BALANCING CONSENSUS, CONSENT, AND COMPETENCE:
RICHARD RUSSELL, THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE
& OVERSIGHT OF AMERICA’S DEFENSE, 1955-1968

DISSERTATION

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By
Joshua E. Klimas, M.A.

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Dissertation Committee:
Professor David Stebenne, Advisor
Professor John Guilmartin
Professor James Bartholomew

Approved by
Advisor
History Graduate Program
ABSTRACT

This study examines Congress’s role in defense policy-making between 1955 and 1968, with particular focus on the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC), its most prominent and influential members, and the evolving defense authorization process. The consensus view holds that, between World War II and the drawdown of the Vietnam War, the defense oversight committees showed acute deference to Defense Department legislative and budget requests. At the same time, they enforced closed oversight procedures that effectively blocked less “pro-defense” members from influencing the policy-making process. Although true at an aggregate level, this understanding is incomplete. It ignores the significant evolution to Armed Services Committee oversight practices that began in the latter half of 1950s, and it fails to adequately explore the motivations of the few members who decisively shaped the process. SASC chairman Richard Russell (D-GA) dominated Senate deliberations on defense policy. Relying only on input from a few key colleagues – particularly his protégé and eventual successor, John Stennis (D-MS) – Russell for the better part of two decades decided almost in isolation how the Senate would act to oversee the nation’s defense. Russell’s oversight concept weighed multiple competing considerations: the reality that modern presidential power was an outgrowth of the Congress’s acknowledged inability to manage the expanded scope of government; the requirement that the Executive Branch demonstrate
wisdom and managerial competence; the duty to conduct thorough oversight as a prerequisite for congressional consent to presidential proposals; and the Cold War imperative to buttress presidential leadership with at least the appearance of a broad governing consensus. While initially hesitant to craft a substantive policy role, perceived shortcomings in presidential wisdom and managerial competence steadily prompted Russell to insert himself and his committee more directly into the policy-making process. The principle vehicle became incremental expansion of the annual defense authorization bill, although in practice this impacted only at the margins of the defense program. In any case, Russell never fundamentally rejected the necessity for presidential leadership, nor the desirability of relatively closed congressional oversight procedures – both of which proved increasingly out of step with the emerging Senate majority of the late 1960s.
Dedicated to Lisa
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VITA

April 28, 1973 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Born – Detroit, MI

1996 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . B.A. Physics and History, Wayne State University, Detroit, MI

2000 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . M.A. Security Policy Studies, The George Washington University, Washington, DC

2001, 2003 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Distinguished University Fellow, The Ohio State University

2002 . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Foreign Language and Area Studies Fellow, The Ohio State University

2004 – present . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . Analyst, The Center for Army Analysis, Ft. Belvoir, VA

FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: History
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Between World War II and the drawdown of the Vietnam War, the chairmen and senior members of Congress’s defense oversight committees showed great deference to the program and budget requests the Defense Department presented them. At the same time, these individuals – “pro-defense” and generally politically conservative – so dominated congressional proceedings that voices of members with alternate views were almost entirely shut out of the defense policy process. In a nutshell, this is the consensus view of Congress’s conduct with respect to defense policy-making during the first decades of the Cold War, and it is a view that most scholars have been willing to casually accept as they focus their attention on the Executive Branch. As a two-sentence summary, this view of the Congress is largely correct. However, it is also wholly devoid of nuance, leaves unexplored the political considerations and power distributions that yielded this outcome, explains little of the complex motivations underlying the behavior of influential members of Congress, and understates their assertiveness on a host of individual issues. Most importantly, the consensus view largely ignores the significant evolution in Congress’s defense oversight process that took place between the late-1950s and the early-1970s. While these reforms may have only impacted on the margins of the defense program, they nonetheless grew out of a genuine concern on the part of
prominent Armed Service Committee members in both houses of Congress that a more pronounced congressional oversight role was necessary to bring about increased efficiency and effectiveness in Defense Department decision-making. Finally, the consensus view fails to name names. In the Senate, one name mattered more than any other, and perhaps more than all the others: Richard B. Russell, Democrat from Georgia. Relying only on the input a few key colleagues – particularly his protégé and successor, Mississippi Democrat John Stennis – Russell for the better part of two decades decided almost in isolation how the Senate would act to oversee the nation’s defense program.

In the broadest terms, this study examines Congress’s role in defense policy-making between 1955 and 1968. Topically, the focus is congressional oversight of the defense program, that is, the range of individual programs and activities on which the Defense Department spends money, and the strategic and policy purposes these funds support. In terms of individuals and organizations, the focus is the Senate, particularly the Senate Armed Services Committee (SASC) and the committee's most prominent and influential members. The study is particularly interested in the committee’s series of decisions, concurrent with its counterpart committee in the House, to steadily expand the portion of the defense budget subject to annual authorization.1 This expansion began in 1959, with the requirement for annual authorization of missile, aircraft, and naval vessel procurement. The Armed Services Committees’ enacted this requirement as a provision –

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1 The two Armed Services Committees are the “authorizing” committees for the Defense Department. Authorizing legislation provides the legal basis for the federal government to obligate funds. Appropriations, on the other hand, actually establish the permitted level of funding. Each house of Congress has an Appropriations Committee for this purpose, and each Appropriations Committee likewise has a defined subcommittee structure to execute the various annual appropriations bills. In cases where no specific authorization for expenditure exists, appropriations bills serve as de facto authorizing legislation.
section 412(b) – of the fiscal year (FY) 1960 military construction authorization bill.\(^2\) Prior to passage of section 412(b), real estate and military construction accounts were the only portions of the defense budget subject to annual authorization, with other accounts falling under large standing authorizations sized for general war – or not specifically authorized at all. Over the twenty years subsequent to section 412(b)’s passage, virtually the entirety of the annual defense budget came under Armed Services Committee oversight. Today, the annual defense authorization bill – along with its counterpart appropriations bill – remains the focal point for congressional oversight of the defense program.

This study began from the premise that, given the complexity of the Congress, it was practical to sacrifice breadth in order to gain a deeper understanding of one of the Congress’s component parts – in this case, one of its key legislative committees. While it remained necessary to place the functioning of the individual committee within the larger politics and procedures of the Congress, this study presumed it was not necessary to study the “whole” in equal detail in order to gain valuable insights about the oversight process. The study selected the SASC for detailed examination for three reasons. First, a reading of the literature suggested that, of the four primary defense oversight committees – the House and Senate Armed Services Committees, and the defense subcommittees of the House and Senate Appropriations Committees – the SASC was most effective by the late-1960s in demonstrating at least an emerging substantive oversight capacity that

\(2\) This requirement took effect in 1961.
linked programs to strategy and policy. Second, the Appropriations Committees have generally received more scholarly attention than the Armed Services Committees, leaving the literature more in need of studies of the latter. Third, as a practical matter, the SASC simply has the most intact document collection in the National Archives of any of the Congress’s defense committees.

The available scholarship on Congress and defense oversight during the period in question is not extensive. The growth of presidential initiative and influence – both in formulating policy and managing its execution – is among the leading themes of modern American politics and governance. As a consequence, scholars interested in Cold War-era national security policy-making have focused on the various presidential administrations and the executive bureaucracies they oversee, largely ignoring the Congress’s role in the process. While true in general, this is particularly true of the pre-1970s Congress. In reviewing the available scholarship, in fact, it is almost a misnomer to speak of “historiography,” as historians have played almost no role in its development. The scholarship that exists is generally the product of journalists and political scientists who wrote almost concurrently with the events of the day. Historians interested in the early Cold War or in national security decision-making have almost wholly avoided systematic study of the Congress.

Most scholars interested in Cold War-era defense oversight have focused on either decisions to employ the armed forces (“war powers”), or on the annual budget process (the “power of the purse”). With respect to the latter, scholars have rightly

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3 Subsequent research suggested that the House Armed Services Committee was at least as dedicated in this regard.
regarded budget oversight as both the Congress’s primary *routine* responsibility in the defense field, and its primary influence mechanism over the defense program.\(^4\) Scholars of the late-1950s and early-1960s focused almost exclusively on the Appropriations Committees, at least in part because prior to section 412(b) the Armed Services Committees had largely abdicated any role with respect to the annual budget.\(^5\) Despite the appropriators’ ultimate control over the size and details of the budget, however, scholars have generally been dissatisfied with the appropriators’ abilities to translate their version of budget control into an effective program oversight mechanism. In particular, the scholarly consensus is that appropriators found primary motivation in emphasizing a “fiscal watchdog” role. By both necessity and choice, they tended to take a line item-focus of the budget that prevented a holistic assessment of the defense program’s larger strategy and policy aspects.\(^6\)

Scholars quickly took notice of section 412(b), but few were either kind toward or optimistic over the early results. Bernard Gordon, for example, attributed passage of section 412(b) to pressure arising from increased public attentiveness to defense issues subsequent to the Soviet Union’s 1957 Sputnik launch, along with what he concluded


\(^6\) Subsequent research supported this view. Whether the Armed Services Committees successfully stepped into the void is another matter that will wait for the conclusion.
was Richard Russell’s jealousy that other senators and committees were gaining notoriety in the defense sphere at his expense in Sputnik’s aftermath. Despite writing in the first year that section 412(b) took effect, Gordon dismissed the impact of the new procedures and concluded that authorizers could not hope to achieve the influence of appropriators.7 Writing only slightly later, Raymond Dawson was among the few who viewed the new development positively. In terms of motivation, he concluded that Armed Services Committees deliberately intended annual authorization “to alter the balance in executive-congressional controls over some strategic decisions.”8 In terms of effectiveness, Dawson found that annual authorization at least provided the Armed Services Committees a stronger information base from which to critique the defense program, and that often the committees were in fact able to leverage this to increase their influence over policy decisions.

In addition to attracting the scholarly eye away from the Congress, the rise of the modern presidency has impacted congressional scholarship in another way. Those comparatively few scholars who did choose to study the Congress’s role in defense policy-making generally did so from an executive-focused perspective. That is, they proceeded from the assumption that a more assertive Congress was necessary to correct deficiencies in presidential leadership. As a result, an adversarial paradigm dominates the scholarship. This paradigm often implies that the only real measure of congressional


performance on substantive policy oversight should be its legislative record on turning aside or meaningfully altering the President’s proposals – if not acting as an independent source for policy.

Most who published in the late 1950s and early 1960s, for example, were highly critical of Eisenhower’s caps on defense spending, his reliance on nuclear deterrence, his inability to push the American advantage in rocketry and satellites, and his unwillingness to invest in increased general purpose forces to fight limited or “brushfire” wars. On the other hand, most of those writing in the late 1960s and early 1970s expressed a profound discontent with the nuclear arms race and foreign military intervention. In both cases, these writers looked to Congress for alternate policies in opposition to the President’s program. As a result, measures of congressional effectiveness or value added tend to be based almost solely on this perspective.

Edward Kolodziej’s *The Uncommon Defense and Congress* provides a perfect example. Focusing on the period 1945 through 1963, Kolodziej argued that the Congress needed to reorganize itself to better handle its oversight responsibilities, in what was then still a relatively new era of protracted, militarized international conflict. In his view, reform was necessary largely in order to correct shortcomings in presidential policies, particularly with respect to constraints on spending evident through the latter Eisenhower administration. Like most observers up to that point, Kolodziej focused on the appropriations process. While he looked at the Armed Services Committees’ initial foray in procurement authorization, like Gordon he was unimpressed with the results.9

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Writing in the early 1970s, Alton Frye agreed with Kolodziej that the Congress needed to play a more assertive role, but in this case to achieve significantly different policy ends. In *A Responsible Congress*, Frye advocated greater congressional involvement to promote arms control and to restrain the defense program generally. Focusing primarily on the period from 1968 through the early 1970s, Frye examined the efforts of individual senators both within and outside the defense committees to achieve the ends he advocated. He argued that, starting in 1968, a profound transformation had begun in Congress’s handling of defense issues – “from a relatively closed to a relatively open process;” “from a relatively prodefense attitude to a relatively negative and skeptical posture;” and “from a relatively deferential stance toward executive leadership in national security to a determined effort to get into the act itself.”

Regarding the SASC and its oversight function, Frye argued that Stennis’s tenure brought increased respect for the committee’s efforts. Under Stennis, the SASC finally “began a determined campaign to demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its responsibilities for overseeing the Defense Department,” a contrast to its previous “rubber stamp” image.

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11 Stennis replaced Russell as SASC chairman in 1969, as Russell forfeit the chairmanship to take over the full Appropriations Committee instead. Senate rules forbade Russell from holding both chairs simultaneously.

In terms of their ability to exercise at least some level of substantive oversight, the defense committees of 1960s had the occasional defender. Arnold Kanter, for example, argued that specific program preferences drove the actions of the defense committees, and that these preferences owed more to genuine concerns over the nation’s defense requirements than from concerns over waste or constituent service. He concluded, “Critics may not applaud Congress’s policy choices, but it does seem that Congress has, in the recent past, made such deliberate program decisions.” However, most scholars have since accepted Frye’s premise that a fundamental revolution in defense oversight occurred between 1968 and the mid-1970s. Edward Laurance termed it a “step-level change in the Congressional defense policy system.” To scholars, this revolution involved not only who in Congress participated in the oversight process, but also the substantive value of the oversight being performed.

The adversarial paradigm evident in Kolodziej and Frye wound together with the argument for step-level change to channel scholarly interest away from the pre-1968 Congress. Most scholarship subsequent to the early-1970s has focused on analyzing the

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15 One should note that there is a range of opinion as to the wisdom or value added of the post-1970 changes to congressional behavior. While the dominant trend in the scholarship is to look upon these changes favorably, there has been a minority backlash that has either questioned the value-added or found the trend entirely negative. In addition, some of the more recent scholarship has questioned the fundamental effectiveness of congressional “revolution” in either case, suggesting that any changes were manifest far more in terms of style than in real growth to congressional influence. These issues in the scholarship are not explored in detail here, as they fall outside the timeframe of this study.
relative power between, and the proper constitutional prerogatives of, the two branches. As such, most scholars have been interested in patterns of post-1968 executive-congressional conflict, offering at best the occasional glance backward to the pre-1968 period. Such glances tend to be highly impressionistic and dismissive. For example, Barry Blechman and W. Philip Ellis found that the changes in authorization procedures beginning with 412(b) foreshadowed the broader assault of the early-1970s. Moreover, they concluded that these changes eventually allowed the Armed Services Committees to supplant the Appropriations Committees as “the preeminent congressional authority on defense management” – although perhaps not until after 1968. Still, these few sentences are equivalent to virtually their entire analysis of the pre-1970 Congress. Overall, Blechman and Ellis conclude that only after 1970 did the Congress really begin “to play an active role in shaping the structure of U.S. military forces.”

To cite one last example, Randall B. Ripley and James M. Lindsay have each written extensively on the Congress’s role in defense and foreign policy-making. Together, they have been critical of the scholarly temptation to focus judgments of congressional effectiveness on the institution’s “ability to generate and to enact its own substantive policy proposals.” Nonetheless, they dismiss the period between the Korean

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16 This point is common in reviews of the historiography. For example, see James M. Lindsay and Randall B. Ripley, “Foreign and Defense Policy in Congress: A Research Agenda for the 1990s,” Legislative Studies Quarterly 17 (1992): 418.


18 Ibid., 11.

War and the drawdown in Vietnam as almost devoid of congressional influence or effectiveness – so much so that they conclude: “From the early 1950s until the mid-1970s, the list of who mattered in the realm of foreign and defense policy stopped with the president and the national security bureaucracy.”

At a minimum, this study hopes to persuade the reader that there is more of scholarly interest in the pre-1968 Congress than Ripley and Lindsay starkly conclude. The study’s primary purpose is twofold. The first is descriptive. It seeks to place the SASC’s handling of its oversight responsibilities in a broader political, social, and to some degree economic context. The study looks at the relationship between the Congress and the Executive Branch. It places the behavior of committee members with respect to the Executive in the historical context of both the Cold War and the longer-term trends that have accounted for the President’s steady growth in influence over both policy formulation and the management of the federal bureaucracy. The study also considers the structural power distributions of the Senate as organization, the behavioral norms of the Senate as a community, and the range of personal motivations that prompted individual member conduct. The study considers the role of the staff in shaping committee activities and outcomes. It looks at the committee’s relationship to the broader Senate, and assesses how this changed over time. Understanding this entire range of factors is critical to

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understanding why and how distinct committee oversight decisions took place, and to understanding how the committee executed and adapted its role over time.

The study’s second purpose is to understand how SASC members conceived of their responsibilities to execute a substantive policy oversight role with respect to the defense program, and to assess their effectiveness. The study defines a substantive policy oversight role as – at a minimum – ensuring that the Defense Department senior leadership acts competently and efficiently in managing the department’s various component activities, particularly with respect to prioritizing program and budget decisions in support of strategic plans and policy, in order to achieve an effective defense. As such, a substantive policy role is not by necessity adversarial, although it is by nature explorative, inquisitive, and critical in the analytic sense rather than the value-laden sense. A substantive policy oversight role can of course go several steps further, from merely assessing the effectiveness of decision-making processes (as suggested initially), to assessing the validity of decisions, to attempting to assert alternate plans and policies to replace those of the Executive Branch. In other words, at the most base

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21 One should note that, in the real world the practical linkage between policy and plans on the one hand, and programs and budgets on the other, is far less direct than a simple theory of defense planning might suppose. In the first place, plans and policies are often vague in terms of resourcing requirements, making effectiveness in resourcing highly subjective. Moreover, one or more parties in either branch of government may regard the unconstrained resourcing of plans as unaffordable. Finally, actual resourcing decisions may spring from all manner of factors at either the executive and congressional level that have nothing to do with approved policies and plans. The study attempts to account for these other factors – particularly at the congressional level – in the various cases it examines. To the degree that members of Congress might be operating according to such other motivations, they would not be termed as executing substantive policy oversight. That should not suggest that certain other oversight motivations – such as general fiscal accountability or restraint, or the mitigation of waste, fraud, and abuse – are invalid or lesser, just that they are different categories of considerations outside the primary focus of this study. For example, we will see cases where committee members sought to ensure that the Defense Department senior leadership acted competently and efficiently in order to achieve an effective defense at a reasonable cost. This combination of motivations is perfectly legitimate as a mode of oversight. It is simply that the study is more interested in assessing the former, while it still describes or accounts for other motivations driving members’ behavior.
level a substantive policy oversight role focuses on the rationality of the Defense Department decision-making process and the gross synchronization of program outputs to the defense strategy. At a more aggressive level, a substantive policy oversight role focuses on critiquing or seeking to fundamentally alter the very policy-level decisions that are supposed to inform the defense process and its programmatic outcomes in the first place.

While the SASC exercised broad jurisdiction over the Department of Defense and a host of issues associated with the U.S. defense program – as well as foreign, and intelligence policies – this study highlights SASC authorization and oversight of major weapons systems. While the study does not exclude comment on other areas under committee jurisdiction where necessary to illustrate a broader point about oversight practices, issues such as intelligence oversight, military operations, Executive Branch confirmations, and arms control issues are of secondary concern. Other issues like military and civilian personnel policies, routine operations and maintenance activities, the legal status of U.S. forces overseas, and the maintenance of strategic material stockpiles are outside the study’s scope entirely. The study focuses on major weapons systems for several reasons. By and large, individual weapons systems constituted the most

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22 For more information on SASC jurisdiction, see United States Senate, “Standing Rules of the Senate,” rule XXV, par. 1, sec. (c), http://rules.senate.gov/senaterules (accessed July 1, 2007). It is difficult to draw neat semantic lines around categories like “defense” and “foreign” policy. They tend to be overlapping rather than discrete sets of issues. In general, defense policy relates more to issues of military capabilities while foreign policy relates to diplomacy. However, issues like arms control do not fit easily into either category alone. Moreover, an umbrella term like “national security policy” does not necessarily capture defense and foreign policy entirely. In particular, significant aspects of the latter fall outside of the national security realm unless one is willing to cast the definition so widely as to encompass almost everything. While committee jurisdictions are comparatively narrow in focus, the individuals who serve on them have a full spectrum of motivations and this study will often need to stray beyond the narrow confines of procurement or defense policy to adequately address individual behavior and illuminate the broader environment in which SASC activities occurred.
contentious portion of the total defense program that Congress revisited on an annual basis. In other words, weapons systems were simply the issues in which the defense committees were consistently most interested, although issues like total personnel strength, unit and equipment readiness, and National Guard and Reserve issues also ranked highly. In addition, oversight of weapons programs linked directly to broader issues of strategy and policy, as weapons systems were (and are) often the key enablers of specific strategic and policy choices. Finally, by the late-1950s and through the 1960s, outlays for the development, procurement, and operation of weapons systems constituted the primary growth category in the defense program’s considerable demands on the nation’s material resources.23

A few statistics are useful in placing into perspective the magnitude of the defense program of the 1950s and 1960s, not all of which relate directly to weapons systems. Summed over the period 1955 to 1968, the defense budget totaled over $3.8 trillion, measured in constant FY 2000 dollars.24 This equaled a little over 46% of all federal spending during the same period, or approximately 10% of U.S. gross domestic product (GDP). Similarly, on average almost fifty percent of the Executive Branch civilian labor

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24 Calculated using U.S. Defense Department, National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2006, 206-207 (table 7-2), 216-217 (table 7-7). Using the same references, spending in the “national defense” functional category amounted to approximately $4.48 trillion during the same period. The main additional component in the national defense category involves Department of Energy spending for defense applications of nuclear power.
force worked for the Defense Department. When active duty military personnel and defense-related private sector employment are factored in, about nine percent of the U.S. labor force on average worked in the defense sector. In 1955, one SASC staff member supplied the following statistics. A B-52 bomber required approximately 2,000 gallons of gasoline to become airborne. Total defense-related investment in the U.S. was estimated at $150 billion – larger than the assets of the one hundred largest American corporations. The Defense Department’s total work force – “military and civilian, direct and indirect employees” – was better than seven million people, approximately the population of Czechoslovakia. By any standard, the business of defense program oversight involved among the weightiest issues of the day.

As mentioned previously, the study is particularly interested in the Armed Services Committees’ collective decisions to steadily expand the portion of the defense budget subject to annual authorization. This constituted the most significant procedural change to the pattern of defense oversight during the study’s timeframe, and possibly in the joint history of the two committees. In addition to annual budget authorization, the study remains cognizant of other oversight methods with substantive policy implications. Two are of particular note. The first involves investigative hearings, principally those

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25 The predecessor agencies of the Defense Department were also among the oldest portions of the federal government. The first Congress created the War Department, along with State and Treasury, in rapid succession in the summer of 1789. The Navy Department followed later in 1798.


27 U.S. Defense Department, National Defense Budget Estimates for FY 2006, 212-213 (table 7-5), 214-215 (table 7-6). Defense Department military and civilian employment, along with defense industry employment, totaled about 6.6 million in FY 1955. By FY 1968 total employment reached 7.95 million, an increase of 1.3 million. Defense industry growth accounted for more of the increase than did the growth in active duty military personnel – 674 versus 612 thousand, respectively.
held under the auspices of the SASC’s principle investigating arm, the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. The second involves authorization of changes to the Defense Department’s organizational structure and functions, the major example of which occurred in the context of the 1958 Defense Reorganization Act.

The timeframe 1955 to 1968 bounds three periods in Senate history. First, it coincides with Richard Russell’s uninterrupted tenure as SASC chairman. Second, it corresponds to the committee’s formative years as a body capable of exercising real substantive policy oversight. Third, the timeframe also coincides with a period of relative stability and consensus in the Senate on issues of defense and foreign policy – at least among those senators best situated to influence the process. The Cold War did not instantly materialize in the summer of 1945. U.S. foreign policy remained in flux in the first half decade after World War II. The Truman administration did not finally conclude that its foreign policy required the backing of large U.S. armed forces until the outbreak of Korean War in June 1950. Even then, many in Congress – in particular, Midwestern Republicans grouped in the Senate around the leadership of Robert Taft (R-OH) – doubted the wisdom of a large military and a wide alliance system, and postured to

28 Above we made the point that Russell was the Senate’s preeminent member on defense policy for almost two decades. In addition to his uninterrupted tenure between 1955 and 1968, Russell also served as chairman during the 82nd Congress, from 1951-1952. Republicans gained control of the Senate after the 1952 elections, allowing Leverett Saltonstall to serve as SASC chairman during the 83rd Congress. Russell and Saltonstall were men of similar temperament and outlook (if not necessarily ability, as we will see) and the flavor of committee operations differed little across their chairmanships. One strongly suspects that Russell exerted a dominant influence over the committee even in his minority status. Looking past 1968, one can assume that Russell remained particularly influential on defense issues as Appropriation Committee chairman, even after he forfeited his SASC chairmanship, although his tenure as Appropriations Committee chairman lasted scarcely more than two years and was plagued by his ill health.

29 A similar conclusion might well be drawn about the situation in the House of Representatives, but that is beyond the scope of this study.
reverse these trends. Taft’s 1953 death contributed to this movement’s decline, but critically so too did the efforts of senators like Russell, Lyndon Johnson (D-TX), and Walter George (D-GA). These men worked through the 1950s to build a foundation of support in the Senate for the basic premises of U.S. foreign and defense policies that the Truman administration had codified in NSC-68, and which successor administrations only modified on the margin through the end of the Cold War. Richard Russell’s work to manufacture and maintain this Senate consensus is an unappreciated layer of the story. While in certain respects these efforts might appear tangential to this study’s focus on the development of defense oversight procedures, exploring these efforts is critical both to understanding the motivations that determined Russell’s behavior with respect to defense oversight, as well as to understanding why the broader Senate behaved as it did with respect to defense policy during the period of Russell’s chairmanship.

The U.S. Congress is a complex organization. As is often said, it is not an it but a they. Each chamber has its committee structure, often with overlapping or unclearly defined jurisdictions. Each chamber has its members – the influential and the not so influential – who often seek to shape legislation whether or not they sit on a relevant committee. Each chamber has its two parties, and each party has its leaders, its conference, and its own committees. Sometimes parties are fractured and disorganized; at other times they are tight-knit and fiercely partisan. At different points in its history,

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30 A party’s conference, or caucus, is simply the entirety of its membership. All Democratic senators form the Democratic conference, and likewise for Republicans. During the study’s timeframe, the party conference each had a Policy and a Steering Committee. The former was supposed to assist the conference and the party leadership with analysis and strategy formulation in support of the party’s legislative agenda. The latter was largely responsible for handling committee assignments.
the preponderance of Senate power has alternately rested with the majority leadership, the majority conference, or the individual committee chairmen. Whichever cluster predominates, power is shared among them to one degree or another. Unlike with the House of Representatives, moreover, the Senate’s rules diffuse power. Individual Senators enjoy significant prerogatives that often only supermajorities can rein in, if at all. Finally, each chamber has its staffs – both committee professional staff members and personal legislative assistants – who are often the real experts, and in many cases the real advocates and drivers of legislation.

Several factors mitigated this complexity with respect to defense oversight of the 1950s and 1960s. First, the committee structures were comparatively simple and rational. This era predated the Budget Committees, which are a product of the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act, and are designed to examine the federal budget from a holistic perspective and ensure that individual authorizers and appropriators remain within with agreed-upon budget targets. Each chamber had one primary authorizing committee (its Armed Services Committee) and one primary appropriating subcommittee (the defense subcommittee of its Appropriations Committee). While each chamber also had a separate appropriations subcommittee in charge of Defense Department real estate and military construction, the jurisdictional lines of authority were clear. Although a number of committees had – or tried to assert – jurisdiction over aspects of defense policy, in practice this rarely resulted in serious conflict with the Armed Services Committees. While both Democratic and Republican senators outside the major defense committees sometimes desired greater influence on aspects of defense policy, they rarely found an effective outlet. Unsolicited bills submitted to the SASC for consideration died
inconspicuously. Republicans lacked a Senate majority, and Democratic “outsiders” were generally unable to achieve voting majorities on defense policy issues. During most of the period in question, if you were a senator interested in substantive defense policy issues, you sat on Armed Services or the defense subcommittee of Appropriations, or you sat idly. Full Senate action on major legislation that the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees reported was largely pro forma. Attempts to amend such legislation on the floor were almost nonexistent.

On the other hand, if you were a senior senator there was a good chance you sat on both Armed Services and Appropriations. For example, Richard Russell served on the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee the entire time he was SASC chairman. Beginning in the 1963 session, he chaired both committees simultaneously. This only ended in 1969, when he forfeited the SASC chairmanship (although he retained a seat) to head the full Appropriations Committee. Similarly, during the late 1950s and

31 Generally, the SASC handled such bills by referring them to the Defense Department or other affected agencies for comment, later forwarding back to the sponsors the virtually assured letters of non-concurrence.

32 This became less and less true by the late 1960s, and had been overturned by the mid-1970s. By then, members outside the defense committees were avidly seeking both to exert greater influence during “floor” consideration of committee bills, and – acting primarily through their party conferences – to exert greater control over committee operations and the prerogatives of the chairmen in the first place.

early 1960s, John Stennis chaired the military construction subcommittees of both Armed Services and Appropriations.34

Generally speaking, the 1950s and 1960s were a time of particularly strong committees and committee chairmen. Beginning in the late-1950s, however, a movement to democratize the Congress began percolating through both houses, and on both sides of the aisle. This movement sought to rein in the often arbitrary power of chairman, and to give party majorities more responsibility and influence over congressional processes. By the mid-1970s, this movement was in fact revolutionizing many of the internal processes and power distributions in the Congress. While this movement’s greatest consequences post-date the time period under consideration, it is still significant to understanding the Senate climate of the 1960s. The study charts its growth in some detail.

In certain respects, this study resembles an institutional history of the SASC and its subcommittees. The study is more interested in individuals than institutions, however. This study suggests three criteria for assessing an individual’s power or authority over a given issue. The first is the individual’s level of access to information and deliberations through all phases of the decision-making process, both congressional and executive. While access to information is rarely decisive, it is a key enabler of authority. It allows an

34 This study does not systematically address the questions of whether senators tried or were able to leverage service on both committees to enhance their influence on substantive policy issues vis-à-vis the Executive Branch. At a minimum, dual membership facilitated efforts to ensure that authorized programs were actually funded, and at comparable levels to what the Armed Services Committees had authorized. A cursory glance at the record shows that appropriations in fact approximated authorizations on average. The larger issue, however, is that many of the significant executive-congressional disputes relevant to this study involved congressional attempts to force the President to spend money on programs he or his Secretary of Defense opposed. In such cases, Congress effectively had no mechanism to enforce such spending. At least in theory, this also changed with the 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act, which diminished the President’s fiscal impoundment powers. The literature reviewed for this study did not indicate whether it changed in fact.
individual the ability to understand, frame, and shape the course of debate. This is true both for decision-makers and the staff members who shape their agendas, and are often more knowledgeable of the details than are their bosses. The second criterion is the individual’s stature, or in other words, the respect that others at all levels must generally accord the individual and his or her opinions, whether or not anyone actually heeds them. Stature gets you in the room. It provides the opportunity to shape decision-making when one lacks the direct, singular authority to decide. The third criterion is the individual’s actual authority or influence in making or shaping decisions. While stature provides the opportunity to shape decisions, influence actually shapes them, unless of course one has sufficient influence to make them outright.

Richard Russell was the chairman and dominant member of the Senate Armed Services Committee. In almost all cases, Russell’s position became the committee’s position, and then the Senate’s. In many respects, Russell’s leadership is the focal point of this study. Russell was not in all cases an island; he delegated a good deal of committee work to other members whom he trusted, and his committee colleagues were often able to sway him with their arguments. In particular, John Stennis – a true committee workhorse as well as Russell’s protégé and long-presumed successor – exercised considerable and increasing influence, and over time developed a notion of oversight far more assertive than any Russell ever held. Lyndon Johnson was an important – if often detached – member until he left the Senate in 1961. His main role during the 1950s involved his chairmanship of the SASC’s Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. Some, like Stuart Symington (D, MO), Leverett Saltonstall (R, MA), and Margaret Chase Smith (R, ME), were prominent and outspoken members – if not truly
influential – throughout virtually the entire period under study. Others, like Strom Thurmond (D, SC), Henry Jackson (D, WA), and Barry Goldwater (R, AZ), joined the committee during Russell’s tenure but reached greatest prominence after his time. A few, like Ralph Flanders (R, VT), played fleeting but crucial roles. This is also a story of staff members, who generally served in the background but whose importance should not be understated. Again, however, the story of the SASC prior to 1969 is largely a story of Richard Russell’s leadership. While often moved by his fellow members, Russell ultimately decided for the committee, and other members’ proposals could not survive his determined opposition. As we will see, the control Richard Russell exercised over the SASC was likewise evident with respect to the broader Senate. Russell’s ability to influence Executive Branch decision-making is more difficult to judge. While there is

35 Although not the first woman elected to the Congress, Margaret Chase Smith had the distinction of being the first woman elected separately to both the House of Representatives and the Senate. While she was initially appointed to the House of Representative to replace her deceased husband, she won reelection in her own right, and in 1948 won election to the Senate. Margaret Chase Smith was one of only two female senators during the period under study (Maurine Brown Neuberger (D-OR) served from 1960-1967). During much of her time in the Senate – she lost a reelection bid in 1972, after which she retired from politics – Smith served on both the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees. She and Russell formed an early friendship and remained personally close throughout their lives. Incidentally, Smith also sought the Republican nomination for the presidency in 1964, and became the first woman to have her name placed in nomination at a major party convention.

36 Strom Thurmond joined the Senate as an independent in 1954 at the age of 51, promptly became a Democrat, and finally changed party affiliation to Republican in 1964. Thurmond also became in 1954 the only Senator ever to win as a write-in candidate. After sitting Senator Bernard Maybank died unexpectedly in September of that year, the state Democratic Party appointed a successor to run in that fall’s election rather than holding a special primary. Many South Carolinians considered this high-handed, and Thurmond was able to capitalize on this to win 63 percent of the votes an independent in the November election. Thurmond eventually became SASC chairman from 1995 to 1998.

Barry Goldwater joined the SASC in 1961, departing after 1964 as he left the Senate following his failed presidential bid. He rejoined the Senate and the SASC after the end of Russell’s tenure, eventually becoming chairman from 1985 to 1987.
significant anecdotal evidence suggesting this influence, concrete and indisputable examples are few.

Understanding power distributions – whether within a committee, within the Congress, or between the Congress and the Executive Branch – is not an end in and of itself. It is only important in so far as it identifies who gets to make decisions. Having identified the influential, the study is ultimately most interested in understanding their worldviews, their range of motivations, their conceptions of the proper standards and modes of oversight, and the fundamental goals and purposes that motivated their behavior and informed their decisions. We leave assessment of these issues – as well as the ultimate influence of Russell and the SASC with the Executive Branch – to the narrative, and the conclusion.

Notes on Sources

Scholars studying the 1950s and 1960s Congress contemporaneously had little recourse for source material other than bill reports, sanitized hearing transcripts, newspaper accounts, and the occasional interview. These sources provide a good overview of the public activities of the Congress, and highlight the majority of issues that received significant congressional scrutiny. They shed little light on the private activities of the Congress, whether private because of security, political sensitivity, or simple banal obscurity – that is, the day-to-day affairs typical of any organization that do not warrant particular publicity but which go far to explain why and how an organization behaves as it does. While the documentary record available to the historian is in some cases frustratingly no better than what was available to the contemporary journalist or political
scientist, the archival record still offers a good deal more breadth and basis for insight than was generally available to the contemporary researcher, particularly with respect to understanding simple day-to-day committee behavior.

This study relies heavily on the official document collections of the Senate Armed Services Committee housed at the Center for Legislative Archives, a division of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). The study supplements these with records of the various Defense Department component organizations also housed at the National Archives, as well as the personal papers of Robert McNamara, which are also among NARA’s holdings. In addition, the study also uses materials from the John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson presidential libraries, and the private collections of Richard Russell and John Stennis (the latter two of which are housed at the University of Georgia and Mississippi State University, respectively). In particular, the study makes extensive use of the various oral history collections available through each of these institutions.

Collections in the care of the National Archives have a number of limitations. First, significant portions still await security declassification and inventorying. This limitation was evident with respect to SASC records, but was often extreme with respect to Defense Department collections. At the time research for this study was ongoing, virtually nothing of value was available from any of the record groups for the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), the Joint Staff, or the Department of the Air Force. Some useful Navy Department collections were available, as were several such from the Department of the Army, although quality diminished noticeably with respect to post-1960 holdings for both. Moreover, subsequent to the September 11, 2001, terrorist
attacks, the Department of Defense reclassified large portions of several previously declassified collections. This was purportedly out of a fear that they might contain materials on weapons of mass destruction, or certain physical or other vulnerabilities of use to potential terrorists. Whether any of the reclassified materials would have been useful for this study is difficult to say. It seems at least safe to say that the amount of potentially valuable but reclassified material pales in comparison to what has never been released in the first place. Of particular value would have been the records of the various Service and OSD legislative liaison offices still classified or otherwise restricted. The most valuable of the Army and Navy records mentioned above came from similar collections. More problematic than security concerns in achieving the eventual release of currently restricted materials is simply the limited human resources available to implement the document review process. This is particularly true when coupled with the ever-expanding volume of materials the Defense Department sends to the National Archives for storage.

Even more serious than records awaiting review is the fact that many of the potentially most useful SASC documents simply no longer exist, or were never made in the first place. In terms of quality with respect to identifying the real underlying issues, motivations, and maneuverings of key members, no block of material proved more valuable for this study than the transcripts of SASC meetings held in executive session (i.e., closed to the public), particularly those dealing with mark-up of legislation prior to the release of committee bills and reports. While executive session transcripts exist for many of the topics relevant to this study (the various military construction authorization bills, for example, as well as the 1958 Defense Reorganization Act), they simply do not
exist *at all* for the mark-ups of the procurement and research & development authorization bills, or for many of the key investigative activities of the period. Transcripts of these sessions either were not made for security or sensitivity reasons, or were incinerated at the end of the Congress’s annual session for the same reason. Moreover, the *entire* collection of SASC executive session transcripts abruptly ends after 1963. Similarly, no transcripts of House-Senate Conference meetings are available.

While the private collections of Russell, Stennis, and Johnson did prove relatively rich in certain respects, there were definite limitations. All three men were discrete in their political dealings, and particularly secretive on national security issues. They generally preferred to handle matters face-to-face or in telephone conversations rather than in correspondence, much less in full public view. As an obvious consequence, much of the key discourse was archived only in their memories, and was lost upon their deaths.

This loss was most severe with respect to Russell and least with Johnson, with Stennis in the middle. The difference related in large part to how each used staff. Johnson was a Senate pioneer in the effective use of a large, talented, energetic staff. His archives contain a treasure of staff memos – particularly from aide George Reedy – detailing potential strategies and the pros and cons of different policy positions. Moreover, while Johnson preferred discretion in his dealing with others that might be subject to public release, he remained interested in having his staff maintain an extensive private record – as his many reams of presidential phone conversations attest. Again, while such records are thin from a defense policy perspective, they do much to illuminate the man and the environment in which he operated.
Stennis likewise made extensive use of his committee professional staff, and a wealth of memos focusing on both policy and process exist in the official SASC record and his personal collection alike. In addition, Stennis was personally a dedicated record keeper. He maintained a detailed accounting of his daily activities, and frequently composed “memos for the record” recounting his actions, opinions, and recollections. Unfortunately, much of this was written in Stennis’s hand, and his writing was horrible. Worse still, Stennis kept many of his records in short hand. Literally dozens of untranscribed notebooks full of short hand notes sit in the Stennis archives. They will probably never be deciphered.

Russell was far more old-fashioned in his use of staff. His personal staff was largely clerical, not legislative. Staff memos of the type abundant in the Stennis and Johnson collections are absent in Russell’s. Moreover, Russell was a poor record keeper. While one finds occasional memos for the record or cryptic notes scrawled on stray pieces of paper, these are comparatively few and often almost illegible.

Oral histories were among the richest data source available. They of course have their own limitations. First, as one would expect, the subject matter of the interview is generally not focused squarely on one’s research topic. Comments are often tangential or difficult to interpret, and of course memories fade or twist over time. Second, questioning is often tailored to reminiscences of the individual for whose archive they were collected. This tends to give them a eulogistic quality that may slant reality. Moreover, many of the reminiscences relating to Russell’s stature and influence come from Lyndon Johnson’s aides and confidants. Given the close personal and professional relationship between the two men, as well as the key role Russell played in Lyndon Johnson’s rise and leadership
in the Senate, these individuals may not be the most unbiased sources. Ideally, a project like this study would utilize a far wider range of archival collections from individual senators than time or resources permitted in this case.

