BOOK REVIEWS and NOTES

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DECISIONS FOR DEFENSE

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The departure of Robert McNamara from the Department of Defense coincided approximately with the conclusion of two decades of armed services unification. It is fitting for both reasons to sum up recent events at the Department, and study their present impact on the country and their portent for the future. Of the spate of recent books bearing on these subjects, the three discussed herein are particularly significant and complement each other in coverage. The evolution of the present defense organization and procedures within the Executive Branch is presented authoritatively in The President and the Management of National Security. The most important Defense Department actor to date provides a personal view of recent organizational and procedural changes and their impact in The Essence of Security, and a well-informed observer (and sometime participant) assesses what has happened to the nation in The Weapons Culture.

McNamara the Leader

In The Essence of Security, Robert McNamara asserts his beliefs about the importance of management: "Its medium is human capacity, and its most fundamental task is to deal with change. It is the gate through which social, political, economic, technological change in every dimension, is rationally spread through society." A further important belief presented is that a manager should eschew the role of a "judge" who "waits until subordinates bring him problems for solution, or alternates for choice." Rather, he should assume the role of a leader who "immerses himself in his operation, and leads and stimulates an examination of the objectives, the problems and the alternatives."

That McNamara immersed himself in and led his operation there can be little doubt. In The TFX Decision, Robert Art ¹ points out how, early in his career as Secretary of Defense, McNamara reversed a unanimous recommendation by five generals and admirals of the Defense Source Selection Board and other high-ranking officers—the Chiefs of Staff of the Air Force and Navy among them—concerning the choice of the contractor for the bisection plane. If any previous Secretary of Defense, or any service secretary before unification, did anything similar, it has gone unrecorded.

Not much more than a dozen years before McNamara took office, James Forrestal said

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of the proposal to create the Defense Department, according to Jack Raymond: "I do not believe that the head of the proposed Government colossus . . . will ever have more than the most superficial knowledge of the Department." On being appointed first Secretary of Defense he said: "This office will probably be the biggest cemetery for dead cats in history."

It became apparent soon after McNamara took office that, from the military view, he was anything but a dead cat. Hanson Baldwin termed the situation in the Department "the McNamara Monarchy" and another military writer called the former president of the Ford Motor Company a "civilian on horseback."

Firmly entrenched as the Defense Department leader, enjoying the confidence of Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, no man had a better opportunity than McNamara, in his management position, to spread defense changes rationally throughout society. His successes and failures tell something of the still-controversial figure, but even more about the overall process of defense decisions in the nation as a whole.

Unfortunately, McNamara's book consists largely of a collection of presentations to Congress and to various groups, providing primarily personal opinions on a variety of subjects and the details of some of the organizational changes and weapons choice decisions made under his aegis. Few insights may be gained into his relations with others, or the dynamics of the great change in American defense policies and practices that took place while he was a central actor.

The President and the Management of National Security highlights the important organizational, personnel, and procedural changes in the Defense Department introduced by McNamara: use of PPBS, establishment of the Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Systems Analysis, and the coming of Hitch, Anthony, Enthoven, Nitze, Brown, et al. These changes enabled "the secretary of defense . . . really to gain control of the department."

"These then," the authors of the chapter on "Changes in the Department of Defense" write, "are the basic dimensions of the McNamara Revolution." Hardly! The organizational changes, the emphasis on systems analysis, the key aides, and even the ascendancy of department civilians are transitory legacies of "the McNamara Monarchy," changed, in many instances, in the first year of the new Administration. The really basic changes during the Kennedy Administration and the first three Johnson years, with McNamara at the defense helm, include the changes in the National Security Council, the staff of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the like, as is so clearly stated in the Institute for Defense Analyses report. The resulting impact, however, has been seven years of a continued, if not escalated arms race, the heavy involvement of the United States in Vietnam, the ascendancy, or rather further ascendancy, of the Defense Department in gaining access to government resources and decision-making powers, and the decision to deploy a "light" ABM system.

Paradoxically, McNamara was heavily involved in the decision process leading to each of the above, yet had reservations or second thoughts about all of them.

Arms Escalation

The heating up of the arms race was foreordained in 1960 by the election of John F. Kennedy. His campaign call, according to Ralph Lapp in The Weapons Culture, for "crash programs to provide ourselves with the ultimate weapons [to] . . . close the missile gap since [during Eisenhower's terms] it is quite obvious we obtained economic security at the expense of military security," was followed, immediately upon his assumption of office, by a special defense budget message requesting significant increases in strategic missiles. McNamara, in a 1967 speech, provides some indication of the validity and consequences of the decision to approve the budgetary request:

In 1961, when I became Secretary of Defense, the Soviet Union possessed a very small operational arsenal of intercontinental missiles. That decision in itself—as justified [as a conservative hedge] as it was—in the end could not possibly have left unaffected the Soviet Union's future nuclear plans. Clearly the Soviet build-up is in part a reaction to our own build up since the beginning of this decade.

Indeed, Lapp points out that McNamara's knowledge of the fallacy of Soviet missile su-
periority was not only retrospective. More than a month before the budget message, McNamara held a press session in which he declared that there was no missile gap.

