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The Armed Services and Parkinson's Law II

Mike Mansfield 1903-2001

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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 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 overhauled. 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 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 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 time to give to our military leaders, under sound civilian administration, the functions which are supposedly theirs under the laws of the land.
Speech of Senator Mike Mansfield (D., Montana)

THE ARMED SERVICES AND PARKINSON'S LAW - II

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