thomas-Hill-Austin bill, would have “set up the single military department, the single secretary, and the single chief of staff advocated by the President and the Army.” The bill also included a number of features “apparently [intended] to please the Navy,” including civilian secretaries for each service and several coordinating bodies.<sup>177</sup> Under S. 2044, the “Chief of Staff [would be] responsible for executing the orders of the President and Secretary on military matters” and would have “all of the authority and responsibility for issuing directives for and in the name of either the President or the Secretary.” The committee intended the “office of Chief of Staff [to be] the unifying element” that would “remove the separatism, conflicting actions, waste of manpower and matériel, and delays” that had plagued the military during the war. Echoing the Collins Plan, the committee envisioned the Chief as having “a comparatively small military staff to assist him.” The Chief of Staff would also “be the principal military adviser of the President and the Secretary” and would serve on an advisory body, “the

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<sup>173</sup> Truman, “Special Message to the Congress Recommending the Establishment of a Department of National Defense.”

<sup>174</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 55-56.

<sup>175</sup> Harry S. Truman, “Our Armed Forces Must Be United,” *Collier’s Weekly*, August 26, 1944, in Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Armed Forces Department of Military Security*, 196-197.

<sup>176</sup> Zegart, *Flawed by Design*, 117.

<sup>177</sup> Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*, 127-129.

Joint Staff,” along with “the Commanding General of the United States Army, the Chief of Naval Operations, and the Commanding General of the United States Air Force[.]” This body would “carry great weight and influence on military policy, strategy, and the budgetary requirements of the armed forces[.]”<sup>178</sup> When it came to the role and powers of the Chief of Staff, S. 2044 closely resembled the Collins Plan and Truman’s message.

**Rationale:** According to the committee report that accompanied the bill, “[t]he experience of World War II established firmly the doctrine of unified command in the theaters of military operations as an unquestioned prerequisite for successful operations. This unity of command, partially attained only after we were plunged into war, must be developed in time of peace, and must be extended to operate over the entire Military Establishment at the top level of strategic planning and direction.”<sup>179</sup>

**Where to find it:** Caraley, *The Politics of Military Unification*; Hammond, *Organizing for Defense*; Legere, *Unification of the Armed Forces*; Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Common Defense: Report*; Senate Committee on Naval Affairs, *Unification of the Armed Forces*

**Date:** 1948

**Proposed by:** Dean Acheson, future Secretary of State (along with George Mead, James Pollock, and James Rowe, Jr.)

**Proposed in:** Internal deliberations of the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the United States Government (the “Hoover Commission”), of which Acheson was Vice Chairman

**Summary:** Although the Hoover Commission ultimately recommended that the JCS should be “presided over by a voteless chairman,” Acheson wanted the members of the commission “to go farther than they were willing to go.” Acheson’s proposal was to create “the post of Chief of Staff for the Armed Services[.]” The Chief “would have staff functions only, not command functions; the Secretary and President would decide the orders.” The Chief would be “the most senior rank in the services” and “would have his own staff, designated by the Secretary.” Acheson acknowledged that “[t]o some extent the ability of officers who have served as chairmen of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has produced a part of what our proposal sought. But the prestige of form, rank, and authority to recommend, as well as the help of a staff, would accomplish more.” Acheson made it clear that the Chief would not have “command functions,” so it is a close question whether his proposal would have created a top officer. Evidence that Acheson intended to create a top officer with some amount of executive authority is that he favorably compared the position to the Army Chief of Staff.<sup>180</sup>

**Rationale:** Acheson argued that the JCS was inadequate because “[t]he members of the committee are burdened by both staff and command duties, some of which require committee action. This organization is extremely difficult for civilian officers engaged in foreign affairs to work with. All too often it produces for those looking for military advice and guidance only oracular utterances....Even on a tentative basis, it is hard for high officials to get military advice in our government. When one does get it, it is apt to be unresponsive to the problems bothering

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<sup>178</sup> Senate Committee on Military Affairs, *Department of Common Defense: Report*, 3 and 10.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>180</sup> Dean Acheson, *Present at the Creation: My Years in the State Department* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969), 243-244.

the civilian official.”<sup>181</sup>

**Where to find it:** Acheson, *Present at the Creation*

*Note: It can be difficult to identify and understand top officer proposals in the period from 1959 through 1986. Under the 1958 Department of Defense Reorganization Act, the chain of command ran from the President to the Secretary of Defense, and from the Secretary to the combatant commands and the military departments. But on December 31, 1958, Secretary of Defense Neil H. McElroy issued a confusing directive. The directive established “two command lines: one for the operational direction of the armed forces and the second for the direction of support activities through the Secretaries of the Military Departments.” According to the directive, “[t]he operational chain of command was to run ‘from the President to the Secretary of Defense and through the Joint Chiefs of Staff to the commanders of unified and specified commands.’” Although “[i]t was generally understood that the word ‘through’ implied that the Joint Chiefs of Staff would be transmitters, and not originators, of command orders,” the directive caused uncertainty about whether the JCS was in the chain of command and what the JCS’s precise powers were.<sup>182</sup> The landmark 1985 report prepared by the staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, described the pre-Goldwater-Nichols state of affairs:*

