P.S. to the NEWS
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PENTAGON LEADERSHIP

Should the Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force be advocates for their departments? Or should the civilian political leaders in the Pentagon be adversaries against the uniformed military over whom they have control?

Funny thing, no one ever asks that question about other Cabinet positions. The Secretary of Labor is for unions. The Secretary of Agriculture is for the farmers. The Secretary of Commerce is for the business community. Only in the Defense Department do we accept the adversary relationship between the political appointees and the interests they are supposed to represent.

No one challenges the time-honored concept of civilian control of the military, least of all the military. Uniformed general officers have proved time and again that they will make themselves willing tools of their civilian superiors, even to the extent of supporting the SALT II Treaty, the giveaway of our Panama Canal, and the leading of thousands of our finest young men into death, capture, and mutilation in a no-win war.

Since the National Security Act of 1947, 42 Americans have served as Secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force. Some have moved up to higher offices (Cyrus Vance, Army Secretary '62-'64, became Secretary of State; Harold Brown, Air Force Secretary '65-'69, became Secretary of Defense). But most are relatively unknown and served an average of only a little over two years.

The principal reason for the decline in power and prestige of the Secretaries was the seven-year tenure of Defense Secretary Robert McNamara, who brought about near-total centralization of crucial Pentagon decision-making in his person and office. McNamara came to the Pentagon from the Ford Motor Company with the aura of executive expertise, even though there was no evidence to support that halo and Ford had just experienced the debacle of the Edsel.

The centralization of decision-making in the person of the Secretary of Defense may look efficient on an organizational chart. There is just one problem: we haven't won a war since.

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Even though the power and prestige of the Secretaries of Army, Navy and Air Force were cut off at the pass, there is much, much more they could do if they would perceive themselves as advocates of their departments rather than adversaries who have a "mind set" based on distrust of the uniformed military. Our present Secretary of the Army, for example, Clifford L. Alexander, Jr., uses his office to promote his own preconceptions about women and minorities instead of to build the world's best fighting force.

The U.S. Army's "how to fight" field manual FM 100-5 called "Operations" states that the Army must be prepard to fight outnumbered and win. To do this, our military services must depend on superior U.S. technology.

We have a clear lead over our potential enemies in automated data processing, and this is expected to give us a decisive edge on the battlefield. However, 77 percent of the military personnel who operate our computers and automated systems in the field failed the skill qualification test in 1978. That is just one example of the current manpower quality problem.

Military morale is an essential part of an effective army and navy. It is at an all-time low today, as evidenced by low re-enlistment rate of career soldiers. But, as Rear Admiral Daniel V. Gallery pointed out in his book "Eight Bells and All's Well," "I doubt if Mr. McNamara and his crew have any 'morale setting' on their computers."

General Douglas MacArthur, when Chief of Staff in 1933, warned that: "It [morale] will quickly wither and die if soldiers come to believe themselves the victims of indifference or injustice on the part of their government, or of ignorance, personal ambition, or ineptitude on the part of their leaders." The reason MacArthur inspired such loyalty among those who served under him is that they knew he would always be loyal to them. He knew that one attribute of great leadership is a recognition that loyalty is a two-way street: it must flow down as well as up.

A good Secretary of the Army should support and reinforce his officers and serve as their political buffer. He should be a vigilant, informed and demanding advocate, not an adversary. He should try to raise the Army's "morale setting" as well as the quality of its personnel and its weaponry.

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