

## **BACKGROUND MATERIAL ON STRUCTURAL REFORM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE**

### **INTRODUCTION: WHERE HAVE WE BEEN?**

The National Security Act of 1947 was the result of a political compromise made at the dawn of the postwar era. It set in place a system that was not a conventional military structure but one which emphasized the "coordination" of Army, Navy and Air Force. The Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) were set up as a committee and like most committees, they had a chairman who enjoyed only limited powers; indeed, the "chairman" did not even have control over the "joint staff" of the committee. The system preserved much of the traditional autonomy of the services and required unanimity for all but the most routine decisions. Like the Security Council of the United Nations, this great power unanimity was required before any significant action could be taken. This inevitably led to log-rolling and a "least common denominator" approach in providing military advice to civilian decision-makers. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) was the only superior that could effectively counteract service autonomy; consequently, the answer to every defense problem over the last forty years was to add functions—and therefore offices and personnel—to the OSD staff.

The 1958 amendments to the National Security Act reflected the fact that civilian centralization was insufficient to solve the operational problems that ensued whenever the forces of one service had to be used in concert with those of another. The unified command structure that was set up after the war had continued to reflect the interests of the single services who dominated those commands in different areas of the world. Thus, the commands were unified in name more than in fact. Recognizing that, President Eisenhower recommended legislation to correct the most serious flaws, and sent the following message to the Congress:

Separate ground, sea and air warfare is gone forever. If ever again we should be involved in war, we will fight it in all elements, with all services, as one single concentrated effort. Peacetime preparatory and organizational activity must conform to this fact. Strategic and tactical planning must be completely unified, combat forces organized into unified commands, each equipped with the most efficient weapons that science can develop, singly led and prepared to fight as one, regardless of service.

Although Congress strengthened the unified command system somewhat (by removing the service chiefs from the chain of command), it stopped short of carrying out President Eisenhower's recommendations in 1958. In particular, the JCS system was left largely intact. Thus, the American military command structure was seriously flawed as it approached the conflict in Vietnam.