



# Should the Navy and The Air Force Merge?

By THOMAS K. FINLETTER

**Troubled by mounting demands for a one-uniform defense force, the former Air Secretary offers a provocative plan: if a change is inevitable, let's try a two-service setup that would end waste and feuding, save morale and—most important—add muscle to our vital air atomic punch**

**T**HERE is a serious move afoot to do away with the Army, Navy and Air Force as separate services and set up a huge combined service all in one uniform. You may not have heard much about this plan, but for months it has been under consideration at important conferences both inside and outside the military establishment, and now it is breaking into the open.

I am against it.

The intent of those who propose this super-unification is, of course, good. Nonetheless, it would weaken the national defense. It would be particularly bad for our air atomic power—our single strongest weapon, the force the Russians really fear, and our greatest hope for preventing World War III.

Destroy the individuality of the Army, Navy and Air Force and you will deal a heavy blow to the strength on which we must rely for security. Great damage would be done to the pride, ingenuity, foresight and imagination that make a military service good—and nowhere are these qualities more necessary than in our air atomic force. There is no need for a single service. It would be much better

to keep the three services the way they are, with amendments to the law which I shall discuss later.

I do not think the move to set up a vast single service has gone so far that it cannot be stopped. But if it has, we should not go all the way. We should stop at two services instead of one. We should combine the Navy and the Air as one service, leaving the Army separate.

#### Air Atomic Program Would Benefit

The Navy, with its carrier task forces, is today largely an air service. The only two large ships it is building today are carriers. It flies 10,000 airplanes. A combination of the Navy and the Air Force would keep air atomic power individual, separate, single-minded, forward-looking and imaginative.

Carrier task forces are the core of the Navy. Battleships, cruisers and destroyers largely protect and support the carriers. Submarines easily could be operated under the proposed combination without damage to their vital role. It therefore is a practical plan to consolidate the Air Force and the

Navy, thus putting together homogeneous elements, both already engaged in the great business of air power.

Much can be said for a two-service arrangement. Two services would be simpler to run than either one service or three. It is a curious political truism that when you have two service departments you do not need a third department to co-ordinate the two; but when you have three service departments, you need a fourth department to co-ordinate the three. Such was the British experience before us, and such has been our experience.

Under a two-service arrangement, the Department of the Air Force-Navy (or whatever it would be called) and the Department of the Army could jointly recommend the forces they needed, after consultations with the Secretaries of State and the Treasury and the Director of the Budget. Differences between them could be resolved by the President. Overlapping or other waste in procurement, supplies, personnel, installations and functions would be handled by the two departments, with the aid of the Budget Bureau.

This arrangement would be good for efficiency



WIDE WORLD

**Defense chief C. E. Wilson should have power to fix size of combat forces, says author**

and economy. But most important of all, air atomic power would have the position it ought to have in our government. This combined and very powerful Navy and Air Force would be able to put forward directly to the President and other leaders its reasons for believing that our military strategy and tactics in this age of atomic revolution must be centered on air power if we are to prevent war.

A two-service plan such as I suggest would not be a backward step to the setup we had before unification in 1947. In many ways it would be an advance, not only over the old arrangement, but over the present three-service plan, for it would give to air power the pre-eminent and extremely powerful role that formerly was not so necessary as now, and that is sure to become increasingly necessary as we move along in the greatest technological revolution in the history of arms. The atom bomb is the core of this revolution, and the atom bomb must be carried by air power. If we weaken air atomic power now, we will make it that much more likely that the Russians will start World War III.

#### Single Service Detrimental to Security

And we surely *would* weaken air atomic power if we put it along with the rest of the defense forces into a huge single-service establishment, where it would become not pre-eminent, as safety demands, but almost anonymous.

Some airmen believe that Air is so obviously the key to military strategy and tactics that if everything is put into a single service, the Air will take over. But that is not what happened in SHAPE and the NATO forces, or in the Far East Command, or in the Pentagon's combined staff work.

The reason given for the drive toward a single service is that there is squabbling and waste under the present setup. Put the Army, Navy and Air Force together in one service and one uniform, the argument runs, and there will be no more squabbling. There will be an order not to squabble. There will be no more waste. There will be an order not to waste.

