
Defense Report

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Congress Reorganizes the Military— But That's Only Half the Job

In the words of Representative Les Aspin, Chairman of the House Armed Services committee, the recently enacted military reorganization bill represents "probably the greatest sea change in the history of the American military since the Continental Congress created the Continental Army in 1775."

Other commentators, editorialists and military "reformers" have concluded that the reorganization legislation promises to solve all the complexities associated with leading and managing an armed force nearly five million strong. In fact, the reforms go only halfway because, while they might help improve our defenses by tightening the military's organization, they completely ignore the need for better organization and clearer lines of responsibility for the efficient management of national security within Congress itself.

Hope for improvement in the effectiveness of our armed forces can be gained from the reorganization bill's provisions strengthening the role of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, by making him the President's principal military advisor and giving him responsibility to ensure that the budgets of the military departments meet the priorities set by the various theater Commanders-in-Chief (CINCs). The current bill also strengthens the CINCs' authority over the military units assigned to their respective theaters: so much for that half of the equation.

This legislation's principal shortcoming was best enumerated by the most recently retired Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Gen. John W. Vessey, Jr., when he said: "Whatever interservice rivalry there may be, it contributes far less to inefficiency in the Defense Department than does the maze of overlapping committee responsibilities, the plethora of unnecessary reports, the lack of program stability and the perennial delays in getting appropriations bills out on time—all attributable to Congress."

The only hope for real improvement in defense management must await the convening of the 100th Congress next January. Is it reasonable to expect that they might become familiar with Gen. Vessey's points before they tackle their awesome responsibilities of providing for our national security?