

Pentagon Study Reviewing Joints Chiefs Role

The role of the Joint Chiefs of Staff has come under the scrutiny of a highly classified Defense Department study which may lead to major revisions in both the structure and the operational roles of that body. According to the *New York Times*, the study is a prelude to Secretary of Defense Harold Brown's effort "to blunt the influence of the military leaders," a statement which while substantially true, oversimplifies the issue. It must be kept in mind that the present structure of the Pentagon hardly facilitates rational military policy or a responsible role and coordinated input in that policy from the nation's military, regardless of Harold Brown's power grab.

In an interview with Lawrence J. Korb, a professor of Management at the Naval War College and the author of a recently published book, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff*, it was learned that the current Pentagon study will probably move in two directions. (1) It will seek to redefine the command status of the Joint Chiefs which has been very ambiguous over the 25 years of its existence. (2) It will seek to strengthen central planning capabilities as opposed to the separate, generally "turf"-oriented, service inputs to that process. This latter aspect will probably involve the elimination of the "dual role" of Joint Chiefs members, each of which functions simultaneously as his respective service chief. It will

thus allow the Staff to perform more of a role as a general staff for the planning of personnel, operations, logistics, plans, policy, and communications.

Professor Korb added that the *Times* article mentions increased planning capabilities while simultaneously noting that the size of the Joint Staff would be reduced from its present compliment of 400 officers, two mutually opposite ends.

The command function of the Joint Chiefs is even more politically sensitive. It has been a generally accepted, although not legally defined, position that the Joint Chiefs would act as command liaison between the Secretary of Defense and operational military commands in the field. However, the Secretary of Defense has the legal authority to order field operations directly and to bypass the Joint Chiefs, something which was done most frequently and with increasing resentment during the reign of Robert McNamara as Secretary of Defense. If the Joint Chiefs were officially removed from that chain of command and not replaced with some sort of Pentagon command liaison between field units and the executive levels of President and Secretary, the military command structure would be seriously weakened while further contributing to the isolation and increasing depoliticization of the nation's military.