*There is considerable confusion over the roles of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the operational chain of command. As a result, the appropriate relationships between the operational commanders and those above them in the chain of command are very uncertain. There are two basic causes of this confusion: unclear statutes relating to the role of the Secretary of Defense in the chain of command and [the] ambiguous DoD directive relating to the role of the JCS.<sup>183</sup>*

*Because the role of the JCS in the chain of command remained ambiguous until Congress passed the Goldwater-Nichols Act in 1986, proposals to replace the JCS with a single officer could also be ambiguous. It is sometimes unclear whether reformers wanted to vest that officer with executive authority, or whether they wanted the officer to merely serve as a transmission link from the Secretary to the military.*

**Date:** 1960

**Proposed by:** General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Army Chief of Staff and future JCS Chairman

**Proposed in:** Taylor’s book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*

**Summary:** Taylor recommended replacing the JCS with “a single Defense Chief of Staff for the one-man functions [of the JCS] and by a new advisory body called provisionally the Supreme Military Council. The service Chiefs of Staff would lose their Joint Chief hats and would return to their services to act exclusively as Chiefs of Staff to the respective department Secretaries. The new Defense Chief of Staff would preside over the present Joint Staff [and] would wear four or five stars and be the senior military officer of the United States Government reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense and to the President. He would be legally and overtly a single Chief

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 243.

<sup>182</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 142.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid, 303.

of Staff, with public responsibility corresponding to his great authority.”<sup>184</sup>

**Rationale:** Taylor argued that the JCS could “engage in useful deliberations on matters of policy when time is not a factor and unanimity is not important. But [the Chiefs] are not qualified to cope with operational matters which require an immediate decision without awaiting the outcome of debates characteristic of a council of war.” To fix this, Taylor recommended “separat[ing] the responsibilities of the Joint Chiefs of Staff which can be dealt with by committee methods from those which require one-man responsibility in order to get acceptable results.” In Taylor’s view, “[b]y sorting out the committee-type and the operational-type functions of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and by fixing clear responsibility for their discharge, it would appear that we would overcome most of the disadvantages noted in the present JCS system.”<sup>185</sup>

**Where to find it:** Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*

**Date:** 1960

**Proposed by:** Committee on the Defense Establishment, appointed by President-elect John F. Kennedy and chaired by Stuart Symington

**Proposed in:** *Report on Reorganization of Department of Defense*

**Summary:** Among other things, the “Symington Report” recommended reconstituting the JCS “so the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs (to be redesignated Chairman of the Joint Staff) would be the principal military adviser to the President and the Secretary of Defense. The Chairman would preside over a group of senior officers from all services to be known as the Military Advisory Council. Each of such senior officers would be appointed by the President and would no longer have any functions or responsibilities in the service from which he came and to which he would not return. In addition, the Chairman would direct the Joint Staff enlarged commensurate with the added responsibilities of the Chairman.” The commanders of the unified and specified commands “would report directly to the Chairman of the Joint Staff[.]” The Secretary of Defense, or “the Chairman of the Joint Staff by authority and direction of the Secretary,” would issue “orders to commanders of unified and specified commands[.]”<sup>186</sup>

**Rationale:** According to the report, “[t]he existing structure of the Department of Defense is still patterned primarily on a design conceived in the light of lessons learned in World War II, which are now largely obsolete.” Among the “major objectives to be sought in modernizing the present Defense Department structure,” the report argued that “the predominance of service influence in the formulation of defense planning and the performance of military missions must be corrected. At present defense planning represents at best a series of compromised positions among the military services. Action by the Joint Chief [sic] of Staff takes place if at all, only after prolonged debate, coordination and negotiation between the staffs of the three service chiefs in preparing them to represent the points of view of their services in the Joint Chief of Staff. No different results can be expected as long as the members of the Joint Chief of Staff retain their two-hatted character, with their positions preconditioned by the service environment to which they must return after each session of the Joint Chief of Staff. Nor can the Joint Staff become

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<sup>184</sup> Taylor, *The Uncertain Trumpet*, 176.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid, 175 and 177.

