Mike's Speeches on the Defense Establishment

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001
There is an alarming indication that increasing attention in the Pentagon is being directed toward removing basic roles and missions of the Armed Services from existing statute and making them subject only to executive determination.

Such a move is being advocated under the guise of "strengthening" the Secretary of Defense and "streamlining" the Defense Department. This may strengthen the executive agency. But it will weaken legislative authority and status in an area in which Congress has wisely and resolutely insisted on the exercise of its prerogative and responsibility since the founding of our country.

What are these "roles and missions"? Briefly these constitute the specific provisions of the National Security Act of 1947, amended, which set forth the fundamental and basic roles and missions of each of the Armed Services. In a sense these provisions of law constitute a charter for each armed service, a kind of directive from Congress stating the purpose for which Congress, in accordance with its constitutional responsibility, creates, provides for, and maintains each of the armed services.

It must be clearly understood that the statutory prescription of roles and missions is not a detailed statement of the specific day-to-day jobs, weapons, techniques, research projects and routine activities. Rather, roles and missions in law are stated in broad, flexible and elastic terms, which do not make this statutory assignment of roles and missions a straight-jacket, a restriction, or an impediment to scientific and technological progress.
I doubt if anyone today could prescribe in more fundamental and more flexible terms the roles and missions of the armed services as they were written into the National Security Act of 1947 with its subsequent amendment.

It must be clearly understood that the roles and missions of the National Security Act are separate and distinct from the detailed assignment of "functions" of the Armed Services. The functions of the Armed Services are the details of the jobs and duties of the Armed Services, stated in more specific terms than exists in law. Essentially, the functions, which are prescribed by the executive authority of the President or the Secretary of Defense, are adjustable from time to time to new techniques, new weapons, new scientific discoveries. Such functions are amplifications of the basic roles and missions prescribed by law.

So, in the combination of the wording of the roles and missions in the National Security Act as written by Congress and the detailed, adjustable assignment of specific functions by the executive, there is a completely proper, workable, and successful device by which the legislative and the executive can exercise appropriate authority with respect to what the Armed Services are to do.

This matter of statutory prescriptions of roles and missions is no new issue. In fact, it was probably the fundamental issue connected with the National Security Act of 1947. It certainly received more attention from Congress in its consideration of that bill than any other feature of that law.
I would like to briefly review some of the pertinent facts in connection with the inclusion of roles and missions in the National Security Act of 1947, as amended.

As originally proposed, the National Security Act of 1947 did not include the statutory outline of roles and missions. Rather, it was proposed that an executive order on roles and missions would be issued upon passage of the security act. However, Congress, in its wisdom, decided that it was not only the right of Congress to prescribe basic roles and missions for the Armed Services but it was an inescapable responsibility of Congress to so do. Such an attitude on the part of Congress was not readily accepted by the executive sponsors of the proposed national security act. However, Congress was resolute in its position and set forth in properly worded provisions the fundamental roles and missions of each of the Armed Services.

I would like to point out that Congress, alert to the practical realities of defense matters, recognized that two elements of the Armed Services were in jeopardy. Because they considered those elements to be necessary to the attainment of a properly balanced defense organization and because such jeopardy should not be permitted to continue, Congress was more precise in the prescription of roles and missions for naval aviation and the Marine Corps.

Congress reaffirmed in even more emphatic terms, through Public Law 416, 82d Congress, 2d Session, its insistence upon a continued maintenance of a combat ready Marine Corps as a national force in readiness. Congress underlined its attitude and determination in this respect by stating that the Commandant of the Marine Corps should have coequal status with
other members of the JCS in consideration of all matters pertaining to the Marine Corps and that, among other provisions, the Marine Corps should be maintained at a strength of three combat divisions and three air wings.

It was perfectly obvious at that time that powerful factions within the Armed Services bitterly opposed this Congressional decision.

There is not the slightest doubt in my mind but what the Marine Corps will be destroyed as a combat force in readiness if present efforts to remove roles and missions from the law is successful. There is no place for the Marine Corps as it is developed, as Congress wants it, and as the country needs it, in the master plan of those who wish to centralize all military authority under somebody in the Pentagon.

It is just as certain that our balanced naval power, with its unsurpassed naval aviation, as well as its Marine landing forces, will be destroyed if the roles and missions are removed from statute. We will find the United States, which is in fact an island nation dependent upon maritime power for economic and military survival, possessing a Navy which no longer will contain the unique American attribute of sea power -- the balanced fleet.