The Russell-Johnson friendship survived the bitter fights over social welfare and civil rights legislation of the 1960s. Both accepted that such fights were an understandable byproduct of the political process. While each held strong views on which he would not budge, each respected the other’s right to an alternate position and moved on. Ironically, the two fell out in 1968 over the Johnson administration’s delay in handling a Georgia federal court nominee whom Russell backed. While policy disputes were one thing, what Russell perceived as malevolence on the part of Johnson’s staff in the handling of such a “bread and butter” political matter was another. Russell responded by withdrawing his support for Abe Fortas’s nomination to replace Earl Warren as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. The Senate subsequently successfully filibustered Fortas’s nomination. By all accounts, the Johnson-Russell relationship never resumed its old closeness, despite Johnson’s repeated apparently good faith efforts to mend the rift.
The Growth of Executive Leadership

Taking the Constitution on its face, Congress is the first and most powerful branch of the U.S. government. Even in the area of national security – much less fiscal and budget matters – the Congress’s explicitly enumerated powers far exceed those of the President. Among other constitutional provisions, the Congress has the power to declare war, raise and support armies, provide for and maintain a navy, and make rules for the governance and regulation of the armed forces. More generally the Congress has the authority to “make all Laws which shall be necessary and proper for carrying into Execution the foregoing Powers (enumerated above), and all other Powers vested by this Constitution in the Government of the United States, or in any Department or Officer thereof.”38 Finally, Congress’s principal power – at least as expressed on an annual basis – is to appropriate the funds the federal government requires to operate, and to specify the purposes for which those funds may be used. In the absence of congressional appropriations, it is in most instances illegal for the Executive Branch to spend money for its own operation and activities. This power toappropriate is often called the “power of the purse.”

38 U.S. Constitution, art. 1, sec. 8.
The President’s explicitly enumerated powers are far more limited. The President is constitutionally the Commander-in-Chief of the regular and reserve armed forces (if Congress sees fit to provide and maintain them), as well as state National Guard units (when called to federal duty under congressionally authorized statutes). The President has the power to make treaties and appoint executive officers (subject to Senate advice and consent). Finally, the Constitution stipulates that the President “shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient.”39 In other words, the President can provide the Congress with legislative proposals, but has neither the formal power to submit bill language for legislative action, nor any other official role in the legislative process other than the requirement to either approve or veto the bills the Congress passes.

Despite the Congress’s decided edge in terms of explicitly enumerated powers, over the past century the presidency has in many respects come to dwarf the Congress – particularly in terms of national security policy-making, but also in certain regards with respect to budgeting. To some degree, the growth of executive influence has come from persistent claims regarding the President’s implied powers as Commander-in-Chief. The frequency with which the United States has been engaged in either major wars or extended periods of “national crisis” over the past century has made these arguments all the more compelling. Given this reality, it is easy to become fixated on the role war powers have played in the growth of executive dominance in the national security realm,

39 Ibid., art. 2, sec. 3.
and to ignore another more ordinary but more pervasive reality. Over the past century, quite aside from issues of war or national emergency, the Congress consistently found itself overwhelmed by the steadily expanding scope of the federal government’s activities, both domestic and foreign. As a consequence, it has consistently looked to the President to exercise routine managerial leadership over the rapidly expanding federal budget and bureaucracy – leadership that the Congress consistently found itself unable to provide. Clearly these two issues of war powers and the expanding scope of government are related, as a portion of the growth in federal activities, bureaucracy, and budgets has come about due to the national security environment. However, to the degree that the Executive Branch has *de facto* surpassed the Congress as the first branch of government, it remains largely because the Congress has consistently delegated its powers in the President’s favor.

Conflicts over power and prerogatives are as old as the American republic. Congress first developed its committee structure between 1795 and 1825 in part “to free itself from dependence on executive leadership.” The intent was that standing committees would allow for specialization and the development of expertise that could match that resident in the Executive Branch. The balance of congressional versus executive power ebbed and flowed over the 19th century. The decades following the Civil War were perhaps the high water mark of congressional ascendancy. During this period, however, the size and scope of the federal government remained limited, as did threats to

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the nation’s security. America’s defense budget and the size and capabilities of its Army
and Navy remained miniscule, at least in comparison to the great European powers. While America’s trade and diplomatic ties with the wider world steadily expanded over
the second half of the 19th century – the latter most often following in the footsteps of the
former – Presidents generally held to the Constitution’s design and arranged international
agreements as treaties, giving the Senate a decisive say in their passage. Moreover, the
Senate was not shy about exercising its veto.\textsuperscript{41}

During this era, the relationships between congressional committees and the
executive departments they oversaw remained intimate, and the budget process remained
decentralized. With respect to appropriations, the President remained largely outside the
process; departments submitted their proposals directly to Congress with no presidential
oversight or coordination.\textsuperscript{42} The relevant appropriations subcommittees approved
department budgets piecemeal, with no effort to place individual spending bills in the
context of a broader budget or fiscal policy.

There was no real pressure to do so, since during the 1800s the federal
government typically ran a surplus, based largely on revenue from the tariff and western
land sales. At the same time, these surpluses abetted a culture of “pork barrel”
appropriations in the Congress, to the benefit of local constituencies. These rosy
circumstances for appropriators did not last long past the turn of the 20th century. As

\textsuperscript{41} The Senate failed to ratify several treaties during this period, including the attempted annexations
of the Dominican Republic in 1870 and of Hawaii in 1893, as well a U.S. protectorate over Nicaragua in
1884. See Robert Johnson, “Congress and the Cold War,” \textit{Journal of Cold War Studies} 3 (spring 2001): 76-
100.

\textsuperscript{42} Fred R. Harris, \textit{Deadlock or Decision: The U.S. Senate and the Rise of National Politics} (New York:
Oxford University Press, 1993), 203.
federal government programs and bureaucracies steadily expanded, traditional revenue streams could not keep pace. The fiscal pressures that grew out of this divergence eventually provided the impetus to presidential control over the formulation of department budgets. This growth in budget control would in turn become central to the general growth of presidential power with respect to the initiation and execution of policy.

As 20th century deficits became more regular, so too did calls for budget reform. Many activists expressed the view that the President should be the agent for change. Progressive reformers felt a strong presidency would act as a check against what they felt was a “corrupt and inherently conservative” Congress.\textsuperscript{43} The argument for enhanced presidential budget control drew on newly developing business principles of “scientific management,” as well as examples of executive-controlled budget systems introduced in several states and cities.\textsuperscript{44} During his presidency, William Howard Taft established the Commission on Economy and Efficiency to explore proposals for increased presidential budget control, and the 1916 Republican platform adopted the commission’s recommendations. World War I provided the tipping point, however. The rapid expansion of budgets and bureaucracies necessary for mobilization and execution of the war effort ballooned the federal deficit, making the lack of effective budget integration and management no longer tolerable.\textsuperscript{45}

\textsuperscript{43} Johnson, “Congress and the Cold War,” 84.

\textsuperscript{44} Sundquist, 41.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 40.
The 1921 Budget and Accounting Act was among the key milestones in the development of presidential power.\footnote{Ibid. 39. In Sundquist’s words, “The modern presidency, judged in terms of institutional responsibilities, began on June 10, 1921, the day that President Harding signed the Budget and Accounting Act.”} Congress passed the act with the explicit goal of holding down overall federal spending.\footnote{Harris, 203.} The act made the President responsible for coordinating the budgets of all executive departments and agencies, prior to their annual submission to Congress. It also created the Bureau of the Budget (BoB) to serve the President in executing this responsibility. In effect, the collection of individual department and agency budgets now became a singular “President’s budget.” In passing the Budget and Accounting Act, Congress de facto acknowledged its inability to originate an overall budget policy, and delegated this responsibility to the President.

Having sacrificed any role as the originator of overall budget policy, Congress focused instead on “oversight” – a nebulous term that could involve almost everything or almost nothing, depending on the interest of the overseer. The Congress’s standing committee system remained the principal mechanism for oversight, although the Congress also created a General Accounting Office (GAO) through a provision of the 1921 Budget and Accounting Act to assist in the oversight function. While the power of the purse still ultimately resided with the Congress, the President now exercised far more initiative in controlling the purposes of federal expenditures, and thus in setting the terms of budget – and ultimately policy – debates. Moreover, if the committee system was meant to allow specialization and the development of expertise in Congress, the system’s
capacity in these respects paled in comparison with the level of specialized expertise developing in the executive departments. This was particularly true with respect to highly professional or technical fields – not only science or engineering, but also economics and military operations. Members of Congress with limited time, multiple legislative and constituent responsibilities, and little if any professional staff simply could not match the competency developing in the executive departments.\textsuperscript{48} While the bureaucracies professionalized, members of Congress remained generalists. Although the President as an individual was no better suited to manage the growing departmental bureaucracies then were individual members of Congress, the President’s own professional staff steady expanded in size and responsibility, beginning at a much earlier date than any similar development in the Congress.\textsuperscript{49}

The trend toward increasing presidential initiative and congressional delegation continued through the interwar period. In neither domestic nor foreign policy was the Congress a mere rubber stamp. At a minimum, Congress always retained the right to say “No.” Such was inherent with the power of the purse, as well as with other constitutional responsibilities. The Senate’s refusal to ratify the Treaty of Versailles in 1919 is a well-known example of congressional assertiveness, as was the Senate’s defeat of President Franklin Roosevelt’s “court-packing” proposal of 1937. Moreover, the Neutrality Acts of the 1930s were instances of true congressional initiative in setting foreign policy rather

\textsuperscript{48} Most congressional committees only gained professional staffs with passage of the Legislative Reorganization act of 1946.

\textsuperscript{49} The President’s staff comprises the White House Office (WHO) and the Executive Office of the President (EEOP). The distinction between them is largely semantic, as the former is technically a component of the latter. Elements of the WHO are physically located within the White House, while other elements of the EEOP are located externally.
than merely responding to presidential proposals. In the broader context of the steady growth of presidential power, however, such instances were exceptions.

While Congress was never of one mind on the wisdom or propriety of investing the presidency with the primary responsibility for managing the government, the majority continued to sanction this path. The Congress’s reaction to President Roosevelt’s 1937 Brownlow Committee report provides an example.\(^50\) This commission formed to examine Executive Branch reorganization proposals and suggest “rationalized” lines of presidential control that would enhance the President’s ability to manage and to develop policy alternatives. Among other things, the commission included recommendations to strengthen the President’s staff to assist in policy-making. In Sundquist’s words, the plan “was clearly designed to make the president the ‘single directing executive authority’ over a hierarchical executive branch.”\(^51\) Roosevelt submitted the slate of commission reorganization proposals to Congress in 1937, virtually along side his court-packing plan. In the furor surrounding the latter, none of the commission’s reorganization plans could pass both houses of Congress during the 1937 session. Even accounting for the predictable partisan tinge directed against the President, however, the debate over the proposals revealed a level of congressional ambivalence over the presidency’s growing influence. Roosevelt supporters like Senator James Byrnes (D-SC) argued that “the history of Congress shows that Congress just cannot make these (necessary) changes,”

\(^{50}\) The commission’s formal name was the President's Committee on Administrative Management, but it was commonly referred to in reference to its chairman, Louis Brownlow.

\(^{51}\) Sundquist, 49.
while opponents like Arthur Vandenberg (R-MI) denounced the measures as “potential dictatorship.”

While opponents won the day in 1937, two years later Roosevelt was able to secure a bill that delegated certain Executive Branch reorganization powers to the President, subject to veto by concurrent resolution of both Houses of Congress. Having won this point the President pushed through five reorganization plans the same year, one of which formally created the Executive Office of the President (EEOP). In agreeing to what amounted to a further increase in the capability of the President relative to the Congress, members were again (albeit reluctantly) acknowledging the need for presidential leadership. In the words of Senator Harry Byrd (D, VA), himself no starry-eyed admirer of presidential power: “The only way to reorganize the Government is to give the power of reorganization to the President and then depend on him to accomplish it, and hold him to strict accountability.” As Congress incrementally delegated governing initiative to the presidency during the 1920s and 1930s, majorities consistently acknowledged that Congress was incapable of the kind of truly “executive” leadership that modern times required. Moreover, the Congress made these decisions outside of any direct consideration related to the nation’s external security. World War II and the

52 Ibid., 52.

53 As opposed to a “joint resolution,” a “concurrent resolution” does not require the President’s signature. However, because of this a concurrent resolution cannot by itself carry the force of law, while a joint resolution signed by the President does. A subsequent modification to the law allowed either the House or Senate to veto a presidential plan individually.

54 Sundquist, 55.
developing Cold War did not create these trends toward presidential leadership and expanded powers. They only served to reinforce them.

In 1946, as wartime mobilization turned down and millions of soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines returned home, concern mounted over the need to stabilize the economy, avoid a return to economic depression, and ensure a “soft economic landing.” Congress passed the Employment Act of 1946, which directed the federal government to "promote maximum employment, production, and purchasing power," required the President to submit an annual economic report to Congress, and gave him a Council of Economic Advisers to assist. The real impact of this legislation on the economy over time was arguably marginal. The important point is that, when again presented with what appeared a significant policy challenge, the Congress looked to the President for leadership and to itself for oversight.

This held true in the national security field. World War II had demonstrated the increasing necessity for “joint” operations among the military Services (as opposed to separate and discrete sea, air, and land campaigns each fought by a single Service in isolation). President Truman promoted the need to have a tighter coordinating mechanism for the three Service departments. Congress eventually passed the National Security Act of 1947, which among other things created the position of Secretary of Defense to oversee the Departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force – the last also newly created.55 Congress only grudgingly accepted the requirement for greater military

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55 The act also created the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the National Security Council (NSC). It did not create the Department of Defense, however. The 1947 act left the three Service departments at cabinet level and created the Office of Secretary of Defense, with minimal staff support, to coordinate the “National Military Establishment.” This proved unworkable, and 1949 amendments to the act officially
“unification” under the guise of the Secretary of Defense, who would be next in the military chain of command after the President. When given a choice between a highly centralized structure (under a proposal the Army advocated) and a looser confederation (which the Navy supported), Congress opted for the latter. The choice of a confederation rapidly proved unworkable, however, and in a series of reorganizations that followed in 1949, 1953, and 1958, the Congress first relented and then eagerly granted the Secretary of Defense ever greater authority over the Defense Department. In this climate, Congress continued to struggle with how best to exercise its oversight responsibilities.

Ostensibly to update its oversight capability and keep pace with the President’s enhanced role, Congress also passed the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946.56 Among its major points, the act aimed to make the Congress’s committee structure leaner, and to better align committees according to principal oversight functions. The act reduced the number of committees in each House from 33 to 15, reduced the number of members on each committee, and in the Senate limited members to two major committee assignments. In the spirit of military unification, each chamber also merged its Military Affairs and Naval Affairs Committees into a single Armed Services Committee. Each standing committee of the Congress was permitted to hire up to four professional staff members and six clerical staff, with the Appropriations Committees excepted to maintain

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larger staffs. The act also permitted the hire of additional investigative staff as necessary on a supposedly temporary basis, although many such staffers achieved *de facto* permanent status. Moreover, the act established the Legislative Reference Service (LRS), which was to provide the Congress an independent source for research and policy analysis, as a separate division within the Library of Congress. Finally, measures rejected by the House but adopted separately by the Senate allowed for each senator to hire one administrative assistant, and for the creation of Policy Committees that were supposed to allow each party a more effective policy coordination mechanism. While measures such as the Policy Committees failed to meet their supposed purpose, the committee restructuring achieved at least somewhat of a rationalization in legislative lines of authority, while the additional staff structure and the LRS provided Congress an enhanced, if nascent, ability to gather information and review policy independently from the Executive Branch.

57 While this act marks the real departure point in the proliferation of professional congressional staffs, Michael Malbin notes that Congress's initial experience with nonpartisan professional committee staffs began in the mid-1920s with the two Appropriations Committees and the Joint Committee on Internal Revenue. See Michael J. Malbin, *Unelected Representatives: Congressional Staff and the Future of Representative Government* (New York: Basic Books, 1980), 11.

58 Ibid.

59 As Richard Baker notes, “As early as 1941, the Senate considered a measure to allow each member to hire one ‘research expert’ … (but) Senior members who chaired committees objected to any plan that would add subject specialists to the clerical ranks,” for fear that this might diminish the power of the chairmen to control legislation. Baker, 89.

60 George Reedy, a staff assistant to Lyndon Johnson who also served as a Senate Democratic Policy Committee staffer, commented that “(the 1946) act was highly unpopular in both houses, particularly because the committee consolidation that resulted eliminated precious chairmanships, (and because) the policy committees would inevitably provoke clashes with members who felt that their primary allegiance was to their constituencies rather than to party organization.” Reedy argues that the act only passed because it also contained a “badly needed” pay raise. Reedy also concluded that “the Policy Committee was turned into a public relations group for the Republicans and a source of extra staff for the floor leader on the
The steady hardening of the Cold War through the early 1950s impacted how many senators viewed their oversight responsibilities and their relationship with the Executive Branch. Quite simply, many now believed the nation was in a persistent state of danger. Some conceptualized this as a series of cresting threats, others as a more general, long-term challenge. However one conceptualized the threat, many simply doubted that Congress as a corporate body was capable of exercising the kind of leadership that the nation required in such a time. Only the President could lead. Many came to view their predecessor Congresses’ efforts to restrain Franklin Roosevelt’s foreign policy during the 1930s as a testament to the hazard of congressional assertiveness in a time of national danger.

Members were hardly of one mind in this regard, however. Throughout the Truman and into the Eisenhower years, a sizeable block of so-called Midwestern Republican senators gathered around the leadership of Robert Taft of Ohio. They remained determined to scale back presidential authority, the scope of government, and the size of federal expenditures, with respect both to the nation’s domestic and national security policies. This group was not a majority, however, and required allies to implement its agenda. Although weakened with Taft’s 1953 death from cancer, this group remained a formidable bloc through much of the remainder of the decade. Their political opposites in most respects resided in the liberal wing of the Democratic Party. Although often poles apart from the Midwestern Republicans, the liberal Democrats shared two of their characteristics. The liberal Democrats were often skeptical of presidential power

with respect to national security policy, and they formed a distinct Senate minority. A third prominent bloc – and the one generally able to form either the decisive majority (when paired with one of the others) or the most vocal and obstructionist minority (when they felt their interests warranted) – were the conservative Southern Democrats. Their self-acknowledged leader was Richard Russell. Russell and his southern colleagues generally found more in common with the Taft Republicans than with their fellow liberal Democratic partisans, particularly with respect to domestic policy. With respect to national security, however, Russell regarded both groups as dangerously on the fringes. As such, he remained disinclined to subject national security decisions to the whims of Senate politics. As we will see, both the steady growth of presidential power and the realities of 1950s Senate politics significantly impacted Russell’s attitude as to the proper mode of congressional oversight of national security affairs. Although not monolithic in this regard, Russell’s default position was that oversight of the nation’s security was safest in his close hold. Moreover, Russell was singularly positioned to ensure that his perspective became the Senate’s policy.

**Power in the Senate: An Overview**

Power in the Senate has three sources: institutional, normative, and personal. Institutional power relates to how the relative power to make or influence decisions is distributed across an organizational chart, and includes the rules and procedures that determine how entities on the organizational chart relate to one another. Institutional power can be either *positive* or *negative*. The rules of the Senate give each individual member enormous negative powers to obstruct the legislative process. Through unlimited
debate, for example, a determined minority of a sufficient size to defeat a cloture vote can obstruct almost anything. Despite the obstructive power of individuals and minorities in the Senate, however, we are here more concerned with positive power. In the Senate, passing legislation is far more difficult than obstructing it. A senator’s positive institutional power has a great deal to do with the particular boxes in the organizational chart that he or she occupies. The most prominent nodes are the standing legislative committees and their subcommittees. The degree to which positive power has been skewed towards the chairmen and the majority party members of these committees has varied over time, but is always considerable. The principal alternate nodes of positive power are the party caucuses, although the degree to which power in these centers has been distributed across the leadership posts, the caucus committees, and the broader caucus membership has likewise varied over time.

Once upon a time, the Senate functioned with strong central lines of authority, much as the House always has. Unlike with the House, however, the mechanism for central authority in the Senate was not the rules, but the party caucus system. Party caucuses were particularly strong prior to direct election of Senators, which only began after 1912. Before this, state legislatures appointed senators to their posts, which made the latter directly accountable to the former. This system proved highly amenable to enforcing party discipline, and allowed for the Senate party caucuses to exercise tremendous power. If a leader called a caucus and won at least a fifty percent vote, all members were more or less bound to support this decision.\footnote{Reedy, \textit{The U.S. Senate}, 44. According to Reedy, “Popularly elected senators quickly defied the caucus system. After that, no formal machinery controlled the senate.”}
In the absence of a strong caucus system after 1913, institutional power defaulted to the standing committee chairmen. Power largely remained there through the 1970s, when activist party majorities successfully rebelled against the powerful chairmanships and made them more accountable to majority rule. During what might be called the “era of the committee chairmen,” there were occasionally strong majority leaders. Alben Barkley and Lyndon Johnson were two. They led with the concurrence of the chairmen, however, not by dominating them. While any Senator could use the rules to propose or to attempt to obstruct legislation, the concurrence of a chairman was generally necessary to pass legislation.

Chairmen of the 1950s and 1960s had enormous power in controlling the flow of legislation under their jurisdictions. Although rules varied somewhat among different committees, the powers of the chairmen generally included the rights to: 1) schedule meetings and call them to order (or not); 2) set the committee agenda and call bills, with as much or as little prior notice as desired; 3) make staff appointments with minimal consultation; and 4) appoint members to subcommittees and control subcommittee operations. Moreover, chairmen generally either served as or appointed the floor managers to husband legislation on the Senate floor. Chairmen also served as the dominant members of House-Senate conference committee delegations. Having said all this, the

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63 Under Senate rules, it is *possible* for the presiding officer to refer legislation directly to a floor vote, or to pass legislation by attaching it as amendment to another measure under Senate consideration. In all eras of the Senate, however, most successful legislation passes through the committee system.

64 Matthews, 159-161.
institutional power of Senate chairmen should not be overstated. In the context of committee operations, majorities had the capacity to vote against the chairman on both substantive and procedural matters.65 As George Reedy noted, “At all times, chairman who were out of step with the majority were easily bypassed but the methods of doing it were so tactful and graceful that it was not apparent to the public.”66 In general, however, committee members did not casually choose to buck their chairmen.

Normative power derives not from a rule or an office. Instead, it is influence that results ultimately from a common perception of how things should be – or at least an acceptance that things are as they are, and it is better to go along than to rock the boat. Institutional and normative power are often related, in so far as the exercise of the former often tends over time to shape the very norms of behavior in an institution, and in a manner that can in turn tend to reinforce the preexisting institutional power distribution.67 As Donald Matthews argued, during the 1950s chairmen generally were not domineering, and members generally did not challenge chair authority, because it simply was not done. Direct assault on chair authority by junior members was not what senators – most senators, anyway – considered proper behavior. Chairmen did not abuse their formal powers because they did not need to; other members – both on their committees and in

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65 Ibid., 162.

66 Reedy, 17.

67 The qualifiers here denote that the exercise of institutional power can instead also create a backlash effect that causes the less powerful to seek to reform the institution. This is one aspect of the reform movement that sought to democratize the Congress between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s.
the Senate generally – deferred to their authority and showed their views considerable respect.68

This characterization oversimplifies reality, but it is useful as a generalization. The important point is that the normative power was real in the 1950s. William White and Donald Matthews presented highly similar accounts of the norms they observed in the Senate of that era.69 The perfect “Senate type” came to the chamber expecting to serve an apprenticeship period, during which seniors judged him for his capacity to work hard and develop specialized expertise.70 During this time, the apprentice should not expect to focus on sponsoring legislation or making a splash with the press or public, but rather on the grunt work of committee legislative activity. As the exceptionally long-tenured Senator Carl Hayden (D-AZ) described it, upon his own arrival in the Congress he was told that there were two kinds of senators, “show horses” and “work horses,” and that, “If you want to get your name in the papers, be a show horse. If you want to gain the respect of your colleagues, keep quiet and be a work horse.”71 As the new senator gained expertise, he would parlay this knowledge into respect in the eyes of his colleagues, while at the same time adhering to norms of courtesy, reciprocity and institutional patriotism. As he grew in seniority, he would move up the committee ladder and over to choicer

68 Matthews, 159-162.


70 The use of masculine pronouns is appropriate. Again, Margaret Chase Smith was the only woman in the Senate of the 1950s.

71 Matthews, 94. Hayden was once the longest serving member in Senate history, with a tenure lasting from 1927 through 1968. His combined House and Senate service totaled almost 57 years, a mark that has yet to be surpassed.
committee assignments, until as a chairman or senior member of a major committee or important subcommittee he would finally acquire real institutional power. References to norms of deference among younger senators during the 1950s are so common in the reminiscences of senators serving at that time that there really is no basis for dispute. A senator’s rise could be slow, as it was with John Stennis, or meteoric, as it was for Lyndon Johnson. The important thing was to acquire a patron, as each found in Richard Russell. Junior members who rebelled against these norms could expect to be labeled mavericks and to languish in the legislative wilderness (although mavericks often did not desire to be legislators first and foremost in any case). This presentation is an oversimplification, but still useful. Without question, during the 1950s a set of Senate norms existed that buttressed the institutional power of the chairmen and reinforced their leadership positions on areas within their jurisdictions.

Personal power relates to qualities of character and political ability that allow an individual to operate effectively, close deals, and cultivate client networks of Senate supporters and allies on whose sympathetic votes one can generally count. Individual power often enabled institutional power rather than the opposite, as George Reedy suggests:

The reality, however, is that the committee chairmen are usually powerful because they have more political ability then other members... If one looks at the records of the committee chairman one will usually find that they gained their Senate powers long before they became chairman.73

72 However, while most of the evidence for the influence of Senate norms is anecdotal, Barbara Sinclair analyzed patterns of floor behavior – specifically, amendments that directly or indirectly were subject to a roll call vote – and concluded that “to a considerable extent, members did abide by norms such as apprenticeship and specialization in the 1950s.” See Barbara Sinclair, “Senate Styles and Senate Decision Making, 1955-1980,” The Journal of Politics 48 (November 1986): 877-908.

73 Reedy, The U.S. Senate, 16-17.
In the Senate of the 1950s, the first path to institutional power was the demonstrable ability to abide norms, build expertise, work within the system and with other members, and thereby gain a reputation for competence and “team spirit” that allowed one to grow in stature and influence. This was not enough, however, to become a true power. A true power had to understand how to build and use non-institutional sources of influence to get things done.

The works of Matthews and White suggested that an “Inner Club” of powerful Senators in effect ran the Senate of the 1950s. Alternately, some called it the “Senate Establishment.” Its existence was real, but its character should not be exaggerated. It was more an old boys' network than a cabal. Its members – the “whales,” in Harry McPherson’s vernacular – did not meet in a secret circle to decide the fates of the hapless Senate majority. Its members did, however, meet in informal groups of twos and three to discuss pending legislation as casually as they might discuss how they spent their weekends. Its members also tended to dominate the respective party leadership posts and Policy Committees that controlled the flow of the legislative process. Thus, the legislative trades that grew out of their private and often informal discussion did often determine what would actually pass the Senate. To quote McPherson again:

(While focusing too narrowly on the influence of certain members results in) simplifications meant to illustrate a point… the interlocking powers of

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74 Senator Joseph Clark (D-PA) publicly criticized the “Senate Establishment” in February of 1963 for barring nonconformist Senators from positions of influence in the party machinery.

the whales were extremely important in determining the legislative behavior of the minnows. Public opinion was also important, and so was the pressure, or lack of it, exerted by the Administration. But the public often had no strong opinion, or was divided and diffused – and the power of the Establishment, of the whales, was constant and palpable. Most senators wanted to be able to see bills bearing their names emerge from committee, and to show people at home that they could get an appropriation for a prized project; for that, good relations with a power were necessary.76

As he elaborates:

Whales were chairman, but not all chairmen were whales. Whales have the negative power to stop legislation, either because they oppose it or were indifferent to it. A controversial proposal could not pass without their friendly intervention. Not that all of them had to support it; the comment of only one or two was required to give the rest of the Senate confidence that a bill – like a stock issue backed by a respected underwriter – was all right to support.77

McPherson puts senators such as Russell, Johnson, Warren Magnuson (D-WA), Clinton Anderson (D-NM), and Robert Kerr (D-OK) among this core group. These and a few others “would be talked to rather constantly to make sure they were okay. There were some people you just didn't want to run afoul of; they were part of the team.”78

The fundamental thing that a prospective whale had to understand was that power ultimately came from the ability to control votes. First and foremost, this involved the senator’s ability to skillfully trade his single vote on an issue for which he cared little in

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

Having realized the utility to be gained from trading a single vote, the next critical step was to understand how to orchestrate a series of such trades over time such that, along with other tactics, one could build client networks that allowed one to move blocs of votes when necessary to engineer a desired legislative outcome. To acquire skill in vote trading was among the key tasks toward acquiring personal power.

While the group McPherson describes comprised largely southerners and westerners of a centrist to conservative bent, political philosophy was an enabler more than a prerequisite. Hubert Humphrey (D-MN), for example, was both a noted liberal and an Establishment member. Fitting in with this group had far less to do with adherence to a particular philosophy than to the ability to sacrifice philosophy for the sake of compromise. Members of the Establishment considered themselves professional politicians and legislators, and legislating required deal-making more than speech-making. Above all, it required the ability to give ground on matters in which a senator or his constituents had no fundamental concern, in order to support a colleague on a matter of critical concern to him or his supporters. Members of the Establishment could accept another senator’s need to represent his constituents’ interests aggressively, even if it clashed with theirs. What members could not stand were uncompromising men who were unconcerned with anything other than philosophical purity. Uncompromising men would

As Reedy explained, all senators essentially “have the same instrument of power – one vote. The determinantal factor is how to use that vote – whether they merely cast in favor of measures that they support and against measures that do not support, or whether they also trade their votes for positions of advantage.” Reedy, The U.S. Senate, 16-17. Depending on its scope, this practice can also make roll call analysis misleading.
not accept that it was better at times to cast their votes based on calculations of interest rather than the ideological merits of the bill in question. Such men thus violated among the most basic rules of politics, as these members of the Establishment understood them.

It would be a mistake to assume, however, the personal power was only about cold calculation. It was as much rooted in the qualities of character – courtesy and institutional patriotism – that attracted other members, as it was in the development of client networks through reciprocity. The Senate in the 1950s was an intimate place, and likeability mattered a good deal in smoothing interpersonal relationships and moving legislation. Providing an anecdote that at least somewhat demonstrates the point, Harry McPherson tells a story of two separate speeches in 1958 denouncing Johnson’s heavy-handed leadership style – one by William Proxmire (D-WI) and the other by Wayne Morse (D-OR). While McPherson claimed to be unsure of Proxmire’s motives, he attributed Morse’s to the fact that:

Morse had accepted a speaking engagement in Oregon that would pay him a couple of thousand dollars and Johnson had scheduled a vote on (that day). Morse asked him to change it and Johnson said, “I can't! Everybody else is lined up.” So Morse went out and made this thundering speech, all in the grand concepts of democracy and individual rights and authoritarianism and so forth, and it all had to do with having to give up that speech.\(^8\)

When asked if Johnson was more inclined to excuse Morse than he was Proxmire, McPherson responded, “Oh, sure. He liked Morse, and part of it had to do with their bucolic interests. They both had cattle, and Johnson and Morse and (Robert) Kerr and Clinton Anderson all did a lot of talking about their horses and their cattle, and I think

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they did some trading of them. All that built a tie between them that he didn't have with Proxmire."

**Power in the Senate: Richard Russell**

This study has so far presented an aggregated view of the nature of power in the Senate of the 1950s. We next turn to look in detail at Richard Russell. Russell was quite arguably the perfect “Senate type” and the most influential single senator of the 1950s – not just on defense issues, but overall. First, we review the anecdotal evidence supporting this premise. Then, we examine in detail the bases for Russell’s power in the Senate. In the next chapter, we examine the goals and motivations that drove his exercise of power.

The amount of anecdotal evidence testifying to Russell’s enormous stature and influence in the Senate and with the Executive Branch seems overwhelming. While assessing the judgments of Russell’s contemporaries, however, certain caveats are in order. First, many of the anecdotes were collected post mortem, and so have a certain eulogistic quality, particularly those collected as part of the Russell Library’s oral history project. Second, a disproportionate number come from old Lyndon Johnson aides or Senate colleagues who shared a close relationship with Russell, and therefore the “other side of the Hill” is poorly represented. Third, of particular relevance to this study, there is notably little evidence pro or con regarding Russell’s influence from the senior leaders of

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81 Ibid.

82 “Overall” meaning in general, but certainly not on every specific issue.
the Defense Department with whom he served, most notably Robert McNamara. Nonetheless, it is hard to doubt that the collective recollections available represent a basic underlying truth.

While Lyndon Johnson gained public prominence for his Senate leadership during the 1950s, several of Johnson’s key aides considered Russell the true Senate power. George Reedy concluded:

In terms of legislative achievement, it would be impossible to find a national leader of greater stature than Richard B. Russell of Georgia. With Russell's blessing, almost any measure could pass the Senate. Against his determined opposition, it was doomed. He was not only subtle, he had a grasp of history with a long view of both past and the future. Above all, he was clear-eyed. More than any other man I have ever met, he could see what was there to see, even when he didn't like it. He was recognized on both sides of the aisle as the preeminent Senator…

Harry McPherson similarly concluded, “Russell had no peer in the politics of Congress.” Many of Russell’s Senate colleagues shared this sentiment. George Smathers (D-FL) remembered Russell as “the smartest guy” and most formidable Senator:

Every now and then Johnson and Dick would come to loggerheads about something, and invariably Johnson would back off. The only guy that ever would make Johnson back off was Dick Russell. I don't know of anybody else, even Senator (Walter) George, as wonderful as he was…

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83 Reedy, The U.S. Senate, 31.

84 McPherson, A Political Education, 54.

85 Smathers continued, “But see, Johnson could con. Johnson had different approaches. He had a whole arsenal of shots that he would use. One of them was sweet talking, the next one was doing a favor for you, the next one was talking rough to you, the next one was appointing him to a committee or something. But whatever was needed, that's what he would use on that particular fellow. Now, Dick Russell knew all of his tricks…” George A. Smathers, interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie, August 15, 1989, Interview #2: From the House to the Senate, transcript, Oral History Interviews, Senate Historical Office, Washington, DC, http://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/history/oral_history/George_A_Smathers.htm.
Senator J. William Fulbright (D-AR) considered Russell “by much the most important senator.”\textsuperscript{86} Senator Proxmire, a vocal critic of cost overruns in military procurement in the late 1960s and early 1970s, attributed the Senate’s previous passivity on defense legislation to Russell’s “enormous prestige” among fellow Senators.\textsuperscript{87} Hubert Humphrey noted that when he came to the Senate in 1949:

Richard Russell was the most powerful man in the Senate… While Taft more often got the headlines as the Republican leader, Russell was really the master strategist and tactician for the conservative coalition. Even Senator Scott Lucas, who, as (Democratic) majority leader, spoke as though he were in charge, always checked any important or controversial question with Russell…\textsuperscript{88}

Hugh Scott (R-PA) agreed: “Of all the Senators I served with – and there were many – I would say that I believe Russell was the ablest and most influential.”\textsuperscript{89}

Russell’s power in the Senate was evident to Executive Branch. Presidents since Truman maintained a close consultative relationship with Russell. Whether or not they intended to heed it, they widely sought his advice on Senate politics and a range of policy issues. Recalling his tenure as Eisenhower’s Vice President, Richard Nixon noted:

Eisenhower was a lot more comfortable dealing with Russell than he was Johnson… (O)n any critical decision that Eisenhower made, particularly in the foreign policy or the national defense area, he would never make it


\textsuperscript{88} Hubert H. Humphrey, \textit{The Education of a Public Man: My Life and Politics} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 93.

without he himself, or his friend and colleague Jerry Persons, talking to Dick Russell.\footnote{Richard Nixon, interviewed by Hugh Cates, oral history, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.}

Dean Rusk, Secretary of State under both Kennedy and Johnson, recalled that Russell’s influence in the Senate left a deep impression on Kennedy even after he left the chamber.

As President:

(Kennedy) talked to (Russell) fairly regularly, tried to keep in touch with him to keep them together as much as possible. Of course, on certain subjects they just didn't agree… You always had to take his view into account but that didn't mean you always had to accept his view as policy… But no one during those years could be President without maintaining pretty close touch with Senator Richard Russell.\footnote{Dean Rusk, interviewed by Hugh Cates, oral history, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.}

Rusk recalled that Russell was one of five members of Congress with whom the administration would regularly consult about what would and would not pass Congress, “possibly because they could tell the Congress.”\footnote{The others were Senators Humphrey (the Democratic Whip), Kerr, and Dirksen (R-IL, and Republican Minority Leader), as well as Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn (D-TX). Dean Rusk, interviewed by Richard Geary Rusk, Thomas Schoenbaum, and Loch Johnson, interview U, Dean Rusk Oral History Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.} Similarly, as Johnson counseled McNamara after Russell issued “displeasing” comments about the Vietnam War:

I'd take that Russell broadcast and read it pretty carefully because he's very respected and I think that somebody ought to reason this out with him because if he gets off on this tack he can hurt us and hurt us bad... he has more influence with Fulbright than anybody up there and really more in the Senate than any other man when he uses it.\footnote{Russell’s comment was to the effect that, in a democratic election, the Vietnamese would likely elect Ho Chi Minh. Russell also criticized Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.’s reappointment as ambassador. Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Dean Rusk, August 2, 1965, 10:33AM, Citation #8501, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.} (emphasis added)
For his part, Rusk considered that, with the exception of Presidents, “For twenty years Dick Russell may well have been the second most powerful man in Washington.”94 Speaking at a seminar on national security affairs at Georgetown University in 1986, former CIA Director and Secretary of Defense James Schlesinger lamented, “I too would like to return to the good old days (when) all you had to do was talk to Senator Richard Russell and he would bring all the rest (of Congress) along.”95

To be truly influential on an issue, an individual Senator must generally combine an interest in the subject – whether arising from personal concern or political benefit – with the institutional or personal power to leverage a desired outcome. With respect to defense policy, no senator more fully combined both characteristics than Richard Russell. This was true between 1955 and 1968, and may be true with respect to the Senate’s history. Accounting for institutional sources of power, Russell’s were significant. His SASC chairmanship not only provided him the dominant position on all defense legislation (other than appropriations) before the Senate, it also offered a more general lever of influence with all members who had military installations or defense contractors in their states – that is, just about all members. Take for example the fiscal year (FY)

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94 Dean Rusk, interviewed by Richard Geary Rusk, Thomas Schoenbaum, and Loch Johnson, interview W, Dean Rusk Oral History Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.

95 Schlesinger’s first government position was as an assistant Bureau of the Budget director for national security affairs from 1969 until 1971. This was the only time his government service coincided with Russell’s Senate tenure, although Schlesinger worked at the Rand Corporation from 1963 until 1969 – during the latter period as director of strategic studies. Kai Bird and Max Holland, “Summer Follies,” The Nation, 243 (August 30, 1986): 136.
1955 military construction authorization bill. It affected 47 of the then 48 states (somehow missing West Virginia), with the line-item breakdown by state duly listed at the back of the Committee’s report. Moreover, the SASC was the point of reference for senators with so-called “military cases” that they needed to resolve on behalf of their constituents. Such cases involved legislation to benefit private citizens (generally veterans or their families) seeking some form of government assistance or compensation. While such bills have become relatively rare in recent years, they were common during the 1950s and 1960s. Russell never shied away from offering fellow Senators this sort of helping hand.