<sup>186</sup> Committee on the Defense Establishment, “Report on Reorganization of Department of Defense,” 1960, in House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff [H.R. 6828, Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1982]: Hearings before the Investigations Subcommittee of the Armed Services Committee, 97th Cong., 2d sess., 1982, 639-640.*

fully effective in developing the basis for clear military judgment unless the present degree of influence exercised by separate service thinking is sharply reduced. In short, there is a clear need for defense interest rather than particular service interest.”<sup>187</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*; Lynn, “The Wars Within”

**Date:** July 1, 1970

**Proposed by:** Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, appointed by President Richard Nixon and chaired by Gilbert W. Fitzhugh

**Proposed in:** *Report to The [sic] President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense*

**Summary:** Among other things, the “Fitzhugh Report” recommended transferring the JCS’s responsibility “to serve as military staff in the chain of operational command...to a single senior military officer, who should also supervise the separate staff which provides staff support on military operations and the channel of communications from the President and Secretary of Defense to Unified Commands....This senior military officer could be either the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, as an individual, not ex-officio, the Commander of the Tactical Command [a proposed new organization], or some other senior military officer, as determined by the President and the Secretary of Defense.”<sup>188</sup> It is unclear whether the panel envisioned the senior officer as having executive authority and, if so, how much.

**Rationale:** The panel identified several problems with the structure, processes, and policies of the Department of Defense. One was that “[t]he present arrangement for staffing the military operations activities for the President and the Secretary of Defense through the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Military Departments is awkward and unresponsive; it provides a forum for inter-Service conflicts to be injected into the decision-making process for military operations; and it inhibits the flow of information between the combatant commands and the President and the Secretary of Defense, often even in crisis situations.”<sup>189</sup>

**Where to find it:** Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, *Report to The President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense*

**Date:** July 1978

**Proposed by:** Richard C. Steadman

**Proposed in:** *The National Military Command Structure: Report of a study requested by the President and conducted in the Department of Defense*

**Summary:** The “Steadman Report,” prepared at the request of President Jimmy Carter, recommended that “the Chairman should now be given authority to play a more active role with the [combatant commanders], and that this authority should be formally delegated to the Chairman by the Secretary.” The report envisioned the Chairman as “the Secretary’s agent in managing the [commanders].”<sup>190</sup> While the report was not explicit about making the Chairman a top officer, Steadman clarified his views a few years later (discussed below).

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid, 637-638.

<sup>188</sup> Blue Ribbon Defense Panel, *Report to The President and the Secretary of Defense on the Department of Defense* (Washington, DC: July, 1, 1970), 4, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a013261.pdf>.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid, 1.

<sup>190</sup> Richard C. Steadman, *The National Military Command Structure: Report of a Study Requested by the President and Conducted in the Department of Defense* (Washington, DC: July, 1978), 34-35, accessed March 21, 2021, <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a086048.pdf>.

**Rationale:** The report noted that “DoD directives now in force do not provide the [combatant commanders] with a single military superior in Washington. This has two negative aspects. First, the [commanders] do not have a formal spokesman in the Washington arena to assure that their viewpoints are part of the decisionmaking process. Second, there is no single military officer responsible for overseeing and directing [their] activities...they have no military boss per se. These are both functions which the Chairman now informally, and in part, fulfills, but he is naturally inhibited by not having a clear formal mandate.” According to the report, the JCS “committee structure is not effective for the exercise of military command or management authority. Such authority could be more effectively exercised by the Chairman[.]”<sup>191</sup>

**Where to find it:** Steadman, *The National Military Command Structure*

**Date:** April 21, 1982

**Proposed by:** General Edward C. Meyer, Army Chief of Staff

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Meyer restated the arguments for JCS reform that he had made in the April 1982 edition of the *Armed Forces Journal*. Among other things, Meyer recommended putting the Chairman in the chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the commanders of the unified and specified commands. Meyer was asked about the “prohibition in the law at present which would not allow the chairman to exercise military command” and whether he would “recommend that that prohibition be removed[.]” Meyer responded, “Yes. I believe it should be [removed],” suggesting that he was in favor of giving the Chairman command authority. According to Meyer, “[t]he [combatant commanders] would report directly to the Chairman, not through the Secretary of Defense as currently required.”<sup>192</sup> Meyer’s proposal differed slightly from the recommendation of Air Force General David C. Jones, the JCS Chairman, who appeared at the same hearing. Where Meyer recommended putting the Chairman in the chain of command, Jones recommended giving “the chairman oversight of the unified and specified commands” and having the chain of command go “through the chairman” from the Secretary of Defense to subordinate commands.<sup>193</sup> (The law today concerning the role of the Chairman closely resembles Jones’s proposal. See footnote 1.)

