

One of the current duties assigned to the JCS is to "prepare strategic plans and provide for the strategic direction of the armed forces" (clause (1) of section 141(c)). Clause (1) of subsection (d) would change this duty (as assigned to the JCS Chairman) in two ways. First, it would remove any suggestion that the JCS Chairman is to direct the armed forces as a military commander. The current provision, which requires the JCS to "provide for the strategic direction of the armed forces," implies directive authority. The new clause would, instead, specify that the JCS Chairman is responsible for preparing strategic plans that provide for the strategic direction of the armed forces.

Second, clause (1) would require that the strategic plans prepared by the Chairman include plans conforming with resource levels projected by the Secretary of Defense. The Joint Chiefs of Staff do not now prepare such fiscally constrained plans. The major JCS contribution to the strategic planning process, the Joint Strategic Planning Document (JSPD), generally defines the scope of the military threats facing the United States and the military forces required to respond to those threats.

Such unconstrained planning can play a useful role at the beginning of the strategic planning process by establishing benchmarks for comparing projected military capabilities with the force structure required to fulfill (at acceptable levels of risk) national security objectives and policy in light of projected threats. Such comparisons can help to identify deficiencies in the size, configuration, and capabilities of U.S. forces. More importantly, these comparisons can help to link better national security objectives and the level of resources allocated for national defense. Improved linkage would be useful given the current perception of an objectives-force mismatch. Clause (1) of subsection (d) would not preclude the Chairman from continuing to prepare unconstrained strategic plans.

Once objectives and resource levels have been set, however, subsequent strategic planning must take place in the context of fiscal constraints. The fiscally unconstrained nature of the JSPD relegates the JCS to a marginal role in the planning, programming, and budgeting process that eventually yields the annual Defense Department budget request. Thus, while the JSPD provides benefits at the start of the strategic planning process, it does not help to establish priorities and to make difficult resource choices. The President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management reached a similar conclusion in "An Interim Report to the President":

Better long-range planning must be based on military advice of an order not now always available—fiscally constrained, forward looking, and fully integrated. (page 5)

The Committee strongly believes that the JCS Chairman is uniquely qualified to help set military priorities in a fiscally constrained planning document. For this reason, the Committee recommends that the Chairman be assigned this specific duty in law. It should be noted that this fiscally constrained planning document will be meaningful only if the Secretary of Defense provides realistic fiscal guidance to the Chairman. In this way, joint military strategic planning would guide the difficult choices that must be made