Russell’s ability under SASC auspices to benefit other senators paled somewhat in comparison to his capacity as a leading member of the Appropriations Committee. There is an old joke that says there are three types of senators: Democrats, Republicans, and appropriators. Russell was an appropriator. He was never shy about the importance he placed on being a member of the Appropriations Committee. Russell served on Appropriations his entire Senate career. When he arrived at the Capitol in January 1933, the majority leader asked him which committee assignment he preferred, and Russell responded that he wanted a spot on Appropriations. A bit amused, the leader informed him that it often took senators several years to gain enough seniority for a seat on Appropriations, if and when one even opened up. He suggested Russell set his sights a little lower. Russell replied that if he could not be on Appropriations, he would rather not be on any committee at all. By several twists of extremely good luck, however, Russell

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won a seat on Appropriations that year, and began his long climb up the seniority ladder.\textsuperscript{97} It took until Carl Hayden’s 1969 retirement after a 42 year Senate career for the top spot on Appropriations to finally open up, however. Russell promptly accepted the assignment. While Russell regretted sacrificing his SASC chairmanship in the process – rules prohibited him from chairing both committees simultaneously – he jumped at the chance to replace Hayden. As he told an \textit{Atlantic Monthly} interviewer,

It was a difficult decision (to give up the chairmanship of Armed Services). But the Appropriations Committee of course, in my mind, is the committee of the Senate. It is vital to many activities in the state of Georgia and I did not feel like I could in justice turn down that assignment, as important as it is, when I could retain the chairmanship of the money subcommittee of the Defense Department.\textsuperscript{98}

Of relevance to this study, however, is the fact that – other than his title – probably little else changed in 1969 with respect to Russell’s influence on Appropriations. While difficult to substantiate, Russell is alleged to have been the dominant committee member for perhaps the previous twenty years.\textsuperscript{99} Similarly, Russell appears to have been the dominant member of the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee (DSAC) long before he formally took the subcommittee chairmanship in 1963 – a position he was able to hold on to after also taking over the full Appropriations


Committee.¹⁰⁰ In fact, both Hayden and defense appropriations subcommittee chairman Dennis Chavez (D-NM) long suffered infirmities that prevented them from devoting their full time or capacities to their committee duties. In these cases, Russell had no qualms about filling the void – examples of Reedy’s point about the “tactful and graceful” manner in which Senate chairmen could be bypassed. Russell’s position on Appropriations was one of the pillars of his Senate influence. Coupled with his SASC chairmanship, this provided Russell a decisive “one-two punch” in his ability to influence any defense legislation under Senate consideration.¹⁰¹

Besides these standing committee assignments, Russell held seats on both the Democratic Policy Committee (after 1947) and Steering Committee (after 1957). The latter paired Senators with committee assignments. Choice committee assignments allowed a Senator to build national name recognition or better serve his constituents’ interests, and a good assignment did not come automatically. Prior to passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, for example, it was commonplace at the beginning of a congressional session for certain senators to push for changes to the Senate rules that would weaken the filibuster, and thus the southerners’ ability to fight civil rights legislation. Russell of course was the acknowledged leader of the Southern Caucus. Howard Shuman served as legislative and administrative assistant to prominent liberal Senators Paul Douglas (D-IL)

¹⁰⁰ For example, McPherson notes that Dennis Chavez’s (D-NM) “frequent indisposition” in the years before his 1962 death left him unable to meet his committee responsibilities, one of which was defense appropriations subcommittee chairman. McPherson, A Political Education, 43.

¹⁰¹ Other senators with seats on both Appropriations and Armed Services included Leverett Saltonstall, Margaret Smith, Lyndon Johnson, and John Stennis.
and William Proxmire. As Schuman tells it, at the start of each new congressional session:

The appointment of new senators to committees was put off until after the vote on rules), and when new senators came to see Johnson and (Democratic Party Secretary) Bobby Baker about what committee positions they would have, they were told to please go down the hall to see Dick Russell, who was the power in the Senate. And Dick Russell would ask them what their position was on the filibuster rule, and make very pointed questions about that. The Steering Committee did not decide committee assignments until after the filibuster fight was over, and the people who voted with the Southerners got the gravy and the good positions; the people who voted with us got the District of Columbia Committee and the Rules Committee.102

This story puts a fine line on what constitutes coercion. Unlike Lyndon Johnson, Russell did not have a reputation for overtly coercing his colleagues. Senator Earl Clements (D-KY) found that when Senators voted with Russell, they did so primarily out of respect. Clements noted that Russell “was considered as really the strong arm, politically, in the Senate if he wanted to use it, but Dick Russell never – he didn't do that.”103 Similarly, Henry Jackson found:

(Russell) was not the kind who would put pressure on another senator. He commanded such respect that – I don't want to say he didn't need to do that – he just wouldn't do it. That was not his nature. He was a gentleman. He was just an honorable, decent man and there are not too many of them.104


As Shuman’s story suggests, however, if Russell did not overtly coerce it was because he did not need to; given Russell’s enormous institutional power, the implications of crossing Russell were implied. This was likewise true with respect to Russell’s position on the Policy Committee. As McPherson notes, the committee had little to do with policy. Mostly, it handled legislative scheduling.\(^{105}\) In other words, its members determined which bills – whose bills – would get to the floor and when. Russell’s influence on this Committee was no less than on Steering, or Appropriations, or Armed Services – and all his colleagues knew it.

As important as Russell’s institutional positions of power were his less tangible sources of influence – his client networks, his understanding of the Senate’s rules and precedents, his knowledge of politics and pending legislation, and his personal qualities of character and intellect. Turning first to client networks – and to the dark side of his Senate legacy – Russell was the commonly acknowledged leader of the Southern Caucus. This was the bloc of senators from former Confederate states whose primary legislative concern, at least as a group, involved obstructing all federal efforts to restrict southern segregation in any form. Russell derived significant influence from this leadership position, if for no other reason than it meant that he could routinely count on their voting support on any legislative matter. More than that, however, because of historic Republican Party weakness in the South, the southern Democratic senators were usually able to attain considerable seniority, and thus they tended to predominate as committee

\(^{105}\) McPherson, oral history interview IX, LBJ Library.
chairman. In any case, states of the former Confederacy elected 22 senators.\textsuperscript{106} While it was not true that all 22 at all times were active members of the Southern Caucus, even with a few “defectors” this meant that, on any legislative or procedural issue, Russell could almost automatically count on a bloc of votes that totaled about one-fifth of the Senate. Often, Russell’s fellow southerners would cast their votes based on little more than Russell’s personal recommendation. This pattern of influence did not end with the southerners. Former Senate parliamentarian Dr. Floyd Riddick, for example, suggested that Russell could routinely move blocs of thirty votes or more in this manner.\textsuperscript{107}

Riddick added, however, that Russell’s influence over the Senate was due primarily “to his command of Senate procedure and the respect he enjoyed from his Senate colleagues.”\textsuperscript{108} It was his command over Senate rules, precedents, and procedures that accounted for Russell’s rise to leadership among the southerners in the first place. Although Russell both publicly and privately supported segregation, it was his unparalleled ability to manipulate Senate procedures (to the favor of a determined minority in this case) in order to bloc desegregation measures that made Russell the first among his southern peers. As such, Russell was arguably the single most powerful defender of segregation in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. His efforts helped stall any meaningful civil rights legislation for almost twenty years prior to 1964. It is not as if the other southerners did not also understand parliamentary tactics. Most were quite capable in this regard.

\textsuperscript{106} The eleven include: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, North Carolina, Mississippi, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia.

\textsuperscript{107} Tobin, 39.

\textsuperscript{108} Riddick likewise considered Russell “perhaps the most powerful Senator of his time.” Ibid.
Russell was simply the smartest and most capable among them, and over time they gravitated to his leadership, not only during desegregation fights but in general. Moreover, Russell’s personification of southern courtly norms made him a desirable leader among his southern colleagues, and such qualities tended to endear him to his fellow senators generally, even those who bitterly opposed his politics.109

Russell’s personal qualities require more attention. While some might tend to assume that such a profound defender of segregation must have possessed a generally unpleasant set of personality traits, as is often the case in human experience this was not true. Russell was certainly by no means overtly jovial or outgoing, and he was not a glad-hand. His personality was far more reserved, and he would initially seem cool to most new and even many long-time acquaintances. Nonetheless, his basic qualities of character – courtesy, honesty, forthrightness, trustworthiness – and of intellect were magnetic to many of his colleagues. Senator Margaret Chase Smith remembered the difficulty she had

109 Stennis wrote the following to Russell following their defeat on the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It demonstrates both Russell’s role as a legislative leader and the affection that his fellow southerners’ held him (although some may have been less effusive):

“No one can thank you enough, but I want to thank you all I can for the truly great and remarkable leadership you've given us and our fight against the recently passed civil rights bill. You skillfully led us all the way. You won all the constitutional arguments and lost only when the sole determination lay in sheer numbers.

There has never been a finer demonstration of leadership - and, in turn, loyalty on the part of those being lead - as was demonstrated here as you carried the battle for the Constitution and for our group. Except for you and your fine leadership, a stronger civil rights bill would have been passed – at least one with major provisions – as early as 1948 and the years soon thereafter or, certainly, soon after the unprecedented Supreme Court decision in 1954.

Georgia never had a finer son, nor America a greater Patriot. And I am among those who shall ever give you undying gratitude. Many thoughtful people of the nation feel the same way.”

in being accepted as the only woman in the Senate. With Russell, she found immediate acceptance. He had a habit of calling her “Sis,” a term she found completely endearing. The rapidity with which she gained positions on the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees surely owed to Russell’s influence. She concluded, “Senator Russell's attitude toward me made the difference between me feeling that I belonged and didn't belong.”

Russell’s fellow senators understood his word was his bond. As one of his early colleagues in Georgia state politics recalled, “Dick Russell is the closest thing I've seen to an honest politician.” Not only would he “tell you if it's impossible to get what you want,” he would “tell you if he doesn't think he should be asking for what you want.”

Russell’s biographer found that Russell was adept at making other people feel important, for giving credit to others, and for leading “without people realizing that the action was his rather than their own.” He routinely mediated legislative disputes in which he maintained little stake, enabling compromises that might otherwise have been impossible. Similarly, he was known for a willingness to do legislative favors for other senators – to move blocs of votes to support their interests as well as his. Caro relates the

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110 She notes, for example, that Stennis was not initially as accepting. “I was never quite sure that he thought very much about a women in the United States Senate... After about, oh, it may have been two years of my service with these people, I had a hand written letter from Senator Stennis saying that he had never believed that a woman should serve in high public office, that I had convinced him that there was a place for a qualified, dedicated woman.” Margaret Chase Smith, interviewed by J. G. Shoalmire, June 15, 1976, transcript, Oral History Project, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library, http://library.msstate.edu/congressional/oralhistory/Smithmc.pdf.

111 Caro, 170-171.


113 Caro, 171, 179.
story of a freshman senator facing the defeat of a bill vital to his constituents, who all of a
sudden found Russell standing next to him commenting on the merits of the bill and
wondering if he could offer some measure of support. Russell suggested the freshman
call the bill forward again that afternoon, by which time Russell had marshaled his fellow
southerners to turn out in favor. The bill passed easily. These are just a few examples
of the qualities and the favors that cemented Russell’s personal power.

A mark of Russell’s basic attractiveness was that so many people who vehemently
disagreed with him on civil rights issues pained themselves to find excuses for his
behavior. McPherson often found himself trying to persuade Russell to take a more
liberal view “because his character and professionalism were magnetic.” Lawrence
O’Brien, chief of legislative liaison under Kennedy and Johnson, worked tirelessly to
pass the 1964 Civil Rights Act. He tended to write off Russell’s position as attributable
simply to historic and regional factors. Russell’s admirers frequently suggest that if
only he had been born and raised in a different context he would have naturally adopted a
different view. Perhaps the most poignant example of one of Russell’s admirers

114 Ibid., 200.
115 McPherson, A Political Education, 56. In another venue, McPherson expanded on this. “He just let the
ten twenthieth century pass him by. As he said one time in exactly those words to me. And yet he never became
an all-out bigot; his views on race are those very much of a paternalistic land-holder who wants to take care
of his colored people but sees them very much apart and is terribly annoyed when they rise up and demand
their rights annually. He is in no sense a Strom Thurmond or a Robert C. Byrd of West Virginia, who are
genuine racists and despise black people.” Harry McPherson, interviewed by T. H. Baker, December 15,
johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/mcpherson/mcpher01.pdf.
116 Lawrence F. O’Brien, interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, April 8, 1986, oral history interview VIII,
obrienl/OBRIEN08.PDF.
agonizing over his behavior comes from President John Kennedy. Discussing Russell’s career one evening with *Atlanta Constitution* publisher Ralph McGill, Kennedy mused:

> I wonder if you could explain to me a man like him. The southerners, the really able southerners that I’ve met in the Senate and in the Congress, have been extraordinarily gifted men in parliamentary matters. The good ones seem to have a grasp of government and how to carry out the political maneuvers quite beyond that of the able men of other regions... But I don't know any person that puzzles me more than Senator Russell. Here's a man of great gifts and great capacity for friendship and loyalties. The whole world is changing, and the whole nation is changing. And yet this gifted man remains adamant and defiant in the matters of any measure which tend to enter the field of race – civil rights.\(^{117}\)

Russell’s racism was more of the patriarchal than the virulent variety. While he despised Klan-style violence and viewed racial epithets as “low”, he unquestionably believed in a hierarchy of races, with Anglo-Saxons at the peak. To Russell, history demonstrated this superiority, just as it indicated that blacks as a group still required uplifting. While Russell’s views on race no doubt grew from historic and regional factors, he was sufficiently introspective to question the assumptions of his nurture. McPherson found that, “Like most men, he became more conservative as he grew older. Unlike most men he observed himself doing so – ruefully speculating that it was not the wisdom of age but simply age itself that had driven him inward and rightward.”\(^{118}\) This self-awareness never led Russell to back track on his support for segregation, however. Russell was also perceptive enough to understand that his cause was out of step with trends in modern American politics, and that eventually the Senate would find the super-majority it required to defeat the filibuster. Nonetheless, he held firm. He may have rationalized his

\(^{117}\) Ralph McGill, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.

action in part with the belief that, as an elected representative, he was merely serving the interests of his constituents. He never acknowledged that he had any responsibility to serve the interests of Georgia’s black citizens as well.

Throughout his career, Russell embraced the concept that knowledge is power. He had an enormous work ethic. He is said to have read the entire *Congressional Record* of both houses’ proceedings each evening. Since he never married, the Senate’s business became his life. In addition to his thorough study of Senate procedure – his grasp of the complex and voluminous set of precedents that guide Senate operations was said to have rivaled that of the official parliamentarians – Russell was also a careful student of pending legislation. He mastered all bills on the Senate calendar, both in terms of their technical details and their political implications. He read not only the bill reports, but also the home-state newspapers of the bill’s sponsors. When someone asked for his opinion on a pending issue, Russell was known for his willingness to present all the pros and cons dispassionately, whether or not this ran counter to Russell’s legislative position.\(^{119}\) When someone had a problem to solve, he or she could generally find in Russell a knowledgeable and willing advisor. Russell’s knowledge base and intellect enabled him to earn the respect of his colleagues, and this in turn nurtured his stature in the Senate. As the common respect for his judgment grew, so did his influence. If he was able to offer his fellow members such knowledgeable advice on issues unrelated to his primary committee responsibilities, then they could feel comfortable trusting his judgment on the

\(^{119}\) Caro, 178.
issues about which they lacked any specialized knowledge, but which were his life’s work.

With respect to defense policy, Russell’s committee assignments gave him an enormous informational advantage over the majority of his fellow senators. Moreover, Russell had a level of access to Executive Branch information and decision-makers well beyond that of most other defense committee members. It was common then, as now, for presidential administrations to consult with a select group of legislative leaders on a particular matter as a proxy for consulting with the entire Congress. With respect to defense and foreign policy issues, Russell was routinely a member of such groups. Russell’s level of access often went further than this, however. On some issues, Russell might be the only member of Congress privy to the goings-on in the Executive Branch. This was due both to Russell’s stature, his knowledge of congressional politics, and his profound commitment to secrecy. After Nixon’s election in 1968, for example, Johnson advised him that “the key man to talk to is Dick Russell... you can always tell him something and he’s going to keep his mouth shut and keep it secret.”120 As Russell became increasingly ill at the end of the 1960s, he insisted that Stennis be a party to such discussions as well. Nixon recalled, for example, that Stennis and Russell were the only members of Congress that he informed prior to the 1969 bombing campaign in Cambodia.121 Similarly, CIA Director Allen Dulles suggested that Russell was the only Senator with whom he would share details of CIA operations. As he left for a meeting on

120 Nixon, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.

121 Ibid. Nixon also states that they supported the policy, and indicated they would do so publicly.
the Hill one day, Dulles commented to an aide, “Well, I guess I'll have to fudge the truth a little… I'll tell the truth to Dick. I always do… That is, if Dick wants to know.”

On the other hand, most senators received no more exposure to defense issues than what they heard during the floor non-debates on defense legislation. While they were free to attend hearings and read reports, including those of the few (but steadily growing in number) independent defense and foreign policy analysis institutes, most senators simply lacked the time to study issues outside of their direct responsibilities. Likewise, most lacked sufficient personal staff support to dedicate staff resources to study these issues. Russell’s informational advantage, coupled with his work ethic, mastery of the legislative process, and reputation for good judgment, made his recommendations on defense legislation almost unassailable outside the defense committees. With Russell managing a bill on the floor, the few senators disposed to arguing for alternate policies or spending decisions were generally intimidated from doing so. Russell understood his bills thoroughly, and came well prepared to justify any measure. Challenging him on the floor of the Senate must have seemed as likely to result in embarrassment as in any change to the legislative course Russell recommended. In any case, Russell’s enormous stature and the basic trust most colleagues had in his judgment, coupled with Senate norms that counseled against floor fights with powerful chairmen, made the majority of senators ill disposed to contest Russell in the first place.


123 Nixon, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies. In Nixon’s view, Russell’s command of a bill meant that “there was no one on the Republican or the Democratic side that relished the responsibility of having to oppose him.”
Russell’s influence was not static over time. He rose steadily in stature and influence in the Senate during the 1930s and 1940s. The 1950s saw his high water mark. The Senate began to change fairly rapidly after 1958. Liberal and conservative blocs in both parties became larger and more cohesive. Abetted by changes in media and transportation, the average senator became more activist and individualistic and less willing to abide traditional Senate norms. Many of the prominent southern and western Establishment Senators who dominated the committee rooms and cloakrooms of the 1950s died or left office in the 1960s. Their replacements thought and behaved differently. It may have been true during the 1950s that: “With Russell's blessing, almost any measure could pass the Senate. Against his determined opposition, it was doomed.”124 Because of the changes taking place in the Senate, this would be far less true by the end of the 1960s, at least with respect to the Senate’s broader legislative agenda. As we will see, however, Russell retained tight control over the defense legislation that fell under his immediate jurisdiction. At least through 1968, Russell’s decisions in committee won almost uniform Senate approval.

124 Reedy, The U.S. Senate, 31.
CHAPTER 3

RICHARD RUSSELL

Russell, the Executive Branch, & National Security Policies and Processes

Goals and Motivations: An Overview

Richard Brevard Russell, Jr. was born in 1897 to an old southern family whose history in America predated the Revolution.125 During the Civil War, Sherman’s army burned the clothing factory belonging to Russell’s grandfather. Russell’s father was educated and ambitious, and expected the same of his son. Richard Russell, Sr. was both a businessman and public servant, and spent much of his career in Georgia state judicial assignments, including sixteen years as state Supreme Court Chief Justice. He also failed in several attempts at election to the Georgia governorship and the U.S. Congress. While far from impoverished, the Russell family never fully recovered financially from its wartime losses. The lessons young Richard drew from his family’s experience, as well as from his reading of military history and listening to old veterans’ war stories, shaped much of his adult worldview of warfare and politics.126 Of relevance to this study, Russell

125 Both Fite and Caro have extensive sections describing Russell’s early life and career prior to the period under study.

126 Senator Milton Young (R-ND) recalled, “(O)ne time I said to Senator Russell, ‘You people in the South are much more military-minded then we in the North.’ He said, ‘If you had a general like Sherman march through your state you would be too.’” Milton Young, interviewed by Hugh Cates, oral history, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.
gravitated to the notion that security required military strength, and that war was brutal and could not be won with half measures and limited campaigns. Russell’s only military service involved duty with the United States Naval Reserve in 1918. He graduated with a law degree from University of Georgia at Athens, also in 1918, after which he entered private legal practice. His legal career was short, however, as his interests quickly turned to politics. Russell proved something of a political prodigy. In 1921, he was elected to the state House of Representatives, where he served until 1931 (and served as Speaker after 1927). In 1930, Russell won election as Georgia’s Governor – the youngest in state history. His eye was always on the United States Senate, however; a position to which his father had aspired but never achieved. After the death of sitting Senator William Harris in 1932, Russell jumped at the chance to run. After a difficult campaign, he succeeded in becoming the youngest senator in state history as well.

Russell had already served almost twenty years in the Senate before he first sat as SASC chairman in 1951, at the age of 54. Throughout his long tenure as chairman – interrupted only by a short-lived Republican majority from 1953 to 1954 – Richard Russell remained committed to certain distinct policy goals, although in certain respects these had more to do with generalities and process than with specific outcomes. First and foremost, Russell supported investment in a strong national defense. He was a firm believer in the axiom: “To ensure peace, prepare for war.” Russell’s goal in maintaining a large armed force was deterrence; he personally opposed the notion that the U.S. military should be employed frequently or casually in foreign interventions.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ Deterrence here refers to deterring conflict generally, not simply to deterring nuclear war.
Deterring war required more than investment, however. Deterrence fundamentally involved affecting an adversary’s state of mind, and in Russell’s view this in turn required decisive leadership backed by broad national resolve. Russell was by the early 1950s a firm believer in the necessity of strong presidential leadership in defense and foreign policy. The times required it, both because of the international security climate and because only the presidency was capable of managing the increasingly unwieldy budgets and bureaucracies that were necessary to execute modern defense and foreign policies. In Russell view, Congress simply could not provide true executive leadership.

The following exchange occurred between Russell and Francis Case (R-SD) during committee deliberation on provisions of the 1958 Defense Reorganization Act. The specifics deal with whether the President or Secretary of Defense could successfully modify military roles and missions in time of acute crisis without prior congressional consent. Russell’s comments, however, provide a good insight into his default view with respect to presidential leadership:

Russell: “(The Secretary of Defense) can submit (a change), if there is an emergency and you know good and well that the Congress is not going to touch anything. For example, today, suppose the Secretary were to submit something with all the trouble in the Middle East. We are not going to touch it. Case: “You would say go ahead? Russell: “We would say go ahead – and it is always that way.

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128 The term “presidency” implies not just the President, but his broader “administration” – i.e., the President’s appointed department and agency leadership, and his White House and EEOP staff assistants and advisers. It suggests a level of decision-making decentralized enough that it does not represent singular presidential decisions, but senior enough that it is distinct from the permanent departmental bureaucratic decision-making structures.
When we get into trouble, the Congress supports the President, it does not make a difference who he is, what party – when we get the flag of the United States in trouble.”¹²⁹ (emphasis added)

Although in many respects a gross oversimplification, the policy-making cycle can in theory be broken into three phases: initiation (i.e., raising and framing issues), decision, and implementation. Russell hardly changed over time in his consistent support for executive leadership in \textit{initiating} and \textit{implementing} most aspects of the nation’s security policy.¹³⁰ While he believed that the Congress had certain oversight rights and responsibilities in these phases, the Congress’s basic nature as a generalist, consensus-oriented body inherently limited its role in these phases to the margins.

When it came to the \textit{decision-making} phase, on the other hand, Russell believed in principle that, as a coequal branch of government, the Congress had specific, constitutionally defined roles and responsibilities to execute. In practice, however, he was often loath to second-guess presidential decisions or recommendations. On the other hand, this inclination against second-guessing was most evident with respect to what might be termed “operational” policies – diplomacy, intelligence, covert operations, and military intervention. It was less evident with respect to “organizational” policies involving institutional structures and functions, or with respect to human and fiscal “resourcing” policies of the type prominent in the budget authorization and appropriations processes. As such, Russell was more open to the Congress taking an

¹²⁹ Committee deliberation on H. R. 12541, July 17, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

¹³⁰ Again, these phases do not involve an administration initiating and implementing policy \textit{directly} in most cases, but rather involve it \textit{managing} the permanent bureaucracy’s initiation and implementation actions.
aggressive public advocacy posture on issues of organizational and resourcing decisions – and more open to modifying his concept of proper oversight in these areas over time – than he was with respect to other, more operational aspects of security policy.

As the foregoing has attempted to suggest, Russell’s commitment to safeguarding the Congress’s prerogatives as a coequal branch of government – particularly with respect to organizational and resourcing decisions – was often in conflict with his general deference to executive leadership. Another factor further complicated this dynamic. As previously noted, Russell believed that large defense investments and strong presidential leadership still required the backing of broad national resolve in order to deter war. As such, Russell viscerally supported the principle of “responsible” bipartisanship in defense and foreign policy. The precise bounds of Russell’s notion of responsible bipartisanship were amorphous. The notion at least implied that one should not play cheap politics with defense and foreign policy, although again the boundary line here was often difficult to discern – although more in the sense of what Russell would tolerate from his colleagues than in what he himself would practice.

More to the point, Russell’s notion of responsible bipartisanship largely proceeded from the premise that the Congress had a responsibility to support a “well-meaning” President in his defense and foreign policies – again, both because only the President could truly lead, and because consensus was necessary to demonstrate resolve and hopefully achieve deterrence. The requirement to support did not necessarily imply that one could not advocate, aggressively in some cases, for alternate policy positions. The Congress still had a responsibility to provide both public and private advice, and a duty to participate in decision-making. The presidency likewise had a responsibility to
respect congressional prerogatives in these regards. However, at a certain point, Russell felt the Congress needed to fall in behind the President and “support the flag” – again, particularly with respect to operational policies.

Russell often did not trust his Senate colleagues – and sometimes not even his committee colleagues – to fall in line on the same basis that he would, whether because he feared their cheap politics, their fundamental policy disagreements, or simply their loose lips. As such, he was loath to see other committees, or members of his own committee, become too freewheeling in their involvement in Executive Branch processes.\(^{131}\) While sensitive to other members prerogatives, Russell was also not above intervening – subtly or not – to quash such efforts, although he chose such interventions selectively. Often, Russell even chose to keep particularly sensitive oversight issues in his close personal hold – at most sharing with a mere handful of his most trusted colleagues. By so doing he *de facto* substituted his personal oversight for that of the Senate as an institution, thereby arguably undercutting the prerogatives of at least his fellow committee members. Russell presumably rationalized this as an extreme form of the very specialization argument that underpinned the Congress’s committee structure in the first place. Having personally overseen the matter, as the chairman of the committee with proper jurisdiction, the matter could then be closed with the responsibility for oversight having been sufficiently executed.

“Well meaning” presidential policies were likewise amorphous in definition. Russell’s conception was broader than simply the idea that well meaning policies were

\(^{131}\) Whether such involvement constituted “investigation” or “interference” was often in the eye of the beholder.
those that he himself supported. At minimum, however, well meaning policies had to embrace the necessity for a strong defense. This was a perhaps low bar, as none of the Presidents of the period fundamentally questioned this premise. To Russell, however, his various disputes with Presidents – over spending levels with Eisenhower, over arms control with Kennedy, over the prosecution of the Vietnam War with Johnson, as examples – were less important than this basic shared commitment to the nation’s defense.

While Russell was ultimately deferential toward executive leadership, he was not simply passive in the face of it. Russell felt few qualms about providing wide-ranging advice and harsh criticisms of executive policy *in private* to senior administration officials including the President, and Russell rarely lacked the opportunity to provide such advice. However, both Russell and the executive officials with whom he served understood that, having said his piece, Russell would usually default back to public support of presidential policies. The issue that Russell found most troubling over his long career involved the lengths to which he should personally go in publically supporting interventionist policies that he privately opposed – particularly when he understood that, were he President, he himself might have found it impossible at times to back away.

_Responsibility and Support to a Well-Meaning Executive: Defusing Congressional Investigations & Interventions_

Almost immediately upon assuming the SASC chairmanship in 1951, Russell had to deal with among the most difficult challenges of his tenure. That April, with the Korean War nearing stalemate, President Truman dismissed General Douglas MacArthur
for insubordination. Public opinion was strongly negative, and Truman’s approval ratings plummeted. The President even faced calls for his impeachment, including from de facto Senate Republican leader Robert Taft. As large crowds greeted MacArthur's return with a hero's welcome, the Senate Armed Services and Foreign Relations Committees prepared to hold joint hearings on the dismissal. Russell presided, and won wide acclaim and respect for his fair-minded and deliberate conduct.

Russell worried that a political spectacle in the halls of Congress would weaken the image of resolve that he felt U.S. leaders had a responsibility to project to the world. Russell’s strategy – as Stennis later recalled – was “just to let the matter wear out, or let the air out of the tires, so to speak, of the proponents of General MacArthur.” Russell allowed testimony to drag on for weeks in order to hear in scrupulous detail from experts and proponents on all sides of the debate. While Russell conducted much of the proceeding in closed chambers, he was careful to release security-deleted transcripts to the press as soon as possible after each session. As the hearing plodded on, testimony critical of MacArthur’s actions from his fellow military commanders tended to deflate the harshest of Truman’s critics.

132 For much of his Senate career, Taft exercised a similar sort of informal leadership on the Republican side as did Russell on the Democratic side. Johnson, for example, often recalled how Taft and Russell informally ran the Senate through the late 1940s and early 1950s. Unlike Russell, however, Taft eventually served as Republican leader in 1953, although he died of complications from cancer that same year.

In the end, Russell chose to issue no formal committee report – in Stennis’s view, to “avoid lighting the flames again.”134 In a bow to his colleagues’ prerogatives, however, he did permit Republican critics to release a minority report commenting on the testimony. This provided them an opportunity to formally vent their criticisms in writing, but without the weight of a formal committee finding. Russell’s action on this matter contributed significantly to his rise in stature within the Congress and with the Executive Branch. This episode cemented Russell’s reputation as not simply a powerful cloakroom Senate politician, but as a statesman. It also served as a solid example of Russell’s notion of responsible congressional leadership, and as the archetype that he expected worthy committee protégés to follow. Both John Stennis and Lyndon Johnson took note.135

Russell made an unsuccessful run for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1952, which foundered in large part on his image as a southern sectional candidate. Afterward, he settled as a senator for life. While his action in the MacArthur case supported a Democratic president, Russell’s mode of behavior remained constant after Dwight Eisenhower assumed the presidency. If one of Russell’s decision rules was to assist a well-meaning President in securing the defense of the nation, Russell had no difficulty applying this rule to Eisenhower. One observer paraphrased Russell’s attitude toward Eisenhower as follows:

He regarded Eisenhower as being politically unassailable because he would look at Eisenhower and would look at that beaming face and that

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135 Russell’s role in supporting Johnson’s rise through the Senate Democratic leadership is widely acknowledged. For example, see Caro, 365-6, 475-84.
broad grin and you would think that man really wishes well, well of his country, and you would forgive him anything.136

After Lyndon Johnson became party leader in 1953, Russell pressed the point to his protégé that Johnson had to exercise leadership with responsibility, at least as it applied to national security. Soon after his election as leader, Johnson described his basic approach to Eisenhower by noting: “There are two courses open to a minority party… It can indulge in the politics of partisanship, or it can remain true to the politics of responsibility.”137 As Roland Evans and Robert Novak elaborate:

“Responsibility” was to be the central thrust of Johnson's “Eisenhower policy” in scores of Senate debates and national crises. And in the guise of “Mr. Responsibility,” Johnson never let the majority of his party in the Senate risk the anger of the American people by blind criticism of President Eisenhower, perhaps the most widely popular President in this century.138

The theme of Johnson’s responsibility on the one hand, and the irresponsibility of both Republican isolationists and Democratic liberals on the other, dripped from the memos and talking points that Johnson aide George Reedy poured forth over the next eight years.139 Johnson most often behaved true to this theme, at least at critical decision


138  Ibid.

139  The theme of responsible bipartisanship was not unique to Russell and Johnson. At the beginning of the Eisenhower administration, it was common among the Senate Democratic foreign policy establishment. Senator Walter George, ranking Democrat on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and then senior senator from the Georgia, early on praised the principle of bipartisanship. As quoted in Reichard: “In foreign affairs,” he asserted, “the Nation must whenever possible speak with one voice…” Insisting that Democrats would not “abdicate their right to freedom of action,” he pledged that Democrats would be “ready at all times to give to the administration sincere bipartisan advice.” Other Foreign Relations
points, as when he threw his weight and his acumen behind efforts to defeat Senator John Bricker’s (R-OH) attempts to restrict the President’s authority to negotiate treaties and enter into executive agreements.140

Again, however, the driving inspiration for this theme had come from Russell. It was always Russell who counseled Johnson, whenever the latter “started bragging about how he could smash Eisenhower,” that in addition to domestic political consequences, there would be “grave repercussions if the Democrats broke foreign confidence in the President.”141 During his tenure as President, Eisenhower consulted regularly and often intimately with both Russell and Johnson on the range of national security topics. Their access transcended that of the normal congressional leadership meetings that Eisenhower frequently hosted.

For both Russell and Johnson, politics of course never truly stopped at the water’s edge during the 1950s. Genuine disagreements frequently existed, and both partisan and personal politics sometimes intruded. Johnson had strong presidential ambitions, which Russell actively supported. While Russell had little interest in his own right in injecting political issues into national security policy-making, he was eager to develop Johnson’s stature as a statesman who was competent to manage the nation’s defenses. Achieving this effect necessitated some degree of political maneuvering, as it involved a conscious

Committee Democrats echoed this pledge. Hubert Humphrey insisted that bipartisanship would demonstrate to the world that American foreign policy was “not subject to sudden change as a result of the tipping of the political scales.” Gary W. Reichard, “Divisions and Dissent: Democrats and Foreign Policy, 1952-1956,” Political Science Quarterly, 93, no. 1 (spring 1978), 53.

140 See Caro, 527-41.

141 Evans and Novak, 184.
campaign to build Johnson’s national media and public image. As Democratic leader, on
the other hand, Johnson had a far broader political agenda and a wider constituency to
serve than did Russell. This meant Johnson had a much more difficult time – and perhaps
lower base inclination than Russell – in keeping politics and national security separately
compartmentalized. Hanging over all political maneuvering, however, remained the
themes of unity and responsibility. The point was not so much that one should never play
for political advantage, much less engage in genuine, serious-minded, thoughtful
discussions over policy. The point was that one should not conduct the process in a way
that damaged the image of U.S. resolve or presidential authority. This is what defined
“cheap politics,” although the bounds were obviously subjective.142

Key Eisenhower administration officials accepted the same basic premise as
Russell and Johnson as to what constituted responsible bipartisanship. They generally
spoke in positive terms of Johnson and Russell’s overall conduct, even if there was
bitterness over some of the tactics Johnson sometimes employed. As Eisenhower aide
Bryce Harlow recalled:

(Johnson) was a good bipartisan on foreign policy. He really was. He and
Mr. Sam (Rayburn, Speaker of the House), raised in the old school, never
believed, as they never should have believed and nobody in his right mind
should believe, the old business about politics stopping at the water’s
edge. That’s ridiculous... Even so they didn’t play cheap politics with
foreign policy. They would play politics with foreign policy and play
hardball.143

142  “Cheap politics” is not a term Johnson or Russell commonly used; the study uses it to attempt to
explain responsible bipartisanship.

143  Bryce Harlow, interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, February 28, 1979, oral history interview, LBJ
Library. Harlow continued, “Lyndon loved to use, just loved to use, Eisenhower’s pet, foreign aid, as a
shillelagh on Ike. He would hold it up deliberately to be the last item in a session of Congress and use it as
leverage for making Ike do what he wanted to do on other things. He’d hold up the foreign aid
In his memoirs, Eisenhower recalled that he and Johnson had their differences, although he felt these were more pronounced in the domestic and economic realms than in foreign policy. Overall, Eisenhower concluded that Johnson “was far more helpful than obstructive… for this I was grateful and frequently told him so.”

In 1959, Russell and Johnson again demonstrated their concept of responsible oversight and support for presidential leadership. This time, they actively intervened to modify an initiative on the part of Henry Jackson to investigate Eisenhower’s use of the National Security Council to support administration decision-making. Jackson’s vehicle was a subcommittee of the Senate Government Operations Committee, which he chaired. Jackson of course also had a seat on the Armed Services Committee. Perhaps because of this, he was particularly careful to avoid crossing Russell on an issue that might possibly verge into the jurisdiction of Armed Services. Early on, Jackson approached Russell for his input on the investigation and sounded him out on the prospects of forming a select committee to investigate the issue. Russell was lukewarm to the idea of an investigation, and specifically opposed to the formation of a select committee. However, he did not try to quash the idea outright, and even offered the hope

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144 Quoted in Evans and Novak, 168.
145 Robert David Johnson found that Jackson’s base motive was to increase the perception in Washington policy circles that he was “a specialist in international affairs.” Robert David Johnson, “The Government Operations Committee and Foreign Policy during the Cold War.” *Political Science Quarterly* 113, no. 4 (winter 1998-1999), 651.
that Jackson’s subcommittee would “formulate recommendations for improvements in this important field.”146

Eisenhower administration officials, however, quickly became alarmed at the potentially expansive scope of the investigation, and enlisted aid from Johnson and Russell to rein in Jackson’s ambitions. In a White House meeting with these two and Fulbright, Eisenhower stressed the importance he had placed on his National Security Council machinery to formulate and implement policy. He referred specifically to a resolution Jackson had sponsored, which suggested that Jackson’s subcommittee would probe into the official deliberations of the NSC. The President was worried that an investigation focused in this respect would only serve to raise a wedge issue that would damage Executive-Congressional relations, and might also prove highly disruptive to day-to-day Executive Branch operations. In particular, Eisenhower feared that such an investigation would only serve to raise the specter that Congress was suspicious of the President and his key deputies. He stated that, to his knowledge, no “responsible” leader in Congress of either party had been fundamentally opposed to any of his particular policies, and that picking a fight now would serve no constructive purpose. Russell recalled his dialogue with Jackson, and noted that he now felt such an investigation should probably not be made at all. Johnson noted that, although he had been holding it up for some time, Jackson’s resolution would soon come before the Senate Democratic Policy Committee for action. Johnson had been lobbying certain other key senators to

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146 Russell to Jackson, April 6, 1959, Henry M. Jackson file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 86th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
oppose the resolution, but this was not yielding the desired effect. Russell suggested that the President write a letter to either Johnson or Fulbright stating that, given the gravity of the current international situation, it was a poor time to conduct such a study. Eisenhower eagerly agreed to write such a letter, although he thought it unwise to stress the gravity of the current situation as this might only invite a similar investigation later. Russell responded that the important thing was to kill the present resolution. Such language would help accomplish this. Eisenhower agreed to follow this course of advice.147

The President’s letter had the desired effect. By the time the Democratic Policy Committee met, Jackson had taken the lay of the land and decided to portray his initiative as a “quiet study” rather than an investigation. He noted that his subcommittee would lack subpoena powers. Further, he promised to focus on structural rather than policy issues to avoid overtly attempting to embarrass the administration, and to consult with the Democratic leadership as the course of the investigation developed.148 Eisenhower was satisfied with this outcome. His aide Bryce Harlow wrote to Johnson, “The President really appreciates the help you, et al, gave on this. It has worked out fine – thanks in major measure to what you did.”149 (emphasis in original)


Russell performed a similar function for Kennedy early in his tenure, this time by tamping a Strom Thurmond initiative to investigate the State and Defense Departments for possible Communist influences. While Thurmond’s primary target was the former, actions by Defense Department officials that appeared to “muzzle” senior military officers for speaking out publicly against Communism provided the opportunity. Thurmond sponsored a Senate resolution to investigate the matter. In point of fact, there was considerable committee support, including from Russell, for both the military officers whom the Office of the Secretary of Defense had either reprimanded or censored, and for the notion that something was amiss in OSD attitudes toward military men speaking out against communism. However, Symington expressed the consensus view that resolving such matters was better handled in one-on-one meetings with McNamara, particularly given the strains that formal hearings would impose on the Defense Department at the same time the Berlin crisis was ongoing. Saltonstall seconded this, stressing the importance of avoiding actions that might serve to “upset the morale of the Department of Defense at this time, and to give any indication of loss of faith in our Department of Defense by our citizens.”

Thurmond was not dissuaded about the need for a formal investigation, however, and Russell accepted that it was Thurmond’s prerogative – as it had been Jackson’s – to sponsor a resolution and to push for an inquiry. The SASC voted overwhelmingly to recommend the resolution to the full Senate, and it passed on a floor vote. On the other

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150 Committee deliberation on S. Res. 91, September 20, 1961, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
hand, Russell was by no means inclined to let Thurmond lead such an inquiry. He assured his fellow members, “I don’t mean to have any headline-seeking investigation.”\textsuperscript{151} As such, and despite Thurmond’s protests, Russell refused to establish a separate subcommittee and instead forced the issue under the auspices of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, which Stennis now chaired. Stennis was hardly eager for this responsibility, but he executed his task dutifully. As OSD congressional liaison chief David McGiffert recalled:

Stennis became increasingly disenchanted with the hearings, but being the gentleman and ex-judge that he is, he remained very careful to make sure that everybody had their day in court. He, as well as others on the committee, except Senator Thurmond, became more and more noticeable by their absence from the hearings until at the end there was nobody there, really, but Senator Thurmond.\textsuperscript{152}

According to Kennedy administration records, Stennis even passed Thurmond’s emerging recommendations directly to Executive Branch officials to get their response and their “guidance as to where the investigation should go from here, if anywhere.”\textsuperscript{153}

In the end, the subcommittee released a mild report that affirmed both the necessity of civilian control in approving materials with a public affairs impact, as well as the necessity for military professionals to have the freedom to express their views “within official circles.” With respect to the specific actions that sparked the inquiry, the report concluded that OSD officials were acting within their authority, but that the actual review

\textsuperscript{151} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{152} David E. McGiffert, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.