**Rationale:** Meyer argued that developments since World War II “[demand] that our national security policy be buttressed by better and faster planning mechanisms. It also demands that the roles of the civilian and military leaders charged with vital responsibility be clearly defined so we are able to provide citizens the defense posture necessary to assure their freedoms.” Meyer told the committee that he “believe[d] we have to increase the role of the chairman so that he is the provider of military advice concerning inter-service capabilities and requirements, and the provider of advice on operational matters.”<sup>194</sup> Having the combatant commanders “report directly to the Chairman” would create a “direct relationship [that] would enhance the concurrent, complementary activities of these principals and their staffs. The advantage of this linkage is the focus it would give to the principal military functions involved: strategic guidance, operational planning and, in the ultimate, the operations themselves. This strengthened relationship [between the Chairman and the commanders] would pay immense dividends in the

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, April 21, 1982, 32-33 and 37 (testimony of General Edward C. Meyer)

<sup>193</sup> Ibid, 49 (testimony of General David C. Jones).

<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

crucial transition from peace to war.”<sup>195</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*; Lynn, “The Wars Within”

**Date:** April 21, 1982

**Proposed by:** Representative Newt Gingrich

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Appearing at the same hearing as Meyer and Jones, Gingrich recommended replacing the Chairman with “a Chief of the Joint Staff” which could “well be a five-star position.” The combatant commanders would report to the Chief of the Joint Staff. Gingrich also recommended creating “a true Joint Staff...made up of men and women who would plan never to return to their services, but who would serve in combatant commands to retain touch with reality...They would, in effect, be rotating constantly within a joint system. This would, I think, create a sense of joint awareness for those who are concerned about the dangers of an inbred general staff.”<sup>196</sup>

**Rationale:** Observing “that we have had almost 25 years now of reviews” and “over a dozen major studies of the Joint Chiefs of Staff system,” Gingrich said that “[n]o one who studied it has been very happy with it. Many people have been extremely unhappy with it.” Gingrich argued that “[w]e need to create a command and control system capable of waging, if necessary, a global conflict and a system sufficiently dynamic and lean that the Soviets will have reason to believe we could, in fact, survive in a real confrontation.” Among other problems, Gingrich said that “we have great duplication of effort, and we have a great deal of committee decisionmaking, rather than the kind of synergistic effort that” the United States would need to defeat the better-resourced Soviets.<sup>197</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*

**Date:** July 14, 1982

**Proposed by:** Retired General Maxwell D. Taylor, former Army Chief of Staff and JCS Chairman

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the House Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Taylor reprised his 1960 proposal for a single Chief of Staff. In order to fix “the problem of providing qualified military advice and staff support to the Secretary of Defense,” Taylor proposed “transfer[ring] to the Secretary the present Joint Staff, renamed the Military Staff, National Command Authorities, and remodeled to meet his particular needs. It would be headed by the Chief of Staff, National Command Authorities, who would be the senior officer of the Armed Forces, the immediate subordinate of the Secretary of Defense in the channel of command, and a regular member of the National Security Council. In all these roles, he would be the principal military adviser on matters related to current military policy, strategy, and major DOD programs....The Military Staff, composed of officers drawn from all services in appropriate numbers, would be organized along conventional military lines with staff sections for personnel, intelligence, operations, plans, logistics, and budget. In serving the Secretary, the

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>196</sup> House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*, April 21, 1982, 43-44 (testimony of Representative Newt Gingrich).

<sup>197</sup> Ibid, 43 and 45.



staff would deal extensively with matters affecting the [combatant commands]. Some of those things might include the drafting of orders, directives, and strategic guidance for them, the review of their war and contingency plans, the verification of the task readiness of their forces and the adequacy of their resources to carry out their assigned tasks....The Chief of Staff, National Command Authorities, in addition to supervising the Military Staff, would be prepared to advise the Secretary of Defense on all major matters relating to the current forces, their progress, budget and research and development programs.”<sup>198</sup>

**Rationale:** Taylor focused on “three major flaws in the JCS system: First, the failure of the chiefs to carry out satisfactorily their statutory obligation to serve as the principal military adviser to the President, the National Security Council, and the Secretary of Defense. Second, a lack of clarity in defining the relationships among the National Command Authorities[, and, third,] the absence of a military staff capable of supporting the Secretary of Defense in his duties, both in the NCA and as head of the Department of Defense.”<sup>199</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Reorganization Proposals for the Joint Chiefs of Staff*; Lynn, “The Wars Within”

