McNamara and the Pentagon: Limits of the "Management View"

Two recent books* from former Pentagon insiders are, in different ways, memoirs of the McNamara era at the Department of Defense (DOD) and testimonials to Robert S. McNamara. *How Much Is Enough?*, by Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, is essentially a history of the systems analysis office in DOD in the 1960's; Adam Yarmolinsky's *The Military Establishment: Its Impacts on American Society*, as the subtitle implies, has a longer focus and time scale. But both books generally affirm McNamara's efforts at reform of the military budget and of the making of military policy.

Yarmolinsky, a lawyer and Kennedy cadreman, went to the Pentagon in 1961 to serve first as a special assistant to McNamara and later as deputy assistant secretary for international security affairs. McNamara found Yarmolinsky to be an able and versatile staff man and made him a trusted lieutenant. McNamara's trust proved nontransferrable later, when Yarmolinsky's nomination to an important post in the antipoverty program died in Congress and Yarmolinsky left government in 1966 for a berth at Harvard law school.

Enthoven joined the Department of Defense before the 1961 change of Administrations but, with McNamara's arrival at the Pentagon, Enthoven moved to the staff of Comptroller Charles J. Hitch, the chief theoretician of the McNamara campaign to assert control over the military budget. Enthoven became Hitch's deputy and then in 1965 was made an assistant secretary for systems analysis when a separate systems analysis office was established. He is now a vice president at Litton Industries. Wayne Smith joined the systems analysis office in 1966, became special assistant to Enthoven, and now serves on Henry Kissinger's national security staff at the White House.

All three were "whiz kids" in the sense intended when used by senior military men in the Pentagon in the early Kennedy years. The young civilians brought in by McNamara inspired emotions reflected in this remark from a *Saturday Evening Post* article in 1963 by a former Air Force chief of staff General Thomas D. White:

> In common with many other military men, active and retired, I am profoundly apprehensive of the pipe-smoking, tree-full-of-owls type of so-called professional "defense intellectuals" who have been brought into this nation's capital. I don't believe a lot of these often over-confident, sometimes arrogant young professors, mathematicians and other theorists have sufficient worldliness or motivation to stand up to the kind of enemy we face.

Both books acknowledge the frictions that developed between military men and the new breed of civilians in the Pentagon, but the authors resist any temptation they may have felt to pay off old scores. They opt for analysis rather than recriminations and see the actions of career officers as conditioned by military tradition, institutional loyalties, and interservice competition.

A Quality of Restraint

The restraint that characterizes both books extends to the references to McNamara, the dominant figure at DOD through most of the 1960's. It was one of the bitter ironies of the decade that McNamara, who went to the Pentagon tagged as a peerless technocrat and liberal reformer, left DOD identified in the public mind with the controversial TFX aircraft and the Vietnam war. The authors' admiration and affection for McNamara is obvious, particularly in the Enthoven-Smith book, but the discussions of McNamara policies and decisions seem selective and even protective, so that McNamara becomes, if anything, more of an enigma.

The impersonal tone is understandable in the Yarmolinsky book, since it is the product of a group effort subsidized by the Twentieth Century Fund for which Yarmolinsky acted as study director. To more than a score of "principal contributors"—academics, journalists, former government officials—are attributed the substance of the 25 chapters covering the evolution of the American military and its interactions with such institutions as Congress, industry, universities, and the press. Since the sections are unsigned, the demarcations between Yarmolinsky's efforts as organizer, editor, and writer remain speculative.

Two chapters, titled "Military Sponsorship of Science and Research" and "Military Research and the Academy," are direct adaptations of previously published writings of Harvey Brooks, dean of engineering at Harvard and an inside observer of the federal science advisory scene. Brooks' account of the development of the military-university relationship from World War II through the Cold War and into the present awkward stage cites the major arguments and controversies that have beset the relationship but, as the following excerpt suggests, does it in a dispassionate tone representative of the section and of the book at large, which tends to make it hard to distinguish the more important points from the less important.

> One may also argue that a university should be somewhat responsive to the needs and priorities of the society in which it exists and which supports it, although the responsibility of the university to set rather than accept priorities is regarded by many as a primary duty. In the 1950's the American public and a large part of the academic community saw Soviet expansionism and technological progress as a clear and present danger. The launching of Sputnik led to much reflection about the adequacy of American education and the lag in support of military research as well as of basic research in universities. However, the growing dread of nuclear war has troubled a great many in academic life, and strong opposition in the intellectual community has developed in response to national involvement in the Vietnam war.

Not surprisingly in view of its genesis, *The Military Establishment* lacks completeness and a consistent point of view, but it covers a lot of ground and its contributors know the system. In fact, the book may get its heaviest use as a mine of information for critics of the military who often are really not very well informed about how things really work in the institutions and social structure in which the military spend their lives.

The two books are linked significantly by the use of a McNamara phrase for the heading of the concluding chapter of the Yarmolinsky book and the title of the Enthoven-Smith *How Much Is Enough?* The allusion is to a 1963 McNamara quote, "You cannot

* *How Much Is Enough?*, by Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, published by Harper & Row, $8.95.
The Military Establishment, by Adam Yarmolinsky, published by Harper & Row, $10.00.

make decisions simply by asking yourself whether something might be nice to have. You have to make a judgment on how much is enough."