This simple solution is appealing. Simple solutions always are. But the price we would pay for this kind of simplicity would be much too high.

Actually, the squabbling among the services has been much exaggerated. There were some bad interservice rows at the beginning of unification, but they are over. Most of them now do not go beyond the limits of healthy rivalry.

The waste is something else. Waste—a loose term—means having things or people (divisions, warships, airplanes, supplies, military and civilian

## “Two armed services would be simpler to run than either

personnel and the like) that are not necessary or are already provided by one of the other services. There is waste which can and must be eliminated.

The way to get rid of the major waste is to make sure that the Secretary of Defense decides the force levels—the actual number of combat units which are in the country's striking force. In the Army the force level is measured in divisions or detached parts of divisions, such as regiments. In the Navy the measurement is the number of combat ships—carriers, battleships, cruisers, destroyers, submarines and so on. In the Air Force it is the number of combat air wings—the number of planes in each wing depending on the type (bomber, interceptor, fighter bomber and so forth).

#### What the Support Establishment Does

The support establishment is everything else—everything from the fighting units back to and including the headquarters at the Pentagon. It includes all the personnel, equipment, material, supplies, bases, warehousing and the rest necessary to keep the combat forces ready to fight. There is some waste in the support establishment—but it is pretty well under control.

The public, the press and Congress have directed most of their criticism at the support establishment, leaving the decision on force levels almost entirely to the experts in the Bureau of the Budget or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That attitude shows a lack of understanding, because it is the force levels which basically fix the cost of the military establishment. If you are building a house, the size of the house you build does, after all, have a great deal to do with what you will pay for it.

The force-level decision is now the most important decision in the Defense Department. If we have unnecessary forces we will waste billions of dollars of the taxpayers' money. If we have inade-

#### Background in Defense

In 1947, Thomas Finletter was named chairman of the President's Air Policy Commission. The resulting “Finletter Report,” issued the next year, set forth a bold program to assure our future air power. Selected as the Secretary of Air in April, 1950, he held that important position until the new Republican administration came into office early this year

quate forces we will be playing with the safety of the country.

Before Korea the force-level decision was made mostly by the Director of the Budget. He recommended to the President how much money should be allotted to the Defense Department and the three services. The President, of course, made the final decision. But in government the man who recommends is in a key spot. His recommendation most of the time is in fact a decision. The role of the Joint Chiefs under this way of fixing force levels was only to divide up the money they were given—which they did in about equal thirds among the services—and to translate the dollars into divisions, warships and air wings.

This system of having an economic expert decide the force levels was good for the taxpayers' pocketbook but bad for the security of the country.

After Korea the system was changed. The right to decide the force levels was taken away from the economic expert, the Director of the Budget, and transferred to military experts, the Joint Chiefs of Staff. That method was better for the security of

the country, but it was bad for the taxpayers' pocketbook. It is almost sure that a decision on force levels by the Joint Chiefs of Staff will call for certain forces which are not strictly necessary.

Each Joint Chief is the military chief of his own service. Each inevitably represents his own service, with all its traditions and loyalties, when he acts as a member of the Joint Chiefs. And the decisions of the Joint Chiefs have to be unanimous. Try as they will to submerge the interests of their service, the Joint Chiefs' decisions on force levels are inevitably compromises which have unnecessary or overlapping forces in them.

It would appear, therefore, that the Joint Chiefs of Staff should not make the final force-level decision. Who should? The key to the answer lies, I think, in a deep principle of democratic government: that *the experts should be on tap and not on top.*

The important decisions in government are much broader than any one field of expertness. They always affect a wide range of the national interest. Take the important “military” decisions. How exclusively military are they? Was going over the 38th parallel in Korea exclusively military? On first impression it might appear so, but in fact it got us into war with Red China, hurt our relations with our fellow nations in the UN and involved us in great additional expenditures. Certainly the question to bomb or not to bomb over the Yalu was never military only. The deployment of U.S. ground troops to NATO in Europe was a political move of high importance. The kind of airplanes we build affects the bases we must have in foreign lands, and gets us into political matters of considerable complexity.