This effort -- and it is a persistent one -- to remove roles and missions from law is not only a matter of military importance. It is of basic constitutional importance which is impossible to over-emphasize in matters of legislative - executive relationship. In a practical sense the statutory prescription of roles and missions is one of the few meaningful instruments by which Congress can discharge its proper responsibility with respect to defense policy. If roles and missions for the Armed Services, as now prescribed by law, are removed from existing statute and made subject to
executive whim, little will remain for Congress to do except appropriate monies for the Pentagon.

This effort, which is gaining momentum within the Pentagon today, is one of the most fundamental issues of our times. Congress could not, and I predict will not, look lightly or casually upon attempts to divest Congress of its authority and its responsibility to prescribe these basic roles and missions. Those persons who have, since 1947, refused to accept the decision of Congress to include roles and missions in the National Security Act must not be permitted to succeed with their efforts to undo this Congressional decision.

There has not, in recent years, been a more clearcut manifestation of a Congressional mandate in defense policies than the Congressional determination to prescribe roles and missions rather than leave it to the executive.

I don't believe that Congress will permit this Pentagon power play to succeed. I do not believe that Congress and the American people will ever permit the Pentagon to erase the statutory safeguards that assures a continued existence of the Marines as an ever-ready combat force.
There has been much talk about the debilitating effects of inter-service rivalries. I would point out that while service rivalries have caused friction and waste, that rivalry in this sense should not be confused with service competition. Service competition has done much to uphold the morale of the services, and it has undoubtedly saved the country lives and dollars. There is a need for continued healthy service competition, but the lines should be drawn sharply so that honest, worthwhile endeavors to excel will not be compounded by efforts to eradicate and to place one service paramount to the others.

I think there is much to be said in behalf of the continuation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff because, as a result of this, we have the best judgment of the combined thinking of the best men in all the services. If the joint chiefs of staff concept was to be done away with, it would mean that the alternative would be the creation of a single chief of staff or principal military advisor to the President who would, on the basis of his single judgment as against the collective judgment of the joint chiefs of staff at the present time, be empowered to make decisions in behalf of the security of this country. This kind of substitution - this one-man judgment - should be avoided as much as possible. I think that, far better than breaking up the present system we have at this time, it would be in the interests of the nation and our security to bring about a reorganization within the Pentagon itself.
Parkinson's Law - the multiple additions to a civilian bureaucracy - is a classic illustration of what is happening in the Pentagon. It is my understanding that there are in excess of 30 assistant secretaries or their equivalent in the Department of Defense, the Department of the Army, the Department of the Navy and the Department of the Air Force. These assistant secretaries have their assistants, and in addition to these there are numerous commissions and committees.

Many of these civilians in the Pentagon can and do give directives to the military personnel stationed there, and they do so while the responsibility rests not with them but with the officers to whom they issue orders. The question of the coupling of authority with responsibility in the Pentagon is one which the Armed Services Committees of the Congress ought to investigate and make recommendations to correct. There are too many political appointees in the Pentagon who know too little about matters military. There are too many of these appointees who stay for too short a while, learn too little, and who accomplish little except to add to the disorder already prevalent throughout that building. Too many of these temporary civilian administrators try to formulate policy in all fields of defense and very likely too many of them, all too often, interfere when they should be minding their own business.

In my opinion, it would be a good thing if the Armed Services Committee would look into the question of the chain of command and find
out, for example, just how many steps there are between the individual joint chiefs of staff and the chairman of the joint chiefs and the President of the United States or, for that matter, the Secretary of Defense. We find, for example, that in the New York Times of February 6, 1958, an article by Hanson W. Baldwin states that General Maxwell D. Taylor, Army Chief of Staff last September, said, "There are 19 civilian officials between the Army Chief of Staff and the Commander-in-Chief who either command, control or influence his conduct of the business of the Army."

The civilian bureaucracy which has grown up in the Department of Defense should be investigated. It is not a small policy-forming group superimposed on the separate services as was originally contemplated. It now numbers thousands of employees who do not confine themselves to policy, but who duplicate and confuse the work done by the individual services and who delve deeply into administration, operations and even command. It is time to streamline the Defense Department. It is time to take a look-see at this swollen civilian bureaucracy, and it is time to reduce the number of assistant secretaries and assistants to the assistant secretaries. It is time to find out what the numerous commissions and committees have been doing, and if they have been doing nothing, it is time to abolish them. It is time for a housecleaning not to the end that the Pentagon must be made an example of, but to the
end that greater efficiency, better organization and greater stability 

in the Department of Defense 
among the military can be established. It is time to do away with the 

political appointee and to put in his place the dedicated public servant. 

It is time to recognize that the Defense establishment in its proper 
sphere can and does make a contribution to our democracy. It is time 
to restore greater respect among and between the services, and it is 

under sound civilian administration, 
time to give to our military leaders the functions which are supposedly 

theirs under the laws of the land.