**Date:** April 18, 1983, and September 20, 1983

**Proposed by:** Department of Defense

**Proposed in:** The department’s legislative proposal concerning H.R. 3145 and comments on H.R. 3718

**Summary:** The April 18 letter that accompanied the department’s proposal concerning H.R. 3145 explained that “[t]he proposal would place the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the national military chain of command[.]”<sup>200</sup> There was some confusion whether the department’s proposal would have given the Chairman meaningful authority or whether it would have merely made the Chairman the link through which the Secretary of Defense communicated with the combatant commanders.<sup>201</sup> The department provided “a more detailed explanation of [its] views” in a September 20 letter to Representative Bill Nichols, Chairman of the Investigations Subcommittee of the House Armed Services Committee, concerning the provisions of H.R. 3718 (discussed below). In that letter, the department stated its support for “the provision of the bill that would formally place the JCS Chairman in the national military chain of command.” But the department also stated its opposition to casting the Chairman “in the role of supreme military commander,” arguing that “[i]t is one thing to place the Chairman in the national chain of command; it is quite another to vest him with supreme military command in his own right.”<sup>202</sup> The department’s distinction between putting the Chairman in the chain of command and making him a commander did little to clarify whether the Chairman would have exercised any amount of authority. As a result, it is unclear if this was a true top officer proposal.

**Rationale:** In its September 20 letter, the department stated its support for “the provision of the bill that would formally place the JCS Chairman in the national military chain of command” because “[t]he *de facto* role of the Chairman in serving as the link between the Secretary of

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid, 805 (testimony of retired General Maxwell D. Taylor).

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 801-802.

<sup>200</sup> William H. Taft, IV, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, to Thomas P. O’Neill, Speaker of the House of Representatives, April 18, 1983, in Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 98.

<sup>201</sup> See Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*, 98-99.

<sup>202</sup> William H. Taft, IV, General Counsel of the Department of Defense, to Bill Nichols, Chairman, Investigations Subcommittee, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives, September 20, 1983, in House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report*, 13-14.

Defense and the combatant commands is nowhere officially recognized—an anomaly which this provision of H.R. 3718 would remedy. It is entirely appropriate for the highest ranking officer of the armed forces to transmit orders of the President and Secretary of Defense to the combatant commands.”<sup>203</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report*; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*; Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*

**Date:** September 20, 1983

**Proposed by:** Richard C. Steadman

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Steadman recommended putting the Chairman in the chain of command.

**Rationale:** Echoing the language of his 1978 report, Steadman argued that “the field commanders [have] no military boss in Washington, thus depriving them of a formal source of assistance in their dealings with the Services on whom they rely for man and material [sic]. It also means there is in the Pentagon no adequate formal review of the status and performance of the field commands. And most importantly, it means that commands to the field are generally subject to the cumbersome JCS process of coordination and compromise. This becomes particularly important in complex multi-service operations, such as the rescue attempt in Iran, where the lack of a central planning and mission control staff under a single commander seems to have been a key element in its failure. To correct this situation, the Congress should formally place the Chairman in the chain of command.”<sup>204</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense (Part 2)*

**Date:** October 17, 1983

**Proposed by:** Representative Bill Nichols (and 24 cosponsors)

**Proposed in:** H.R. 3718 – Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983

**Summary:** The bill, which the House of Representatives passed on the above date, would have removed the limit on the size of the Joint Staff and put the Chairman in the chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders, among other things.<sup>205</sup>

**Rationale:** The bill was a response to “[t]he unsettling message revealed” during 1982 House Armed Services Committee hearings “that organizational flaws mar the performance of the present Joint Chiefs of Staff.” Those flaws included the lack of “a single military individual in the chain of command” and restrictions on the Joint Staff that “adversely affected” its work.<sup>206</sup>

**Where to find it:** House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report*; Locher, *Victory on the Potomac*

**Date:** 1983

**Proposed by:** Dr. Harold Brown, former Secretary of Defense

**Proposed in:** Brown’s book, *Thinking about National Security: Defense and Foreign Policy in a*

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid, 14.

<sup>204</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense*, pt. 2, September 20, 1983, 88 (testimony of Richard C. Steadman).

<sup>205</sup> See generally, House Committee on Armed Services, *Joint Chiefs of Staff Reorganization Act of 1983: Report*.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid, 3-5.

*Dangerous World*, and a November 17 hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee  
**Summary:** According to Brown, “[b]y far the best solution [to replace the JCS] would be to have a Chief of Military Staff” at the head of “a Joint General Staff” because it would “introduce a clearer and less parochial military view on issues of military strategy and capabilities[.]” The “General Staff would be able to review, compare, and suggest changes in the plans of commanders with different geographical or functional responsibilities and to decide among their competing demands for limited combat resources.” Additionally, “[t]he President, the Secretary of Defense, and Congress would be able to get much clearer and more accountable military advice” from a single Chief than from the JCS collectively. Under Brown’s plan, the service chiefs would continue to report to the service secretaries, but the Chief of Military Staff “would make an overall budget recommendation, including a ranking of priorities from among the programs of the different services.”<sup>207</sup>