\textsuperscript{153} Mike Manatos (Administrative Assistant to the President) memo to Mike Feldman (Deputy Special Counsel to the President), June 12, 1962, 6/1/62-7/12/62 file, Mike Manatos White House Staff Files, JFK Library.
process lacked consistency and sometimes proceeded irresponsibly. Stennis and four other members – Symington, Jackson, Saltonstall, and Smith – signed the report and another – Edward “Bob” Bartlett (D-AK) – submitted individual views in “solid agreement” with the majority. Thurmond declined to sign and submitted his individual views. The consensus report characterized the subcommittee’s activities as follows: “Seeking light rather than heat, we have applied the rule of reason to the highly emotional and controversial issues involved.”154 Thurmond summed up his dissatisfaction with Stennis’s handling of the subcommittee by noting, “I felt that if (Stennis) had taken the position that these people ought to be subpoenaed and (brought) in here, and (had been) aggressive about this, it would have been a great service to the country. But, evidently he felt, I imagine, that the overall policy that he was following was best at that time, if not for the country, for the administration.”

**Foreign Aid: The Occasional Helping Hand**

Throughout his career, Russell remained deeply skeptical of foreign aid and intervention. While Russell doubted the wisdom of overtly challenging the President with respect to the latter, this was not true with respect to aid. While he rarely if ever used his Senate influence to derail a President’s foreign aid program, he generally voted against them. There were exceptions. For example, Russell supported the Truman Doctrine and the Marshall Plan. In general, however, Russell feared that aid encouraged a free-rider

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154 Press release, October 25, 1962, Special Subcommittee on Communist Seminars file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
problem among America’s allies and clients. He doubted the possibility that aid would lead either to building effective military capabilities in recipient nations or, in most cases, to political and economic transformation of the targeted country. Russell advised Kennedy, for example, that the Alliance for Progress was “wonderful in theory but that, in reality, the ruling classes in practically all of the South and Latin American countries would never agree to the reforms on which Alliance for Peace was predicated.” Russell felt instead that aid should be kept to the minimum necessary to prevent a Communist takeover. In his view, a dollar wasted in aid was a dollar unavailable for a stronger military.

On the other hand, as on many other issues it was possible for a President to appeal to Russell’s sense of duty in order to gain his support on a foreign aid measure. In December 1963, for example, Johnson informed McNamara that he had a cut a deal with Russell on the Military Assistance Program (MAP), which extended grants and loans to support military equipment sales to foreign countries. Johnson told McNamara that although Russell did not like foreign aid, he would support U.S. commitments when pushed. In this case, Russell agreed to $1 billion aid package, if McNamara could assure there was “no fat.” Noting the general difficulty in passing foreign aid bills, Johnson stated that by getting Russell on board first, it became much easier to get consent from Vinson and George Mahon (D-TX, and House Appropriations Committee Chairman).


156 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert McNamara, December 7, 1963, 5:03PM, Tape K6312.05, PNO 3, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - JFK Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.
Similarly, as opposition to the Vietnam War developed in the Senate Foreign Relations Committee (SFRC) in 1965, Russell – at great reluctance – agreed to have the SASC take responsibility for a new annual military assistance authorization, the Military Assistance Service Fund (MASF). Thereafter, as SFRC authorization of “MAP grants to Vietnam dwindled, the MASF soared.”

**Intelligence and Covert Operations: The Most “Executive” of Functions**

During his tenure as chairman, Russell exercised almost unilateral Senate oversight – which could more aptly be described as “non-oversight” – of the CIA’s budget and activities. Russell regarded intelligence as the most “strictly executive” function in government, a point he made to Kennedy early in 1961 shortly after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. In a note for his records, Russell recalled making the following points during the conversation: “Believe in maintaining prerogatives legislature (but)... CIA needs many things but it does not need Cong committee supervising. Fear ground swell of sentiment to control… Man you appointed should not have some Senator or Cong looking over his shoulder.”

The 1947 National Security Act placed CIA oversight under the jurisdiction of the two Armed Services Committees. Each committee in turn formed a small subcommittee to execute this function. Russell’s tenure as chairman after 1955 coincided with those of

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four CIA directors – Allen Dulles (February 1953 to November 1961); John McCone (November 1961 to April 1965); retired Vice Admiral William Raborn (April 1965 to June 1966); and Richard Helms (June 1966 to February 1973). We previously mentioned Allen Dulles’s claim that, while he did not mind “fudging” the truth to these oversight subcommittees in general, he never lied to Russell – if Russell wanted to know the truth. Russell often did not. Other CIA subcommittee members generally shared this aversion from obtaining too much information about CIA activities. Saltonstall once stated publicly, “It is not a question of reluctance on the part of CIA officials to speak to us. Instead it is a question of our reluctance, if you will, to seek information and knowledge on subjects which I personally, as a Member of Congress and as a citizen, would rather not have.” Similarly, after becoming Armed Services Committee chairman and thus assuming Russell’s CIA oversight responsibilities, Stennis was quoted as saying, "You have to make up your mind that you are going to have an intelligence agency and protect it as such, and shut your eyes some and take what is coming."

Russell was highly effective in ensuring that no one else in the Senate outside his very narrow circle of trust was able to look into CIA activities or budgets. As McCone recalled, only a very small select committee that included representatives of both the

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159 Keagle, et. al., 78.

160 For example, according to Victor Marchetti and John Marks, Russell once told Helms “that there were certain operations he simply did not want to know about.” Victor Marchetti and John D. Marks, The CIA and the Cult of Intelligence (New York: Dell, 1974), 324, http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=77687219.

161 Ibid.

Armed Services and Senate Finance Committees – four or five members total between the two – reviewed CIA budgets. McCone would meet with them frequently to review programs “and be guided by their judgment on a great many matters,” although on some issues he would only meet individually with Russell (or Vinson, on the House side).\(^{163}\)

Dean Rusk recalled that, even as Secretary of State, he never had access to a CIA budget, despite being a statutory member of the National Security Council. The CIA's budget went directly from the agency to a few specially-cleared individuals in the Bureau of the Budget, next briefly by the President, and was finally (on the Senate side) “turned over to Senator Russell, and that was the end of it. He would lose the CIA budget in the defense budget and he wouldn't let anybody question it… (His) judgment, his word on that was the last word.”\(^{164}\)

All senators did not happily accept this course, not only by the 1970s but also in the 1950s. In 1956, for example, Mike Mansfield (D-MT) introduced a resolution calling for a Joint Committee on Central Intelligence. Russell easily beat back this challenge with a floor vote of 59-27. In 1966, now Democratic Majority Leader Mansfield supported a Fulbright resolution to establish a separate Committee on Intelligence Operations. In discussing the latter measure with Johnson, Russell noted that he had no control over what Fulbright did or whether Johnson ordered the CIA to “spill its guts to anybody in the world.” However, Russell argued that in fact the “little disarmament crowd – Nelson, McGovern, Fulbright, Morse” – were the only ones driving the issue,

\(^{163}\) John McCone, interview, oral history interview, transcript, LBJ Library.

\(^{164}\) Rusk, Cates interview, Richard B. Russell Foundation Oral History Project.
and he assured Johnson that he had the votes “to beat the ass off of them.” This time, Russell increased his floor margin, defeating the measure 61-28.

In his more reflective moments, however, Russell understood that the Senate winds were changing. He knew in particular that it grated on Fulbright to have no role in CIA oversight, even though he was chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Consequently, he agreed in 1967 to allow a few Foreign Relations Committee members to sit unofficially on the CIA oversight subcommittee's meetings – perhaps implicitly acknowledging that anything he felt they should not hear simply would not be discussed, and knowing explicitly that they would benefit from no direct staff resources to help them prepare or digest what they heard. Russell presumably felt this maneuver would be just enough deflate the demands of the more influential critics of the CIA, and thus forestall formation of a Senate majority. Similarly, the following year Russell suggested to Helms that, “because of increasing skepticism among certain Senators about the agency operations, it probably would be a good idea for the CIA to arrange to have its financial procedures reviewed by an independent authority.” This would preemptively disarm critics before they were able to coalesce around this point. Helms concurred, eventually appointing former Defense Department Comptroller Wilfred McNeil to the task. While Russell never failed during his tenure to guard the CIA from broader oversight, his maneuvers in the end proved stopgaps. In 1976, Stennis was unable to stop

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165 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, June 2, 1966, 8:05PM, Citation #10204, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

166 Marchetti and Marks, 81.
the Senate from creating a new Select Committee on Intelligence with responsibility for CIA and oversight, and national strategic intelligence generally.

_Defusing Foreign Military Interventions – Or Not_

The issue that most consistently and most seriously strained Russell’s notion of support to a well-meaning President involved foreign military intervention. An early example of this involved Russell and Johnson’s combined effort to steer Eisenhower away from involvement in the French Indochina War, as the administration considered intervention in order to lift the siege of Dien Bien Phu in 1954. With the Korean War cease fire holding, Russell was personally opposed to any action that might involve the United States in another Asian ground conflict. Moreover, Russell was highly skeptical that France was a worthy ally in this particular fight. In late summer 1953, administration officials first began sounding out Senate opinion with respect to increasing U.S. financial aid to the French war effort. When approached, Russell was highly critical, arguing that the French were able to carry a higher burden than they were letting on. More to the point, however, he stressed his conviction that Indochina would prove a horrible morass. Unwilling to openly break with the President on this issue, Russell assured that he would not “say a word of criticism” publically. He warned, however, that the U.S. was facing the “worst mess we ever got into.” Soon after, the administration announced an aid package amounting to an additional $385 million.167

By the following spring, Viet Minh forces were successfully laying siege to the French fortress at Dien Bien Phu in northwestern Vietnam. As Eisenhower contemplated intervention in the form of air strikes to help lift the siege, he called a meeting of senior congressional leaders to discuss options. Administration foreign policy officials including Secretary of State John Foster Dulles and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs Admiral Arthur Radford led the meeting in the President’s absence. Seconded by Johnson, Russell took the lead in questioning the wisdom of intervention. Russell believed a limited initial strike would inevitably build into a sustained commitment. He admonished, “Once you commit the flag, you've committed the country. There's no turning back. If you involve the American Air Force, why, you've involved the nation,” and ground troops would soon follow. Russell announced that he was “weary of seeing American soldiers being used as gladiators to be thrown into every arena around the word.”\textsuperscript{168} After a lengthy discussion, the congressional leaders suggested three conditions for U.S. intervention: 1) That the U.S. found allies to participate in joint military action; 2) That the French agreed to maintain their military commitment until the war’s end; and, 3) That France agreed to grant a greater level of independence to Indochina.\textsuperscript{169}

Eisenhower subsequently opted against intervention, and some have attributed this at least in part to the position congressional leaders took at this meeting. It seems doubtful this was truly the cause for Eisenhower’s decision, however. First, the conditions the leaders suggested at the meeting were probably not “non-negotiable.”

\textsuperscript{168} Ibid., 147.

\textsuperscript{169} Ibid.
They were closer to preferred guidelines. Russell, Johnson, and a large congressional majority would no doubt have publicly supported the President whatever his ultimate decision, regardless of the response from America’s allies. The congressional meeting aside, moreover, Eisenhower was probably already disinclined to intervene unilaterally, and when he failed to find allied supporters he concurred with the above stipulations by default. More than anything else, this instance exemplifies Russell’s tendency to offer hard-hitting and usually perceptive advice *in private*. The flip-side of the coin, however, was Russell’s tendency, once having proffered that advice, to then back-off and to publicly support the President regardless of whether the administration heeded his advice. Russell never fundamentally broke from this paradigm. The ironic strain of having to choose how far to follow his onetime in protégé into a still more serious escalation of the conflict in Vietnam a decade later eventually almost drove him to this breaking point, however.

Throughout the remainder of Eisenhower’s presidency, Russell and Johnson remained publicly supportive of Eisenhower’s foreign policy, despite occasional policy misgivings or process frustrations. For example, in 1957 the President requested congressional support for what became known as the Eisenhower Doctrine. Specifically, the President requested that Congress grant him the authority to provide economic and military assistance to willing nations in the Middle East, along with the authority to employ U.S. armed forces to protect their territorial integrity and political independence against Communist aggression. Russell complained privately that “the Congress of the United States is being treated as a group of children, and very small children, and children with a low IQ at that, in the manner that this resolution has been presented to
us. Nonetheless, he was initially willing to support the measure, until he concluded that its economic aid provisions were excessive. While he ultimately voted against the resolution, he apparently did not actively oppose its passage by the whole Senate. If his active support had been required, it seems unlikely that it would not have been forthcoming.

Russell was frequently critical of Eisenhower’s military investment decisions. Like Eisenhower, Russell fundamentally believed that the primary role for the armed forces was deterrence. Russell disagreed, however, with Eisenhower’s apparent conviction that the U.S. could sufficiently deter the Soviet Union and the People’s Republic of China through possession of a large nuclear arsenal, a robust (if not in all respects state-of-the-art) triad of strategic delivery systems, and a nuclear doctrine of Massive Retaliation that stressed a credible use policy. Over the course of the 1950s, Russell increasingly came to doubt that the U.S. was investing sufficiently in either development of the most advanced strategic delivery systems, or in conventional force size and modernization. Russell was less apt than some in Congress to latch viscerally to the notion that the U.S. had to match or surpass its adversaries, quantitatively and qualitatively, in all areas in order to ensure its security. Russell did feel, however, that the U.S. had to be careful to ensure both that it had a credible posture across the range of conventional and nuclear capabilities, and that it did not risk falling behind in key emerging niche technologies, particularly again with respect to strategic delivery systems. A gap in either area could lead to a destabilizing flaw in America’s deterrence posture.

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170 Ibid, 206-207.
that its adversaries might seek to exploit. Unlike some, Russell worried little about whether similar U.S. advantages might be similarly destabilizing in the view of America’s Cold War opponents.

As the Kennedy administration came to office, Russell welcomed the promise of increased defense spending. On the other hand, Russell was in fundamental sympathy with another of Eisenhower’s principles – his reluctance to commit U.S. forces to other than short-term, crisis response interventions abroad. If anything, Russell felt Eisenhower was too aggressive in this respect. Russell was certain that any policy of engaging the Communist powers in a series of proxy confrontations – limited or “brushfire” wars, in the vernacular of the time – around the periphery of the Third World could be nothing but ruinous. Russell had absolutely no interest in employing U.S. forces to fight at “any rung of the escalatory ladder,” to paraphrase a basic Robert McNamara’s Flexible Response concept. While the capability for this might be necessary for deterrence, the practice would be disaster.

Although Russell had no interest in engaging Soviet or Chinese proxies around the Asian and African peripheries, he was a great believer in the Monroe Doctrine and urged its application with respect to international Communism. In particular, he strongly favored elimination of Castro’s regime. As President Kennedy considered his options during the Cuban Missile Crisis, for example, Russell advised him that a blockade or quarantine was insufficient. Since the U.S. would eventually need to “clean out the situation,” he urged an invasion.171 Russell once told Fulbright that he considered himself

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171 Notes on meeting with congressional leaders regarding Cuba, October 22, 1962, Conferences with the President and Congressional Leaders 1961-1962 file, National Security Files, JFK Library.
“a damned isolationist,” but that he believed the U.S. had to keep the Western Hemisphere clean, and it was better to intervene early when costs were low.\textsuperscript{172}

As with Dien Bien Phu, however, Russell would not apply this logic to Vietnam, nor to the remainder of the formerly French Indochina. Here, Russell never believed costs could be low enough, nor the probability of quick success sure enough, to warrant U.S. military intervention, even in training and advisory roles. He believed in the axiom that “forces follow the flag” (although it is noteworthy that he apparently did not apply this to CIA operations). More than anything, Russell believed that in the Third World the U.S. lacked allies who would fight for themselves, in many cases because the governments were little more than corrupt elites who could not mobilize or motivate their population to fight for \textit{them}. As the 1960s progressed, Russell became increasingly worried that the Kennedy and Johnson administrations were demonstrating a marked willingness to act on Kennedy’s inaugural promise to “pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, (and) oppose any foe” by intervening militarily in a series of Cold War proxy conflicts in Asia and Africa.\textsuperscript{173}

As the young Kennedy administration contemplated intervention in Laos in the spring of 1961, for example, Russell offered counsel similar to that he had provided almost eight years earlier. In a meeting between the President and the congressional

\textsuperscript{172} Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Robert McNamara, August 21, 1965, 4:35PM, Citation #8587, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{173} JFK Library, “Inaugural Address of President John F. Kennedy,” http://www.jfklibrary.org/Historical+Resources/Archives/Reference+Desk/Speeches/JFK/003POF03Inaugural101201961.htm. While Russell was cold to rhetoric implying intervention, other lines from the address mirrored his views perfectly, such as: “We dare not tempt them with weakness. For only when our arms are sufficient beyond doubt can we be certain beyond doubt that they will never be employed.”
leadership, Russell argued against the notion of the Domino Theory, at least as applied to Laos. He stated that he had never conceived how “losing” Laos could set the stage for the loss of all Southeast Asia. From his perspective, the important consideration was finding allies that could fight effectively and independently, and if these did not already exist there was no ability to create them. As with Dien Bien Phu, Russell also argued for the necessity of European allied participation if the President chose to intervene. His own view, however, was that the U.S. should withdraw its personnel and write off the situation. Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh Burke countered that if the U.S. did not assist the Laotians, the Vietnamese would give up, followed by the Thais, and eventually all of Southeast Asia. Russell responded that, if Burke thought Thailand and South Vietnam would fight for themselves, then the U.S. should make its stand there, not in Laos. Although he did voice it at the meeting, Russell almost certainly did not believe – already in 1961 – that the South Vietnamese would in fact prove worthwhile allies.

He was sure of this by 1964. As Johnson faced successive decisions to escalate U.S. involvement in Vietnam throughout 1964 and 1965, Russell repeatedly voiced his fear that such a course would only prove disastrous. However, Russell could never recommend an alternate course that he believed would offer success. More importantly, unlike with Laos, Russell could never find it in himself to counsel his friend to avoid further escalation, much less to withdraw America’s commitment and suffer an obvious defeat. In a March 1964 telephone conversation, for example, Johnson suggested that

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174 Notes on meeting with congressional leaders regarding Laos, April 27, 1961, Conferences with the President and Congressional Leaders 1961-1962 file, National Security Files, JFK Library.
Russell would be one of three or four people with whom he would consult regarding any escalation. Russell recalled his response: “I told him I did not want to go in and I did not know how to get out.” This was the dominant theme of Russell’s advice during this critical period.

In another such conversation that November, after Johnson’s election and after the Gulf of Tonkin incident, the President asked Russell point blank what he thought the U.S. should do about Vietnam – albeit more in a manner that suggested he was sounding out Russell’s opinion rather than really searching for advice. Russell responded that he wished the U.S. could still get out, but he did not know how to make that happen. He predicted that further escalation could lead to a ten-year commitment. He even told Johnson that he had suggested to CIA Director McCone that the agency put someone in power in South Vietnam who would then turn around and demand that the U.S. withdraw. This was probably not a serious suggestion, and McCone did not take it seriously. Russell concluded by telling Johnson that the only worse potential problem for the U.S. than Vietnam was the Congo. Russell hoped and prayed the U.S. would not get involved there as well.

In March 1965, Johnson called Russell – who was hospitalized at Walter Reed Army Medical Center – to inform him of his decision to send Marines to secure the U.S.

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176 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, November 9, 1964, 11:57AM, Citation #6304, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.
airfield at Danang in South Vietnam. Johnson noted that he made the decision the previous day and had informed all the necessary committee chairman except Stennis, who was serving in Russell’s stead on Armed Services, but was off hunting and could not be located. During this conversation, both men clearly agonized over a decision that they agreed would mire the U.S. further into a situation that would cost more American lives by the day with no foreseeable end in sight. Russell yet again stated that the situation scared the life out of him, but he did not know how to back away. Both men acknowledged the irony that the Marines were being sent to guard an airbase whose aircraft were incapable of achieving any rapid effect to end the conflict, yet the action of deploying them made any future decision to disengage still more difficult. Still, each found it easier to take yet another step forward. By mid-summer 1965, the U.S. began both sustained air and ground operations in Vietnam.

Over the next three years, as the Johnson administration wrestled to balance carrots and sticks in its approach toward North Vietnam, Russell became an increasingly outspoken hawk. He criticized the administration’s self-imposed limits on U.S. rules of engagement, particularly with respect to the bombing campaign against the North, as well as its unwillingness to close Haiphong’s port facilities. The U.S. having come this far, Russell now felt that further escalation offered the only promise of turning off North Vietnamese support for the war. The Union had not won the Civil War with half measures; nor had the Allies won two world wars by pulling punches. In any case,

177 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, March 6, 1965, 12:05PM, Citation #7026, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.
Russell regarded anything less than a full press as a disservice to the U.S. troops who were sacrificing so much. Nonetheless, deep down Russell always regarded U.S. prospects as poor. It disturbed him greatly that that the South Vietnamese government was focusing on pacification and putting U.S. troops in a combat role. To Russell, this was “contrary to how South Korea behaved in its darkest times.” Moreover, despite Russell’s desire to take the war more aggressively to the North, he believed that policies in the South like free-fire zones and relocating populations to protected hamlets only served to further alienate the southern population from the government and the war effort.

In August 1965, Russell gave an interview in which he stated that, were an election held in all of Vietnam at that time, the people would freely elect Ho Chi Minh. This statement concerned Johnson greatly, and he instructed Secretary of State Rusk to try to convince Russell otherwise. Johnson worried that an outspokenly critical Russell might prompt fence-sitting senators into opposition. Worse, it might provide decided congressional critics the breathing space to likewise voice their criticisms publicly –

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178 One of Russell’s nephews volunteered for service Vietnam and was paralyzed within the first six weeks, subsequently spending a year at Walter Reed Army Medical Center.

179 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, July 26, 1965, 5:46PM, Citation #8399, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

180 Russell once told McPherson: “Look into the free-fire zone business. I don't like the sound of it. The Vietnamese people are animists. They feel very deeply about the land where their ancestors are buried. I suspect we're alienating them by moving them away from their homes, even if it's for their own safety. I know how Georgia people feel about that. When a big dam is dedicated down there, and a lot of farmers have been moved out to make way for the reservoir, I don't go to the dedication. I don't want them to see me up there on a platform built over their land.” McPherson, *A Political Education*, 409.
Fulbright in particular.\textsuperscript{181} Despite Johnson’s attempt at pacification, however, Russell continued to speak publicly in a manner that directed or implied criticism of the administration’s handling of the war – usually in a moderate and clinical tone, but in contrast to what one might expect from someone who had so long worried about projecting a united front to the world and avoiding the appearance that the Congress distrusted the President’s policies. Moreover, while there is little direct evidence, it seems probable that Russell’s comments had exactly the effect on both Senate doves and hawks – from the likes of Fulbright to Stennis – that Johnson had feared.\textsuperscript{182}

In February 1968, after the start of the Communist Tet offensive and as the administration considered an additional deployment of American troops to Vietnam, McNamara visited Russell – again hospitalized at Walter Reed – to discuss the matter. Russell counseled McNamara in no uncertain terms that this additional deployment was a mistake; America could not afford to cast its last strategic reserve of ground forces into the fight, particularly as long as the will of the South Vietnamese remained suspect. In addition, Russell urged that Johnson recall U.S. commander General William Westmoreland. Russell had lost faith in his abilities. These remarks shocked McNamara, who insisted that Johnson was under the impression Russell agreed with the troop

\textsuperscript{181} Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Dean Rusk, August 2, 1965, 10:33AM, Citation #8501, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{182} Perhaps it is better to say that this study uncovered little direct evidence. This topic of Russell’s influence on his fellow senators with respect to Vietnam was not a core research focus, so it is difficult to say what evidence is out there. This would be an interesting subject for additional research, however. With respect to Stennis, who also became an outspoken hawk in much the same vein as Russell, it seems unlikely that he would have spoken out so frequently and so publically absent Russell’s cue. Moreover, Russell’s behind-the-scenes influence with Fulbright regarding U.S. policy toward the Congo was evident, as we will see.
increase. In his notes of the meeting, Russell scribbled at the end that he would call
Johnson and personally urge against the troop increase, even threatening to oppose it
openly on the floor of the Senate.\footnote{Russell note on conversation with McNamara, February 13, 1968, “Personal Notes, Misc 1968-1969” file, Red Line series, United States Senatorial Papers, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries.} It is unclear whether he followed through, or if so,
what precise impact this had on Johnson’s thinking. However, while Russell opposed
additional troop deployments, he had not decided to urge an American withdrawal, and
he retained support for a naval quarantine and intensified bombing of North Vietnam.

No other security issue utterly frustrated Russell as did Vietnam. Long before Tet,
he became determined to see that the U.S. would not replicate this mistake elsewhere in
the world. This had implications for Russell’s handling of the defense authorization bill,
as we will see. In terms of foreign intervention, after Southeast Asia the area that worried
Russell most was the newly independent central African state of Congo. Belgium had
rapidly withdrawn from its former colony in 1960, leaving behind a highly fragile and
fractured new nation. During the early 1960s, a United Nations intervention force
deployed to tamp down a series of secessionist movements. While the UN succeeded in
producing a temporary calm, the country’s resource riches, geographic location, and
weak central authority virtually cemented its future as a Cold War proxy battleground.
With the UN mission scheduled to end in mid-1964, the United States, the Soviet Union,
and the PRC all vied for influence. While the U.S. backed the official government in
Kinshasa, the Soviets and Chinese channeled support to rebels in the east and south of the
country. Starting in January 1964, a series of rural insurgencies flared in these areas, involving approximately half the administrative districts of Congo.

In this climate, Russell worried desperately that the Johnson administration might either decide upon direct military intervention or, more likely, training and logistics support operations that would in effect solidly plant the U.S. flag in the region, setting the conditions for possible future escalation as had occurred in Vietnam. As previously mentioned, in March 1964 Russell warned Johnson against U.S. involvement in Congo. Through late summer of 1964, the eastern insurgencies gathered momentum. Russell continued to counsel Johnson, but privately feared that he was losing influence. As Russell recorded in his notes, “It seems… that McNamara, the State Department are determined to force American military intervention in the Congo and the President is more persuaded by them than he is by my statements.”

Beginning in the early fall, however, the course of the conflict rapidly turned against the eastern rebels, in part because of the Kinshasa government’s use of white African mercenaries, and in part because of the rebels ineffectual efforts to consolidate their gains. In the fall, rebels took hostage a large group of white expatriates in Stanleyville (later, Kisangani) and attempted to use them as bargaining chips to force an end to U.S. and European support of the Kinshasa government. This prompted the U.S to intervene in a supporting capacity, supplying transport aircraft to assist a drop of Belgian paratroops in an operation to free the hostages that November. This remained the extent

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of direct U.S. involvement for the time being. By early 1965, the military situation in Congo had largely, if only temporarily, stabilized. On the political front, Congolese Army Chief of Staff Joseph Mobutu launched his second coup in five years – both with U.S. backing – this time assuming the presidency. Mobutu would remain head of state of the soon-to-be renamed Zaire until 1997.

Russell’s concerns over U.S. involvement did not soon end, however. In 1966 and 1967, Mobutu faced a series of rebellions that tested the stability of his regime. One such rebellion in Kisangani in July 1967 prompted Johnson to authorize the dispatch of three transport aircraft to support the government of Congo’s military operations. Russell was extremely distressed at this turn, and found an eager ally in Fulbright. Their combined public opposition to this intervention surprised Johnson, as he was under the impression his deputies had cleared the operation with the key members of Congress. Rusk insisted that he had discussed the matter with Fulbright personally, and that Fulbright had offered no objections at the time.185

Russell’s influence apparently prompted Fulbright’s change of mind. In August 1967, Fulbright sponsored a “sense of the Senate” resolution that called for the direct participation of the Congress in any decision to commit U.S. troops or resources abroad. It passed overwhelmingly. While lacking enforcement mechanisms, it served as a slap on Johnson’s hand. According to Fulbright, this resolution was as much Russell’s as his, both in concept and in passage. As Fulbright recalled:

185 Deputy Press Secretary W. Thomas Johnson’s notes of Tuesday Luncheon Group Meeting, July 12, 1967, “7/12/67 2:50 pm Tuesday Luncheon Group” file, Presidential Special Files, LBJ Library.
(The) idea of introducing it grew out of the conversation (Russell) and I had at a lunch one day in which we were... immediately disturbed by the possibility of intervention in the Congo... (We) were talking about it and... developed the idea that we ought to do what we could to dissuade the administration from intervening physically in the Congo civil war and the idea of entering this resolution came up. I asked him to introduce it and I would co-sponsor it and do the work. He said no, he thought it more appropriate for me to and so I had the staff translate our views into written resolution, submitted to him for his approval. He did approve it and agreed to support it but he asked that I sponsor it. And he did support it, of course, and that was one of the principal reasons that it passed, with a very large majority.\textsuperscript{186}

Nothing suggests Russell intended this resolution to be a watershed in Executive-Congressional relations. Rather, it was a tactical move meant to influence a specific policy debate. Still, it was a considerable deviation from the behavior that Russell consistently demonstrated throughout the Eisenhower years.

Whether it was in any way decisive with respect to Johnson’s thinking is difficult to say. The U.S operation that sparked the resolution ended in early August. While some newspaper accounts suggested that the administration was pulling the plug on the operation because of congressional pressure, Johnson insisted to his advisors that this was untrue. He stressed the operation was ending because the mission was complete.\textsuperscript{187} However, he once again chastised his deputies for having failed in their legislative liaison responsibilities, and he warned them not to repeat this in the future. Johnson then wrote personally to Russell in an attempt to ease his friend’s concerns. The President retrospectively laid out the justification for the operation, and noted that U.S. forces were

\textsuperscript{186} James William Fulbright, interviewed by Hugh Cates, oral history, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.

\textsuperscript{187} Tom Johnson’s notes of Tuesday Luncheon Group Meeting, August 8, 1967, “8/8/67 1:25pm Tuesday Luncheon Group” file, Presidential Special Files, LBJ Library.
operating strictly in a supporting capacity, not in a combat rule. Johnson pointed out that all aircraft and personnel had successfully returned to the U.S. with no losses and with the mission complete.\(^{188}\)

Russell continued to take the matter seriously, however, almost to the point that it caused a crisis of conscience. The pattern of U.S. intervention in the 1960s led him to question the ultimate utility of his life’s work. As he noted on one occasion:

Desire to register earnest protest against action (of) this government in sending planes and troops to the Congo. Consistently involvement in local rebellions… Why do we have special obligation to Mobutu?… How long can we expect the Soviet Union and Red China to remain quiescent… Spent most of my Senate career working to assure armed strength of the U.S. – Disheartening to see. Shocking to think of even one American youth ordered to his death to save Mobutu.\(^{189}\)

On another occasion, he similarly wrote: “Have tried to maintain military strength of U.S. – but only to defend – not to be the plaything of the State Dept.”\(^{190}\) While Russell never swayed in his commitment to investing in strong a military, the events of the 1960s at least caused him to doubt certain programs that promised capabilities to more rapidly deploy to Third World trouble spots, as we will see. Many of his Senate colleagues, on the other hand, became increasingly vocal opponents of both foreign intervention and large defense budgets. This new mood with respect to defense spending was to become

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the bane of Russell’s last years in the Senate – with the irony that he had perhaps helped stoke the newfound outspokenness of his colleagues through his own criticisms of the Johnson administration.

**Russell, Fiscal Responsibility, and Constituent Service**

While always supportive of large defense budgets, Russell also considered himself a fiscal conservative. As such, he sought to balance military strength with fiscal restraint, although with a decided tendency to opt for the former. Russell might at times lament the great sums being spent on defense:

> There is something about preparing for destruction that causes men to be more careless in spending money than they would be if they were building for a constructive purpose. Why that is, I do not know; but I have observed, over a period of almost thirty years in the Senate that there is something about buying arms with which to kill, to destroy, to wipe out cities, and to obliterate great transportation systems which causes men not to reckon the dollar cost as closely as they do when they think about proper housing and the care of the health of human beings.\(^\text{191}\)

Russell never fundamentally doubted the necessity of these expenditures, however.

At the same time, Russell never shied away from what might be termed the “redistributive politics” of Congress. He believed that a primary responsibility for any member was to look after his constituents’ interests. This was how one got reelected and moved up the seniority ladder.\(^\text{192}\) This also meant accepting that at least some degree of

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\(^{192}\) As he wrote in a form letter response to constituents regarding Strom Thurmond’s change of party affiliation in 1964, “While I have every respect for Senator Thurmond for the action he has taken, I must say that my position is entirely different from his. I see nothing to be gained by surrendering 30 years of Democratic seniority which enables me to... to protect the interests of Georgia in a great many matters such as military installations. I shall cast my personal ballot for the Democratic ticket, but I do not intend to take any active part in the campaign this Fall, nor have I advised anyone how to vote.” Form letter to...
pork had to flow to the home state. For Russell, this was simply reality. The challenge was to avoid becoming so cynical that all concerns for fiscal responsibility and restraint in appropriations evaporated. Russell preached, and to a considerable degree believed, that maintaining a limited government was necessary to nurturing a strong national economy. He was generally able to rationalize concerns for fiscal austerity with concerns over constituent interest by falling back on two premises. First, he believed that military spending that benefited the southern states was just desserts for the lack of a real reconstruction program following the Civil War. Second, but more importantly, Russell sincerely believed that military spending should first and foremost be focused responsibly on building and maintaining an effective military; however, if money needed to be spent, it was best spent in Georgia.

The exact nature of Russell’s influence on Defense Department contracting and basing decisions is uncertain. It was probably much like his influence on certain Senate votes; he would not twist arms per se, but he expected others to take note of his interests and to abide them unless they had a compelling interest to the contrary. As long-time SASC chief clerk Harry Wingate commented, “I don't ever recall the chairman saying you get in touch with so and so and tell them I want the facility located in Georgia.” On the other hand, he implied Russell did not need to: “The military, the Defense Department, they knew where Senator Russell lived.”


It was not just the Defense Department; other senators knew where Russell lived. As Henry Jackson once noted, “I chaired the Military Construction Subcommittee for him. There are a lot of projects in Georgia that I was able to be of some help to him. Needless to say, he could do it himself, but I didn't need to talk to him about it and he didn't talk to me about it. I just understood what his interest was.”

Russell often claimed that he never tried to manipulate the contract process or to demand favors on behalf of constituents, and that the pressure he sometimes received to do so greatly disturbed him. No one likes being subject to a hard sell. Once in a closed committee discussion on authorization of expenditures for civil defense facilities, Russell noted his opposition to open-ended authorizations for such purposes because governors and civil defense directors “will put the Congress under such pressure that we can’t stand it and we will appropriate much more money than we should.”

Other committee members felt the same. In a 1962 SASC session marking-up a bill to amend the Armed Services Procurement Act of 1947, for example, Francis Case complained that the Defense Department should publicly disclose its reasons for not awarding certain contracts to losing bidders. He resented that his supporters put enormous pressure on him to throw his political weight around. Whenever they came up on the losing end of a contract decision, it made him look ineffectual, as if they lost because of him rather than their own shortcomings. Symington responded that he got similar pressure from his constituents to get them government contracts. Russell replied,

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“The Senator is certainly correct. I do not have much (R&D contracting) in my state, unfortunately for the state, but perhaps fortunately for me as an individual… they do expect the Senators to be salesmen in some instances. I have had to tell a number of them, ‘I am not a salesman. I cannot do it. All I can do is make an appointment to see some fellow, and that is all I will do.’

There is little doubt, however, that the Defense Department contracting official who took that appointment request regarded it as an implied endorsement.

As noted above, Russell and the other southerners regarded military spending as a form of reparations for the lack of post-Civil War economic reconstruction. Senator Herman Tallmadge (D-GA), noting the high per capita income of Georgia before the Civil War, remembered that he and Russell worked tirelessly to move jobs and money to Georgia. However, Tallmadge also insisted that Russell never made direct lobbying effort on behalf of his constituents. In any case, Georgia benefited greatly from Russell’s position in the Senate, as it did from fellow Georgian Carl Vinson’s chairmanship of the House Armed Services Committee. By 1958, for example, there were fifteen defense installations in Georgia. That year, Russell wrote in a constituent form letter that annual pay and dollar allowances for troops stationed in Georgia, as well as civilian personnel employed there, was approximately $425 million – fifth in the United States. Still,

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195 Committee deliberation on H. R. 5532 to amend Armed Services Procurement Act of 1947, August 10, 1962, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.


197 Russell letter to constituent, November 19, 1958, Correspondence June-December 1958, Armed Services Committee subseries, Legislative series, United States Senatorial Papers, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries.
Russell and Vinson’s combined influence must be put in perspective. Georgia – and the South generally – did better in terms of installation than in terms of contracting, particularly contracts that promoted high technology skills. Between about 1950 and 1970, the ten southern states had a combined share of defense prime contracts that went from roughly 7 percent of the nation’s total to about one quarter, although with Texas rather than Georgia as the principle beneficiary. On the other hand, California alone outpaced the entire South in terms of contracts, and those the South received had limited effect in developing high skill sectors in the broader southern economies. Similarly, while military bases stimulated the service sector and sometimes translated into a moderate increase in industrial production, the overall effects on the southern region’s growth during this period were not striking. Nonetheless, the South consistently received conspicuously more in federal spending than it paid in taxes, and given the poor economic base from which it started, these funds mattered more to the South before the 1970s than they did to other regions.198

While Russell was eager for Georgia to get at least its fair share of military bases and defense installations, he was pragmatic when it came to base realignment and closure decisions. In a 1963 phone conversation shortly after Johnson became President, for example, Johnson informed Russell that certain work creating nuclear material at the Savannah River reactor was likely to be curtailed. Russell replied that this was okay, as long as the facility was treated equitably compared to others. Russell noted that he had seen this coming, and had been preparing state politicians. He felt the U.S. had more

nuclear material than it needed anyway. He wanted the budget down and accepted closure if it came to that, although he allowed that when the announcement came he would still have to raise a fuss for local consumption. In a conversation a few days earlier involving the likelihood of another future round of base closure, Russell advised Johnson that the politically difficult issue for members of Congress was whether there would be a job loss or not. If there were replacement jobs, this would not cause as much furor locally, and Johnson could benefit nationally from the appearance of fiscal responsibility. Russell noted that during McNamara's prior round of closings there was a three week uproar, then Russell never heard a thing about it again.

While Russell may have been reluctant to lobby generally, his relationship with defense contractor Lockheed Corporation involved cases at least bordering on outright influence peddling. Lockheed was consistently among the largest employers in Georgia, and was at times the largest. Russell often traveled for free on Lockheed corporate planes. A 1966 memo from a staff member regarding Lockheed interest in obtaining a Navy shipbuilding contract for Georgia concluded with the comment, “I assured (him) of your strong interest in the matter and that you would do everything

199 Literally, "When my nuts fall out I guess I'll holler as loud as anybody," Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, December 21, 1963, 5:45PM, Tape K6312.14, PNO 3, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - JFK Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

200 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, December 7, 1963, 5:00PM, Tape K6312.05, PNO 2, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - JFK Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

201 Lockheed Corporation merged with Martin Marietta in 1995 to become Lockheed Martin, and is currently the world’s largest defense contractor.
within your power to see that Georgia is considered for the facility.\textsuperscript{202} In fairness, this is an oblique reference. Even if Russell was genuinely opposed to influence peddling, it did not hurt to at least appear that he was doing all in his powers for the benefit of one of his most important constituents.

On the other hand, some have charged Russell’s direct involvement on behalf of Lockheed’s successful proposal to build the C-5 transport aircraft – the largest plane ever built, and one subsequently plagued with cost overruns and operational readiness problems.\textsuperscript{203} Russell’s biographer Gilbert Fite is among those who charges influence peddling. He concluded that Russell pressed Johnson and McNamara to find in favor of the Lockheed, citing that Russell called it “an even trade” for a similar favor he was doing for Johnson. The announcement on Lockheed’s behalf came shortly thereafter.\textsuperscript{204} Incidentally, Johnson remarked at the C-5’s inaugural rollout, “(E)very other community in the country, including Johnson City, Texas, should be envious of the amount of federal


\textsuperscript{204} Fite, 444.
funds coming in to Marietta as a result of your getting this contract for Lockheed-Georgia.”

