

File: 101.11.100
 Wash Post 1 Oct 1952

Today And Tomorrow. . . By Walter Lippman

Ike and the Pentagon

AT LONG LAST, on Thursday evening in Baltimore, General Eisenhower began to talk seriously about the subject he knows the best—about the planning and the operation of the military establishment. Early in his speech he made it clear enough, without going very far into the matter, that he knows where is the root of the trouble. "Those civilians who should exercise authority in military matters," said the General who may be the chief civilian, "feel hesitant because of their lack of specialized knowledge and experience. In a threatened emergency Congress is reluctant to question the demands of the military."

This could be understood to say that, being a General of the Army with specialized knowledge and experience, he would not be hesitant about exercising the kind of authority over the Pentagon that President Truman and Secretary Lovett do not now exercise. That, I feel confident however, is not the whole or the most important part of what he means. If it were, if being a General he felt he knew how to fix everything, he would not be proposing to "create a commission of the most capable civilians in our land to restudy the operations of our Department of Defense."

THE FACT of the matter is that, as the military establishment is now organized, no one in the top civilian posts—the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the three service secretaries, is in a position to exercise authority in military matters. The reason they cannot exercise authority is not because as individuals they lack specialized military knowledge and military experience. Gen.

Marshall, when he was the civilian Secretary of Defense, performed a great service in fixing the over-all principle of the policy of our rearmament, but his warmest admirers would admit, I think, that he did not exercise himself, or help the President to exercise, an adequate civil authority.

The real trouble in the system as it is now organized is that the civilians at the top have to get all their military information and all their military advice from the very men over whom, in law and in principle, they are supposed to exercise supreme authority. It is the business of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to advise the Secretary of Defense and the President on what to do about the Navy, the Army, and the Air Force which they themselves command.

THIS MEANS that everyone concerned is in an impossible position. Can the chief of any service advise the Secretary of Defense to reduce the appropriation for his service in order to increase the appropriation for another service? The unhappy man has to live the rest of his life with his fellow officers. He has to be the advocate of his service, not the objective planner of the national military policy.

As a result, "the civilians who should exercise authority in military matters" are almost helpless, even if they are themselves, by training, professional soldiers. They are helpless because there are no men to whom they can turn for independent information and expert advice on what is best for the national defense as a whole—as distinct from what is best for the special and vested interests of each of the three services.

THIS CRUCIAL point is the main theme of the extraordinary address which Dr. Vannevar Bush delivered at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn., on Friday evening. No one, in or out of uniform, is better qualified than is Dr. Bush to speak about military planning in the Pentagon. He has been working over the substance of this address for a long time, and I venture to say that there has been no more important or illuminating discussion of the problem of how to establish a wise and effective control of our enormous military establishment.

It is difficult in a brief summary to do justice to Dr. Bush's recommendations—not to make them sound simpler than they are and less thoroughly studied than they have been. But the gist of what he recommends is that "the Joint Chiefs of Staff is the senior military planning agency. Its sole duty, as a body should be to advise the Secretary of Defense and to recommend action to be taken by him or by the President . . . I should not itself exercise command directly or indirectly."

The whole duty of the Joint Chiefs would be to advise the civilian authorities. They would have no duties, no rights and no powers of command over the services themselves.

Although Dr. Bush does not say so, his proposals carry with them the idea that an officer who was appointed to the Joint Chiefs of Staff would probably not go back to a command in his service. He would be rather like a Senator who was appointed to the Supreme Court—expected to be out of politics, in his case out of service politics, for the rest of his life.