**Rationale:** Brown criticized the JCS for often producing “lowest-common-denominator [compromises] rather than making hard choices either between services or between operational theaters.”<sup>208</sup>

**Where to find it:** Brown, *Thinking about National Security*; Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Organization, Structure and Decisionmaking Procedures of the Department of Defense* (Part 12)

**Date:** October 16, 1985

**Proposed by:** Staff, Senate Armed Services Committee

**Proposed in:** *Defense Organization: The Need for Change* (staff report to the committee)

**Summary:** *Defense Organization* was a landmark, 600+-page study that greatly influenced the 1986 Goldwater-Nichols Act. The study presented and assessed a range of reform options. One option was to “place the JCS Chairman in the chain of command[.]” According to the study, “[u]nder this option, the JCS Chairman would have a much more forceful role in choosing and implementing military operational actions. He could be authorized to handle routine operational matters by issuing commands and only involve the Secretary of Defense on critical issues. Moreover, it would be logical under this option to make the JCS Chairman the exclusive contact at the DoD policymaking level for the operational commanders, at least on operational matters.”<sup>209</sup>

**Rationale:** The study did not advocate for any particular reform proposal, but rather provided a menu of options for the committee to consider. The study noted that “[p]roposals to place the JCS Chairman in the chain of command are based upon (1) concerns about the relative inexperience and limited time of the Secretary of Defense; (2) the utility of having a single military point of contact and a single command voice of higher authority within the Washington headquarters of DoD on operational matters; (3) the need for formal military representation in the Washington headquarters portion of the chain of command; and (4) concerns that command by a committee (the JCS) violates the principal [sic] of unity of command.” The study observed that “[t]he current limits on the authority of the JCS Chairman preclude him from developing recommendations on operational matters that set aside undue Service parochialism in the search for effective courses of action. Placing the JCS Chairman alone in the chain of command may give him the stature and independent authority necessary to rise above Service parochialism. It

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<sup>207</sup> Brown, *Thinking about National Security*, 210.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

<sup>209</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*, 325-326.

may be possible for the Chairman to make objective recommendations to the Secretary of Defense. Additionally, as a member of the chain of command, the JCS Chairman would clearly become the focal point within the Washington headquarters of DoD for the operational commanders on operational matters.” The study acknowledged that the “[a]rguments against this option also have merit. Key among these is the view that putting the JCS Chairman in the chain of command would weaken the authority of the Secretary of Defense. This option could lead to circumvention of the Secretary and to insulation and isolation of the Secretary from the operational commanders. Should these negative predictions occur, the Secretary’s ability to effectively manage DoD would be impaired and civilian control of the military would be weakened.”<sup>210</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Defense Organization: The Need for Change*

**Date:** November 10, 2015

**Proposed by:** Jim Thomas, Vice President for Studies at the Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Thomas proposed replacing the Chairman with a Chief of the General Staff and the Joint Staff with a General Staff. The Chief of the General Staff “would be principally responsible for formulating military strategy, developing concept plans, and directing global force allocation and application” and “would play the critical role of global integrator and decider between competing military demands consistent with guidance from the President and Secretary of Defense.” The Chief would have “decision and directive authorities” over all military forces, including both the combatant commands and the services. The General Staff would serve as “the military’s global brain[.]” In order “[t]o address Congress’ historical concerns about the over-concentration of power invested in [one] individual,” Thomas proposed that “the Chief of the General Staff should not be the principal military adviser to the President (unlike the current Chairman) but should be under the direction and control of the Secretary of Defense[.]” By Thomas’s own admission, his proposal would result in “major organizational changes, not modest, inoffensive tweaks to the system.”<sup>211</sup>

**Rationale:** Thomas argued that the military lacked “an effective central control entity” and that “no military leader in our current system is empowered to prioritize efforts across regions[.]” As a result, staff processes were “cumbersome and time-consuming,” and frequently led to “lowest-common-denominator outcomes that everyone can live with” instead of good decisions.<sup>212</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*

**Date:** December 8, 2015

**Proposed by:** Michael G. Vickers, former Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Vickers recommended “transforming the Joint Staff into a Joint General Staff” headed by the Chairman, who would be “dual-hatted as the Chief of the Joint General Staff[.]” The staff’s officers would be subject to “a rigorous selection process that would seek to identify those with potential to serve as strategists[.]” They “would [then] spend the remaining two-

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<sup>210</sup> Ibid, 338.

<sup>211</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *30 Years of Goldwater-Nichols Reform*, 27-29 (Thomas testimony).