Whatever the real economic impact, Russell’s actual or perceived ability to bring defense dollars home certainly contributed to his political stature in Georgia. Indeed, throughout his Senate career, Russell remained a giant in the eyes of Georgia’s voters. He served for almost 38 years in the Senate; over half his life. Following his victory in a special election in 1932, he served continuously until his 1971 death at age 73. During that time, Russell suffered only a single reelection challenge, when in 1936 he defeated Georgia’s sitting Governor Eugene Tallmadge (father of future Senator Herman Tallmadge) by nearly a 2 to 1 margin. In five subsequent elections Russell ran absolutely unopposed. In those races, he never faced a single challenger in either the Democratic primary or the general election.

205 Johnson’s remarks, as relayed to Russell, March 1968, 3/68 file, Intra-Office Communications series, United States Senatorial Papers, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries. William Proxmire, one of the C-5’s leading critics, offered a fitting commentary on the absolute political importance of serving one’s constituents, “There was no point in my talking to (Russell) or to Senator Talmadge … about the C5A. I knew what their position would be. It would have to be. If I were in their position I'd, my position might well have been the same.” Proxmire, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.
CHAPTER 4
THE SENATE ARMED SERVICES COMMITTEE

The Membership

Influential senators generally combine an interest in a subject with the institutional or personal levers of power necessary to achieve an outcome. Senators other than Russell with considerable institutional and/or personal power – e.g., Carl Hayden, Dennis Chavez, Lyndon Johnson – demonstrated less interest in defense policy than Russell. Others whose interest rivaled Russell – most notably Stuart Symington, but also Henry Jackson, Strom Thurmond, and Barry Goldwater – lacked his power base. Russell’s preeminence should not imply that other SASC members were not important. Some were consistently influential over the breadth of time under study. Others rose in importance over time. Some were only occasionally – but then significantly – influential. Although Russell was a strong chairman, he was for the most part also a genial chair who respected other members’ opinions and prerogatives (up to a point), gave those he trusted wide latitude in executing day-to-day committee business, and sometimes even permitted those he trusted to pursue their own special interests under official SASC auspices. On the other hand, Russell’s word was in the end invariably the committee’s word. No other committee member could hope to bring a personal initiative to fruition without Russell’s blessing – and certainly not in the face of his determined opposition.
The following sections describe individuals who were either Russell’s key deputies, or who otherwise represented a certain “committee type” worthy of comment.

**Protégé: John Stennis**

After Russell, no other committee member was more consistently influential over time than John Stennis. It seems both harsh and fair to conclude that most senators who sought membership on Armed Services wanted the prestige of membership, the occasional ability to grandstand for public attention, and the enhanced ability to steer defense dollars to their states. Most had no real interest in committee grunt work. Stennis initially sought a seat on the SASC in order to work more closely with Russell, rather than out of any particular interest in military affairs. Stennis quickly became the committee’s workhorse, however. In so doing, Stennis quickly rose in stature with Russell. Between 1955 and 1968, Stennis arguably put more effort into the day-to-day grunt work of committee business than any other member. Until passage of section 412(b), the real estate and military construction authorization bill was the main piece of legislation the committee reported annually. Throughout the 1950s, Stennis chaired the responsible subcommittee. After Johnson became Vice President, Stennis moved to take over the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. He remained its chairman for the remainder of the 1960s, and steadily transformed it from semi-active subcommittee

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206 Stennis, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.

207 As the portion of the defense budget subject to annual authorization expanded, the additional portions were handled by the full committee rather than a subcommittee, with Russell presiding and with the staff operating under his direction.
focused primarily a “waste, fraud, and abuse” into one that attempted reaching, substantive policy oversight.

Already by the later 1950s, Stennis had become Russell’s obvious protégé and presumed successor as SASC chairman. As Russell’s health deteriorated over the mid- to late-1960s, Stennis received a good deal of on the job training. In both 1965 and 1968 Stennis presided over the majority of the SASC’s sessions, while Russell remained hospitalized at Walter Reed Army Medical Center suffering from complications of chronic emphysema. Given’s Stennis’s steadily growing stature and influence on SASC, his motivations, goals, and objectives receive more detailed coverage than those of most other members.

Stennis was born in 1901. After receiving a law degree from the University of Virginia in 1928, Stennis served as a member of the Mississippi State House of Representatives until 1932, before becoming a district prosecuting attorney and later a circuit judge. Mississippi voters elected him to the Senate in 1947 to fill the vacancy caused by the death of Theodore Bilbo. Stennis was careful to adhere to norms of apprenticeship and hard work. He did not get off to a very fast start – nor did he intend to. Hayden advised him that it would take a minimum of three years to learn how to become a senator. As Stennis recalled:

I had the very strong conviction that I had to first get the confidence of the membership. I felt this would take time and that I would have to do earnest work with no demagoguery. This approach did work, but it worked slowly. Senator Richard Russell of Georgia was unquestionably the Number One Man in the Senate from the time I went there until he passed away twenty years later... Senator Russell recognized my approach and
the quality of the approach that I was trying to make, and encouraged me to follow such a course.208

Stennis’s path paid dividends fairly rapidly. Coming to Russell’s early notice, he soon received a seat on the SASC.209 He also gained a seat on Appropriations in 1955, a year before Johnson. Stennis quickly took over the chairmanship of the Appropriations Committee’s military construction subcommittee, which nicely complemented his military construction duties on the SASC.

While Stennis steadily rose in stature and influence on Armed Services, he was never one of the key Establishment men – neither a minnow nor a whale. Many of those who commented on Stennis regarded his character as his most noteworthy quality. McPherson described him thus: “righteous, he possessed the Judicial Temperament, he was punctilious and straight.”210 Reedy felt, “There was just something massive about his integrity… when you were around Stennis, you had sort of a reassuring feeling, that there

208 Stennis memo for the record on “My Early Days in the Senate,” undated, JCS Recollections file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library. Southerners in particular could afford a go-slow approach, given their higher likelihood of reelection due to the lack of any real Republican challenge in their home states.

209 Stennis implied that he first came to Russell’s attention due to his opposition as a member of the Senate Rules Committee to Truman’s 1948 attempt to do away with the poll tax. See Stennis memo for the record regarding the establishment of the Stennis Library and his accomplishments up to 1968, June 10, 1968, “Senator’s memos to himself, 1968” file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

210 McPherson, A Political Education, 57-58. Stennis won his first election – a contentious race with multiple experienced candidates – by running on the message to a largely rural electorate: “I want to plow a straight furrow right down to the end of the row. This is my political religion, and I have lived by it too long to abandon it now. I base my appeal to you on this simple creed, and with it I shall rise or fall.” Mississippi State University Library, “Biographical Sketch of John C. Stennis,” http://library.msstate.edu/content/templates/?a=476&z=91.
was a man you could trust.” ²¹¹ However, it is not apparent that he developed strong personal relationships outside the southern bloc, and within this group he remained a comparatively junior member until the 1960s, after which the group began to lose its cohesion and legislative dominance. ²¹² Moreover, if Russell was reserved, Stennis could come across as wooden. In a body where one’s interpersonal qualities were a key enabler, this could be a serious handicap. Still, Stennis was regarded as having a strong intellect, both among the southerners and to some degree outside them. McPherson concluded, “Apart from Russell, he was the most impressive Southerner.” ²¹³

During the 1950s and 1960s, Stennis’s key asset was his relationship with Russell. They were both professionally and personally close. While Johnson used his friendship with Russell to spring board to Senate prominence and national recognition, Stennis was content to bide his time. Johnson was ambitious, and his ultimate ambition lay outside Congress. Stennis expected to be a Senate man for life. Stennis was among Russell’s best friends in the Senate. Near the end of his life, Russell personally requested that Stennis deliver the eulogy at his funeral. One former Stennis staff member recalled that the


²¹² Stennis was only “junior” in the sense of seniority. Of the 19 other senators from southern states in 1965, Stennis had less seniority than 10 – a rank that had not changed since Walter George left the Senate in 1957. Russell was only four years older than Stennis, but had 14 years more seniority. Incidentally, the Senate marks seniority by one’s first day in office (with several possible tie-breakers). For example, Russell and Harry Byrd, Sr., both joined the Senate in 1933. Byrd’s tenure began on March 4, the same as all the other Senators elected as normal the previous November. Since Russell won a special election after the death of the incumbent, his tenure began on January 12, making him technically senior to Byrd by about two months. While there was much more to power in the Senate than seniority, if push ever came to shove over a committee assignment, for example, Russell could have claimed seniority and by Senate precedents it would have been difficult to find a reason to deny him.

senator “worshipped Russell. He just thought he was the greatest member of the Senate.”

The closeness of their relationship gave Stennis considerable influence with Russell. Russell trusted his protégé implicitly, both in terms of the quality of his work and in terms of the “responsibility” with which he exercised his committee duties. Russell’s confidence in Stennis owed as well to the fact that they had very similar world views. Their policy inclinations on defense, foreign aid, and foreign intervention were almost identical. Stennis believed a strong military was the backbone of U.S. security. Like Russell, he worried about fiscal responsibility and the cost of defense. Like Russell, he did his best to serve his constituents and bring home as many defense dollars as feasible. As Stennis’s committee stature increased, so apparently did Mississippi’s success in basing and contract decisions.


215 Neal Peirce argued that “Stennis is not the prototypical military pork-barreler; in fact, his personal sense of honor would stop him from putting pressure on the Pentagon to spend more money in Mississippi… But the Pentagon money allocators, perhaps noting on which side their bread was buttered, sharply increased their outlays in Mississippi during the 1960s and early 1970s.” Neal R. Peirce, The Deep South States of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Seven Deep South States (New York: W. W. Norton, 1974), 201, http://www.questia.com/PM.qst?a=o&d=52694208. On the other hand, even after serving as chairman of the military construction subcommittees of both the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, according to Peirce there were still only four military installations in the state – and three defense contractors. Stennis asserted that “often the people who help them get elected are quite demanding of the Senators. This is not true in Mississippi. The ones that have helped me get elected the most have been ones that have requested least.” See Stennis memo for the record on “Events, Stories, and Illustrations,” undated, JCS Recollections file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library. One the other hand, even casual research into such matters shows a number of instances of Stennis attempting his constituents in at least subtle ways. Stennis may not have twisted arms to lobby for his state, but he was a practical politician who felt that, if money was to be spent anyway, at least some should be spent in Mississippi.
Stennis was supportive of arms limitation, but not disarmament – particularly if he feared it would prove unilateral in implementation. He voted for the Truman Doctrine and Marshall Plan. He supported mutual security pacts in principle, but felt the U.S. generally got a poor return in the shares of the common defense borne by allies.\(^{216}\) He remained skeptical of foreign aid, in part because it drained U.S. resources without commensurate allied burden sharing. However, Stennis also feared that an imbalance existed between U.S. commitments and forces – particularly under Eisenhower. As the former multiplied, Stennis feared the latter were in a dangerous state of decline, or at least stagnancy. After the 1958 congressional session, Stennis took a 19-day tour through the Soviet bloc – inspired by a conversation with Dr. Werner von Braun, during which von Braun stated that the American people were wrong to look on the Soviets as technologically backward. Stennis came away from the trip impressed by the energy of the Soviet citizenry and the quality of their educational system in math and the sciences. He was convinced that, over the long term, expanded intellectual horizons would lead to demands for individual freedom and a modification in the police state. At best, however, this would be a twenty or thirty year process.\(^{217}\) During the intervening time, Stennis felt there was minimal likelihood of a Soviet attack, although he believed this was due more to America’s nuclear retaliatory potential than to Soviet passivity. On the other hand, Stennis felt the Soviets were waging a trade war of sorts against the U.S., in that the

\(^{216}\) On these points, see Stennis’s “A Resume on The United States Becoming a World Power,” undated, Stennis Reminiscences 1973 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

\(^{217}\) Stennis’s notes on his Russia trip, undated, Memos 1959 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
Soviets were looking to sell low-cost goods, particularly in Asia and Africa, and would use these growing economic ties to form political friendships and eventually economic alliances. With trade in mechanical goods would come skilled workers and technicians who would preach Soviet ideals and serve as de facto Communist missionaries. Stennis was convinced the U.S. could not meet this challenge through loans or economic support funds distributed directly to governments – which he considered “relief and give-away programs” – as these “proved to sow more seeds of ill-will than good-will.” Such programs, at least as generally administered, did little to develop indigenous capacity such that citizens of the country could work to improve their own quality of life. Instead, he supported aid programs typified by Truman’s Point 4 Program, which aimed to send technical aid, both equipment and personnel, to support indigenous development.

Like Russell, Stennis was more supportive of aid and intervention in Latin America than Asia or Africa. Stennis agreed with Russell that the Communist threat in the Western Hemisphere was paramount, and that Eisenhower and Kennedy were mistaken in not promptly pushing Castro’s overthrow with all available means. Stennis supported Johnson’s 1965 intervention in the Dominican Republic on a similar basis. Beyond ensuring cooperative regimes, however, Stennis felt that “it is just absolutely necessary that we have some kind of affirmative and practical program of cooperative

\[218\] Ibid.

\[219\] Ibid.

\[220\] Stennis memo for the record regarding Cuba, April 21, 1961, Memos 1961 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

\[221\] 10/28/65 Stennis letter to Johnson, October 28, 1965, Folder 28 file, Executive Correspondence series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
activity with the Latin American countries.” He allowed that resulting trade would also contribute to Gulf Coast prosperity.\textsuperscript{222}

Stennis was far more resistant to intervention in Asia. He felt it would be a great mistake, “and perhaps a fatal one, if we attempt to crush Communism in Asia with American manpower.” He felt the best approach was to train native militaries and “cultivate a desire for freedom and a will to fight for the freedom.”\textsuperscript{223} On the other hand, he was skeptical this would succeed in practice. He credited only the Nationalist Chinese and South Koreans as having a will to fight. He also felt anti-colonial sentiments significantly hampered all such U.S. efforts.

Russell and Stennis differed most notably on their default concepts of proper congressional oversight, although their differences were not radical. Prior to the 1959, Russell defaulted to a fairly passive notion of oversight. While his Armed Services Committee made a half-hearted attempt at the start of each session to examine the nation’s overall defense posture, there was little rigorous or searching about this process. His committee played virtually no role in the annual approval of the nation’s multi-billion dollar defense budget. While the latter owed in part to the fact that Russell got to review the budget as a member of the defense appropriations subcommittee, more important was his belief in executive leadership. Although Russell was content to see the Appropriations Committee weigh Defense Department budget justifications on a line-item basis, he was

\textsuperscript{222} Stennis memo for the record on trade and aid to Latin America, May 29, 1961, “Memos Jan-June, 8 1961” file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

\textsuperscript{223} Stennis memo for the record on “1954 ‘The Cold War,’” undated, Folder 10 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
wary of any attempt on the Congress’s part to substitute its collective *policy* judgments for those of the professionals in the Defense Department.\(^{224}\) Given this, Russell was initially content – circa 1955 through 1958 – with defense oversight practices as they existed, and so no compelling reason to make them more rigorous if in the end he doubted they would produce any relevant product. Between 1959 and 1968, on the other hand, Russell’s oversight concept changed significantly – although again not radically – in favor of the Congress playing a more decided substantive policy role. While Russell’s change of heart owed to a variety of causes, perhaps most significant was the influence of John Stennis.

Stennis initially also stated – perhaps taking a cue from Russell – that the Congress should avoid any significant role in making policy-level decisions. However, Stennis’s base inclination was to take a systematic and judicial approach to oversight, that is, to make a searching inquiry that developed as broad a factual case for informing oversight decisions as possible. Perhaps this inclination owed in part to his training as a prosecutor and judge. Perhaps it owed in part to the fact that Stennis did more subcommittee grunt work. Perhaps it was in part out of necessity, as Stennis simply did not have the same level of informal access to Executive Branch information and deliberations as Russell, and thus remained more interested in formal oversight procedures. Whatever the case, while Russell remained basically satisfied with SASC

\(^{224}\) In reality, this distinction between budget judgments and policy judgments was murky. As a member of the defense appropriations subcommittee, Russell frequently criticized Eisenhower’s refusals to spend more in certain defense categories, and voted on many occasions to appropriate more than he knew the President would spend. These would seem to imply policy-level judgments. On the other hand, Russell stated explicitly on several occasions prior to 1959 that Congress should avoid a policy role. How exactly Russell reconciled this in his mind is simply not clear.
oversight procedures prior to 1959, one can clearly see Stennis becoming increasingly discontented – initially with the quality of Executive Branch decision-making that he was overseeing, but as time went on, with the very limitations in committee oversight procedures that he was at least partially responsible for implementing. While other committee members were more overt in pushing Russell toward his 1959 decision to broaden annual oversight requirements, one has to suspect that Stennis’s subtler influence was ultimately key. As the Armed Services Committees steadily expanded the portion of the budget subject to annual authorization throughout the 1960s, Stennis constantly looked for ways – primarily under the auspices of his Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee – to improve the requirement’s implementation. Russell never matched Stennis in this ambition; at least through the 1960s, Stennis never matched Russell in the ability to translate inclinations into outcomes.

**Affiliate: Lyndon Johnson**

Lyndon Johnson was an important but occasional SASC member. Like Stennis, Johnson initially sought a seat on Armed Services in order to work more closely with Russell. Unlike Stennis, Johnson was interested in a rapid accumulation of power in the Senate, and once he achieved this, he had little time for or interest in SASC business. While he was Russell’s protégé in terms of Senate politics, he was in no way a rival with Stennis as a second to Russell on the Armed Services Committee. By the mid-1950s, Johnson was seldom in attendance at full committee meetings.\(^{225}\) He was somewhat more

\(^{225}\) As SASC staff member Ed Braswell recalled: “(A)fter he became majority leader, he just didn't have the time of for committee participation that he had before then. He would be there on the big things, but he
active as Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee chairman, but even here Johnson delegated much of the work to his staff. In any case, he viewed the subcommittee at least as much as a vehicle for his presidential ambitions than as a body with a high priority mission on a day-to-day basis in its own right.

Johnson was elected to the Senate in 1948. As a young man, he had received a degree in education, and taught high school from 1928 to 1931. In 1931 he moved to Washington, DC, and served as secretary to Congressman Richard Kleberg (D-TX) until 1935. He attended Georgetown University Law School in 1934, but did not graduate. He served as state director of the National Youth Administration of Texas from 1935 to 1937, before winning a special election to the U.S. House of Representatives in April 1937. He served in the House until his 1948 election to the Senate. While in the House, he served on the Naval Affairs Committee, where he made a favorable impression on its Chairman, Carl Vinson. He also became a close associate of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn (D-TX). Johnson was ambitious and understood where to find and how to use power. While Johnson could be a sincere friend, he also cultivated relationships with powerful men who could assist his career. When he came to the Senate in 1949, he quickly ascertained that Russell was the real power in the Senate, and did his best to get close to Russell both professionally and personally.

This approach quickly paid dividends. SASC staff member William Darden recalled that Russell “had known (Johnson) as a House member, and when he came over to the Senate, Senator Russell was extremely favorably impressed by how well organized his office was, how energetic he was, and how he just got started on the right front and seemed to know where the sources of power were and how to proceed.”\textsuperscript{226} While Russell at this time was neither SASC chairman nor a member of the Democratic Steering Committee, he already had enormous influence over committee appointments. Russell was soon able to get Johnson a spot on Armed Services, and Johnson also gained a seat on Appropriations in 1956. In 1951, Russell began his first abbreviated tenure as SASC chairman. With Russell’s backing, Johnson quickly secured the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee chairmanship ahead of more senior senators.\textsuperscript{227}

Johnson’s motives in seeking this chairmanship were mixed. Johnson aide Harry McPherson, for example, believed the senator’s concern for defense was genuine.\textsuperscript{228} On the other hand, Johnson was well aware that Harry Truman’s service on a similar investigating committee during World War II had catapulted him to national prominence, and arguably the vice presidency. With the U.S. involved in the Korean War, as well as a general period of rearmament, Johnson likely suspected there was a similar opportunity for him to gain national prominence.\textsuperscript{229} Between the end of the Korean War and the

\textsuperscript{226} William Darden, interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, December 6, 1974, oral history interview I, transcript.

\textsuperscript{227} Evans and Novak, 45.

\textsuperscript{228} McPherson, interview VIII, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{229} Caro makes this argument, 308.
Soviet Sputnik launch in 1957, however, Johnson largely allowed subcommittee operations to atrophy, as his party leadership duties consumed him.\textsuperscript{230} Saltonstall even suggested that Johnson at one point wanted to abandon his SASC seat entirely, but Russell refused to let him go.\textsuperscript{231}

As previously noted, on the other hand, Johnson as party leader was very involved alongside Russell in coordinating Senate Democratic positions on defense and foreign policy issues with the Eisenhower administration throughout the 1950s. It was in this respect, rather than in any role related to the SASC, that Johnson made his most profound contributions to shaping U.S. security policy while in the Senate. Nonetheless, as Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee chairman, Johnson launched an extensive investigation in U.S. missile and satellite development subsequent to the 1957 Sputnik launch. While the ultimate influence this investigation had on changing Eisenhower administration policy is questionable, the investigation did contribute significantly to the evolving manner in which SASC members conceived of their collective oversight responsibilities, as we will see in a subsequent chapter.

\textit{Maverick: Stuart Symington}

Symington was a mainstay on the SASC from the 1950s through the 1970s. As such, he was one of the committee’s most interested, vocal – and in some circles, 

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\item[\textsuperscript{230}] For example, Johnson aide Solis Horwitz noted that Johnson asked to go over to the preparedness subcommittee in the fall of 1957 because it had become lethargic with no one looking after it. Solis Horwitz, interview, oral history interview, transcript, LBJ Library.
\item[\textsuperscript{231}] Leverett Saltonstall, interview, oral history interview I, transcript, LBJ Library.
\end{itemize}
respected – members. On the other hand, he was never really a committee or Senate power. While a workhorse in terms of dedication, he could be a show horse in terms of intent. For at least much of the time period under study, Symington’s ultimate ambitions lay outside the Senate. “Freelancer” is another terms that could be used to describe Symington at times. Russell certainly felt this way, and this prevented Russell from ever really trusting Symington enough to invest in him any serious committee responsibility. Symington was generally active in the hearings and investigations in which he participated, and attempted to persuade other members to his positions. If his positions won out, however, it was generally because they coincided with Russell’s.

Symington was a businessman turned public servant. He enlisted as a private in the U.S. Army in 1918, but did not serve overseas. He was discharged as a second lieutenant and graduated from Yale in 1923. He served in a number of positions, before becoming President of the Emerson Electric Manufacturing Company between 1938 and 1945. In 1945, he also chaired the Surplus Property Board, and in 1946 Truman appointed him Assistant Secretary of War for Air. After the National Security Act of 1947 established the U.S. Air Force as an independent service, Symington became its first secretary, a position he held until 1950. He moved to the National Security Resources Board and then to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation, before winning election to the Senate in 1952.

Symington was appointed to the SASC soon after. He quickly became one of its most outspoken members, and won a following as an expert on national security issues, particularly air power. His problem was that he presented himself as somewhat of a maverick. It was clear from the start that Symington was ultimately interested in a
presidential bid. He eventually ran for the Democratic nomination in 1960, and some consider that he was at least posturing for a bid prior to the 1956 election. This in and of itself was not a problem. Johnson’s presidential ambitions were clear from the start. Even Russell ran for the Democratic nomination in 1952.

Symington, however, was also unwilling to pay homage to Senate norms in the way Stennis and Johnson were. Although a hard worker, Symington had no interest in apprenticeship or cultivating relationships with senior members. As McPherson summed up, Symington was never truly a member of the Establishment. “(T)hough he had size, he was not a major Senate power.”232 He was also more willing to deviate from the script that Russell set for the committee. Russell often viewed Symington’s behavior as somewhat inflammatory, and thus Russell never developed a strong bond of trust with him. Russell feared Symington had a tendency for spectacle that ran counter to responsible bi-partisanship. Russell consented to let Symington chair a special subcommittee inquiry into U.S. air power that ran through 1956, and which many observers felt Symington hoped to parlay into at least a vice presidential bid for that year. Despite his eagerness, Russell refused to let Symington play a similar role post-Sputnik, instead handing the responsibility for the investigation to Johnson and his Preparedness Subcommittee.

Given his experience in the Executive Branch, Symington surely had the ability to influence committee debate. Given the poor archival record of executive session debates and vote tallies, however, such influence is almost impossible to assess properly.

232 McPherson, 59.
Symington certainly did not have the ability to dominate committee votes. At least with respect to the research conducted for this study, none of the other prominent SASC members recalled Symington being a major force on the committee. He held no key subcommittee chairmanships with the SASC, and was not a member of Appropriations. After it became clear to Symington post-Sputnik that Russell would not support his ambitions, Symington’s attention began to drift elsewhere. Bryce Harlow, one of Eisenhower chiefs of legislative liaison, recalled that after Russell and Johnson, “banked Stu into the side pocket… in desperation he turned to the Foreign Relations Committee, started playing games over there and trying to use the jurisdiction of the Foreign Relations Committee to get into national defense subjects, much to the growing ire of Lyndon.”

While Symington was considered a reliable Cold Warrior throughout the 1950s and to the late-1960s, by decade’s end he was becoming notably more “dovish.” In 1968, he informed Russell that his conscience would no longer permit him to vote for many items in the Defense Department authorization and appropriation bills. While Russell was by then having his own qualms with Johnson administration security policies, this disclosure caused Symington’s trust level with Russell and many fellow committee members to plummet.

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233 He did chair the SASC’s National Stockpile and Naval Petroleum Reserves subcommittee from 1955-1970, but this was no power center. He also had a seat on the Foreign Relations Committee.

234 Harlow, interview, LBJ Library.

His early record as an advocate for increased military spending allowed him to develop strong relationships with the Service bureaucracies – particularly the Air Force. This gave him a level of access to at least portions of the executive process that exceeded what was commonly available. On the other hand, he had little of the senior-level access of Russell or Johnson, or later Stennis. If there was an exception to this, it perhaps occurred during the Kennedy administration. Symington had preexisting relationships with several administration personnel, and participated extensively on Kennedy’s transition team. In any case, while Symington’s stature in the Senate and parts of the Executive Branch may have been moderately significant at times, his ultimate influence was always remained questionable.

**Maverick: Strom Thurmond**

Strom Thurmond was an example of a somewhat different kind of maverick. Before coming to the Senate, Thurmond’s background was in education, law, and politics. He served in the South Carolina Senate from 1933 to 1938, and then as a circuit judge until 1946. He also served in the U.S. Army from 1942 to 1946. He won a term as Governor of South Carolina in 1947, during which he also made an unsuccessful run for president as a Dixiecrat in 1948. Thurmond also made an unsuccessful run for a U.S. Senate seat in 1950. Thereafter he returned to private law practice, before winning a special Senate election in 1954 as a write-in candidate following the death of Burnet Maybank. Thurmond was the only Senator in history so elected. He joined the SASC in 1957. Unlike Symington (or Johnson and Russell, for that matter), Thurmond by the time he entered the Senate no longer had presidential ambitions.
Thurmond was a maverick in the sense that he was a “true believer,” which made him at times a loose cannon. Not that he was wildly unpredictable, but in a climate of pragmatic professional politicians, this marked Thurmond as something of an outsider. On civil rights, for example, even an Olin Johnston (D-SC), who was commonly regarded as one of the more reactionary southerners on racial issues, could comment that Thurmond really “believed that stuff.”

Thurmond was the only Senator to attempt to filibuster the Civil Rights Act of 1957 – a bill that Russell had already watered down to the point that it was toothless and thus generally acceptable to the Southern bloc. Still Thurmond spoke for a record 24 hours and 18 minutes straight in an attempt to defeat the bill, an act his fellow southerners regarded as grandstanding, as it only made them look weak with their constituents.

Thurmond often flaunted the norms of responsible bipartisanship that Russell desired to enforce. As noted previously, when in 1961 Thurmond attempted to launch an investigation into alleged Defense Department censorship of anti-Communist lectures presented by uniformed military personnel, Russell consented to the investigation but steered it to Stennis’s Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee where it could be calmly disposed of without much notoriety – all much to Thurmond’s dismay. Throughout the 1960s, Thurmond was aggressively hostile toward McNamara, his deputies, and their policies. Whether one judges that Thurmond had cause or not, this was contrary to the culture of comity that Russell had tried to nurture since the 1950s. While some of the old

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237 Ibid.
committee stalwarts felt similarly about the McNamara Defense Department, the behavior of Thurmond and Barry Goldwater (also a maverick somewhat in the Thurmond mold) tended to be the most severe. Their behavior had a ripple effect on SASC operations generally, as the Defense Department tended to become more insular with respect to sharing information, for fear that it might be used as ammunition. While this affected Russell’s access little, it impacted the activities of other committee members, including Stennis, more severely, as we will see.

As we will also see, at times Thurmond even flaunted committee norms of deference to Russell’s leadership, once even openly lobbying fellow members to reverse a committee vote that had gone in Russell’s favor and against Thurmond’s desired position. Neither Johnson nor Russell privately regarded Thurmond as being particularly capable. Thurmond was a Major General in the U.S. Army Reserve. Russell felt that many of Thurmond’s committee stands amounted to little more than outright lobbying on behalf of the military. While Thurmond was interested and active in committee activities, and could occasionally sway deliberation on a particular measure, he generated considerably more heat than light. His access was at best moderate, owing principally to his Reserve status. His stature and influence were fairly minimal.

238 For example, see: 1) Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, September 18, 1964, 7:54PM, Citation #5607, and; 2) Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, August 18, 1965, 9:35PM, Citation #8564. Both are from Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library;

239 Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, November 11, 1964, 8:26PM, Citation #6328, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.
Finally, there was a bloc of Senators who were committee mainstays. This group included Leverett Saltonstall, Margaret Chase Smith, Henry Jackson, Sam Ervin (D-NC), Francis Case, and several others. These individuals were on the SASC, and in many cases also on Appropriations, for most to all of the period under study. However, none were powerful establishment figures. Regarding their SASC responsibilities, they prepared themselves, came to meetings, asked probing questions, and did much of the grunt work of committee operations. They also largely supported the script that Russell laid out. They were not unimportant. Like Symington, they helped shape committee deliberations on a range of issues. They could also shape Russell’s thinking. At times, they could probably use their seats as platforms to shape the climate of opinion within the Executive Branch. However, for the most part they were Russell’s reliable lieutenants. Most had very similar casts of mind to Russell in terms of national defense goals and objectives. They were certainly capable of independent thought and action, but for the most part they followed Russell’s lead. They trusted his intellect and judgment, and they understood his power. If they cared to oppose him – which in most cases they did not – they understood there was no margin in it.

We will take the most prominent of this group as an example of the “type.” When he retired from the Senate at the end of the 1966 session, Leverett Saltonstall was the

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240 Of those named, Henry Jackson came closest to falling in the Symington mode. Like Symington, he was interested more in developing a reputation in the broader defense policy community than in becoming a Senate Establishment figure. Also like Symington, he was relatively more apt than some of the stalwarts to chart an independent course, rather than defaulting to follow Russell’s lead. Unlike Symington, he had less obvious ambitions for an office outside the Senate.
ranking Republican member on Armed Services. He had chaired the committee while Republicans controlled the Senate during the 83rd Congress (1953-1954). Saltonstall was a Harvard Law School graduate from the class of 1917. He served during World War I as a second lieutenant in the U.S. Army. After discharge, Saltonstall was admitted to the bar and served in a number of local and state offices, rising to serve as Massachusetts Governor from 1939 to 1945. In 1944, he won his Senate seat in a special election to fill the vacancy caused by Henry Cabot Lodge’s resignation. On defense issues, Saltonstall and Russell were highly similar in outlook. Saltonstall summed up his attitude as follows:

> (So-called “pro defense” senators) and the people as a whole want our country to be secure. They want our country to be safe. And we want to continue to be strong so that we have the respect of Russia and potential enemies so that when our diplomats, secretaries of state, and so on, have to deal across the table from them, they can deal from the knowledge that they have the strength behind them. I've always taken that position, and I know Senator Russell feels very strongly, and Senator Johnson, and later President, I don't think we ever had a great difference of opinion.\(^{241}\)

As ranking Republican, Saltonstall had a close working relationship with Russell. He also had a comparable level of access to Russell, except apparently on the most top secret of issues (recall CIA Director Dulles’s comment). Saltonstall was routinely included in congressional leadership meetings with Presidents on national security issues. On the other hand, Presidents consulted Russell on a broader range of domestic and foreign issues than they did Saltonstall. With Saltonstall, consultation was largely *pro forma*, given his committee position as ranking Republican. As such, his stature owed to his rank alone. He was never a confidant to Presidents as Russell was. Besides his SASC assignment, Saltonstall was the ranking Republican on Appropriations. Despite this,

\(^{241}\) Leverett Saltonstall, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.
Saltonstall’s real influence was at best moderate. Saltonstall simply did not have a strong personality. Like Russell, he believed in Senate oversight prerogatives and would defend them. However, on policy disputes he was minimally inclined to push back against the executive branch. McPherson described him as “trustworthy and straight as he looked… (but) neither brilliant, nor witty, nor inventive… He had no enemies – the result not only of his character, but of his disinclination to enter the trenches where personal feelings were exposed and personal bitterness often resulted.”

Bryce Harlow tells a story revealing of Saltonstall’s personality, as well as those of other members and of broader committee dynamics. The setting was Johnson’s post-Sputnik investigation of missiles and satellite capabilities. Secretary of Defense Thomas Gates was scheduled to testify. Harlow recalls that Gates “was afraid of Lyndon, or you might say he recognized Lyndon's power, and he was circumspect about challenging Lyndon because Lyndon could hurt and was not averse to hurting.” Eisenhower had directed Gates to make a prepared statement prior to the start of testimony. Johnson, on the other hand, had instructed Gates prior to the hearing not to read the statement. He told Gates he only wanted to interrogate the witnesses. Harlow recalls having to read Gates the “riot act.” Harlow told Gates, “Of course that's what he wants! That's the way he prevents the witnesses from giving any statements of position. The president wants the statement of position, and you'll never have it unless you have this prepared statement… you're the Secretary of Defense, and he can't tell you you're not to have a prepared statement if you think you should.” In the meantime, Harlow got a hold of Saltonstall –

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whom he described as “the sweetest man in the whole world, and wobbly” – in an effort to coordinate the Republican position on this matter. As a back-up, Harlow also contacted Margaret Chase Smith (whom he referred to as “Mrs. Cantankerous”), informed her of the President’s position, and got her assurance that she would attend the hearing as well.

As the hearing started, Gates attempted to read his statement. Johnson responded, “Well, I respect the right of the Secretary to have a prepared statement. But in the interest of saving time, all of us have this statement before us and can read it. I suggest that we have it inserted in the record and proceed with the interrogation. You'll all be able to read it in the record, and the committee members have it here and they can read it during the day. Is there any objection?” As Harlow recounted, “Tom ran right out on me there.” Gates responded he had no objection. Harlow continued the story:

Well, Lev Saltonstall said he didn't particularly mind, that was all right with him, the senior Republican. But my dear friend Margaret Chase sat forward and said, “Mr. Chairman, I mind. This is the Secretary of Defense, and this is a statement that has been carefully prepared on a matter of great importance to the security of this country. I want to hear him present it to this committee, and I want the press to hear it in its entirety. I demand that the Secretary be allowed to proceed with his statement.” Lyndon was not daunted by any human being on earth except Margaret Chase Smith. He looked over at an irate Margaret and he capitulated and the statement was presented to the committee.243

The Staff

By almost any standard, the professional staff of the Senate Armed Services Committee was inordinately small. During the 1950s and 1960s, it never numbered above four professional staff members. Yet these staffers exercised responsibilities out of all

243 Harlow, interview, LBJ Library.
measure to their collective size. As we will see, certain of the key legislative and procedural initiatives the full committee eventually adopted originated in staff memos or in sidebar conversations with members. This section deals exclusively with full committee professional staff. Beyond them, Johnson and Stennis both maintained fairly sizeable Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee staffs. Some members also had personal legislative assistants who helped them with their defense oversight responsibilities. Preparedness subcommittee staff activities are covered in some degree in the relevant portions of the following chapters. The activities of legislative assistants are not addressed in any detail.

The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 largely introduced professional staffs to the standing committees of the Congress. Before then, only the Appropriations Committees of both Houses, along with a few other specialized committees, had employed staff assistants. After 1946, there was no set pattern across all committees as to how staffs functioned. They operated largely at the chairman’s discretion. However, the very nature of staff work almost inherently provided any staff members involved in anything other than purely clerical duties at least a measure of influence with the committees they served. Professional staff members were generally the primary points of contact between a committee and the elements of the Executive Branch over which the committee exercised jurisdiction. Given their control of much of the daily committee grunt work and the back-and-forth flow of information, staffs had the potential to set – or at least steer – committee agendas and to put their marks on how members interpreted the information they received.
On the SASC, that professional staff’s more substantive duties involved the following: Prior to major proceedings like the annual posture or authorization hearings, staff members typically received preliminary executive department briefings days or weeks in advance that previewed what the members would hear. The staff used this as an opportunity to provide the department input as to members’ preferences and what members expected the hearings to achieve. Staff also assisted the various committee and subcommittee chairmen in developing agendas. In addition, they frequently prepared senators’ opening statements and lists of potential questions, as well as much of the official committee correspondence. Staff versions of these documents were often drafts that the senators modified, but many of the specific details and ideas could be expected to work their way into the final versions. As necessary, staff continued to interact with executive departments as they assisted in developing the committee’s final bills and reports, and in preparing members for floor votes and conference committees.

While not all SASC staff members had a military background, as a rule Russell valued such a background for the experience it provided. However, he also insisted that staff be “civilian-minded” in performing their duties, and show neither any general or Service-specific military bias.244 Additionally, by all accounts Russell used the staff in a strictly non-partisan manner. The Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 demanded the staff be non-partisan, and in practice Russell operated this way. Russell was being honest when, for example, he remarked while introducing one new staff member, “I do not know

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244 Committee comment on the retirement of Verne Mudge, July 30, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
what his politics are. We have never gone into it with any staff member of the committee.” Reflecting back on his committee service, staff member T. Edward Braswell considered that “it was truly nonpartisan.”

For Russell’s entire tenure as chairman, William Darden served as the de facto SASC staff director. Harry Wingate, a staff member who primarily performed clerical duties for Russell, acknowledged that Darden “was the dominating person on the committee staff” throughout the period in question. Darden served in the Navy during World War II, after which he received a law degree from the University of Georgia. Fresh from law school, he went to work as a secretary and “errand boy” on Russell’s personal staff in 1948 (a position that made him the number two man in the office). When Russell took the SASC chairmanship in 1951, Darden moved as well.

Skilled executive department legislative liaison officers understood how important it was to attempt to win over staff members before attempting to win over senators on a specific measure. As Darden noted, at a minimum one should casually approach staff members to sound them out on what the senators were thinking or might think about a particular issue. With respect to full SASC activities, Darden was that key staff member. When the various Service legislative liaison offices developed their

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245 Committee comment on the hiring of Kenneth BeLieu as a SASC professional staff member, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

246 Braswell, interview I, LBJ Library.

247 Wingate, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.

248 Darden, interview, LBJ Library.

249 Ibid.
list of influential Senate members and staffers, Bill Darden was invariably on the list – and sometimes he was the only staff member in the Senate on the list. One liaison office biography characterized him as “One of the few persons close to Senator Russell. He has the confidence of the chairman in all committee matters. Intelligent, objective and a true gentleman in every sense of the word.” It is unclear how much Russell depended on Darden (and the staff generally) to develop his agenda, his recommendations, or his conception of proper committee operations. Unlike Stennis or Johnson, Russell did not engage in significant memo traffic with his key staff members. However, given the length and the intimacy of their relationship – and Darden’s reputation with both fellow staff members and Defense Department legislative liaison officers – it seems hard to believe that Darden’s influence with Russell was not important. If one had to venture a guess, Darden’s influence probably manifested itself most with respect to individual policy and program recommendation – whether through formal advice or informally through shaping the flow of information and analysis, and thus the climate of committee opinion. Darden’s influence was probably least with respect to shaping Russell’s overall oversight concept.

On the SASC, different staff members had different specific responsibilities and competencies. In addition to serving as unofficial staff director and assistant to Russell, Darden was the principal (and sometimes only) staff member to work the procurement and R&D authorization bills. Another staffer – Ed Braswell, a Major in the Air Force

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250 Bios of Armed Services Committee staff members, undated, 430 file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Record Group 335, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Reserves – worked personnel issues. Still another staff member – initially, retired Army Major General Verne Mudge, followed by retired Army Colonel Ken BeLieu, and finally former FBI special agent and Senate Appropriations Committee staffer Gordon Nease – worked to develop the military construction authorization bill. While Darden’s influence with Russell is difficult to discern, the record shows obvious instances where specific interactions between Stennis and certain staff members led almost directly to Stennis’s adoption of a substantive proposal to shape committee policy or procedure. Unfortunately, the overall record is poor with respect to assessing the full substantive role the staff played in committee operations. This fact certainly owes more to a lack of record keeping than to a lack of substantive staff input. Given the general paucity of the record, this study can only provide the committee staff a small portion of the coverage they deserve in proportion to the role they played in committee operations.