For many people in the early 1960's, McNamara symbolized the reassertion of the civil over the military authority in the sphere of defense. Enthoven and Smith would state it in another way and at greater length.

A principal objective of their book is to show how McNamara sought to replace the traditional way in which military expenditures were handled. Under the system that prevailed through the 1950's, the President and Congress set a total figure for the military budget and the Secretary of Defense allocated that sum among the services and acted as an arbiter for the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the services, who essentially decided how the money should be spent.

By contrast, McNamara espoused a "management view," says Enthoven and Smith, which "holds that foreign policy, military strategy, defense budgets and the choice of major weapons and forces are all closely related matters of national security policy. And the principal task of the Secretary of Defense is personally to grasp the strategic issues and provide active leadership to develop a defense program that sensibly relates all these factors."

Budgetary Tools Lacking

According to the authors, McNamara possessed the budgetary power to accomplish his aims. What he lacked were the budgetary tools. This is where systems analysis and the civilian analysts came in.

Actually, if systems analysis techniques had not existed they would have had to be invented. Weapons systems had grown increasingly complex and expensive during the 1950's, and the practice of developing competitive systems and the magnitude of cost overruns had combined to bring the costs of weapons R & D and procurement to unacceptable levels.

Enthoven and Smith do not provide a primer on military systems analysis methodology, a combination of operations research techniques and economic analysis; rather, they present several case histories to illustrate the encounter between civilian analysts and the system. In general the aim of the systems analysis office was to ensure that the real costs of what was proposed—an Air Force wing or an Army division, for example—were computed, that alternatives were fairly presented, and that the services were made accountable for their estimates. The reasoning behind cancellation of the Skybolt missile project and the decisions not to build the B-70 bomber or to deploy the Nike-X antimissile system are discussed at length as examples of systems analysis in action.

The discussion is instructive and convincing, but, unfortunately, some more painful or embarrassing topics are not treated so extensively. The authors, for example, say they are "not qualified to write a first-hand account of such matters as the crucial TFX decisions, the major decisions of the Vietnam war, or the cost overruns on the C-5A. . . ." The authors do comment briefly on these matters. The explanation of their noninvolvement with TFX is that key performance requirements were established before the McNamara team moved into the Pentagon and that, anyway, no systems analysis office had been constituted at the time crucial decisions were made on the engineering and development program for the aircraft. There is further discussion of the decision to persevere with development of a basic fighter to be used by both the Air Force and the Navy and of the choice of contractor, but the reader's appetite for detail is left unsatisfied and the TFX remains, figuratively, the swing-wing albatross around McNamara's neck.

As for Vietnam, the authors say that the systems analysis office was relegated to a secondary position. Enthoven and his colleagues came up with reports critical of body-count totals from the field and were skeptical of pacification programs. Perhaps more to the point, the systems analysis office argued that the enemy was able to control his losses so that victory in the field by the methods being employed by American and South Vietnamese forces was unattainable. These views had little impact and the authors' contention is that there was "no organized, critical analysis of strategy and operations on the Vietnam war."

Why did McNamara and the White House allow this? Here is the authors' explanation.

> If the highest officials in Washington and Saigon were blinded by the deluge of statistics showing only change and activity, it was largely because of a deep resistance to trying to run the war from Washington. The problem was not overmanagement of the war from Washington; it was undermanagement. The problem was not too much analysis; it was too little. The President and his key advisers sought candid assessment of the war, but they would not pay the political costs in terms of friction with the military to get them.

That last sentence is probably the most disturbing in the book.

A major theme of the book is the effort to reconcile weapons systems with foreign policy and strategic objectives. The authors amply illustrate the pattern of challenge and response in weaponry to show that what we do directly affects what the Soviets do, and vice versa.

It appears that systems analysis office studies were influential in heading off deployment of the Nike-X antimissile system in the late 1960's and contributed to what seems to have been a longer-term decision against "damage limiting" programs (defense of cities against nuclear attack). And the rehearsal of the arguments is particularly useful at a time when the United States and the Soviet Union seem headed for serious talks about limitations on both strategic nuclear weapons and missile defenses. It would be equally interesting if the authors had discussed more fully the strategic and political considerations that led to McNamara's recommendation of a "thin" antimissile shield against the Chinese nuclear threat and the decisions leading to the development of the MIRV, perhaps the most destabilizing advance in the strategic arms field in recent years.

Challenge for Systems Analysis

The authors of *How Much Is Enough?* tacitly acknowledge that the Planning-Programming-Budgeting System (PPBS) employed at the Pentagon and exported to federal civilian agencies works indifferently when applied to research. This seems to be true for both basic research and developmental research, which is a more important factor in Pentagon planning. A major challenge to systems analysts, therefore, would seem to be to improve their techniques in this sphere.