One could go on forever with examples; but the principle is clear enough. In these days practically no top-level decision in the Defense Department is purely military. They all involve political or economic policies as well. And the most serious of all in its political and military effects is a decision on force levels. Our foreign policy is greatly dependent upon the military forces we have to back it up. The forces we commit ourselves to build have an enormous effect on our federal budget.

#### Experts Should Advise—Not Decide

The experts, therefore, whether they be economic, military or anything else, should not make the top military decisions of the Defense Department. They should be on tap to advise; they should not be on top to decide. In accordance with a basic principle of our government, the decisions must be made by a civilian, a nonexpert, by a man chosen presumably for his broad judgment rather than his technical know-how—in this case the Secretary of Defense.

To the extent that the decision on force levels involves foreign policy, he must consult with the Secretary of State; to the extent that it involves economic policy, with the Secretary of the Treasury and the Director of the Budget. If it is to be a recommendation to the President, it should be a composite recommendation.

The practical result of having the Secretary of Defense make the force-level decisions would be very good indeed. We should get a sounder force structure—one which will better serve our foreign policy and fit our economic strength—from decisions made by the Secretary of Defense after consultation with his colleagues of State, Treasury and Budget than from decisions made by experts, whether they be in the economic field or in the military field.

One objection is sure to be raised. What makes us think that a civilian Secretary of Defense will know enough to make the force-level decision?

A recent editorial in a New York newspaper expressed worry about having the Secretary of Defense decide such matters as the strength of our striking forces because it was reminded of a Sec-

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retary of Defense some time ago of whose ability it did not think much.

According to this argument we must put the experts on top in military matters because—apparently in this one field alone—we cannot find civilians capable of understanding the problems and making the proper broad decisions.

### In Defiance of a Basic Principle

To take this stand is nothing less than to ask for a complete reversal of a basic principle of our government. Of course, a civilian head of the Defense Department chosen for his capacity for broad judgment is capable of listening to expert military advice and of understanding what is being said. It is grotesque to think that in the military departments alone the civilian head cannot do what the acts of Congress say must be done in all departments.

There is another argument against civilian control, based on this same distrust of civilian judgment in military matters. It is that the civilian heads of the Defense Department will be more interested in making economies—in balancing the budget—than in having the right kind of military strength. That's the same as saying that a Secretary of Defense cannot do his job.

But there is one important change that will have to be made in the Congressional legislation affecting the Defense Department if the Secretary of Defense is to have proper control over major decisions of the establishment. A Secretary of Defense can do his job properly under the present statutory arrangements only if he is backed up by strong secretaries of the three services. The service secretaries should be his main partners and agents to help him carry out his broad policies. He will never be able to do it without them.

Here is where a change in the act is needed. Under the original 1947 act the service secretaries were the heads of executive departments, a technicality which gave them Cabinet status. They also were members of the National Security Council and the senior civilian officers of the Defense Department, junior only to the Secretary of Defense. In the first year or so of the act there was some serious squabbling among the services—the row over the B-36 intercontinental bomber being the worst—and it was thought necessary to strengthen the position of the Secretary of Defense in relation to the service secretaries.

The legal position of the service secretaries was therefore written down. A Deputy Secretary of Defense was created, to rank second in the defense establishment, senior to the service secretaries. The service departments were reclassified as military departments instead of executive departments, thus taking Cabinet status from the service secretaries, and the secretaries were taken off the National Security Council.

This effort to strengthen the legal position of the Secretary of Defense in fact weakened it. It downgraded the position of his principal partners—the civilian officials who should be his great mainstay in exercising his authority over the three services.

*Not until the 1949 amendments are reversed and the original arrangement of 1947 is restored will the Secretary of Defense be able to control the three services and do what the act requires him to do.*

It is just this weakened legal position of the service secretaries which has built up the move toward a monolithic one-service-one-uniform setup. We now have a legal structure which is neither one thing nor the other. It is not a monolithic department which the Defense Secretary can run from its own central office. Nor is it the original arrangement under which the service secretaries, as the main partners and agents of the Defense Secretary, had the legal status which enabled them to carry out his broad policies.