Committee Norms

Chair Authority versus Member Prerogatives

Russell was also not a heavy-handed chairman, by and large. In most respects he was genial with other members, and with staff. He respected the Senate as an institution, and as such he respected the rights and prerogatives of other members. Russell was generally careful to ensure that the committee looked into whatever issues of concern individual members raised. Likewise, he was usually willing to extend invitations to whatever witnesses other members requested. Similarly, Russell would ordinarily try to facilitate members’ requests for information from the Executive Branch, at least to the
degree that such did not violate executive privilege or critical security concerns (whether by the Defense Department’s or his own definition).

However, the reality of Russell’s ultimate authority always hung over committee operations. Simply because Russell respected a member’s prerogative to raise an issue did not mean that Russell did not fully intend to get his way on major committee decisions. In a testament to Russell’s authority, he only lost a single vote in committee on a major question during his entire tenure. This related to a 1963 Thurmond proposal related to anti-ballistic missile defense, mentioned previously, which will be discussed in detail in a subsequent chapter. In any case, Russell quickly had that decision reversed on the Senate floor. Wingate remembered that, before a vote, other members would often simply just check with him to see how Russell planned to vote. “They did not want to oppose the chairman if they could help it.”251 While it is unclear whether Russell and Saltonstall ever had any serious disagreements, the latter recalled that, when it came to committee operations “you didn't want to step on (Russell) in any way.”252 In Stennis’s words, “(Russell) didn't try to run over anyone on the committee, but he was the committee largely.”253

251 Wingate, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.


Secrecy versus Access to Information

A committee norm that Russell sought to rigorously enforce was secrecy. Russell took the requirement to maintain the sanctity of classified and confidential information very seriously. He was almost obsessive. Russell deplored the practice of leaking classified information. Early every calendar year, the committee held defense posture hearings. These offered the Secretary of Defense, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, and the military Services a forum to justify before the committee how their programs and force structures fit broadly within U.S. national security strategy and the world situation. The following comments are excerpted from a discussion as to whether the 1955 posture hearings should offer at least some public testimony. Commenting on the committee’s record for maintaining secrecy, Russell noted:

(We) have, of course, had some leaks from this committee in times past that have caused me a great deal of embarrassment, but by and large we have been rather fortunate in the Armed Services Committee in that field…

When I first came to the Congress, the thing that appalled me more than any other one thing was the fact that something would be said in executive meeting of the committee, and by the time I would get downtown to buy a paper, I would read it on the front pages. It shook my faith in the legislative branch of the government more than any other one thing ever did, and the feeling persists to this date, that it is terribly unfortunate that some men who are so irresponsible can become members of a great legislative body…

Given the highly classified testimony provided during posture and authorization hearings, the committee transcript was scrubbed for security deletions before it was

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254 Stennis and Johnson, for example, had similar attitudes on secrecy, and this was a key component in earning Russell’s trust.

255 Committee discussion of upcoming defense posture hearings, February 3, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
published for public release. Sometimes, if the committee judged that security deletions would be so extensive as to leave little of value behind, no transcript was published. Sometimes, Russell even judged the content of testimony so sensitive that he refused to make intact transcripts freely available to other committee members. Deliberations on the 1958 Defense Reorganization Act show an example, with Russell unwilling to distribute printed copies of executive session transcripts to committee members who were unable – or did not bother – to attend the hearings. He stated flatly that, prior to a determination of whether the testimony would be made public, “I don’t want these records thrown around here because my experience is when that happens you might as well go on and publish it.”

Transcripts for CIA witnesses were never published openly, and were even returned to CIA for safekeeping between hearings. Regarding classified records the committee kept in its possession, they remained under lock and key in the committee vault. Senators not on the SASC had to get the committee’s specific permission to view

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256 Committee deliberation on H. R. 12541, July 2, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

257 See PISC staff member French to Stennis regarding “allegations of faked intelligence estimates purportedly given by CSA to the Preparedness Subcommittee,” June 13, 1961, Missiles/CIA testimony file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library. The allegations apparently appeared in Reynolds News of London, and the editor of The Nation requested that the subcommittee substantiate the allegations. The allegations are apparently related to Alan Dulles’s executive testimony before the committee the previous year that the CIA had changed its method of figuring ICBM strength from a capabilities-based to an intentions-based estimate. Dulles denied that this was an effort to tailor his estimate to the administration’s budget. Stennis requested from French transcripts of Dulles’s testimony in order to assess these charges. French reported back that the staff was unable to furnish further clarification of Dulles’s remarks. Stennis would have to contact CIA to get copies of the transcript.
these records.\textsuperscript{258} Obviously, this made it difficult for committee members and staff to casually review the details of previous committee activities, or for non-members to do so at all.

Given his own security-mindedness, a matter that frustrated Russell endlessly was the tendency of the Executive Branch to act casually with regard to its own disclosure policies. During the same 1955 posture discussion referenced above, Russell commented:

Some branch of the service will be up here to tell this committee that this is very hush-hush, this is highly secret and classified. And the members of the committee will keep it. And three or four days later the Defense Department will give it out to the press. And we have been almost afraid to go to sleep because we might talk in our sleep and give it out. We have had that difficulty here I suppose since the beginning of time, certainly since I have been around here.\textsuperscript{259}

Similarly, in a 1962 hearing with Air Force officials, Russell asked whether certain figures on U.S. missile deployments had been made available to the press. After receiving assurances that all such figures have been deleted from the version given the press, Russell began reading from “The Budget of the United States,” which was of course publicly available and which contained many of the detailed figures contained in the Air Force and Navy classified presentations. Russell remarked that it was “a shame to give such intelligence to the Russians for $1 when we spend so much trying to get similar information.”\textsuperscript{260}

\textsuperscript{258} For example, see posture hearings discussion, February 3, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.

While all committee members nominally had the same rightful access to information, practically speaking there was a three-tier level of access on the committee. The lowest tier was that commonly available to all members through hearings, Defense Department reports, and such. As a matter of practice, the committee leadership – Russell and Saltonstall in particular – typically received special access briefings from the Executive Branch, to which other members were not privy. This was simply a routine operating principle. When Executive Branch officials had to conduct day-to-day business with the Congress, it was common practice that they would deal directly with the ranking committee members. Russell and Saltonstall, however, sometimes either forgot or chose not to pass on this information to the broader committee. A quick example comes from the same posture discussion that we have been referencing:

Case: “Incidentally, I think in connection with briefings, it would be desirable for the committee to have a briefing some time on whatever they want to give the committee on that early warning system. I think there are some angles of it that the members of the committee ought to know. Russell. “I thought we were briefed fairly well on that. Saltonstall: “I think, Mr. Chairman, that you and I personally were briefed by Mr. Robert Sprague, and the committee was given some information, but not all the information.” Russell. “That's right. I recall now.”

This gave Russell and Saltonstall an informational advantage. Again, it was not always one they sought to cultivate intentionally. It was just a fact. Beyond this, however, it was also simply a fact that Russell had a particular level of access that even Saltonstall did not. Russell was often the sole senator consulted on a matter of particular sensitivity, and he generally had no intention of sharing such information with anyone.

261 Posture hearings discussion, February 3, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
For Russell, keeping the Congress and the public informed were important, but not as important as restricting the potential flow of information to the nation’s adversaries. In the interest of specialization and efficiency, Congress had adopted the committee system. Russell felt comfortable with the SASC – or he as its proxy – acting as the Senate’s sole representative in reviewing certain highly sensitive programs and operations. In this respect, he felt it was more important to serve what he personally regarded as the national interest, than to assure that the matters passing within his committee’s purview enjoyed the widest possible consensus, either in Congress or with the American public.

**Bipartisanship**

While a loyal Democrat to the end of his life, Russell was widely regarded as almost wholly non-partisan in his conduct of committee operations.\(^{262}\) Given the Senate’s overall Democratic majority, Democrats also held the majority of seats on the SASC and its subcommittees, as well as all subcommittee chairmanships. However, there is no record of Republican members feeling marginalized because of their party affiliation. Russell readily consulted with Saltonstall, and the two almost universally concurred on committee operations. There is simply no evidence that the kinds of partisan rifts that

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\(^{262}\) While personally dismayed with the direction the Democratic Party was heading on civil rights and other issues, Russell stated publicly prior to every presidential election that he intended to vote Democratic. He did not always actively campaign for the Democratic candidate, but he at all times refused to endorse Republican or third party alternatives. He personally rejected the idea of changing party affiliation as Thurmond did in 1964. In part, this is explicitly tied to the fact that his personal power, and by extension, his ability to serve his goals and his constituents, owed directly to his seniority as part of the Democratic majority. However, Russell genuinely considered himself a loyal Democrat. It was part of his identity. He remained committed to what he regarded as the party’s historic ideals, even if he felt that the modern Democratic Party was leaving him behind.
existed on other congressional committees existed on Armed Services. For example, in Saltonstall’s memory, “(At) no time… on the Armed Services Committee, with very few exceptions, over the twenty-two years I’ve been on it, did politics come into the discussion. I tried to keep them out. I know Russell tried to keep them out.” Similarily, Case once noted to Stennis during a military construction subcommittee session, “I have never served on a committee, Mr. Chairman, where there was any less rivalry or a more complete absence or partisan consideration than in this subcommittee.” Peter Dominick (R-CO) served with Russell for a time on Armed Services in the late 1960s. He later recalled that Russell “one of the most non-partisan people I’ve ever met. Country came first before anything else in his mind. He ran the committee that way.” There is little doubt that the Committee’s other Republicans would have disagreed with this.

Russell’s leadership aside, this lack of partisanship probably owed in great measure to the fact that all committee members shared a fundamentally similar cast of mind. All could be regarded as “pro-defense” in their general dispositions toward committee business. In terms of support for a large defense program, there were no contrarians on Armed Services while Russell was chair. One must suspect that Russell’s general influence in the Senate over committee assignments had a great deal to do with this fact.

263 Saltonstall, interview, JFK Library.

264 Comments during committee discussion on H. R. 10777, May, 11, 1960, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

On the other hand, simply because the committee was bipartisan in its operation does not mean that partisan politics never intruded. Harlow’s example above regarding Secretary Gates’ testimony is only one example. Symington and Johnson’s efforts to use committee investigations, at least in part, to buttress their presidential aspirations are others. Even in these examples, however, both senators felt the need to pay homage to the principle of bipartisanship in the functioning of their investigations, even if each had clear partisan overtones. Through 1963 and 1964, Barry Goldwater similarly used his committee seat to launch attacks on the Johnson administration – although in what Russell regarded as a distinctly less responsible manner. As a rule, however, Russell was able to a remarkable degree to keep operations on a non-partisan footing, and to enforce moderation in partisanship when it could not be avoided.

The Armed Services Committee and the Executive Branch

The previous chapter looked in broad terms at Russell’s particular attitudes and his relationships with successive Presidents concerning national security policy. The several chapters following this present a detailed view of how the Armed Services Committee exercised its oversight, and how this evolved over time. This section focuses on the generalities of committee-executive interaction that are either difficult to treat in the subsequent, more structured narrative, or that are important to framing that narrative and are thus best discussed in advance.

Legislative liaison is a term the Executive Branch uses to describe the day-to-day aspects of executive-congressional interaction. Such interactions range from efforts satisfying congressional information queries to those aimed at “shaping” Congress’s view
of proposed legislation and programs. During the 1950s and 1960s, different legislative liaison responsibilities fell to different points of contact within the Defense Department, depending on the nature of the issue. Service and OSD comptroller’s offices dealt directly with the Appropriations Committees on budget matters. Otherwise, the Services and OSD maintained specific offices for legislative liaison that handled both relations with individual members of Congress, as well as direct interaction with the Armed Services Committees on legislative and other matters, including the annual authorization bills. At the presidential level, the Bureau of the Budget would likewise generally be in charge of interacting with the Appropriations Committees, while Presidents had their own small corps of special assistants responsible for other aspects of legislative liaison, although these individuals might also involve themselves in select budget matters. In practice, the vast majority of defense legislative liaison activities occurred at the Department-level, with only the occasional involvement of presidential-level officials on select issues.

While the business of legislative liaison is often opaque to the outside observer, the record suggests that most direct interaction between the Congress and the Services or OSD occurred at a staff-on-staff level. There is minimal evidence of frequent, ongoing, and direct contact outside the committee room between even the most influential senators and the senior military and civilian leaders of the Defense Department. The exception was the relationship between committee chairmen like Russell or Vinson (and often their senior Republican counterparts) and the Secretary of Defense or his key deputies. Between these men, a close and regular dialogue existed, particularly during McNamara’s tenure.
This is not to say high-level meetings did not occur outside the committee room between Russell or other senators and senior Service officials – for example, the Service secretaries, military chiefs-of-staff, and their deputies. These did occur. The record merely suggests that they were infrequent, and either arranged to address specific issues as they arose, or a part of the general effort the Services made to “touch base” with senior members of Congress, typically at the beginning of each legislative session. The more frequent forms of interaction between department liaison staffs and members of Congress and their staffs were subtler, and generally conducted by relatively junior officials. Within the committee rooms, of course, senior Defense Department officials of all stripes frequently had the opportunity to testify. Official testimony and correspondence on the one hand, and the more subtle forms of everyday staff-on-staff legislative liaison on the other, were the common forms of executive-congressional interaction – again, with the exception of that between chairmen and the senior OSD leadership.

The relationship between the Secretary of Defense, the Services, and the Congress was complex. It was by no means so simple a dynamic, as some might suspect, wherein the congressional committees and the military Services remained at all times “buddy-buddy,” with each straining against OSD’s efforts to maintain tight central control of all issues and information. By the mid-1950s, the President had been in charge of coordinating the development and presentation of executive department legislation to the Congress for more than three decades. Despite this, the offices of the President and
Secretary of Defense remained comparatively novice in the arts of legislative liaison relative to the military Services – although the former were learning all the time.\(^{266}\)

A core function of any given Service’s legislative liaison activity was to develop a positive perception on the part of all members of Congress toward that Service, although defense committee members received special attention. It was common, for example, for senior Service leaders, up to and including the secretary and military chief-of-staff, to write thank-you letters to the members of a committee at the close of each congressional session in appreciation for the committee’s handling of legislative matters of importance to that Service. A primary function for Service legislative liaison staffs involved handling requests from members to look into claims – pension or health care-related, for example – on behalf of constituents in their districts and states. Similarly, these offices kept members informed of information and decisions that could affect their various home state constituencies. Service liaison offices had in place orientation programs for new members of Congress, and they commonly invited members to attend exercises or demonstrations of Service weapons systems, often with the Service paying all expenses. The Air Force frequently lent transport planes to assist members in their travel. Members and staffs of the defense committees were invited to Service formal events and banquets, and were even permitted use of base facilities (gyms, officers clubs, etc.) in the local Washington, DC area. Particularly influential members might even be invited on individual “excursions” with senior military officers. For example, then Air Force Vice Chief of

\(^{266}\) Of course, OSD had only been around as an institution since 1947.
Staff Curtis LeMay personally invited Russell to attend the 1960 Cotton Bowl with him.\textsuperscript{267} The record does not say whether Russell accepted the invitation.

Of course, positive atmospherics were meant to yield gains in committee and floor votes. To achieve this, Services had to marry atmospherics with information. A certain amount of this information exchange occurred during official testimony. As one-time SASC staff member and retired Army Major General Verne Mudge once commented: “Liaison between the Committee and the services is usually very close and frank. The Service Chiefs come before the Committee in closed session and usually pull no punches. Literally hundreds of these meetings are held which never receive any public notice.”\textsuperscript{268} Outside of the committee room, however, it is extremely difficult to pin down the exact nature and scope of the relationship between the Services and their congressional oversight committees. In terms of information flow, official correspondence and briefings to committee staff in preparation for hearings and investigations was quite common. Other “less official” forums often proved valuable conduits as well. Members of Congress who were also reserve officers often received briefings in that capacity, which might otherwise be forbidden by OSD legislative liaison guidance. General and flag officers who had formed relationships in prior days with members of Congress were encouraged – often by formal Service legislative liaison

\textsuperscript{267} LeMay to Russell, undated, Richard Russell file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{268} Verne Mudge memo to the staff of Senator Frank Carlson (R-KS), October 6, 1954, Armed Services Agenda (1955) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC. Senator Carlson was to address students of the Army Command and General Staff College on Congress’s role in the defense policy process.
policy – to stay in touch with and, when in town, to pay office calls to those members. Such visits served the general legislative liaison goal of maintaining positive atmospherics, but could also serve as a venue to transmit potentially sensitive information and opinions (sensitive, that is, from a Defense Department internal politics perspective).269 Again, informal staff-on-staff interactions between the Service legislative liaison offices and both committee professional staffers and legislative assistants of individual members were very common and almost invariably unrecorded.

While generally appreciating the subtler dance the Services engaged in when courting congressional favor, most members deeply resented what they perceived as outright lobbying on the part of the Services. This was probably in part because they did not appreciate a hard sell, but also in part because they regarded such behavior as unseemly. Services were aware of this, and proceeded cautiously. An Army legislative liaison officer once noted that engaging in “floor fights” – in other words, actively courting votes to secure a committee recommendation, or even worse, trying to secure a floor vote contrary to a committee recommendation – could occasionally produce tangible results, but at the risk of angering powerful committee members. In general, he concluded the cost to such tactics far outweighed the benefit.270

269 Admiral Hyman Rickover was a master of legislative liaison, skills which he in many cases used to promote his individual views about the proper future of Navy nuclear propulsion in direct opposition to those of his Service’s senior leadership. As a minor example, invariably with the launch of every new nuclear submarine, Rickover would personally send some form of memorabilia commemorating the event to key members and staffers. While a courtesy, this also served as a reminder of the success of the programs for which he continued to advocate.

SASC members deeply respected military advice, but they expected that advice to be authoritative. They absolutely expected senior leaders testifying before them to have a command of their material. As Mudge once noted, when offering testimony the worst mistake for a Service representative to make was to use the “platoon system” – that is, to bring multiple witnesses on a related subject or to repeatedly turn to a large complement of back-seat personnel for information. This left “the impression that no single person really is on top of the proposition and knows personally what it is all about.”

Committee members expected Services to have carefully considered their recommendations prior to testimony, and to remain committed to them after congressional action, at least without a substantial reason to change. Over the course of the 1950s, for example, Stennis became increasingly “disillusioned” with witnesses who appeared before the Armed Services and Appropriations Committees requesting approval for programs that the Services subsequently abandoned in short order after that approval was forthcoming. Such behavior suggested that the program had no merit in the first place, and reflected poorly on the judgments of committee members responsible for passing recommendations to their full legislative bodies. Stennis reportedly complained to Jackson that, “if these people need the money and came in front of me to request it, I would see that they got it; but I have come to the point of not knowing who to believe.”

On of the reasons the Marine Corps consistently maintained the Congress’s

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271 Mudge memo to the staff of Senator Carlson, October 6, 1954, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

272 Major General J. H. Michaelis (Chief of Legislative Liaison) memo to the Secretary of the Army and the Chief of Staff of the Army, September 4, 1957, 333/474 (4 Sept 57 –) file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series,
admiration was because of its excessive frugality. The common perception was that the Marines asked for as little as possible, and then wrung every bit of use and value out of whatever they were given.273

Members also appreciated that, from a bureaucratic perspective, the military had its own interests to pursue. Such often ran counter to the committee’s oversight goals, particularly those related to economy. At one point, when frustrated at the lack of credible witness testimony as to the requirement for certain elements in the military construction authorization request, Stennis offered the following extended critique:

Witnesses are sent before this committee to justify certain projects that have already been agreed on and so, therefore, it is neither your opinion nor your facts that you are stating to us. I realize that if you do not justify the project you will doubtless be replaced as a witness. Some of you have no personal knowledge of the items that you testify about. Some witnesses seem to take the attitude that it has been approved by the Department of Defense and, therefore, should not be of any particular concern to anyone else. In some ways, after hearing the testimony in these cases, I feel like a judge who has heard a case by merely hearing one side… I think that Congress is going to have to have a Legislative Budget Bureau of its own.274

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273 BeLieu also found that part of the reason for Marine success was that “they are basically a combat-type of organization. They know it and they don’t ever want to forget it. It seems to me when people in uniform begin to think that they exist for another purpose than combat or the support of combat functions, they dilute their reason for existence.” Of course, the Marines benefited from the fact that the Navy provided so much of the Corp’s institutional and combat support structure. BeLieu letter to Capt. Louis Dixon, February 28, 1956, Armed Services Staff – BeLieu file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

As Stennis’s last comment suggests, committee members were sometimes frustrated by their lack of an independent analytical capability with which to view Service programs. They understood that their staff resources were grossly insufficient. With respect to 1950s military construction bills, for example, the committee generally devoted only a single professional staff member to its preparation, without even full-time clerical support. On the other hand, the corresponding office in OSD with responsibility for coordinating Service requests on property and installations had 18 members, including an Assistant Secretary, and excluding clerical personnel. The Services had similar-sized staffs. At times, the SASC either borrowed analysts from or farmed out assessments to the GAO. However, these cases were exceptions. Rarer still, the committee contracted out analysis to academia or some other external research institute source. The number of such instances evident in SASC committee records is in the low single digits.

Throughout the 1950s in particular, the most evident, important, and consistent single frustration that SASC members had with the military Services was that the latter so often simply failed, through the Joint Chiefs of Staff mechanism, to achieve a consensus recommendation based on collective military judgment – at least with respect to the critical policy and programmatic issues of the time. To anyone with an understanding of Defense Department politics, this lack of unity should in no way seem surprising. As we will see, however, this consistent failure drove committee members to look to the Secretary of Defense to craft a unified position. As this proved elusive – at least under Eisenhower – they began to look for ways to modify their own oversight procedures in

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way that would provide the committee leverage to force effective decision-making upon the Department. Except in rare instances, however, committee members remained consistently reluctant either to attempt to force on the Department major policy or programmatic decisions that lacked at least one forceful Service proponent, or to deny requests that had general Department-wide concurrence.

As OSD attempted – reluctantly under Eisenhower’s Secretaries of Defense; aggressively under McNamara – to assert greater control over Department decision-making, its leadership also sought greater control over the Department-wide flow of information to the Congress. On some issues, this involved central coordination of Service legislative liaison activities. Generally, it involved Department directives limiting the freedom of Service officials to offer testimony at variance with official Department positions. As McNamara’s first Deputy Secretary, Roswell Gilpatric, explained the motivation:

We knew from the number of people that the services had in their military liaison units on the Hill – they ran into the hundreds when you add them all together – and from the number of Reserve unit memberships by congressional staffs that there was a constant interflow of information and ideas and everything going on. But we never attempted to fight that; we just wanted to sort of join it in the sense of being given equal time.\(^{276}\)

Again, “equal time” often amounted to placing constraints on the official flows of information to the Congress, under the assumption that the Services would continue to get their messages across using other “less official” channels. One should note, however, that despite the general trend toward OSD control, actual instances of OSD-Service conflict over liaison activities were issue specific rather than general. At other times, the

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\(^{276}\) Roswell L. Gilpatric, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.
various components of the Defense Department found common cause in justifying mutually agreed upon programs before the (sometimes skeptical) defense committees. Representative of this dynamic is an example from 1963 when, in response to congressional reductions in portions of the President’s proposed defense budget, Kennedy directed McNamara “to determine the best method and timing to allow the Joint Chiefs of Staff to persuade Congress to restore proposed budget cuts.”277 While the defense committees would sometimes carry through on decisions contrary to the unified recommendation of the Joint Chiefs, the latter posed a high bar over which committee members were often reluctant to jump.

The Services tended to down play the degree to which their liaison activities were aggressively self-serving, or at least the degree to which the Service senior leadership actively promoted such activities. As Eugene Zuckert, Air Force Secretary from 1961 to 1965 and often a fierce Air Force partisan, later recalled (specifically in reference to the B-70 controversy, which we will examine later):

(T)here was lobbying going on, there was no doubt about that. There were blue suits going up to the Hill, and General LeMay and I finally stopped it. He said we are going to wage this one before the Committees. I used to hear stories about how we were doing this and how we were doing that, and I dared them downstairs to find just one fellow up here who was going in the back door. Give me the name of one guy, and I will fire him the next day. They never gave me a name. But in a big emotional issue like this, there is always a lot of contact. After all, we have Senators who are Reserve Officers. They come in and get briefings, and this is one of the great sources for getting information to the Congress, to get it in one capacity and use it in another.278

277 Major General Clifton (military aid to the president) memo to Gilpatric, April 10, 1963, 2/63-11/63 file, National Security Files, JFK Library.

278 Eugene Zuckert, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.
Even Secretaries whom McNamara implicitly appointed to serve, so-to-speak, as “his men” with the Services recalled a certain paranoia within OSD as to the degree and effect with which the Services conducted their liaison activities. Stephen Ailes, appointed in 1965 as Secretary of the Army, recalled:

I had heard before I went over there that the only way that you could really put the Secretary of Defense in control is to abolish legislative liaison staffs for each of the services because the Secretary of Defense was at such a handicap on the Hill, but I've decided that that was hogwash very quickly in the game and that our people were really doing a different kind of thing up there, and I don't think that they were really any handicap at all to the Secretary of Defense. And believe me, I certainly did everything I could and so did Elvis (Starr) and so did Cy (Vance, the two previous Army Secretaries) to make it damn clear that they were supposed to support the Secretary of Defense up there, you know, in every conceivable way.279

Not surprisingly, OSD efforts to constrain the flow of information met with a hostile response from the defense committees. Most controversial were directives limiting the ability of the senior military leadership to offer unsolicited opinions and recommendations when testifying before Congress.280 Despite the fact that members generally desired a Secretary of Defense who would exert control over the Department, they understood that their access to this type of information was vital if the committees were to have even a limited independent capacity to arbitrate among claimants in Defense Department policy and programmatic disputes. Perhaps more to the point, members viewed this type of action on the part of the Secretary of Defense as insulting. They


280 A thorough examination of the changes in authority between the Services and OSD with respect to direct legislative liaison activities proved beyond the scope of this study.
viewed themselves as constitutional officers of a co-equal branch of government, who had a right to the untainted testimony of the nation’s senior defense officials – its senior military leaders in particular.

Fears that OSD would stifle open discussion of dissenting military views dated from the office’s creation in 1947. In 1956 Russell allowed Symington to convene a special subcommittee investigation into U.S. airpower. Near the start of hearings, Symington complained that the presence of OSD officials during Service testimony amounted to “implied intimidation of the witness.” He continued:

Several times we have had witnesses who have been very forthright and frank, and they have come here and they have said what they thought, and after they have said what they have thought and they have come back as a witness, their testimony has been materially changed and different from what they made before. My belief is that that has been the result of pressure or instruction from the Department of Defense.”

Symington insisted that OSD representatives would be welcome at open hearings, but he wanted to exclude them from executive hearings with Service officials. The record is unclear whether in fact Symington’s subcommittee successfully adopted this practice.

In 1958, the Eisenhower administration (specifically the BoB) issued guidance that directed members of the Executive Branch to support the President's budget during congressional testimony. Witnesses were instructed to “carefully avoid volunteering views” different from the President’s program, “either on the record or off the record.” If they felt compelled to put forward personal views inconsistent with the President's budget

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281 Subcommittee discussions preliminary to Air Power hearings, March 21, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
in response to direct questioning, they were expected to point out that the President's budget resulted from “his perspective as head of the government, and in the light of overriding national policy.” While the reactions of individual SASC members to this policy are not on the committee record, a related suggestion during deliberations on Defense Department reorganization legislation earlier in 1958 proved extremely controversial, as we will see.

Recalling his days as McNamara’s chief of legislative liaison, David McGiffert noted that divisive programmatic disputes with the Congress were comparatively rare. The issue that caused him the greatest difficulty involved restrictions on official testimony. Both Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric in 1961, and his replacement Cyrus Vance in 1965, issued essentially the same guidance directing that a witness must, when pressed for personal opinion, first state the official position, then state that he had expressed his personal views within the Department, then state that, while his personal position is opposed to the Secretary's, he has accepted the Secretary's decision. The witness had then to give the factors supporting the official opposition, before finally stating his own. Committee members found such stipulations ridiculous, and said so publicly. According to at least one committee member, however, such guidelines never

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282 Maurice Stans (Director, Bureau of the Budget) memo to McElroy, December 31, 1958, L1-1 file, Subject Files, 1956-1959 (E181), Records of the Department of Navy, RG 428, National Archives, Washington, DC.

283 The two biggest disputes that he remembered related to the B-70 and naval nuclear propulsion, both of which we will examine below. The record supports his claim that these were the two most severe disputes, particularly when considering the length of time over which these disputes endured. McGiffert, interview, JFK Library.

284 Attachments to staff member William Spell memo to Stennis, July 7, 1965, Memos to Senator 1965 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
deterred Russell from ordering closed sessions during which he directed senior Service officials outside the presence of OSD representatives to testify frankly. As one day SASC chairman John Tower (R-TX) recalled, “And we had some hair-letting sessions with them without any civilians present. Indeed, without even any other military men present. And we got some pretty straight answers from them, and we got some fairly good reflections of what they were really thinking, they didn't always jibe with McNamara.”

In any case, disputes over restricted congressional testimony amounted to what might be described as “points of friction.” Such disputes generally did not have serious or long-standing detrimental impact on executive relations with the SASC’s senior senators. As the 1960s progressed, some of the less influential committee members – Thurmond and Goldwater, for example – became increasingly harsh in their attitudes toward McNamara and his deputies. However, this inclination derived as much from disagreements over policy and programmatic disputes as from disagreements over information flow. This behavior on the part of more junior senators, however, tended to reinforce OSD’s preexisting anxiety with respect to handing over potentially sensitive information to the Congress, for fear that it would be used in an inflammatory manner in an effort to discredit OSD officials. In any case, the SASC’s more influential members – the likes of Russell, Stennis, or Saltonstall – generally regarded such disputes over information flow as hazards of the job, and did not allow attendant frustrations to critically impact their working relationships with Defense Department officials. This

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probably owed in part to a somewhat fatalistic understanding that the Congress was severely limited in its ability to alter or undo presidential or secretarial actions in these areas. While these disputes might hinder the Congress’s ability for oversight, in the view of the senior senators the business of government had to go on. As a rule, the requirement to pass the laws and budgets that senior senators and OSD executives alike agreed were necessary to secure the nation’s defense took precedence over fights regarding the boundaries of executive-congressional privilege and prerogative.

The Armed Services Committee in a Changing Senate

This section examines the relationship of the Armed Services Committee to the broader Senate’s membership and its deliberative mechanisms. Between the mid-1950s and the late-1960s, it is simply a fact that individual Senators outside the defense committees mattered almost not at all in determining how the Senate would act on major Defense Department legislation. Obviously, a Senate voting majority was required to pass any bill the SASC recommended. Russell consistently had no difficulty in securing such majorities, however. Major defense legislation that the SASC reported almost universally passed the floor in a perfunctory manner with no significant modification, if any at all. This remained almost absolutely true throughout the 1950s, and even by late-1960s had only changed on the margins. In this section, we examine the factual basis for charges of non-involvement for the average Senator. We then examine how the trends in attitude – if not actual behavior – of individual Senators changed over the period in question, along with the factors that shaped those trends.
Robert Johnson found that, “in the decade from the end of the Korean War to the end of the Kennedy presidency, defense bills passed with an average of less than one negative vote in both chambers.”\textsuperscript{286} He further noted that the few amendments that non-defense committee members attached to appropriations bills during this period were largely inconsequential in a substantive policy sense. The SASC reported its first annual procurement authorization bill in calendar year (CY) 1961.\textsuperscript{287} The Senate unanimously passed this and the next two such bills with no attempt at amendment, with the CY 1963 version passing on a voice vote. In 1964, Senators George McGovern (D-SD), Proxmire, and Gaylord Nelson (D-WI) attempted to introduce an amendment reducing the Air Force’s procurement authorization. Russell easily defeated the measure and then passed the committee’s version 80-0. The CY 1965 and 1966 committee bills likewise passed unanimously, the latter also on a voice vote. The CY 1967 vote was historic, in that the committee’s bill \textit{only} passed by an 86-2 margin. The CY 1968 bill actually did prove controversial. That bill, managed on the floor by Stennis rather than Russell, faced seven non-committee amendments, two of which the Senate approved. The Senate then approved the final bill 54-3. The reason for this low vote tally is unclear.

Why did these bills get such easy rides through the Senate? In part the answer was normative. As Stennis later recalled, “The idea of challenging weaponry on the floor of

\textsuperscript{286} Johnson, “Congress and the Cold War,” 89. Research for this study did not attempt to verify this claim.

\textsuperscript{287} Most bills past in a given calendar year affected the next fiscal year. For example, the procurement authorization bill passed in CY 1961 impacted fiscal year 1962, which ran from July 1, 1961 until June 30, 1962. The 1974 Budget and Impoundment Control Act changed the federal fiscal year from a July 1 to an October 1 start date, so that in theory the Congress could be certain of passing bills affecting a given fiscal year prior to the actual start of the fiscal year. In practice, this extension has generally only allowed the Congress to procrastinate further.
the Senate, it just wasn’t done then. As Robert Johnson’s finding above suggests, it was not simply SASC bills that passed the respective chambers with minimal opposition. This was commonly true of all defense legislation in both chambers. For example, the House version of CY 1968 the defense authorization bill passed, also with floor amendments, by a vote of 362-15. This appears to have been the first time the tally of “no” votes for the House bill got out of the single digits.

In a previous chapter, we described the Senate norms of the mid-1950s. The Senate of the late 1960s was a very different place – and the Senate of the mid-1970s would be more different still. While the Establishment may have dominated the Senate of the mid-1950s, not all members were content to abide by the norms Establishment senators promoted. In particular, a small and predominantly Democratic group chafed to promote a more liberal, progressive domestic and foreign policy agenda. Some of the more vocal members included Wayne Morse, Patrick McNamara (D-MI, elected 1954), Paul Douglas (D-IL, 1948), Joseph Clark (D-PA, 1956), and Herbert Lehman (D-NY, served in Senate from 1949-1957). While outspoken, they were too small as a voting bloc to impact either Senate or Democratic Caucus action during the mid-1950s.

The 1958 congressional election decisively changed Senate demographics, and set the stage for a fundamental realignment of Senate norms. Against a backdrop that included the fallout from Sputnik, an economic recession, and White House corruption scandals, this election brought the greatest single swing in Senate seats from one party to

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288 Stennis, interview, Mississippi State University Library.

289 This conclusion is based on a review of the SASC committee calendars that tracked legislation through both chambers. House vote tallies are not recorded in all years.
another in history. The Democrats gained thirteen Republican seats, and picked up three of four seats from the newly admitted states of Hawaii and Alaska. Overall, their majority went from 49-47 to 65-35.

For the predominantly southern Democratic committee leadership, this election victory eventually proved a catastrophe. The new Democrats made the average caucus demographic more liberal and northern. The twenty-two Democratic senators from the former states of the Confederacy now comprised barely one-third of their caucus. While the new members did not change the Senate in a day, they demonstrated little desire to abide existing Senate folkways. As they found their footing, they also found allies in a small group of progressive Republican senators who likewise desired to challenge the Establishment. Still, for more than a decade this liberal-progressive bloc lacked a decisive majority. Its members required significant crossover support from moderate Midwestern and western members to achieve their legislative goals, and this placed a brake on their assertiveness.

More than demographics were changing the Senate. Revolutions in communications and transportation were changing the relationship between members of Congress and their constituents. Air travel made it easier – and eventually almost mandatory – for members to return to their home states on the weekends. Consequently, members tended to interact less socially with their colleagues, and this weakened the

290 Baker, 97.
291 Harris, 97-98.
292 Harris, 34.
bonds of familiarity that mitigated political and partisan differences. Moreover, with the increasing prevalence of television and an increasing aggressiveness in journalism, Americans were becoming more vividly aware of issues related to war, poverty, crime, or civil rights. They likewise began to expect their representatives to take more assertive positions on a wider array of issues. As former Senator Fred Harris (D-OK) argued, “Senators found it politically more and more difficult to go to Washington and serve quietly as an apprentice for a time… they found it less and less likely that they could specialize in as few as two or three subject areas,” or follow other established norms. “Once senators had done all of these things without having to worry about public opinion back home, if there was any. They could no longer do so.”

These new, more assertive senators were increasingly able to find bases of institutional power from which to push their agendas. In 1953, in an effort to both mollify junior senators disgruntled over poor committee assignments and to fortify his budding client network, Lyndon Johnson implemented a rule whereby no senior Democratic senator could acquire a second seat on a “prestige” committee (Appropriations, Armed Services, Finance, and Foreign Relations) until all Democrats had at least one such seat. While on the one hand the seniority system for committee assignments was

293 Ibid., 40.

294 This rule had a grandfather clause that exempted senators already sitting on multiple such committees from having to give up any of their seats. Margaret Chase Smith’s long-time legislative assistant, retired General William Lewis, considered the “Johnson Rule” a key contributor to the rise of individualism in the Senate. In his view, Senators became “moonlighters” who did not have to work hard and prove themselves to receive influential positions. He concluded this led to “power without responsibility.” Comments made during interview with Margaret Chase Smith, interview by Joe B. Frantz, August 20, 1975, oral history interview I, transcript, LBJ Library.
bending, the number of Senate subcommittees proliferated.\textsuperscript{295} The 1946 Legislative Reorganization Act had slashed the number of Senate committees and subcommittees. It did not take long, however, for ambitious senators to reverse this trend. By one count, the number of subcommittees devoted to international issues grew from seven in 1947 to thirty-one by 1965.\textsuperscript{296} Such subcommittees could often serve as launching points for investigations into issues that traditionally fell under SASC jurisdiction.

Still, despite the steady changes taking place in the Senate, none of them seriously impacted the Senate’s handling of major defense legislation before 1968. Even in this year, for example, the floor debate and attempts to amend the procurement and R&D authorization bill were comparatively minor by comparison to subsequent standards. Nonetheless, the events of this year marked the first in a series of key turning points over the next decade that significantly shaped how the average member of Congress approached defense legislation. As such, it is worth reviewing in some detail.

Russell was hospitalized at Walter Reed in 1968 when the SASC began deliberation on the authorization bill, so Stennis sat in as interim chairman. With Senator Carl Hayden’s retirement pending, Russell already planned to take over the Appropriations Committee the following year. With Russell’s move, Stennis would assume the SASC chairmanship. Consequently, when Russell had recuperated sufficiently to return to the Senate, he focused his attention on the defense appropriations bill and allowed Stennis to retain control of the authorization bill. The atmosphere

\textsuperscript{295} There is no clear relationship between these trends.

Russell found in the Appropriations Committee that year startled him. He soon informed Defense Department officials that “there was a new attitude in the Congress where for the first time many want to make large cuts in the Defense budget.” Department officials confided amongst themselves that “Senator Russell is a good friend of the department and if he is concerned then we too should be concerned.”

Long-developing congressional frustration with the war in Vietnam – aggravated by the Tet Offensive that Communist forces had initiated that January – no doubt played some role in the development of this new mood. The most direct cause, however, appears to have been fiscal. While U.S. post-World War II annual budget deficits were commonplace, the deficit for FY 1968 was particularly severe, at least by the standard of the times. In hopes of arresting this deficit slide, the Johnson administration decided upon a raft of spending cuts and new taxes for FY 1969. In terms of budgets cuts, the administration set a goal of $6 billion, of which half would come from the defense budget.

At the same time, the U.S. had for a decade been involved in an extended balance of payments problem tied to the difficulty of maintaining the post-World War II Bretton Woods international monetary system. The system took a destabilizing shock in

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297 Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, May 27, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.

298 Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, March 3, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.

299 According to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York: “The balance of payments (BOP) is an accounting of a country's international transactions for a particular time period. Any transaction that causes money to flow into a country is a credit to its BOP account, and any transaction that causes money to flow out is a debit. The BOP includes the current account, which mainly measures the flows of goods and services; the capital account, which consists of capital transfers and the acquisition and disposal of non-produced, non-financial assets; and the financial account, which records investment flows.” See http://www.ny.frb.org/aboutthefed/fedpoint/fed40.html.
November 1967 with a run on the value of the British pound. In March 1968, there was a similar run on the gold reserves that ultimately backed the system. Incidentally, Defense Department officials attributed this run to a New York Times story the previous week reporting on General Westmoreland’s request for an additional 206,000 troops for Vietnam. In any case, the March shock further reinforced the notion that the United States faced a serious debt problem, and that perhaps more severe budget reductions beyond the $6 billion proposed were in order. This sparked a debate in Congress as to relative spending priorities between defense and non-defense discretionary spending. Russell subsequently informed the Defense Department that he had been forced to fight hard in the Appropriations Committee to avoid having all proposed budget reductions come from defense, and that some committee members talked of defense reductions in the range of $15 to $20 billion.