<sup>212</sup> Ibid, 22.

thirds to three-quarters of their careers in the Joint General Staff, rotating back to their Services of origin periodically to maintain operational currency.” The “Joint General Staff would be focused exclusively on the conduct and preparation for war at the strategic and operational levels as opposed to the wide and duplicative range of broad policy and staff functions the current Joint Staff engages in.”<sup>213</sup> Vickers did not say exactly how the Chief/Chairman would fit into the chain of command, but the clear implication was that he or she would have some amount of executive authority, given the Joint General Staff’s focus on the “conduct” of war. It was unclear from Vickers’s testimony whether the Chief/Chairman would exercise authority over all military forces, to include the services, or just the combatant commands. By virtue of being “dual-hatted” as both the JCS Chairman and the Chief of the Joint General Staff, the Chief/Chairman would retain the role of principal military adviser to the President.

**Rationale:** Vickers argued that the military’s main problem was bad strategy, and in his testimony he proposed a number of ways to improve it.<sup>214</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy, and Plans*; Vickers, “Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy and Plans”

**Date:** December 10, 2015

**Proposed by:** General Norton A. Schwartz, former Air Force Chief of Staff and commander of U.S. Transportation Command

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Schwartz proposed putting the Chairman in the operational chain of command between the Secretary of Defense and the combatant commanders. He recommended that the Chairman be given “directive authority...for force employment, deciding force allocation tradeoffs between Combatant Commands and establishing strategic priorities for the Armed Forces[.]”<sup>215</sup> Schwartz did not propose changing the Chairman’s advisory role or the service chain of command; the service chiefs would continue reporting to the service secretaries. He recommended against a general staff, arguing that the Joint Staff should remain “a creature of the Joint Chiefs” in order to “minimize concern about a rogue individual.”<sup>216</sup> This was a reference to the oft-cited concern that the Chairman could become too strong politically if he were in the chain of command and threaten civilian control of the military. In recommending a top officer but not a general staff, Schwartz hoped to obtain the benefits of empowering the Chairman while guarding against the risks of doing so.

**Rationale:** Schwartz told the committee that, based on his “experience as a former member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Joint Staff, I have come to the conclusion that the Chairman’s informal role in supervising the Combatant Commanders and the JCS is insufficient for the demands of our times.” According to Schwartz, decisions “should not be the result of bureaucratic negotiation or the exquisite application of personal suasion but, rather, the product of strategic leadership. That capacity is constrained by the Chairman’s inability to exercise executive authority on behalf of the Secretary of Defense.”<sup>217</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military*

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<sup>213</sup> Vickers, “Improving the Pentagon’s Development of Policy, Strategy and Plans,” 4 and 6.

<sup>214</sup> See generally, *ibid.*

<sup>215</sup> Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*, 7 (Schwartz testimony).

<sup>216</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

## *Operations*

**Date:** December 10, 2015

**Proposed by:** Retired Admiral James G. Stavridis, Dean of the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, and former commander of U.S. European and Southern Commands

**Proposed in:** Hearing before the Senate Armed Services Committee

**Summary:** Stavridis recommended “making the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the senior operational commander, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense.” The combatant commanders would report to the Chairman while the service chiefs would continue reporting to the service secretaries. A general staff would support the Chairman. It would be made up of “mid-grade military officers of extraordinary promise [pulled] from their services and more or less permanently [assigned] to [it].” Stavridis characterized his proposal as a modest change, noting that it was “how the system largely works in practice anyway; and it would merely codify the existing custom into a sensible, linear chain of command.” Stavridis did not recommend changing the Chairman’s role of principal military adviser to the President.<sup>218</sup>

**Rationale:** In Stavridis’s view, the effects of Goldwater-Nichols “ha[d] been overwhelmingly good. But three decades is a long time, and it makes a great deal of sense to look at new ways to think about how [the Department of Defense] is run.” According to Stavridis, putting the Chairman, at the head of a general staff, into the operational chain of command would be efficient and would avoid duplication by “reduc[ing] a great deal of what happens in the combatant commands today.”<sup>219</sup>

**Where to find it:** Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Increasing Effectiveness of Military Operations*

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, 9 and 11-12 (Stavridis testimony).

<sup>219</sup> Ibid, 10.

## **Appendix C**

### **Enduring arguments for and against a top officer**

The arguments for and against a top officer have changed little since World War II. There are two major camps with opposite views on the subject. Coming out of the war, the split was between the Army and its supporters, on one side, and the Navy and Marine Corps, along with their supporters, on the other. That has gradually evolved to the point where the camps are no longer neatly divided along service lines. The following table summarizes the major arguments that have recurred throughout the history of the idea, even as the context in which they were made has changed. The table is necessarily oversimplified and incomplete, but it captures the main areas of dispute and the general positions of the camps. Some of the arguments within the same camp may seem to contradict one another. That is because members of the same camp have sometimes arrived at the same position, but for different reasons.