Being neither fish nor fowl, the present system

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BARRETT GALLAGHER

**Mighty carriers like the Coral Sea have made the U.S. Navy largely an air service, Finletter claims; battleships, cruisers and destroyers now exist mainly to support the air arm**

will have to move one way or the other. It is too expensive the way it is. Expensive in dollars because the great decisions which affect the cost of the establishment cannot be made properly under a confused legal structure. Expensive, too, in the more important regard that we will not get the kind of military force we need for the safety of the country under a compromised, unclear line of statutory authority.

To get a workable arrangement which would carry out the original plan of three independent services, co-ordinated only to the extent necessary to have uniformity in grand policy and to prevent squabbling and waste, amendments to the unification act should restore the Cabinet status of the service secretaries; should put them back on the National Security Council; and should reinstate them in their old rank as the senior officials in the department, junior only to the Secretary of Defense.

And, to formalize their position as the principal partners and agents of the Secretary of Defense, the top policy board of the Defense Department, the Armed Forces Policy Council, should be revamped to include only the Secretary of Defense, the three service secretaries and the Deputy Secretary—with (as it is now) the power of decision in the Secretary of Defense. All major decisions should be made by this council, and the amendment should specify force levels as one of the matters to be decided by the council.

### Dr. Vannevar Bush's Plan Analyzed

This proposal runs counter to an interesting suggestion in Collier's (December 27, 1952) by Dr. Vannevar Bush. Dr. Bush recommends that defense planning (including, of course, the force-level decision) be done by a body of senior officers from the three services who would have no other duties and would report directly to the President or the Secretary of Defense.

This idea, it seems to me, would keep the experts very much on top; indeed it might put them more on top than they now are. There is another objection: Dr. Bush's proposal would have major decisions of government made by men who did not have the responsibility for carrying them out—and decisions by officials who are not responsible for the execution of the decisions are not likely to be good. A similar proposal was made in Britain during World War II, and Winston Churchill did away with it rather brusquely. He says in his book, *The Hinge of Fate*:

"The establishment of a War Planning Directorate divorced from the Service staffs responsible for action would have been vicious in principle, for it would have created two rival bodies, one responsible and one irresponsible, yet both nom-

inally of equal status. It would have confronted Ministers with the constant need to disregard the advice of one or the other of these bodies. It would have led at once to immediate and violent friction . . . I was not . . . prepared to invite a disembodied Brains Trust to browse about among our secrets and add to the already immense volume of committees and reports . . ."

Also, there should be legislation which would set up permanent undersecretaries who would not change with administrations. They would be invaluable to incoming civilian secretaries who were not familiar with the military establishment.

### High Morale Would Be Maintained

If amendments such as these were adopted, the system would work. The individual services would be kept individual, with all their high morale and pride, and air power would keep its imaginative drive and single-mindedness. Costs would be kept down, for the force-level decisions would be made by an impartial officer, the Secretary of Defense, and the waste which now exists could be done away with. From this one saving alone billions of dollars could be cut annually from the defense budget without cuts in the striking forces necessary for the country's security.

If we go the other way—the merger of the three services into a single Department of Defense—it is not likely that these savings in the force levels will be made. The single monolithic service would be so vast that it would be difficult for the Secretary of Defense to make force-level decisions without help from civilian secretaries of the services. He would be sorely tempted to resolve his problem by putting on an arbitrary dollar limit. Such most probably would be the way it would work out; and security could be a victim.

As a practical matter, it may be hard to retrace our steps to the original 1947 act. The tide is going the other way. If nothing is done in Congress soon, the tendency to put more authority in the office of the Secretary of Defense could create a situation from which the move to a single monolithic service would be only a formality.

Even if a bill to reverse the trend were enacted it might well come out full of compromises by the time it got through the legislative process. It might be a drawn match between the single-service idea and the individual-services idea—and a drawn match would let the trend to the monolithic structure go on as it is going.

I hope that this trend will stop. But if it does not, and if legislation is considered to put it into law, I urge that in the course of the debate the suggestion for two services, instead of one or three, be considered earnestly and seriously. Much more than economy in dollars is at stake. ▲▲▲