Stennis was having similar difficulties, at least with respect to his efforts to manage the authorization bill through its floor vote. Stennis spent three days defending the committee bill on the floor of the Senate. The length of the debate alone was historic. The first day focused on Stennis’s presentation. On the second day, debate on floor amendments started. The bill faced seven in total. First, Stennis faced an amendment from Senator Philip Hart (D-MI, one of the class of 1958) calling for an additional $508 million reduction, specifically from the R&D authorization (the Armed Services

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300 Notes from the meeting included the comment, “We can't calculate the damage to this nation caused by this story.” Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, March 18, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.

301 See notes from two separate Department of Defense staff meetings, May 13 and May 27, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.
Committees had already made a three percent across-the-board reduction to the President’s request that year). Stennis defeated this on a 30-28 vote. Likewise, by a margin of 41-17, Stennis defeated an amendment from Senator Nelson to delete $342.7 million for procurement of the Sentinel anti-ballistic missile system. Stennis defeated by a 31-28 vote an amendment from Senator John Cooper (R-KY) prohibiting expenditure of funds authorized for Sentinel until the Secretary of Defense had certified in writing to the Congress that research had proved that Sentinel system was practicable, and the cost had been determined with reasonable accuracy.

On the third day, in a 30-23 vote the Senate approved an amendment from Senator Jacob Javits (R-NY) to promote Defense Department favoritism in contract awards for firms employing large numbers of minority and low-wage workers. The Senate then defeated an amendment from Senator Joseph Clark deleting authorization for Fast Deployment Logistics ships by 31-28. It next defeated a second Clark amendment by 44-12 that would have reduced all authorizations in the bill to the amount appropriated in FY 68, if that amount was lower than in the pending bill. This would have reduced the total authorization by $2.3 billion. Finally, under what Stennis subsequently characterized as a “plea for some economy that had been going on during the debate on the other amendments,” the Senate approved an amendment from Senator John Williams (R-DE) to reduce the total authorization bill by three percent beyond what the committee

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302 We will discuss this program in a subsequent chapter.

303 The study will address this program in a subsequent chapter as well.
reported.\textsuperscript{304} This amounted to a $660 million reduction, although SASC members largely abandoned this reduction during conference committee with the House.

Stennis took the Senate vote in stride. What disturbed him greatly, however, was the fact that SASC members Symington and Howard Cannon (D-NV) voted in favor of the reduction after having voted just a few days before for the total figure in committee. Stennis regarded this as a betrayal, of sorts. In a note to himself he concluded, “In view of the fact that they had voted for the bill as it was brought to the floor in the Committee, and there were no new facts that had developed since then, I considered their votes as a repudiation of the committee as well as an act of irresponsibility. No harm came of it, I don't suppose, but it helped reveal them to me and I will certainly better understand the problem I have before me in dealing with them in future matters.”\textsuperscript{305}

As debate over the appropriations bill continued through the summer, another complication arose for Russell. Portending things to come in terms of media scrutiny of defense spending, \textit{Congressional Quarterly} released an article in late June 1968 based on internal Defense Department information entitled “Defense Budget Cuts of $10.8 Billion Seen Feasible.” The article listed ten programs, and suggested that large cuts could come from each without any significant negative impact on the nation’s defenses. Defense Department officials subsequently commented that they could think of nothing that had caused more problems with Congress than this article, concluding, “Whoever in this

\textsuperscript{304} Resume of hearings on the 1969 military authorization bill, undated, “Senator’s memos to himself, 1968” file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

\textsuperscript{305} Ibid.
building furnished material to them should be ‘shot.’” Russell concurred regarding the level of difficulty that this article had caused him.

The events of 1968 evidenced the initial culmination of trends in the Senate that had been mounting for a decade. Now manifest for the first time, the willingness of the average senator to challenge defense legislation only intensified through the mid-1970s. It is doubtful that Russell’s stature would have been enough – had he lived past January 1971 – to maintain the bulwark position that he held during the previous decades. On the other hand, it is worth considering whether the changes of the early- to mid-1970s with respect to the handling of defense and intelligence legislation might have come about that much sooner had Russell left the Senate a half-decade earlier. One should be careful not to underestimate the impact that Russell’s stature and influence had on his fellow Senators. Among the more objective Senate voices testifying to this effect came from Senator Proxmire. By the late 1960s Proxmire was a prominent public critic of defense procurement levels and cost overruns. He recalled the Senate’s prior handling of defense bills as follows:

Senator Russell had such enormous prestige that when he would come in as the Chairman of the Armed Services Committee and present the procurement bill, the military procurement bill of the Senate, it was very rare that there would be any other speeches, or at least any speech of any length. Of course, the Republican, the ranking Republican on the committee would make a short speech and there’d be somebody who’d introduce an amendment to try and get some funds for an installation or a program he was interested in, but by and large, it would be a very limited debate… I thought that perhaps the other senators were perhaps a little too much in awe of Senator Russell and a little bit too much, too reluctant to

306 Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, June 17, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.
307 Ibid.
challenge him, to challenge this enormous budget… instead of debating it for several days and examining its details and challenging some of its basic assumptions and some of the more controversial programs in it, we just, because there was such faith in Senator Russell the, the proposal would just be rubber stamped.\footnote{Proxmire, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.}
CHAPTER 5

OVERSIGHT IN THE EISENHOWER YEARS, PART I

Through the early and mid-1950s, the Senate Armed Services Committee demonstrated both limited capacity and limited interest in overseeing most aspects of the defense program related to major weapons systems and their substantive policy implications. SASC members did dispose of a fairly sizeable legislative agenda each congressional session. However, these duties mainly related to issues involving: personnel (including pay, benefits, numerical personnel caps, military judicial codes); real estate and facilities; supply and stockpile maintenance; procurement regulations; approval of nominations and promotion lists; and the transfer of military equipment to other countries. In terms of workload by man hours, during most of the 1950s the major legislative effort each year involved the annual military construction authorization bill. By one staff member’s estimate, this accounted for seventy-five percent of the committee’s workload.309

In essence, most of the committees’ basic functions involved establishing or modifying the legal framework governing Defense Department operations. Authorization

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309 Although the details of this estimate are unclear, presumably this measure relates to committee and staff man-hours spent developing legislation. See BeLieu memo to Stennis, July 31, 1956, Real Estate Subcommittee 1953-1956 file, Legislation series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
bills specifying the purposes and maximum amounts to be spent on procurement and R&D programs would have fallen into this category. Prior to 1961, however, the Armed Services Committees did not annually pass such bills. Instead, standing authorizations – both quantitatively large and qualitatively general in scope – governed military procurement, and no specific authorization governed R&D. In practice, a congressional appropriation act was taken as a *de facto* authorization where gaps existed in the law.310

This situation generally suited Armed Services Committees members through the 1950s. Members were content to trust the Executive Branch to propose programs and budgets, and to have the Appropriations Committees act on them, with minimal Armed Services Committee input. Discontent only developed as Armed Services Committee members began first to question the effectiveness of Executive Branch management of the defense enterprise, and then to doubt the Appropriations Committees’ ability to exercise substantive policy oversight in the same manner that they exercised budgetary oversight.311

Serious committee discontent first manifested itself in the context of perceived Defense Department mismanagement with respect to continental air defense systems during the mid-1950s. It burgeoned in the aftermath of the Soviet Union’s successful

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310 As Russell once explained: “If an appropriation for which there is no authorization is proposed and becomes law because no successful point of order was made against it, the appropriations act has been held sufficient in itself. Under the specialization or division of labor that the Congress has prescribed for itself the so-called legislative committees consider authorizations and the Committees on Appropriations consider appropriations within the limit of the authorization.” Copy of Russell floor statement, undated, H. R. 9751 (1962) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

311 The difference between program and budget oversight is essentially the difference between asking *why* money is spent in support of a national strategy, as opposed to *how* and *how efficiently* it is spent.
1957 Sputnik launch and during the defense reorganization debates that followed, as members expressed severe dissatisfaction with the Eisenhower administration’s managerial effectiveness with respect to missile and satellite programs specifically, and the overall defense program generally.

The entire rationale for Congress having ceded so much managerial authority to presidency had been based on the presumption that the Executive Branch would prove more effective. As this appeared less and less the case, many SASC members came to believe that their committee needed to become more involved in the development and procurement processes. As a consequence, the Armed Services Committees collectively adopted in 1959 the practice of annual procurement authorization – at first limited to aircraft, missiles, and naval vessels. They executed this step, however, with the relatively modest intent of gaining better leverage to force the Defense Department to exercise more effective management of its own activities, rather than to attempt to substitute congressional judgments on programs and policy for those of Defense Department professionals.

The State of Oversight in the Mid-1950s

Authorization bills are essentially laws establishing programmatic and budgetary boundaries for the Defense Department. They neither compel the Congress to appropriate funds, nor the Defense Department to obligate funds for specific purposes. Authorization bills merely set the legal parameters for these other actions. Standing authorizations governed military procurement during the 1950s. The limits these imposed were for the most part high and generic enough that the Defense Department was unlikely to bump up
against them in its appropriations requests in any case short of world war. For example, the Army and Air Force Authorization and Composition Act of 1950 set the authorized procurement limits for Air Force airframes. It allowed “24,000 serviceable aircraft or 225,000 airframe tons aggregate of serviceable aircraft, whichever amount the Secretary of the Air Force may determine is more appropriate to fulfill the requirements of the Air Force,” along with whatever spare parts and equipment were necessary for maintenance.312 Similarly, during the 1950s the law limited the Navy to 15,000 aircraft.313 There were no limits on the Army (to include helicopters). With respect to naval vessels, the Vinson-Trammel Act of 1934 remained the basic authorizing law for the Navy, although Congress had amended the authorized tonnage limits upward on a number of occasions before and during World War II. By Vinson's own estimate, when annual authorization began in 1961, the Navy was still 2.5 million tons below its authorized level.314 There was no authorization law during the 1950s governing limits on missiles.315 In the rare case that the Defense Department did need to exceed an authorization in a given category, the Armed Services Committees would pass a specific, one-time bill granting the necessary increase.

The guiding assumption was that, in wartime, the Secretary of Defense should have the flexibility to procure forces as needed – up to some predetermined point set in

312 The act also provided that money appropriated for these purposes was to “remain available until expended, unless otherwise provided in the appropriations act concerned.” Dawson, 45-46.
313 “Memorandum re Section 412(b) of Public Law 86-149,” undated, “FY1962 White Papers, Feb-Mar 1961” file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.
314 Kolodziej, 368.
315 “Memorandum re Section 412(b),” undated, Papers of Robert McNamara.
law – without having to come back to Congress with a supplemental authorization request at each new increment. This assumption on the part of committee members was rooted in the collective experience of World War II and the Korean War, as well as in the (bad) memory of congressional restraints on Franklin Roosevelt’s efforts to rearm America and its once and future allies during the 1930s.

In addition to such memories, the combination of limited program oversight capacity and interest grew from a number of other factors. At the most banal level, most senators were extremely busy. They carried extensive workloads, including multiple committee and subcommittee assignments. In executing their legislative and other responsibilities, most benefited from comparatively minimal staff support. This applied both with respect to personal legislative assistants as well as committee professional staff resources. Consequently, most did not innately relish the addition of new, highly substantive – and thus time consuming – legislative responsibilities.

More importantly, however, was the fact that, because of their heavy workloads, most senators regarded themselves as generalists (rather than specialists in the manner that House members with their single committee assignments tended to regard themselves). As generalists, they were loath to attempt to substitute their judgments on critical policy and program issues for those of the experts in the Defense Department, particularly in the context of the Cold War. These basic dispositions existed even in senators such as Russell and Stennis, who by their positions and duties could become as expert as it was possible for any member of Congress to become. While such men could be viewed *the* experts on defense policy in the Senate, it was quite simply almost impossible to master an organization as complex as the Defense Department had become.
by the 1950s.\footnote{As Russell once stated, “I don't have time prepare myself on all questions. That is one thing that people don't really comprehend. A man who has a direct responsibility for a gigantic activity such as the Department of Defense just cannot give a detailed study of to every one of them. He has to shoot from the hip. And when I am in doubt about a question, I always vote “no.” I think that is the only safe plan to follow. If you are in doubt and vote yes, why you have to take responsibility for what is done. If you are in doubt and vote no, you get another look at it somewhere…” Excerpts from December 1968 Atlantic Monthly magazine article “A Conversation with Richard Russell”, undated, “Russell, Richard, 1966-1969” file, Congressional Correspondence series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.} Secretaries of Defense labored against this same difficulty. Even a tenfold increase in professional staff members (had Russell desired such an increase) would have yielded the Armed Services Committees only a limited growth in corporate expertise on most issues, in comparison to that of the vast and growing Defense Department bureaucracies.

During the 1950s, committee members also struggled to cope with the implications of the defense program of the rapid and growing pace of scientific and technological change characteristic of the twentieth century. These changes continually exposed the militaries of the world’s leading powers to a series of “military-technological” revolutions. Technological advantages had always been important in warfare, of course. In the period between the Napoleonic wars and World War I, however, the technological margin between the Great European powers had remained relatively small, and had mattered less than sheer numbers or operational and tactical prowess in determining military outcomes.\footnote{This was perhaps more true with respect to armies than navies.} While World War II had not demonstrated a full reversal in the relative value of technology versus numbers, the weights were changing.\footnote{This manifested, for example, in the rapid advance in the state-of-the-art for tank and aircraft designs. Many early and even mid-war models were utterly obsolete by war’s end, and of minimal military value even when matched in quantity against their most high-tech replacements.} Breakthroughs in jet engine design had severely negated the historic
defensive value to America of the world’s oceans. Technological breakthroughs in
ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons negated them completely. New continental aircraft
and missile warning and defense systems were necessary. These had to be tied together
by computers and information systems that in some cases took the human at least
partially out of the loop in order to achieve the speed necessary for effective system
integration. Jet, missile, nuclear, computer, and network revolutions were all occurring in
the military realm simultaneously.

Complex questions arose from these developments. How did all these programs
fit with one another? How could they be integrated with one another? Which Services
should have responsibility for which capabilities – or should capabilities be split among
the Services? How much duplication in R&D was necessary to stimulate innovation; how
much was merely wasteful? How should dollars for new R&D be balanced against funds
for systems now ready for procurement? How should different systems and capabilities
be prioritized?

The bewilderment these questions caused further diminished congressional desire
to question Defense Department judgments.\textsuperscript{319} In general, most members of Congress
simply demanded that the Defense Department leadership be diligent in pushing
America’s quantitative and qualitative military advantage. This largely defaulted to
questions attempting to gauge the nation’s “preparedness” for the next crisis. As many

\textsuperscript{319} Paul Kilday (D-TX), a prominent HASC member, once described his bewilderment at the rapid pace of
change in an interview with Bernard Gordon. As Gordon recalled, while Kilday previously “felt competent
to judge policy, this is far less so today. Earlier, he felt that he knew and understood the state of military
development; today, with the development of new weapons and an exploding technology. Rep. Kilday is
quite willing to concede that he no longer has this same grasp. ‘We have fallen behind on our knowledge of
. . . planes [and] missiles . . . no longer do I feel expert.’” Gordon, 702.
were uncomfortable with the notion that quantity increasingly mattered less than quality, such questions often defaulted to the notion that military preparedness equated with quantitative advantage in terms of major weapons systems.

While it is easy to look on the Congresses of this period as mere “rubber stamps,” one must at least sympathize with the gravity of the decisions at hand. While members of the defense committees retained a healthy skepticism, they basically trusted and empathized with the military professionals with whom they dealt – believing that they all shared a common cause. To the degree that they committed themselves to any policy or program oversight role, committee members preferred to act as a court of appeals. They looked for specific instances of inadequate decision-making or insufficiently resolved disputes, and attempted to refer these back to the Defense Department for another look – and another the year after that, if necessary.

The oversight mechanisms that supported this appellate role were generally informal. They sometimes involved a specific investigation or a hearing into an authorization matter, but were mostly restricted, for example, to exchanges with department officials during informational hearings or discussions during nomination proceedings. In this limited appellate capacity, however, some members steadily built up a confidence in their ability to exercise a more formal and substantive form of oversight – albeit over what to them remained an essentially Executive Branch policy and program development process.

Richard Russell first became Senate Armed Services Committee chairman in 1951 after the previous chair, Millard Tydings (D-MD), lost his 1950 Senate reelection bid. Russell’s initial tenure lasted only two years, ending after the Republicans won a
Senate majority in the 1952 congressional elections. When Russell reassumed the chairmanship in January 1955, he established the committee’s first permanent, wide-ranging subcommittee system. Tydings had previously established the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, which had a more-or-less permanent status by 1955. The SASC had also previously formed ad hoc subcommittees to deal with specific bills or issues. Russell’s innovation theoretically allowed the committee a greater capacity for specialization in disposing of many of its recurring legislative functions. There simply was not much substance to these functions, however. Russell added a subcommittee on CIA oversight, which he used primarily to prevent the Senate from overseeing CIA activities. Other subcommittees dealt with the U.S. national stockpiles of strategic materials and the naval petroleum reserves, the NATO Status of Forces Treaty (which governed the legal status of U.S. forces stationed in Europe), and real estate and military construction. Symington, Sam Ervin (D-NC), and Stennis chaired these three subcommittees, respectively.

Somewhat more substantive an oversight function were the annual posture hearings that the full committee held each January. These hearings involved OSD, Joint Chiefs of Staff, and Service senior leadership testimony providing a general overview of each year’s military program in the context of U.S. defense strategy and the current world situation. However, while these hearings were classified and often presented highly sensitive information, they amounted to little more than continuing professional education for committee members. The committee had limited capacity to act on most policy or program issues arising from these hearings. Given the considerable overlap in membership between the SASC and the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations
Committee, these hearings at least added to the knowledge base of several members who would later in the year work appropriations issues. However, the appropriations process generally focused on line-item budget details and did not readily support assessment of how individual programs fit into the broader context of U.S. national security strategy.

The SASC established a temporary Subcommittee on Air Power under Symington’s leadership that operated during 1956. While it aimed to study U.S. strategic nuclear delivery systems (bombers and missiles) and air defense capabilities in the context of charges that the Soviets were rapidly outpacing the U.S. in bomber procurement, as already noted it was also a venue to further its chairman’s political ambitions.320 The subcommittee produced few if any direct legislative outcomes. In terms of lasting impact, however, its activities tended to heighten already developing committee concerns over the Eisenhower administration’s apparent ineffectiveness in relating strategy to programs, and its lethargy in pushing America’s strategic advantage over the Soviet Union.

The one area in which the SASC played a regular role in the annual program and budget process was in the authorization of real estate and military construction activities. The single most significant program category that this subcommittee dealt with over the

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320 While Symington went to great pains to deny that his subcommittee activities served his own political ambitions, it seems clear that at a minimum he expected that they would help to position him as a potential vice presidential nominee, if not as an outright “consensus” presidential candidate if the 1956 Democratic Convention became deadlocked. For example, Fred Rhodes, a lawyer who served as chief counsel on the “Truman Committee” during World War II and who Saltonstall and Duff brought on to serve as Special Counsel for the minority on the Symington Committee, warned that, “The primary purpose of the investigation is personal and political—being a bid for publicity, with a view to getting the Democratic nomination in the (now probable) Stevenson-Kefauver deadlock...” Garrett Underhill memo for Colonel Davenport, March 26, 1956, 333/474 (4 Sept 57 —) file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Record Group 335, National Archives, Washington, DC.
latter half of the 1950s involved construction of early warning and air defense sites in the continental U.S. against manned bomber attack. Stennis’s handling of these issues proved highly significant to the development of SASC oversight procedures over the coming decade. Slowly, Stennis arrived at the conclusion that in recommending the approval of the annual construction program, his subcommittee was by default passing judgment on the propriety of the entire air defense program. Stennis grew increasingly concerned not only that there was wasteful duplication in the overall air defense program, but also that the considerable funds being spent on air defense were ill advised strategically. He based this premise on the projected relative decrease in the Soviet manned bomber threat over time, coupled with what he believed were significant unfunded capabilities elsewhere in the defense budget. Eventually, he arrived at the conclusion that authorization language could be used as a tool to enforce better decision-making upon the Defense Department.

**Air Defense: Stirrings**

Stennis’s initial concerns for preventing wasteful duplication in continental air defense developed against the general backdrop of a wide-ranging desire within much of the Congress and the broader defense community to promote “jointness” among the military Services. Jointness refers to the goal of breaking down stovepipes and eliminating duplicative efforts among the Services in order to achieve greater efficiency, interoperability, and unity of effort in planning, programming, and operations. The concept’s roots date at least to World War II, and its founding premise is that armies, navies, and air forces would generally not fight distinct conventional ground, sea, and air campaigns in the future.
Increasing the Defense Department’s capacity for jointness by strengthening the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Joint Staff (at the expense of the Services) had been among the goals of every round of defense reorganization subsequent to passage of the 1947 National Security Act. Many members of Congress were initially skeptical of jointness, concerned that it promised either too much central authority (akin to a German General Staff, even if under civilian control) or too serious a downgrading of the military Services (even possible disbandment, in the case of the Marines). By the mid-1950s, however, Congress was generally supportive of the need for increased jointness – as long as the Armed Services Committees retained a veto over the President or Secretary of Defense’s efforts to alter Service roles and missions.

During the mid-1950s, charges of wasteful duplication among Service, OSD, and Defense Agency programs cropped up in a variety of venues. They were often accompanied by accusations that ineffective OSD management at the highest levels abetted this duplication. For example, in 1956 testimony before the defense subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee, Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for R&D Trevor Gardner charged that service rivalry, along with overlapping and inefficient bureaucratic structures, was seriously hindering the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and other missile types.321 At about the same time, the nomination of Clifford Furnas for the position of Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Development came before the SASC. Under questioning from Saltonstall,

321 Kolodziej, 235 In a subsequent article in Look magazine, he noted that overall missile development efforts were “something of an administrative nightmare of committees and subcommittees competing with each other for influence and appropriations.”
Furnas indicated he did not feel that the degree of competition in the Defense Department was excessive. He commented that some duplication or competition among teams of scientists and technicians was productive in spurring innovation. Under further questioning, Furnas agreed that overall there was a shortage of competent scientific manpower in the country, and that the “accelerated status” of the ICBM and intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) programs meant that other programs were not proceeding as rapidly as would otherwise be the case.  

Russell picked up the questioning, asking about the potential for consolidating all of the guided missile programs in an effort to conserve the limited scientific manpower available. He also expressed concern that the Secretary of Defense had not appointed someone specifically to oversee joint program coordination. The discussion ended with Furnas taking essentially an “I’ll see what I can do” stance. This was enough to mollify committee members for the time being, as they understood they lacked any really effective mechanism to compel Defense Department action. The committee approved Furnas’s nomination, and having been put on notice that this was a committee concern the new Assistant Secretary could expect members to raise the issue with him again the next time he was before the committee. Subsequent hearings might prove unpleasant for Furnas if the committee judged he had taken insufficient action, but that was the extent of the committee’s sanction. These types of exchanges served the purpose of communicating committee concerns and placing

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322 ICBMs are ballistic missiles with ranges greater than 5500 km, or about 3500 miles. IRBMs have ranges between 3000 and 5500 km. Below IRBMs come medium-range ballistic missiles (1000-3000 km) and short-range ballistic missiles (less than 1000 km).

323 Discussion during committee deliberation on Furnas’s nomination, February 16, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
“peer pressure” on administration officials to act, but members generally accepted that this was the limit of what they could accomplish in terms of program oversight.

Initial committee concern over problems in the continental air defense (CAD) program developed prior to 1955.\textsuperscript{324} The specific system first in question was the Army’s Nike Ajax. Project Nike was an umbrella program covering a range of Army air defense programs. Ajax was a specific system featuring a supersonic missile with a conventional warhead, an acquisition and tracking radar, and a computer system to guide the missile to intercept. Nike Ajax was first successfully tested in 1951, and began fielding in 1953. According to Army testimony, as of the mid-1950s the Nike Ajax provided the only operational system capable of reaching the altitudes of all existing Soviet aircraft.\textsuperscript{325} The Army eventually established dozens of Nike Ajax sites across the U.S. and overseas to provide short-range “point” defense to military installations and population centers.

During organizational meetings prior to the 1955 posture hearings, as well as during the preliminary real estate and military construction subcommittee meetings, committee members noted that they were skeptical of the Nike Ajax’s true operational effectiveness.\textsuperscript{326} They were reluctant to deny authorization for facilities construction, however, given the system’s purported promise and the general importance of CAD to

\textsuperscript{324} All years are calendar years rather than fiscal years, unless otherwise noted.

\textsuperscript{325} “Authorizing Construction for the Military Departments” (unpublished committee print accompanying H. R. 9893), June 26, 1956 file, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{326} Posture hearings discussion, February 3 and 8, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives. Note that February 8 discussion was not previously cited, but aside from the date the citation is otherwise the same as that for the February 3 discussion.
the military and the defense of the homeland. Claims of skepticism nonetheless prompted Army legislative liaison personnel to action in an effort to allay committee concerns.\footnote{The Army proposed a briefing by top research scientists, followed by lunch. Staff member Verne Mudge commented, “The project sounds like a good one in view of Committee interest in NIKE and our responsibility for NIKE sites.” He offered that committee members could leave in Army cars after an upcoming nomination hearing. Russell responded in the affirmative. Mudge memo to Russell on Army’s desire to brief SASC members on Service ground to air missile programs, March 30, 1955, Armed Services Agenda (1955) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.} They failed to achieve the full effect they desired, however, as members voiced their concerns again during the military construction subcommittee’s formal hearings later in the year. For FY 1956, the Army was requesting $160 million in new authorization related to air defense real estate and construction activities worldwide.\footnote{“Report of Real Estate and Military Construction Subcommittee, Senate Committee on Armed Services, to Authorize Certain Construction at Military, Naval, and Air Force Installations, and for Other Purposes” (unpublished committee print accompanying S. 1765), undated, S. 1756 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.} This amounted to thirty-two percent of the Army’s total military construction request for that fiscal year. Stennis and Case – the latter the subcommittee’s sole Republican member – expressed their skepticism that Ajax had the necessary range to intercept all Soviet bombers. They questioned whether the program was receiving adequate senior-level review. The Army witness responded that the program was under constant review, and that a higher performing Nike B with greater range was under development. While the Nike B – later renamed the Nike Hercules – would replace the Ajax, however, it would be some time before the new version was ready for procurement.

Case was disturbed that, by the time the Army fully fielded the Ajax, the system would be obsolete and the Army would turn around and ask Congress to immediately
begin authorizing something new. He suggested that the Secretary of Defense should be
required to certify the need for new Nike installation construction. He continued:

When you are looking at one segment of the military establishment and
the plans there have been set up for doing a certain thing, from their point
of view it may still be essential or necessary, but in the over-all look
which the Secretary of Defense presumably has, it could be that he sees
something coming over the horizon which outmodes what may have been
entrusted to the divisional or branch responsibility… It isn’t a question of
good faith on the part of anybody. It is just to ensure the mechanics of
review with the best checking that we could get, and that would mean
going back to the person with over-all responsibility.329

For the time being, this proved nothing more than random musing on Case’s part. In the
end, the committee did not require a Secretary of Defense certification. The SASC left
the Army’s Nike authorization request intact. In the subcommittee report informing the
SASC’s mark-up of the authorization request, the subcommittee rationalized this decision
on the basis that future hopes for a better system did not justify failing to provide the best
system currently available. In any case, the report pointed out that the SASC was not
responsible for recommending Senate approval of Nike Ajax procurement, only the
construction of related facilities. The subcommittee report noted, however, that it was
important to constantly evaluate the Nike Ajax “in relation to new developments in this
field.” The report concluded, “The committee trusts that this evaluation will be carried
out by the Appropriations Committee and the Department of Defense.”330

329 Real estate and military construction subcommittee deliberations, July 10, 1958, Transcripts of
Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United
States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

330 “Report of Real Estate and Military Construction Subcommittee,” Bill files, Committee on Armed
Services, National Archives.
1956 added a new wrinkle to questions about the Nike Ajax’s utility. The Navy had previously developed its own Talos missile system for sea-based air defense. The Air Force was now seeking authorization to construct land-based Talos sites to protect its Strategic Air Command (SAC) bases beginning in FY 1957. While the Nike Ajax program was at a more advanced stage with respect to land-based deployment, the Air Force touted the Talos as a more capable system. In Trevor Gardener’s previously cited testimony before the HASC in early 1956, he identified the Nike and Talos systems as one area of wasteful duplication in Defense Department missile efforts. At Furnas’s nomination hearing that same year, Stennis questioned the nominee on the Ajax’s merits and the premise that there was a duplication problem in the air defense field, noting his predisposition that “there must be a lot of duplication.” Furnas responded that he believed Nike Ajax to be more effective than at least its severest critics charged. He argued that the program had improved significantly since its earliest version. Furnas’s testimony in general left the impression there were no duplication problems and that OSD was managing CAD efforts as effectively as possible.

In March 1956, Chief of Naval Operations Admiral Arleigh Burke testified before the SASC. While the nominal subject of the hearings was unrelated to the mounting Nike-Talos controversy, the matter came up. Symington questioned Burke on why the Navy had not adopted Nike Ajax in a sea-based air defense role. Burke responded the primary reason was that the Nike’s radar requirements were incompatible for shipboard use. However, Burke allowed that, when it came to adopting another service’s system
versus developing one in house, “Everybody likes his own child.”\textsuperscript{331} Although one could not fault Burke for his honesty, Stennis was not terribly impressed with the answer. He raised the question of how Congress could reasonably be expected to pass on programs at great expense to the nation when the Defense Department was not making its best effort to make its program requests as efficient as possible. He pointed out:

\begin{quote}
We do not feel that we are a policy-making committee on (the Nike-Talos) problem, but we do have to keep passing on these matters, and by implication we are recommending to this committee and then to the Senate that this program be continued… Now, if we cannot get an answer to this question from the Chiefs of Staff, we do not know where else to go.\textsuperscript{332}
\end{quote}

Case followed up, making clear that when Nike Ajax first came before the SASC a few years before there were already reservations about its performance. However, with no alternative in place the subcommittee felt it had to pass on the program. Case noted that the issue had changed now that an alternative had emerged in the form of Talos. While they were clearly frustrated, at this point Stennis and Case were largely venting. The Navy was not a player in the growing Nike-Talos dispute before the committee. The Navy’s sea-based application of Talos had no military construction component, and thus never came before the SASC for authorization. However, the dialogue clearly indicated that committee members were concerned. They did not want to have to make a choice between the Nike Ajax and the Talos for land-based air defense, but they could not accept

\textsuperscript{331} Committee deliberation on H. R. 8100, March 22, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{332} Ibid.
that deployment of both was in the national interest. They wanted someone in the Defense Department to decide, on the basis of greatest efficiency and effectiveness.

Not surprisingly, the Nike-Talos issue came up in force during the military construction authorization hearings that year. Whether by collusion of happenstance, the Army and Air Force attempted to resolve the controversy by arguing that, in fact, Nike Ajax and Talos fulfilled two separate missions. The Army argued its Service-specific mission was close-in “point” defense, for which it said the Nike Ajax was well suited. The Air Force, on the other hand, testified that its mission was wider “area” defense, and it believed that the Talos better fit this bill. Under this construct, there was no duplication between Nike Ajax and Talos. SASC members did not accept this, however, concluding that these missions were in fact overlapping. The subcommittee found a “definite and urgent need” for the Secretary of Defense to clarify Service air defense roles and missions. In an effort to force the issue, the committee – while indicating it had no inherent bias against the system – refused to authorize the $16.25 million that the Air Force requested to establish Talos sites around SAC bases. It stated it would deny any other authority for operational land-based Talos facilities “until the relative merits of both systems have been positively tested and the roles and missions clarified.” The committee concluded that it did “not believe that Congress should be placed in the position of defining roles and missions, even by inference.”333 The committee requested that the Defense Department hold a comparative evaluation of the two systems as soon as possible, and that an independent board assess the results. During committee

333 “Authorizing Construction for the Military Departments,” Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
deliberations, Stennis was the most forceful proponent of this course of action. He advocated this step because he felt comfortable it would “help force the issue” without adversely affecting the nation’s defenses.\(^{334}\) He did not believe delaying construction would cause an overall program delay, given that the system was just leaving the experimental stage. Interestingly, this decision received full committee approval with very limited debate, in sharp contrast to issues like troop housing and land use that were also covered in mark-up. Most members appeared more concerned with items in which their home-state constituents took a direct interest. Outside the Air Force, there was no evidence of such strong constituencies for or against the Talos at this time.

The SASC still needed to reconcile its version of the bill in conference committee with the House. In anticipation of this, the Air Force proposed that the Congress reinstate the $16.25 million authorization, subject to restrictive wording that would require the Secretary of Defense to certify the necessity of the Talos program.\(^{335}\) SASC conferees agreed to this compromise, although Stennis insisted that the Secretary should still conduct an evaluation of the two systems utilizing an independent board.\(^{336}\) Eisenhower took the unusual step of vetoing the bill, however, finding that the conference bill’s language constituted an infringement on the “clear lines of authority which the

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\(^{334}\) Committee deliberation on H. R. 9893, June 26, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\(^{335}\) Floyd S. Bryant (Assistant Secretary of Defense for Property and Installations) letter to Russell, July 3, 1956, H. R. 9893 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\(^{336}\) Stennis floor statement on conference report, undated, H. R. 9893 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Constitution provides on executive versus legislative functions.”"\(^{337}\) In his veto message, he argued that the provision would “compel the Secretary of Defense, an executive official, to share with two committees of the Congress the responsibility for carrying out the Talos missile authorization.”"\(^{338}\) He argued that the committees should instead require the Defense Department to issue reports on the status of Nike Ajax and Talos, which the committees could use as the basis for further legislative action. The Armed Services Committees responded by deleting the entire authorization for land-based Talos facilities from the year’s military construction bill, until the subject had been “clarified.”"\(^{339}\) Secretary of Defense Charles Wilson achieved clarity in November 1956, by assigning the Army responsibility for Talos system development. This essentially ended the Nike-Talos controversy, as the Army was not inclined to pursue Talos aggressively. Talos was never fielded in a land-based role, and in May 1958 the Army discontinued Talos development.

This cancellation prompted Stennis to reflect on the committee’s action. He was convinced that the committee had followed the responsible course by pushing the decision back to the Secretary of Defense:

> The committee took the action of denying the authorization for Talos, not because it believed Talos was an ineffective weapon; on the contrary… The committee felt then, as it does now, that Congress should not be

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\(^{337}\) Presidential veto message, July 16, 1956, H. R. 9893 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC. In vetoing the bill, Eisenhower also acted out of opposition to certain provisions regarding authority for the construction of military housing that he regarded as unconstitutional.

\(^{338}\) Ibid.

called upon to make a determination between the relative merits of weapons systems, each of which was strongly supported by its developers; that this was a responsibility that should be accepted by the Department of Defense.\textsuperscript{340}

Committee members were generally not impressed, however, with the Secretary’s ability to integrate across Department activities, to prioritize, and to make the most efficient and effective use of the funding Congress granted the Department. They felt such abilities were essential, however, if the Defense Department were to achieve any meaningful level of jointness, which was in turn necessary to ensure that the United States could afford at reasonable cost the ongoing Cold War confrontation. Committee members generally felt that, while the U.S. must maintain military superiority, it could not do so at limitless expense. Yet they doubted their own ability to make the tough choices, and by default turned to the Secretary of Defense as the individual most able to cut through Service interests and think in national terms. As far as the committee was concerned, while the Joint Chiefs’ professional military advice was highly valued and respected, the Joint Staff apparatus had simply proved incapable of achieving united, consensus decisions that imposed tough but necessary economies on the defense program. Again, the Secretary had so far proved scarcely more capable in the committee’s eyes, but members looked to him as the Department’s chief executive. While they preferred that he take the initiative in making decisions (subject to congressional ratification, of course), committee members were nonetheless over time becoming aware that perhaps they required greater leverage over a wider portion of the defense program, if in fact they were going to be required to

\textsuperscript{340} Stennis floor remarks (excerpts from July 30, 1958, \textit{Congressional Record}, page 15543), H. R. 13015 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
force such decision-making on the Secretary. Such concerns eventually provided the
impetus to expand the annual authorization beyond military construction and into the
areas of the defense program most critical to the nation’s security in its contest with the
Soviet Union.

The role of the staff in catalyzing this developing awareness was vital. The staff
member who played the most obvious role in stimulating the committee toward oversight
reform was Kenneth BeLieu. BeLieu, a retired Army colonel and former military adviser
to the Secretary of the Army, joined the SASC professional staff in 1956. Russell
immediately assigned him to be the sole full-time staff assistant to the military
construction subcommittee. While committee members were already concerned about
Defense Department duplication and mismanagement by the time BeLieu arrived, Stennis
turned extensively to BeLieu to help shape the committee’s voice on these issues and
provide greater substantive content to addressing the concerns. Much of the critical
language that ended up in committee reports and in Stennis’s speeches originated in staff
memos from BeLieu.

Whatever BeLieu’s precise role in terms of initiating versus responding to
member requests for input on possible reform measures, BeLieu found an eager audience
in Stennis. Already by the mid-1950s, Stennis was alert to and interested in the
possibilities of expanding the SASC’s oversight reach. In February 1956, Stennis – using
information BeLieu drafted – wrote to Russell urging the creation of a SASC
subcommittee to “conduct a prompt and searching analysis” of the ICBM and IRBM
As we have seen, by this time problems in the U.S. ballistic missile development programs were a cause of considerable concern in congressional defense circles. Stennis informed Russell that military construction requirements related to these programs were pending in the military construction subcommittee. He argued that forming a special subcommittee “would serve the purpose of accelerating the program as much as possible and eliminating any duplication in the allocation of resources and utilization of technical personnel and facilities.” This was necessary because “the Department of Defense has not moved as rapidly and as effectively in this vital area as it should.” Presumably, Stennis intended to chair such a subcommittee. He suggested that Jackson, Case, and Ralph Flanders (R-VT) would make excellent members, given their talent and understanding of the issues. While Russell’s response is not recorded, he did not authorize a subcommittee exclusively for this purpose.

On the other hand, Symington’s Subcommittee on the Air Force began to organize in March 1956. The exact genesis of Symington’s subcommittee – specifically, the timing and rationale of Russell’s approval for it – is unclear. It may have been that Stennis’s request added additional impetus to whatever arguments Symington was making. In any case, while nominally formed to look into Air Force modernization and preparedness in comparison to Soviet capabilities, the scope of Symington’s subcommittee quickly expanded in April 1956 to include “guided missiles” – by which

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342 Ibid.

343 With Jackson, Ervin, Saltonstall, and James Duff (R-PA) as members.
By 1956, Stennis was also becoming interested in how defense plans and programs fit together. He was increasingly concerned that the U.S. suffered a strategy-resources imbalance. While Stennis had doubts that the overall defense budget was sufficient, he worried in particular that the Services and OSD were making program funding and other decisions that did not match strategic priorities (by whose prioritization scheme was not always clear). In particular, he feared the Department was depriving funding and critical scientific and technical expertise from higher priority programs like ballistic missile development, so that the Services could develop lower priority – or at least duplicative – programs in air defense.

Here again, the record is clear that BeLieu meaningfully influenced Stennis’s developing viewpoint. In the calendar year (CY) 1956 military construction subcommittee report commenting on the Nike-Talos controversy, Stennis argued (relying heavily on comments BeLieu had crafted), “While it is not the committee’s intent to delve into the broad fields of strategy and policy, the very act of authorizing military construction and base structure facilities is in itself a policy-making function.”344 Stennis worried that “there might be a dangerous trend toward a ‘Maginot line’ type of thinking” that in effect limited the nation’s offensive capabilities in favor of passive defense facilities and systems.345 Instead, he argued that priority effort in terms of manpower and

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344 “Authorizing Construction for the Military Departments,” Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

345 Ibid.
material resources should go to ballistic missiles, particularly the Army and Navy IRBM programs. Incidentally, in making such judgments it is also clear that Stennis was building on insights he derived as a member of the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, where the ICBM and IRBM programs were prominent issues.