"Any accountant going over the postwar books," says Ralph Lapp in his final chapter, "would find some discouraging facts." He points out that over seven-tenths of federal expenditures have been for national security. Almost nine-tenths of federally funded research and development was directed to defense-atomic-space activities, while less than one-tenth of one per cent of such funds went to support research in the area of urban development. "Gradually," says Lapp, "the involvement with defense industry has proceeded to the point where weapons-making begins to dominate our society." According to Lapp's figures, in 1963 the United States was selling armaments to 63 foreign governments, and postwar expenditures for military assistance through 1967 totalled over $35 billion. With the presence of so much modern armament in so many hands, says Lapp, "It is inevitable that American arms become weapons used against us or nations whose cause we support." Writing of the period of McNamara's term as Secretary of Defense, Lapp reviews the ramifications of defense events, showing that our increased expenditures have made us no more secure against our potential enemies—and possibly less—while degrading our domestic existence.

McNamara sprinkles through his presentation a seeming awareness that "military posture is not the central element in our security." He states several times in one form or another that: "We can curb aggression abroad; we can meet our pressing social problems here at home, and we can do both at the same time if we will use wisely the resources we have." Nevertheless, there is a dramatic divergence of view between McNamara and Lapp concerning the ascendancy of the military and its role in the affairs of the United States and other nations.

The former Secretary of Defense sees a bipolar world "overshadowed [by] the permanent possibility of thermonuclear holocaust," a world in which the United States must maintain a carefully measured amount of military strength for deterrence and for protection of friendly developing nations. Far from being concerned about military dominance, he sees "other missions" for the military, contributing to a stable social structure at home, and by advising and "using indigenous military forces for . . . projects that are useful to the local population in . . . anything connected with economic or social progress," an enlarged role for the military abroad. McNamara sees a reduction in military aid requests made by Congress in 1967 as a "serious setback to the entire collective defense effort" in that lip service was paid to the policy, but there was a failure to provide the necessary support to carry it out.

The changes that were made under McNamara in the management of the Department of Defense, described in broad outlines in his book, certainly altered the Department. The presence of McNamara and the introduction of PPB and systems analysis techniques appear, however, to have affected a broader range of policies than those solely within the Department's purview. In the many situations where defense and political considerations commingled, defense was represented by a plethora of "hard" data and the personality of McNamara, characterized by Hilsman as "crisp, decisive, and almost totally lacking in self doubt, [tending] to brush away political and strategic arguments, and to concentrate on what could be quantified." Secretary Rusk, on the other hand, is characterized as "hesitant and tentative" by Hilsman, who says that "he had a great skill with the diplomatist's technique of using words that obscure rather than reveal." Coupled with a State Department which, according to Theodore White in 1961 "had become so tangled as to be almost unfit for any policy-making purpose or decision," the reasons for the primacy of defense influence in national policy decisions becomes apparent.

A further reason for increased defense influence because of the application of systems analysis by the Defense Department is that "we have somehow," as McGeorge Bundy points out in Foreign Affairs, "let the necessary comparisons of one weapons system with another delude us into a belief that these cal-
culations of cost-effectiveness are also calculations of real advantage.”

As had been noted earlier, despite McNamara’s disbelief in Russian strategic weapons superiority over the United States in 1961, a program was launched for a considerable increase in offensive weapons. Though new at the defense helm then, McNamara had more than half a decade in office when he was called on to announce the decision to deploy a “relatively inexpensive—$5 billion” anti-Chinese ABM system as almost his final act. He earlier had opposed a United States ABM. His announcement is in part a primer for not deploying such a system, but he did announce the decision and provide the rationale for it.

Thus, at the very beginning of Robert McNamara’s service in government and at the very end, decisions were made that had considerable influence on the direction of the arms race. In both cases, the decisions appeared to be in response to political pressure. One was intended to justify the charge of a Republican missile gap under Eisenhower, and the other to avoid the criticism that the Democrats under Johnson had neglected our defenses. In both cases, McNamara seemed to oppose the decision, yet he lent his considerable prestige as a rational decision maker to defending them.

What, Ralph Lapp asks, do “all the elaborate systems of defense analysis we possess” avail us “if a U.S. President authorizes a $5 billion Sentinel system to protect himself from Republican charges of failing to insure the nation’s security?”

Few would quarrel with the “most general objectives of the United States” stated in The President and the Management of National Security: “They are to assure the survival and the well being of our own society and to do it without sacrificing those values which underlie and must in the long run guide our . . . policies.”

A perusal of the three volumes indicates the difficulty of pursuing such general objectives. When defense requirements are being weighted, perceptions of external threat vary. Reactions to the judgment of threat tend, as described in the McNamara quotation on the escalation of the missile race of the ’60’s, to make the perceptions self-fulfilling. The values that underlie our policies are also perceived differently and assigned different priorities by concerned actors.

Even if these differences were minimized, there are, from the point of view of the administrators involved, discrete missions that must be defined and performed, but the performance of them affects various groups and the nation as a whole in various, not always foreseeable, ways. In policy matters that transcend a department’s area of interest, when one group with its set of perceptions and solutions becomes dominant (particularly if they tend to avoid seeing complications in other areas), the resulting consequences may well create more problems than they resolve.

From the point of view of an observer such as Lapp, complicating factors and consequences may be seen clearly. Unfortunately, recognition and exposition are not enough. Lapp, as have a host of others in the last two decades, cogently points out the problems created domestically and abroad by the dominance of military defense interests in security matters and priority determination. Neither he nor the others, however, have logical solutions for them. They also do not present logical methods for providing better representation of other interest involved. In fact, one gains the distinct impression from the three books that some may deplore and some may applaud the way security decisions are being made, but there are very few present indications that there will soon be a change in the outcome.

Notes