

Testimony of Admiral James Stavridis, USN (Ret)
Before the Senate Armed Services Committee
10 December 2015

Chairman McCain, Rank Member Reed, other distinguished Members of the Committee, thank you for asking me to come and discuss ideas for reform of the Department of Defense.

In the course of my 37 years of active service after passing out of Annapolis in 1976, I served about half of my career in staff assignments in the Pentagon -- on the staffs of the Secretary of Defense as his Senior Military Assistant; Chairman of the Joint Chiefs focused on the Unified Command Plan; Secretary of the Navy as his Executive Assistant and Special Assistant; and Chief of Naval Operations with focus on long range and strategic planning.

I also served twice in command as a Combatant Commander at US Southern Command for three years; and as US European Commander for four years, concurrently with serving as Supreme Allied Commander at NATO.

While I did not enjoy staff duty as much as being at sea (true I suspect for most military officers), I learned a great deal and formed some opinions that I am happy to share today based on my years of active duty.

Additionally, since leaving active duty two years, I have served as the 12th Dean of The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University and as a Senior Fellow at Johns Hopkins Applied Physics Laboratory. In both capacities, I continue to study and comment on these issues.

All of these remarks, however, are my personal opinions and do not represent the views of any other individual or organization.

I would like to begin by pointing out that I believe that overall that the US Department of Defense is the best functioning entity in the US government, and that it does an enormous amount of good in the world today. And that the vast majority of civilians and military assigned to the Department on staff duty are dedicated, hard-working, and very focused on their jobs in professional and commendable ways.

Having said that, I also believe it is time to take a look at several aspects of the way the Department does business, and the work of this committee is therefore timely and sensible. It is over three decades since Goldwater-Nichols reshaped much of the day-to-day conduct of DoD business, and its effects have been overwhelmingly good. But three decades is a long time, and it makes a great deal of sense to look at new ways to think about how this enormous, \$600 billion per year enterprise is run.

All the thoughts that I offer today should quite obviously be regarded merely as starting points for further discussion, as the issues are so significant and complex that

they demand much study, collaboration, consideration of second order effects, and caution as we go forward.

As 2016 rolls around, it will be thirty years since the Goldwater-Nichols Act fundamentally reshaped the broad organization and specifically the chain of command of the military. It solidified the Joint requirements for education and promotion, created the position of Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and vested the power to conduct military operations solely in the Combatant Commanders, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense and the President. After thirty largely successful years under Goldwater-Nichols, now is a good time to take a fundamental look at what we are doing in the massive Department of Defense and consider some new potential ideas.

Here are five admittedly controversial ideas to think about:

Create a Cyber Force. It is a foregone conclusion that we need a military Cyber *Command*, i.e. an independent, 4-star commander focused on cyber operations. The real question is: do we need a cyber *force* as well? If we look back a hundred years ago, we didn't have an Air Force – quite obviously because we didn't fly planes in any number. It took us over 50 years to figure out that we needed a separate branch of the military to focus on aviation.

Today we cannot conceive of a world in which we would not have trained, capable Airmen ready to defend their nation in the skies. Seems high time we considered a separate service to do the same in the cyber world, a place where we are increasingly under attack and in which many other nations have already militarized. And while we are at it, we should likewise think about whether this model works for Special Operations as well – i.e. creating a fully formed separate Service to perform all elements of Special Operations.

Give Each Regional Combatant Command a Civilian Deputy. As we look at a 21st century in which we need to exercise national security through not only the military instrument but also via diplomacy and development, having a senior civilian as a Deputy at each COCOM makes sense. The best choice would be a senior State Department official, preferably someone who had served as an Ambassador in the region for the Geographical Commanders. He or she should be detailed at the level of Minister-Counselor (1/2 star) with authority through the command.

This has already been successfully implemented at SOUTHCOM, EUCOM, and AFRICOM; and standardizing it makes sense to increase the interagency reach of the COCOMS. We should also give each of the Combatant Command staff a capable J-9 staff element to do interagency coordination and a very small group J-10 to do private public cooperation.

In terms of the Functional Combatant Commands, there may likewise be arguments for including a civilian deputy above the level of the current “Political Advisors POLAD” provided by State Department, although it is a less clear cut case. These commands should be examined on a case-by-case basis to see if this model is equally effective as it is for the Geographic Combatant Commanders.

Reduce the number of Geographic Combatant Commands, rationalizing them to four in number. This should be done in parallel with reducing the overall size of the staffs, which are too large given that much of the operational activity of the Department is conducted by Joint Task Forces anyway.

-- *Merge SOUTHCOM and NORTHCOM into a single Americas Command.* The artificial division of Mexico from SOUTHCOM hurts our unified purpose throughout Latin America and the Caribbean; and our Canadian allies are very involved in the world to the south as well. Making this one command – probably headquartered in Miami, with a sub-unified command in Colorado Springs retaining NORAD and air defense – would be efficient, save resources, and improve focus on the Americas.

-- *Merge EUCOM and AFRICOM, reconstructing the earlier model, now terming it Euro-Africa Command.* The staffs remain collocated in Germany anyway, and there are savings to be had in terms of size much as is the case between the two commands focused on the Americas.

Stand up a truly independent General Staff with Operational Authority, atop the military chain of command. In today's world, the officers assigned to the Joint Staff in the Pentagon essentially function in this role. The problem is that they know they will return to their parent services for promotion and advancement to the next rung on the career ladder.

An independent General Staff would be manned by the brilliant few, selected from their service at the level of O-4/O-5, and permanently assigned to the General Staff. Additionally, some number of O-6 and Flag / General officers could likewise be laterally assigned after their Captain / Colonel and Flag command assignments. But the key would be that they would no longer return to their parent services once they were assigned to the General Staff – only to Joint commands and / or back to the Pentagon General Staff.

It is also time to consider simply making the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff the senior operational commander, reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense. The Combatant Commanders should report to the Chairman, not to the Secretary of Defense. Frankly, this is how the system largely works in practice anyway; and it would merely codify the existing custom into a sensible, linear chain of command. The Service Chiefs should continue to focus on train, equip, and organize functions, with additional responsibility for acquisition, reporting to the Service Secretaries.

Finally in this regard, it is worth looking at the entire system of “Joint Credit” for promotion, and potentially shifting the requirement for “Joint Credit” up to the O-8 or even the O-9 level. This would also permit dropping a significant number of “joint billets” which are needed to keep access to joint credit available to everyone. All of this would potentially permit reducing the total size of the officer corps.

Unify Joint Professional Military Education (i.e. all of the War Colleges) Under one 3-star officer, who would also be the President of the National Defense University.

Given the need for a coherent, unified curriculum under Joint aegis, having a single chain of command (as opposed to each of the Services) controlling Joint Education at the highest levels might make sense. This officer could then report to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, functioning somewhat like a Combatant Commander for intellectual, research, and joint educational matters.

The cultural, educational, and organizational power of unifying the various War Colleges may make sense and, by the way, serve as a central point of effort to organize the study required to consider the other changes discussed herein. This command would then be essentially the intellectual arm of the General Staff described above.

All of these ideas are highly controversial, bordering on heretical. And I freely admit they may not be the exact right next moves. But I offer them as an examples of the kind of thinking we need to undertake on the upcoming 30-year anniversary of Goldwater-Nichols, which shook us up but may not have taken us far enough down the road to truly Joint, Interagency, and International / Coalition operations – which collectively represent the future of security in this turbulent 21st century.