
Defense Report

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To Effectively Reform Defense Some Attitudes Must Change

President Reagan's Blue/Ribbon Commission on Defense Management offers a number of bold recommendations for the improvement of Defense Department (DoD) management and organization. When the Committee's report was released, its more controversial aspects received ample discussion in the national media. But, almost completely overlooked was the personal word inserted as a foreword by Committee Chairman David Packard in which he encourages the government to pursue a "Quest for Excellence"—a standard to which, he insists, defense management must always aspire.

Mr. Packard's prescription for excellence calls for responsibility and authority to be placed firmly in the hands of those at the working level who have the knowledge and enthusiasm for the tasks at hand. It demands a restoration of a sense of shared purpose and mutual confidence among Congress, DoD, and industry.

For Congress, this means shedding the practice of legislating the minutest aspects of DoD's operations in favor of concentration on the larger issues of overall defense posture and military performance.

DoD, according to its former Deputy Secretary, must displace systems and structures that measure quality by regulatory compliance and solve problems by executive fiat. DoD must reduce its numerous management layers, large staffs, and countless regulations by adhering closely to basic, common-sense principles: giving a few capable people the authority and responsibility to do their job, maintaining short lines of communication, and holding people accountable for results.

Finally, Mr. Packard calls on defense contractors and DoD to each assume responsibility for improved self-governance. An honest partnership of thousands of responsible contractors and DoD, each equally committed to proper control of its own operations would eliminate the requirement for legions of government auditors, inspectors, and investigators.

While not entirely new, Mr. Packard's proposal for the establishment of strong centers of excellence affords us great opportunity now to march forward toward improved defense management. His thoughts should be given close consideration in DoD, the government and the country.