Camp Issue area	For a top officer	Against a top officer
<b>Civilian control</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer would strengthen civilian control by promoting accountability and simplifying the nexus between the military and its civilian overseers</li> <li>•A top officer would not weaken civilian control because he or she would be subordinate to the Secretary of Defense and President</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer would increase the risk of “the man on horseback,” a military commander who could seize power or dominate civilian officials</li> <li>•Even if the Secretary of Defense and President are nominally superior, a top officer would have the upper hand in the civil-military relationship</li> </ul>
<b>Efficiency</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer could slice through bureaucratic red tape and get things done</li> <li>•Inefficiency is a bug of our system, not a feature; the military is unnecessarily inefficient and the chain of command should be streamlined</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer would add another layer of bureaucracy and would make things less efficient, not more</li> <li>•Inefficiency is a feature of our democratic system, not a bug; the military is inefficient by design and should stay that way</li> </ul>
<b>Secretary of Defense</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The Secretary has too much on his or her plate to manage military operations and planning; a top officer would be able to give those subjects the attention they deserve</li> <li>•Opponents of reform used to claim that there was no need for a Secretary because the President, as Commander in Chief, could do the job; they were wrong then, and are wrong now</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The chain of command is already unified in the Secretary, and there is no benefit to pushing the point of unification further down the organizational chart</li> <li>•If the military is not making good decisions or is not acting quickly enough, then Congress should reform the role and responsibilities of the Secretary; shifting power to a top officer will not solve the root causes of whatever problems may exist</li> </ul>
<b>Military advice</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The quality of military advice would not be degraded because (in some proposals) there would be a body, independent of the top officer, to provide advice to the Secretary and the President</li> <li>•Dissent channels from the military to civilian overseers would prevent a top officer from blocking contrary opinions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Military advice would suffer because the top officer would quash dissent</li> <li>•Proposals for an advisory body are inadequate because the top officer would dominate it</li> <li>•If an advisory body was strong enough to check the power of the top officer, then that would defeat the</li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The advisory function currently performed by the Chairman could be taken away from the top officer (in some proposals) and performed by someone else</li> </ul>	<p>purpose of having a top officer in the first place</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•If the Chairman was made the top officer, then that would be dangerous because the Chairman would be both the principal military adviser to the President and in the chain of command</li> </ul>
<b>Innovation and initiative</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Having a top officer would improve innovation and initiative because it would put an end to parochial infighting and direct competitive energies in a common direction</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•Centralizing power in a top officer would quash innovation and competition</li> <li>•A top officer would inevitably prefer his or her own service and would be limited by the lessons of his or her own experience</li> </ul>
<b>Unity of command</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•The principle of unity of command should apply at all levels, from the President to the platoon; the Joint Force should be no different</li> <li>•If the job is too big for one person, then that means the Secretary and the President are also incapable of it, which cannot be true</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•There should be unity of command in the field for operations, but not for long-term strategy and planning in Washington</li> <li>•At the national level, many heads are better than one</li> <li>•No one person is capable of being in charge of the entire military—the job is just too big</li> </ul>
<b>Centralization vs. decentralization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer would centralize strategic planning and direction while enabling decentralized execution of operations</li> <li>•A top officer would be focused on global operations, long-term planning, and common Joint Force functions, not on micro-management</li> <li>•Accusations that a top officer would result in a “Prussian-style” general staff are slanderous, outdated, and inaccurate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•A top officer would inevitably micro-manage activity at the operational and tactical levels</li> <li>•A top officer responsible for global planning and operations would require a massive, “Prussian-style” staff; history tells us that model does not work and is dangerous</li> <li>•Even if power was centralized in a top officer, the military would just have to decentralize internally, creating new seams and gaps to replace existing ones; nothing would be gained</li> </ul>

<p><b>Readiness for the next war</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To be ready to fight the next big war, the military must be organized to fight it now</li> <li>• The next war will be global, fast, and all-domain, and therefore will require unity of command, swift decisions, and a global perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The potential benefits of having a top officer in peacetime so as to be ready for the next war are outweighed by the threat it would pose to civilian control of the military</li> <li>• The military will never be organized in peacetime as it would have to be in wartime; it will inevitably have to reorganize</li> <li>• The military will not fight the next war alone; it will be part of a whole-of-government effort led by the President</li> <li>• Other than launching nuclear weapons, which have their own system of command and control, strategic decisions do not have to be made quickly; there is time for consultation</li> </ul>
<p><b>Strategic thinking</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A top officer would improve strategic thinking because he or she would have a global perspective and would not be limited by service bias or other parochial interests</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When it comes to strategic thinking, many heads are better than one</li> <li>• A top officer would inevitably prefer his or her own service and would be limited by the lessons of his or her own experience</li> </ul>

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