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Defense Science Board

One problem that faces the incoming Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering is how best to exploit and advance the state of science as it bears on the defense of the nation. To advise him, a 25-member Defense Science Board was established toward the close of last year by Clifford C. Furnas, who was then Assistant Secretary for Research and Development. (This office and the Assistant Secretary for Engineering were joined recently to form the one office of Assistant Secretary for Research and Engineering, see *Science* editorial of 10 May 1957, page 913.) The use of committees to help make decisions is familiar practice in the Pentagon, but the Defense Science Board does raise some questions of scope and membership.

Inspiration for the board derives in part from the 1955 Hoover Commission report on research and development in the Government. In a broad statement to which there may be important exceptions, the report refers to the "conservative approach of a military organization, even when possessed of adequate technical competence," and calls for "radically new approaches to weapons systems." Specifically, the report recommends that the assistant secretary set up a committee of "outstanding basic and applied scientists" and that, on the basis of the committee's recommendations, he initiate studies for new weapons from funds to be placed at his disposal. Such studies would be within the framework of the Department of Defense, supplementing the research and development programs that are planned and executed in the three military departments.

The charter of the Defense Science Board gives the board this advisory task and, in addition, assigns a second area of duties. The board is to suggest changes in departmental organization, should it find that administrative procedures are less effective than they might be. However, what in practice the board will do remains to be seen, especially since the assistant secretary who signed the charter is not the one whom the board will advise. Although no new funds have as yet been set aside for the purpose, the board may suggest special studies to be initiated by the assistant secretary, or it may seek, by organizational changes, to produce a climate in the military departments more favorable to "radically new approaches." To date, the board is known principally for its opposition to Frank D. Newbury, whose resignation as Assistant Secretary for Research and Engineering was recently accepted and who, so the board charged, neglected the development of new weapons.

With both administrative and substantive questions of science in its domain, the board faces a larger order of business—or possibly a different order—than that recommended by the Hoover Commission's report. Judging from its membership, the board seems to be in a better position to advise on questions of organization than to offer firsthand opinions on new scientific and technologic ideas. Of its 25 members, 18 serve by virtue of their positions as chairmen of various scientific and technical panels in the Pentagon or as heads of defense related agencies. Of the seven members-at-large, five are still to be appointed. The Hoover report, incidentally, mentions only three *ex officio* members.

Finding members for a senior committee poses something of a problem. Chances are that a scientist who is sufficiently well known to command respect outside his circle of fellow-specialists will be doing administrative work rather than research. If the Defense Science Board is to advise on substantive, as well as administrative, questions, then much depends on the appointments yet to be made—to be made, moreover, by a new assistant secretary, who is himself yet to be named.—J. T.