On the importance of systems analysis and also on the limitations on its influence during the Kennedy-Johnson Administrations, the authors of the two books generally agree. The following appraisal found in the concluding chapter of the Yarmolinsky book would win the assent of Enthoven and Smith:

> Systems analysis has established an important role for itself in the choice of weapons systems; it does not yet occupy a central role in working out the relationships between forces and strategy. The

commander in the field must necessarily have great freedom of action to deal with the crises that confront him daily. But planning for the kinds of campaigns the commander may undertake, and the forces with which he should be supplied to undertake them, can give a larger role to analysts who are outside the chain of command, and whose professional background includes work in nonmilitary organizations —from universities to private research groups.

There should also be a larger role for these analysts in postauditing military operations, and a significant, perhaps primary, role for civilian policy leaders in leading an open, as well as an internal, debate on the implications of military choices and the decisions most appropriate to the nation's larger goals.

At the same time, a more effective flow of information to the top civilian authorities in the Pentagon on the execution of their policy directives is also needed. The military departments have their inspectors general at every level down to small units, but no inspector general function, broadly conceived, exists within the office of the Secretary of Defense. Although an inspector general cannot solve the problem of carrying out the intentions of the chief policy-maker down through all the layers of bureaucracy, he can flag those points where the process is breaking down.

Enthoven and Smith share this interest in strengthening the resources of independent analysis available to the President and the Secretary of Defense, but they are immediately concerned with seeing that the beachhead already established is not narrowed, a development for which they see evidence.

A main claim made for the McNamara dispensation at the Pentagon was that it freed the United States from a dependence on a strategy of "massive retaliation" and made possible a "flexible response." In the early days of the Kennedy era this meant increased spending on conventional warfare forces and a fascination with counterinsurgency techniques. In discussing this revision of strategy, the authors reconstruct the reasoning of the early 1960's. For example, General Maxwell Taylor is identified as an architect of the flexible-response doctrine designed to make it possible for the United States to react militarily without resorting to strategic weapons. Critics of the military stand these arguments on their heads and insist that the flexible response doctrine made Vietnam possible.

In the recently published *The Pentagon Watchers: Students Report on the National Security State*, edited by Leonard S. Rodberg and Derek Shearer, for example, General Taylor is portrayed as a protagonist of American intervention anywhere, anytime national interests, very broadly interpreted, are threatened. The new critics have little fondness for systems analysis, since, in their view, it simply makes intervention by the United States more effective.

Yarmolinsky and Co. and Enthoven and Smith, though hardly uncritical of the official policies or unaware of growing dissent against these policies, represent the pragmatists who have dominated United States strategic policy since World War II. Today it is opposite assumptions about the intentions of the Soviets and the Chinese more than differences over Vietnam which separate the pragmatists and their critics. And the two books under discussion never come fully to grips with the arguments of those who would say that enough in the terms of the pragmatists is too much.—JOHN WALSH

Human Environment Conference: Slow Start toward Stockholm

A year from now, 1200 delegates from 130 nations will swarm into Stockholm to attend what is being billed as the first global conference on the full range of the earth's environmental problems. The United Nations, the sponsor of this huge gathering, hopes that it will spawn new international agreements to curb pollution of the air and sea, arouse new interest among nations in managing their resources, and stimulate cooperative research across the continents on conditions of the human habitat.

The U.N. officials who are trying to organize this undertaking are quick to concede that success or failure of the "Conference on the Human Environment" will be determined well before the delegates troop into Stockholm. Its level of achievement, they say, will depend on the level of interest accorded the meeting by participating governments. For the present, however, interest seems somewhat less than enthusiastic.

Last week, members of Congress had a chance to hear about the expectations and preparations for the Stockholm meeting. But a 2-day colloquium organized by House and Senate committees to advertise the event appeared to generate little obvious excitement on Capitol Hill.

In addition to some 100 guests, invited mainly from university, industrial, and government science circles, only half a dozen of such environmental enthusiasts as Senators Hubert Humphrey and Edward Kennedy appeared at the old Supreme Court chamber in the Capitol Building to pay their obligatory respects and then quickly bow out. (Floor activities kept others, including Maine's Senator Edmund Muskie, from attending). Some reporters straggled out of the chamber early as the two-and-a-half hour sessions overlapped the noon hour. Only one invited guest volunteered a question, and even that had little to do with what any of the nine speakers had to say.

Senator Warren Magnuson (D–Wash.), who presided over the colloquium with California's Representative George P. Miller,* had said that the meeting was meant to discuss the "status of scientific information as a basis for pending decisions on environmental problems . . ." Perhaps wisely, it largely skirted that issue, but a more practical purpose seemed implicit in the timing of the meeting. About a month from now, the State Department will ask Congress to foot a bill of still-undetermined size for U.S. participation at Stockholm next year.

Last week's colloquium was one of a series of similar meetings which the U.N. conference officials are attending around the world to drum up the interest of participating governments. Whether or not they succeeded here, they did provide a glimpse of the enormous difficulties inherent in bring-

* Magnuson and Miller are the chairmen, respectively, of the Senate Commerce Committee and the House Committee on Science and Astronautics. Senator Howard H. Baker (R–Tenn.), the chairman of a citizens' advisory group to the U.S. conference delegation, also attended the colloquium.