While the Nike-Talos dispute disappeared at the end of 1956 with the decision to shift Talos development to the Army, SASC members remained skeptical of Nike’s effectiveness. In the subcommittee report supporting the CY 1957 military construction bill, the subcommittee noted that it seriously considered no further authorization for Nike facility construction, but that a special classified briefing convinced members that such would be too detrimental to the nation’s defenses. The report continued to demand better resource prioritization and for the abandonment of obsolescent systems. It called for the Secretary of Defense to eliminate ineffective weapons systems and to exert “concurrent and final reconciliation of the military construction program with approved military plans, force levels, and objectives.”

The report announced, “The requirements for each new weapon or system when presented to the committee have been justified mainly on the ground of technological advances and military capabilities. This is only natural and proper but it is also only logical to expect certain older and superseded systems to be discarded.”

346 “Authorizing Construction for the Military Departments” (unpublished committee print accompanying H. R. 8240), filed with August 8, 1957 Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

347 Ibid.
The subcommittee’s ongoing skepticism toward Nike owed in large part to the fact that, throughout 1957, Stennis’s concept of the tradeoffs in “offense vs. defense,” as he termed it, continued to evolve. While his earlier concerns related to tradeoffs in air defense versus long-range ballistic missiles, he was becoming increasingly concerned that the U.S. had also developed capability shortfalls in its conventional force structure. In the CY 1957 military construction subcommittee report, the subcommittee concluded that the Army was demonstrating too great a concern for its role in continental air defense. Instead, the subcommittee recommended that the Army “place first priority on the capability to engage in successful and sustained ground combat – that this mission must not be subordinated to any other.”348 The Army would no doubt have responded that it was prioritizing its ground combat mission, and that if capabilities were atrophying this was because the Eisenhower administration had refused to adequately fund these areas. In any case, the subcommittee’s language was pretty expansive for a military construction bill. Clearly, certain members were developing strong ideas regarding the overall adequacy of the defense program. The military construction report was one of the few venues that subcommittee members had to put their thoughts in writing (and of course, it was the forum over which Stennis had the greatest control). While Russell was not driving this debate, he was allowing it, and thereby adding his tacit support to it. In turn, the debate was shaping his thinking on the subject of proper committee oversight mechanisms. The issue was still only formative in his mind – a seed. Stennis and other

348 Ibid.
committee members continued either consciously or unconsciously to fertilize it. Events subsequent to the 1957 Soviet Sputnik launch caused it to bloom.

The committee took one other interesting step in 1957 with respect to authorization. Out of a desire to gain more control over military construction expenditures, the committee instituted a policy against multi-year authorizations. New budget authority would last a single year. If Services either failed to request or receive appropriations that year, they would be forced to make a new authorization request the following year. During committee deliberations, Stennis noted, “Now there has been a big lag between authorization and appropriations… a lag sometimes of two, three, or four years… but it was due to the crash program following the Korean War, the great build-up, the jet switchover… We have been trying to close the gap so that the Armed Services Committee would have a firmer control over the expenditures, rather than just the Appropriations Committee alone…” While this change in and of itself was not earth shaking, it was indicative of a growing SASC desire to tighten up the authorization process and gain more control over programs and budgets on an annual basis, rather than taking the default position that the Appropriations Committee would oversee everything.

**Sputnik: Policy and Politics.**

The Soviet Union’s successful Sputnik satellite launch in October 1957 shook American policy-makers and the public alike. To those well-informed on defense and intelligence issues, Sputnik was a shock but not a surprise. Officials in both the Executive Branch and the Congress well understood that the Soviets had active ballistic missile development programs. In August 1957, the Soviets had successfully test fired one in the
same class of ICBM that two months later provided the launch vehicle for the Sputnik satellite. The Soviet Union had simply achieved success in its programs faster than anticipated – and faster than had the United States.

On the other hand, the Sputnik launch occurred in the context of preexisting and widely held fears that the U.S. strategic margin was evaporating. After World War II, some estimates put the Soviets twenty years behind in atomic bomb development, but their actual lag was only four. The gap between the U.S. and Soviet demonstrations of a thermonuclear fusion weapon (or H-bomb) had been only about nine months. The “bomber gap” controversy that culminated in Symington’s 1956 hearings occurred in this atmosphere of slipping advantage. With Sputnik, the U.S. had now fallen behind. The questions were: “How far?” and “For how long?” Despite the existence of Strategic Air Command’s large bomber force, many in and outside of Congress believed that the U.S. would soon enter a period of acute crisis. Until the U.S. was able to deploy its own ICBM force, the homeland would be utterly undefendable from a Soviet ICBM attack (itself a chronic rather than acute condition), while at the same time the U.S. would lack an ICBM retaliatory capability. Strategists inside and outside the military feared this might lead the Soviets to contemplate a disarming first strike, and such speculation found a receptive audience with many in the Congress.

While its impact was not instantaneous, the Sputnik launch proved a key milestone in the Senate Armed Services Committee’s development of more aggressive oversight procedures. In the minds of many committee members, Sputnik clearly

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349 Designated the SS-6 in the U.S., this missile achieved a range of approximately 4000 miles in its August 1957 test.
validated their concerns regarding Defense Department duplication and mismanagement. It also validated their general apprehension that the Eisenhower administration was lethargic in meeting the Soviet challenge – first with respect to ballistic missiles and strategic capabilities, but also with respect to motivating and mobilizing the nation’s human resources to match the Soviets in scientific and technological aptitude.

Members of Congress in general became more confident and more strenuous in their demands for alternate, more energetic, and more resource intensive defense policies. Some desired to “peer under the hood” of the Eisenhower administration to see how effectively it actually made policy.\(^{350}\) A sense developed that Eisenhower’s national security apparatus – if not its overall governing apparatus – was too slow and formalistic to meet the demands for fast-paced, energetic decision-making in a dynamic and rapidly evolving world situation.\(^ {351}\) While on the one hand Russell readily accepted the premise that the Eisenhower administration required prompting to redouble its efforts, he remained concerned throughout the period that an overly exuberant Congress could damage the nation’s international standing if it became careless in its rhetoric or its actions.

\(^{350}\) Recall Jackson’s Government Operations subcommittee investigation of the Eisenhower National Security Council policy-making apparatus, for example.

\(^{351}\) This charge became a centerpiece of John Kennedy’s successful 1960 presidential bid, and true to its campaign rhetoric the new administration implemented national security decision-making processes that abandoned the formalism and careful inter-departmental coordination mechanisms of the Eisenhower administration for one more casual and more directly centered around the President and his top aides and cabinet members. After his assassination, the characteristics of the Kennedy apparatus carried over into the Johnson administration as well. Whether the administration and the nation benefited from these changes is another matter beyond the scope of this study.
When news broke of the Sputnik launch on October 4, 1957, Congress was on recess and the SASC’s members had returned to their home states. Several soon contacted Russell at his home in Winder, GA, urging him to launch a committee investigation. Most also urged him to chair the hearings, expecting that he would make a repeat of his performance during the Truman-MacArthur controversy. Almost immediately upon hearing the news, however, Russell made his choice. Russell contacted Johnson at his Texas ranch and instructed his friend to begin an immediate investigation under Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee auspices.

The record does not provide a clear answer as to why Russell selected Johnson over himself. Russell was never interested in the limelight, so he had no particular desire for the notoriety that an investigation would presumably bring its chairman. The MacArthur hearings had been a joint inquiry with the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. These circumstances placed Russell in an obvious leadership role. On the other hand, the post-Sputnik inquiry that he had decided upon would be a SASC-only effort. Russell looked at the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee as the SASC’s proper investigative arm, so it was natural that he would look to center the inquiry there. Moreover, Russell thoroughly trusted Johnson to run the inquiry responsibly.\(^\text{352}\) Russell and Johnson had long since developed a close working relationship, both with respect to Senate legislative affairs and in dealing with the Eisenhower administration on foreign policy matters. Russell believed Johnson would treat his leadership of the inquiry as a

\(^{352}\) Johnson claimed that Russell was particularly concerned over the inflammatory tone of the wires coming from Jackson and Symington and some of the Republican Senators. Transcript of conversation between Johnson and McElroy, October 21, 1957, Preparedness Subcommittee 1957-1958 file (1st of 2), Armed Services Committee series, LBJ Senate Papers, LBJ Library.
delegation of Russell’s authority, rather than an opportunity to freelance. If necessarily, Russell knew he could personally intervene to put his colleague back on course, and he knew Johnson would respond.

Russell had a series of goals that he expected Johnson’s inquiry to achieve. At the most basic level, given that Sputnik had so captured public attention, Russell felt the Senate was obliged to have a public airing of the issue. Moreover, Russell understood that his fellow senators would continue to raise Sputnik as an issue, and not necessarily in a manner that accorded with Russell’s notions of responsibility. In this case, a SASC inquiry might serve to disarm other senators from seeking alternative venues from which to launch their own independent investigations that Russell could not control. On the other hand – and in seeming contrast to his concern for a responsible investigation – Russell also felt that a successful inquiry would benefit Johnson’s presidential ambitions, which Russell fully understood and supported. Russell would not have found this a contradiction, however. He accepted that good policy could also be good politics. Russell believed that Johnson could successfully use the inquiry to raise his stature on national security affairs without making the President or the country look weak, and without splitting the committee along partisan lines.

353 Johnson early on informed Styles Bridges (NH), that Russell feared how other senators would react in the absence of a formal inquiry. In particular, Johnson noted that Russell felt Symington had “a lot of information and would raise a lot of Hell, but it would not be in the national interest; he thinks we ought to go on and do the job.” Masc. Notes and Transcripts of Lyndon Johnson’s Pre-Pres Telephone conversation

354 Although McPherson acknowledged that he was not best positioned in Johnson’s staff to judge the senator’s motives, he “had the distinct impression that Johnson was trying to capitalize on the defense issue politically and at the same time was trying to show himself not as being bellicose but as being large in scope, so far as foreign relations were concerned.” McPherson also allowed that Johnson went to extraordinary lengths “to pound on the Pentagon in the question of space and did as much as anybody… to make them seem shortsighted, unable to comprehend the importance of the Russian space shot,” although
First and foremost, however, Russell was genuinely distressed with the state of U.S. ballistic missile programs, and with what he considered the Eisenhower administration’s lackadaisical response to the Sputnik launch. The President responded publicly to news of the launch by discounting its importance, noting that it “does not raise my apprehension, not one iota.”\textsuperscript{355} While Eisenhower in part sought to reassure the public with such words, he generally believed that there were no fundamental problems with U.S. ballistic missile and satellite programs, and that no reorganization or reprioritization was in order. The Air Force already had two first generation liquid-fueled ICBM programs underway (the Atlas and Titan) and was proceeding with development of a second generation solid-fueled ICBM (the Minuteman) that would require far less time to prepare prior to launch, thereby reducing its vulnerability to surprise attack. The Army, Navy, and Air Force each had IRBM programs underway (respectively, the, Jupiter, Polaris, and Thor). The Air Force was also close to fielding a ground-launched nuclear cruise missile called the Snark. More importantly for Eisenhower, however, was the fact that the U.S. already possessed an enormous nuclear strike force in the Strategic Air Command. In the event of any attack, Eisenhower believed SAC bombers would survive in sufficient numbers to lay waste to the Soviet Union’s cities and industrial areas. More importantly, he believed this fact was enough to deter a generally cautious Soviet leadership. Eisenhower’s ultimate goal was deterrence, and he did not believe that it was

\footnotesize{McPherson also allowed that Johnson probably sincerely felt the administration had been myopic in its view of the issue and had not committed the necessary resources to the missile program. McPherson, interview VIII, LBJ Library.}

\textsuperscript{355} Caro, 1027.
necessary to seek advantage in every weapons category at every moment in order to achieve it. It was therefore unjustified to expend yet additional sums in order to accelerate ongoing programs by perhaps a year or two, particularly when much of the investment was targeted on experimental capabilities that would become rapidly obsolescent, and when the benefit would be at best a marginal increase in the nation’s already substantial deterrence capabilities.

Russell fundamentally disagreed with the notions that all was well with either the U.S. ballistic missile program or the overall U.S.-Soviet strategic balance. As he told a crowd in Valdosta, GA, a few weeks after the Sputnik launch:

I have been amazed and dumbfounded by the apparent indifference of those in charge of our national government to the shocking news that Russia had successfully launched Sputnik, the amazing earth satellite. The American people are too intelligent to be lulled into a false sense of security by unrealistic assurances that this event is of no importance… Instead of trying to quiet justified fears with soft words, our national administration must appeal to the people for their talent, their resources and their efforts if we are to avoid destruction.356

Russell was not worried about any immediate strategic consequence resulting from Sputnik. Moreover, unlike some he does not appear to have been primarily concerned that the U.S. was entering a period of acute crisis. Instead, Russell was first and foremost worried about the longer-term trend in the U.S.-Soviet strategic balance – particularly the fact that Eisenhower seemed content with a deterrence concept that did not demand that the U.S. retain the advantage in the development of the ICBM, a technology that promised a true revolution in the strategic balance. Russell never felt that the U.S.

356 Excerpts from Russell remarks at Augusta, GA, October 15, 1957, Defense – Missiles and Satellites (Jan-Oct 57) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
necessarily had to pursue every one of the myriad of research and development programs in the strategic weapons field that the military Services either proposed or had ongoing. While some in Congress did come to see any Executive Branch effort to kill any such a program as a cause for concern, Russell was more subtle.\(^\text{357}\) He understood that not all development programs warranted deployment. While he might become intrigued by Service proposals, he could often be talked out of supporting them if the administration could present a compelling argument to the contrary. He agreed with Eisenhower that the overall cost of the U.S. defense program had to be contained, that deterrence was the ultimate goal of the U.S. defense program, and that deterrence did not require pursuing quantitative advantage in every conceivable category of weapon. However, Russell was more risk averse than Eisenhower with respect to the requirements for maintaining a balance in deterrents. Russell believed that there were certain key capabilities that threatened to destabilize the balance and to provide a critical advantage to the side that first developed and then aggressively produced them. Russell believed the ICBM was one such capability.\(^\text{358}\)

Again, it was the balance over time that worried Russell most. In his view, the deterrence balance had to be carefully tended. The U.S. could not afford to fall consistently behind the Soviets in the development of key strategic weapons and delivery systems. It was not the fact that the Soviets had achieved a short-term success that

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\(^\text{357}\) This broader congressional reaction was particularly true during McNamara’s tenure, although it is often difficult to disentangle congressional opposition based on strategic concerns from that based on constituent-service concerns.

\(^\text{358}\) In the next decade, he would believe the same about multiple reentry vehicle (MRV) development, which allowed the placement of multiple warheads on a single ICBM. Eventually, this capability expanded to include independent targeting for each warhead (i.e., the MIRV).
worried Russell. It was the fact that the Soviets had steadily been closing the technological gap, along with the fact that the Eisenhower administration seemed content to cede the advantage and even to allow the Soviets to pull consistently ahead. To Russell, the fact that the Eisenhower administration could cite multiple ongoing ICBM and IRBM development programs, along with the development of other more niche or ancillary capabilities such as the Snark, suggested that Eisenhower and his Secretaries of Defense were incapable of successfully prioritizing and integrating disparate efforts in order to ensure that human and material resources could be focused on the most important and promising capabilities. Russell accepted that there was a certain virtue in ongoing and duplicative research and development efforts – at least through early stages of development – in order to spur a competition of ideas and concepts that might in the end produce better systems. Russell did not feel that the Eisenhower administration was striking the proper balance.

This issue had been a concern for Russell and other SASC members for some time. Russell hoped the shock of Sputnik would prove a spur to Eisenhower. While Russell had directed Johnson to begin a preliminary staff investigation immediately, in early October he was not yet certain that there would be a full committee inquiry. Eisenhower’s public statements post-Sputnik did not assuage Russell’s concerns, however. Neither did the initial set of briefings that the Defense Department presented Russell, Johnson, and Styles Bridges (R-NH, and the preparedness subcommittee’s ranking Republican) a few weeks later in response to the subcommittee’s staff inquiry. At this point, Russell decided to have Johnson press ahead full bore. Russell must certainly have understood that any full inquiry was severely limited in its ability to actually
achieve any direct outcomes with respect to changing administration behavior. Congressional investigations generally had no levers to achieve such. Instead, Russell must have hoped that the inquiry would finally prod the administration to action by helping to focus media and public scrutiny on the issue of Eisenhower’s seeming lack of urgency. Even in this respect, Russell must have also understood that it would be difficult to prod someone with Eisenhower’s stature, experience, and confidence in his policy to actually change course. Still, Russell felt it was the SASC’s duty as the Senate’s principal defense oversight committee to try.

When Russell finally gave Johnson the full go ahead, he instructed that he wanted hearings to begin as quickly as possible. Johnson promised Russell he would begin hearings as soon as the staff could take preliminary testimony from scientists at the national laboratories and other prominent experts. Johnson took the investigation seriously. He supplemented the existing committee staff with scientists from Harvard and Rice University. He also tapped outside legal talent, hiring New York lawyer Edwin Weisl, Sr., as his general counsel. To support his efforts, Weisl brought his son, Edwin, Jr., along with Cyrus Vance, then a young attorney with Weisl’s firm. In order to attract serious scientific and legal talent, Johnson had to ensure them that he intended to conduct and honest, critical investigation, not a “witch hunt.”

In preparing and running the hearings, Johnson was careful to coordinate his position with Bridges. He stressed to Bridges that he intended to run a “national”

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investigation rather than a partisan one.\textsuperscript{360} Johnson wanted to avoid the partisan overtones that colored Symington’s air power subcommittee and the MacArthur hearings.\textsuperscript{361} Achieving consensus with Bridges was not terribly difficult, as both he and Johnson shared a common concern with respect Eisenhower’s attitude toward the nation’s missile and satellite programs. For example, in preparing the witness list, both agreed that it was necessary to begin with scientific experts who could elevate the debate, but who would also frame the issue in a manner consistent with the committee’s intent to stress the severity of the threat and the need for increased efforts. Johnson suggested Vannevar Bush, finding him “the most conservative and intelligent one in the bunch.” Bridges concurred, noting that he first met Bush during a briefing on the atomic bomb project in 1942. He continued, “I have always had the most high opinion of him. Of course, he is too liberal for me, but he is not wild-eyed.” Johnson noted Russell felt that “of all the atomic energy people he had dealt with, Bush had less fuzziness.” Both men selected Edward Teller on a similar basis, and the first day of testimony featured these two witnesses.

The hearings began on November 24, 1957. The main body of hearings completed by late January, although the subcommittee continued to call Defense Department witnesses through July of 1958. Over this time period, the subcommittee convened to hear more than five dozen witnesses over a total of twenty days. The subcommittee held

\textsuperscript{360} Transcript of telephone conversation between Johnson and Bridges, November 5, 1957, “Misc Notes and Transcripts of Lyndon Johnson’s Pre-Presidential Telephone Conversations” file, Notes and Transcripts series, LBJ Senate Papers, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{361} This reference refers to the efforts of a subset of the Joint committee’s Republican members to score political points against the Truman administration.
many of its sessions in secret, with Johnson and Bridges addressing the press side-by-side in post session briefings. During this time, the subcommittee staff members were the real drivers behind the investigation. They of course did most of the preparatory work, and even handled much of the preliminary questioning of witnesses during hearings. Johnson placed tight limits on the amount of time other members had to question witnesses.\textsuperscript{362} Typically, members had only five or ten minutes per witness, a practice many found displeasing. Ostensibly, Johnson enforced this policy in the interest of time, but this also limited other members’ abilities to deviate from the script that Johnson had prepared. Symington in particular felt he did not get an opportunity to develop his argument, and this strained the relationship between the two.\textsuperscript{363}

Throughout the winter, Johnson aide George Reedy fed his boss a stream of position papers describing the politics and policy outcomes that were at stake, and outlining the difficult tack Johnson should negotiate between partisanship and statesmanship. In one memo, Reedy noted the Sputnik could provide the Democratic Party a vital political bounce. The biannual congressional election is always a critical milestone in national politics. Sputnik occurred a year and a month before the 1958 election. Reedy pointed out that the Republican Party had fumbled through the early phase of the current cycle, troubled in particular by economic issues like rising inflation and small business failures, and declining farm prices. Over the summer of 1957, however, Republicans had found a lifeline in the civil rights issue. Eisenhower had

\textsuperscript{362} In addition to Brides and Johnson, the other members of the PISC during this time period were Symington, Estes Kefauver (D-TN), Stennis, Saltonstall, and Flanders.

\textsuperscript{363} Vance, interview, LBJ Library.
gained credit and respect both for passage of the 1957 Civil Rights Act, and for his use of federal troops in Little Rock to enforce a school desegregation ruling. Reedy offered that “in the integration issue they have a potent weapon which chews the Democratic Party to pieces so efficiently that there cannot be an effective opposition... The integration issue is not going to go away... The only possibility is to find another issue which is even more potent... It is conceivable that the Sputnik fulfills the requirement.”

Reedy did not suggest, however, that Johnson engage on Sputnik only from a perspective of political opportunism. Serious issues were at stake, and the American people needed to be alert to the Soviet challenge. It should not be downplayed, as the Eisenhower administration attempted; but neither should the public be whipped to frenzy. Rather, Reedy suggested the responsible course was to stress the urgency of the goal and the necessity of sacrifice to achieve it. The goal should not only be retaking the Soviets on the missile and space race. More important was to match them as a society in the development of scientific and technological expertise within the citizenry. Reedy felt Johnson should stress that the Eisenhower administration was failing to invest the dollars in education, research, and procurement necessary to address the array of deficits that had caused the U.S. to lapse behind the Soviets.

Reedy outlined for Johnson a theory of the relationship between technology and geopolitical primacy. Rome ruled the world because of its roads. The British dominated

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364 Reedy memo to Johnson Memo on Sputnik and politics, undated, “Reedy Memos, October 1957” file, George Reedy series, Office Files of the White House Aides, LBJ Library.

365 To highlight differences – if somewhat glibly – in presidential styles: Eisenhower responded by warning Americans of the military-industrial complex; Kennedy challenged them to go to the moon.
the sea. Americans for decades had dominated the air. The space race had now begun in earnest, and the Soviets could not be allowed to dominate this medium. Americans had been unwise to take blind faith in their capacity to lead the world in technology. Reedy noted that it took the Russians four years to catch up with the atom bomb and only nine months to catch up with the hydrogen bomb; “now we do not even have a timetable for catching up with their satellite.”

Johnson’s inquiry had to serve to responsibly educate the public. Reedy noted that the American people would heed the call to sacrifice to match the Sputnik accomplishment, but only if they understood the “whats” and “whys.” They would not do so only to meet some scientist’s curiosity. He argued:

The first step in developing the potentialities of the issue is a calm, dispassionate – and completely and sincerely non-political – inquiry by Congress... If the issue has merit to it, the politics will take care of themselves. If the issue has no merit to, there are no politics in it... The prime essential is public education... everything the Senate does next year is subordinate to this issue... Eventually, of course, the inquiry would have to produce a program. But that can be left to the future. This may be one of those moments in history when good politics and statesmanship are as close to each other as a hand in a glove.367 (Emphasis in the original)

In outlining a course for the hearings, Reedy emphasized that the preparedness subcommittee should not be a “board of strategy” or a “weapons evaluation group.” He felt that the basic error of Symington’s air power subcommittee was its implied presumption that “the defense of the United States is secured only when the military

366 Reedy memo to Johnson on Sputnik and politics, undated, LBJ Library.

367 Ibid.
leaders are granted all their requests.” Instead, Johnson should focus on past and future management questions. With respect to the missile program, Johnson should place particular emphasis on evaluating the administration’s effectiveness in identifying and prioritizing worthy program proposals, and in implementing them energetically and with sufficient resources. In all cases, Reedy urged that criticisms of administration management be specific and factual, and that the committee stress that mistakes – while needing to be acknowledged and remedied – were not equivalent to treason or blindness, but to poor judgment by men who were attempting to do their best for the country.

Reedy noted that there was broad support in Democratic circles to hit Eisenhower hard on these issues. Reedy suggested that such partisanship was legitimate to permit the transfer of power from one party to another, but argued that the 1960 election was too distant to allow this to be an overriding factor:

The next few years are absolutely critical to the survival of the United States... There is only one man who can do the jobs outlined above. That is the President of United States. There are many people who can make suggestions. But only the President can give the orders that mean our survival... If the Democrats spend the next three years attacking his record and the President spends the next three years defending his record then the country is lost and all of us had better try to get a charter seat on the first flight to the moon...

On the other hand, Reedy also urged that the subcommittee to drum it into the American public that the ability to place satellites in orbit had become a crucial capability and that

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368 Another Reedy memo to Johnson on Sputnik and politics, undated, “Reedy Memos, November 1957” file (1st of 2), George Reedy series, Office Files of the White House Aides, LBJ Library.

369 Ibid.

370 Reedy memo to Johnson on “playing politics,” undated, “Reedy Memos, November 1957” file (2nd of 2), George Reedy series, Office Files of the White House Aides, LBJ Library.
the U.S. “could have had the satellite but did not do so because of a leadership decision.” The American public had a short attention span, so at least some minimal amount of sensationalism was necessary to keep the public and the media interested in the subcommittee’s actions. “The columnists, unless they get some help, will soon run out of scare stories about mapping the earth with infra-red rays.” In other words, the committee should not grandstand, but neither could it ignore marketing. Johnson’s conduct of the investigation and his public behavior basically followed this extended script that Reedy laid out.

The testimony that the subcommittee heard between November and the following May tended to confirm members’ notions about the poor state of Defense Department missile program management. In mid-December, BeLieu wrote to Russell outlining his analysis of the main conclusions developed up to that point. He highlighted the following that he felt the testimony had borne out: 1) The lack of Defense Department leadership; 2) A lack of decision-making ability and organizational structure; 3) Too many committees; 4) A lack of over-all agreed-on policy understood by all; 5) A lack of funds.

As the main body of hearings reached their conclusion, subcommittee members decided against releasing a final report. This was largely because they intended January 1958 to mark not an end to the hearings, but rather a waypoint. Members decided on a

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371 Yet another Reedy memo to Johnson on Sputnik and politics, undated, “Reedy Memos, November 1957” file (1st of 2), George Reedy series, Office Files of the White House Aides, LBJ Library.

372 BeLieu memo to Russell on status of Johnson hearings, December 16, 1957, Defense – Missiles and Satellites (Nov-Dec 57) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 84th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
program of follow-up hearings every two to three months through 1959 “for the purpose of holding the feet of the Defense Department officials to the fire.”373 To this end, the subcommittee decided against writing a report and instead released a list of seventeen recommendations. These were apparently drafted quickly by Weisl and Vance, and received unanimous committee approval.374 Most of these were extremely general and demonstrated no great wisdom or substance. Several focused on improved management and increased resources for the ballistic missile program. However, they also included a demands to “Step up production schedules of Atlas, Thor, Jupiter, and accelerate the development of Titan,” and to “Accelerate the development of the Polaris missile system.” Such would seem to contradict the notion that the department needed to streamline its development efforts and eliminate duplication in order to accelerate the fielding of the most promising systems. The recommendations also included ancillary demands like “Modernize and strengthen the Strategic Air Force,” “Modernize and strengthen ground and naval forces,” and “Pour more effort into our antisubmarine program.” The recommendations also included a demand to “Reorganize the structure of the Defense Establishment,” which became a focus of the full committee’s efforts throughout 1958 – although Eisenhower’s defense reorganization proposals that year owed nothing to this particular recommendation.375

373 Vance, interview, LBJ Library.

374 Caro, 1028-9.

Johnson was able to claim certain accomplishments in terms of shaping the climate of executive decision-making and stimulating Eisenhower to action. The Defense Department paid attention to the subcommittee’s recommendations, putting in place procedures to make sure that it could account and get credit for any action it took – whether directly in reaction to the subcommittee or not – that evidenced responsiveness to the subcommittee’s recommendations.\textsuperscript{376} The Secretary of Defense met with subcommittee members in late-February to present an interim statement on Defense Department implementation of the recommendations. Similar meetings took place in July. In January 1958, Johnson released a statement claiming that the hearings had caused the Secretary of Defense to remove restrictions on overtime, restore funding to basic research, authorize Thor and Jupiter missile production, accelerate Atlas and Polaris development, authorize the creation of the Advanced Research Projects Administration (ARPA), and create an office of Director of Guided Missiles.\textsuperscript{377}

It is not possible to determine whether or not these actions would have occurred in the absence of the subcommittee’s inquiry. However, one gets the distinct sense that, throughout his tenure, Secretary McElroy was unsure of himself and his ability to lead the Defense Department, and more than a little intimidated in his dealings with Johnson, who rarely shied from using hard-nosed tactics with administration officials when he felt he could get away with it. It certainly seems plausible that, at least on the margin, the

\textsuperscript{376} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{377} Johnson public statement, January 23, 1958, Defense – ARPA file, Subcommittee on Real Estate and Military Construction files (82nd – 87th Congress), Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
subcommittee’s activities prompted McElroy to actions he might not otherwise have taken, although McElroy would soon have run into the brick wall of Eisenhower on his other side if he were tempted to go farther than the President desired. Eisenhower was not inclined to allow anyone to bully him into actions that he did not feel were sound on their merits. On the other hand, Russell’s objective in the hearings was not simply to raise the political heat on the administration (although this was part of it), but to present a sound factual basis and a strong argument for a change of course. Having done so, however, the SASC was then largely at the end of its rope. Although it could continue to revisit the issues on which Johnson’s subcommittee had focused whenever administration officials were called upon to testify, as long as the Armed Services Committees held to large standing authorizations they had limited ability to express themselves in positive legislative terms with regard to the programs in question. This ability defaulted to the Appropriations Committees. As Russell was also a dominant member of the Senate Appropriations Committee, this did not trouble him initially. Over the next year or so, however, Russell and other SASC members arrived at a different view as they began to consider the limitations of the Appropriations Committees in taking a holistic view of the defense program, and in linking resources to strategy. This is a topic for the next chapter.

It is difficult to track the administration’s attitude toward Johnson’s handling of the investigation. Early on, Secretary McElroy informed Johnson: “(We) very much appreciate the way you are approaching this. We think the subject is difficult enough, and if through your efforts it is kept out of partisan politics it will be for the good of the
public and we want to work with you.” However, in retrospect Bryce Harlow felt Johnson did “play too hard,” implying in particular that Johnson (along with Symington) was largely responsible for the post-Sputnik perception of a missile gap. He felt Johnson allowed the drive for “political publicity” to get the better of him, and that Johnson at least should have known that Eisenhower’s dismissal of the gap was accurate. Russell’s opinion of Johnson’s performance in this regard is not evident in the record.

While Harlow’s view that the subcommittee’s actions – as well as the Congress’s actions generally over the next several years – contributed to the perception of a missile gap has some basis, the perception of a gap had its roots less in Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee actions than in the varying estimates that different U.S. intelligence services produced with respect to expected Soviet ICBM inventories of the early 1960s. These estimates focused on assessment of Soviet production capabilities, and assumed the Soviets would produce to the maximum extent they were capable. The Air Force generally produced the highest estimates, but the CIA’s own 1958 estimate found that the Soviets could produce 500 ICBMs by 1961. This would have placed them well ahead of the U.S. However, photo reconnaissance intelligence that the U-2

378 Transcript of conversation between Johnson and McElroy, October 21, 1957, LBJ Library.

379 Harlow, interview, LBJ Library. On the other hand, Harlow felt Symington was largely protecting his flank, because as both Air Force Secretary and Senator he had pressed for more bombers rather than faster missile development.


381 By December 1961, the U.S. had deployed 63 Atlas and Titan ICBMs, although it also had a significant IRBM capability deployed in Allied countries in the vicinity of the Soviet Union – a capability the Soviets could not match, although they soon tried with respect to Cuba. On U.S. ICBM figures, see Desmond Ball, Politics and Force Levels: The Strategic Missile Program of the Kennedy Administration (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 50.
aircraft supplied over the next several years failed to confirm such high estimates of Soviet capabilities. By 1961, CIA estimates of Soviet ICBM strength for the next year decreased to about 150, although the Air Force still estimated around 300.382

John Kennedy emphasized the apparent existence of a missile gap throughout his presidential campaign. Eisenhower, not wanting to tip his hand with respect to U2 capabilities, presented no concrete evidence to support his denials of the gap’s existence. In March 1961, however, Robert McNamara concluded, “The phrase ‘missile gap’ is now a genuinely misleading one, and I think the President can safely say so.”383 Despite the evidence that Kennedy’s election claims had been false, administration officials rationalized that, if the President had benefited politically from the illusion of a gap, at least he was correct with respect to the broader state of unpreparedness in which Eisenhower’s policies had left the nation. In a memo for National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, McNamara aide Adam Yarmolinsky wrote:

If we were asked, in a political context, what was the difference between Mr. McNamara denying there was a gap and the Eisenhower Administration saying the same thing, the answer is this: Under Eisenhower, the denial that there was no gap was accompanied by a belief, at the highest levels, that our defense posture was adequate; under the new Administration, the denial was accompanied by an intense awareness that although we were not in immediate great danger, urgent immediate steps were nevertheless needed to improve our defense position.384

382 Ibid., 95.


Most SASC members would have eagerly agreed with this premise, both in 1957 and in 1961. With respect to the development of SASC oversight procedures, Johnson’s post-Sputnik investigation simply reinforced preexisting notions that the committee might have to take a more assertive role in pressing the better management upon the Defense Department. The focal point of SASC thinking in this regard now turned to the debate over reorganization proposals for the Defense Department.
Reorganizing the Defense Department

With Sputnik, reorganization of the Defense Department again became a hot topic in defense policy circles. Reformers looked for ways to better streamline lines of authority and to better manage complex inter-departmental processes in order to meet the Soviet challenge more effectively. Johnson had included this topic in his subcommittee’s list of recommendations following its missile and satellite investigation, but the idea by no means originated there. Other members of the Senate, both within and outside the SASC, had strong opinions on defense reorganization. Several members proposed reorganization legislation in one form or another. As events unfolded, however, the Congress was not a major player in formulating a concept for reorganization. Eisenhower was himself an advocate for reorganization, and his proposals would form the baseline for the congressional debate on the subject.385

Within the Congress, defense reorganization fell squarely within the jurisdiction of the two Armed Services Committees. As we will see, the House committee strongly

385 Given that his first two Secretaries of Defense – otherwise capable men – had experienced such difficulties in managing the Department inclined Eisenhower to believe that the basic problem was at least as much structural and statutory as personal. To some degree, Eisenhower also regarded the problem as normative, and he was looking for a statement from the Congress that it considered the Secretary of Defense the Department’s chief executive and principal manager.
opposed several of Eisenhower’s proposals. In the Senate, Russell’s view would as usual prove the last word on the matter. Russell doubted the main premise of Eisenhower’s reorganization proposal – that the Secretary of Defense lacked a sufficiently clear basis of authority in the law to effectively run the Department and tame Service obstructionism. As in the House, there were also certain specific measures in Eisenhower’s proposal that Russell actively opposed. However, his basic premise in handling the Senate’s side of this issue was that, whatever his specific reservations, he would work to craft a legislative compromise to which both Houses of Congress and the President could agree.

This case is of particular interest in highlighting both norms of SASC behavior and patterns of Russell’s relationship with the Executive Branch. In addition, it clearly demonstrates Russell’s expectation that the Secretary of Defense was ultimately responsible for leading the department. Russell doubted Eisenhower’s proposals with respect to increasing the Secretary’s authority not because he opposed strong secretarial leadership, but because he felt additional statutory changes were unnecessary. In his view, the Secretary already had all the authority he needed. Eisenhower’s Secretaries had only lacked the spine to use their authority. Even as committee oversight procedures began to evolve rapidly after 1958, Russell never fundamentally deviated from the notion that the Congress should look to the Secretary for strong, centralized management of the Department, and that Congress should intervene aggressively in inter-Departmental programmatic disputes only by exception.

Eisenhower first mentioned the need for another round of defense reorganization in his January 1958 State of the Union message. His proposal was based on the work of a long-term Rockefeller Brothers Fund study that Eisenhower had commissioned in 1956.
The study’s purpose was to “define the major problems and opportunities” facing the United States in the late 1950s, “to clarify national purposes and objectives,” and to develop principles which could serve as the basis of national policy.”\(^{386}\) Henry Kissinger directed the project. The study operated with several panels focused on specific topics. After Sputnik, the defense panel rushed its work on defense reorganization for public release, publishing an interim report in December 1957.

The Rockefeller Brothers’ Fund study constituted but the latest in a series of reform proposals spanning the preceding decade and designed to produce more efficient and more joint decision-making within the Defense Department. In 1958 the National Security Act was only eleven years old, and Congress had already amended it on two previous occasions. As noted previously, the basic impetus for the “unification” of the Services that culminated in the National Security Act of 1947 grew from lessons learned during World War II – that distinct sea, air, and land campaigns would no longer be the normal mode of military operations, and that the Services would need to join their capabilities to operate in a combined arms framework. The principal advocates for a tight unification under a single department and Chief of Staff came from the U.S. Army, and they focused specifically on integrating the military Services. The principal opposition to this came from the Navy. They argued against a strong central authority, and focused their proposals on rationalizing the broader inter-departmental national security apparatus.

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The Navy’s position largely won out in 1947. The National Security Act did not create the Department of Defense, *per se*. Instead, the act used the Navy’s terminology of a “National Military Establishment.” This establishment amounted to a loose confederation. Rather than creating a single cabinet-level military department, the act created three. It separated the Air Force from the Army and elevated the former to full cabinet status alongside its two sister Services. The act also created the position of Secretary of Defense to coordinate the activities of the Services. However, in contrast to the large Service bureaucracies, the act authorized only minimal staff to assist the Secretary. The Secretary’s coordinating powers were weak, and little in the way of real unification could be achieved through this office.

This was in part because the bill’s sponsors looked not to the civilian leadership but to the military to achieve greater Service unification – or at least *de facto* unification under the guise of Joint decision-making. The act institutionalized the Joint Chiefs of Staff, which originally formed as an *ad hoc* organization during World War II so that the U.S. would have a corporate body to coordinate with the British Combined Chiefs of Staff. While in theory the JCS provided a mechanism for inter-Service governance, the act did not provide the JCS a formal chairman, and authorized only a small staff to support the Service chiefs in their joint duties. Implicitly acknowledging the impediments to achieving joint, non-parochial governance through the JCS system, the act also wrote certain Service roles and missions into law. In doing so, it effectively safeguarded the continued existence of naval aviation and of the Marine Corps, which Air Force and Army advocates, respectively, had sought to incorporate into their Services. The Act also created the statutory basis for unified military commands. These would oversee either a
specific global geographic region or a specific functional area, such as transportation. Unified commanders would join the capabilities of the Services under a single command structure, either for war-fighting or to execute support functions in the commander’s respective areas of responsibility. As a further decrement to real unification, however, the act allowed the Air Force Chief of Staff and the Chief of Naval Operations to retain statutory command and control authority over portions of their forces.

Initial assessments of the act’s effectiveness were distinctly negative. In particular, the confederate arrangement among the Service departments worked poorly in achieving greater integration and minimizing inter-Service disputes over functions and budget shares. Subsequent rounds of defense reorganization would focus on two areas: increasing the Secretary of Defense’s authority and staff resources, and attempting to enhance the JCS as a truly joint body that would effectively integrate service capabilities and functions. In 1949, the Armed Services Committees reported language to amend the National Security Act, this time formally creating the Department of Defense. These amendments demoted the Service secretaries to sub-cabinet status. They also enlarged the Secretary of Defense’s staff, authorizing an official deputy and three assistant secretary positions. This began the steady trend toward increased OSD control over Defense Department management. The 1949 amendments also formally created the position of Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, but only as a non-voting member (the Chairman would not become by law the principal military adviser to the President and Secretary of Defense until the 1985 Goldwater-Nichols Act).

In 1953, Congress again amended the National Security Act to enlarge the size of the Joint Staff that supported JCS functions, although it still remained small in
comparison to the Service bureaucracies. The Congress also gave the Chairman control over the Joint Staff. In addition, the 1953 amendments abolished a number of defense boards and agencies created in 1947. Their functions transferred to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. To execute, the Secretary received six additional Assistant Secretaries and a General Counsel.

As we have already seen, with respect to improving the management of the Defense Department and increasing the level of joint decision-making and interdependence, the results of this additional series of reorganizations proved disappointing as well. While many reform advocates, including many on the SASC, hoped to see the JCS evolve as a corporate body capable of making unified policy and program recommendations based upon best joint military judgment, this proved unachievable in practice and was largely naïve in conception. The bureaucratic and cultural factors that drove Service departments to adopt contradictory policy and programmatic preferences could simply not be overcome in so short a timeframe (if ever), particularly when the Joint Chiefs retained responsibility for leading their respective Services, and when the staff apparatus that supported the Chairman remained handicapped in its ability to match the size of and the corporate knowledge resident in the Service bureaucracies. This did not mean that the JCS mechanism was an utter failure. Far from it. It simply meant that the JCS was inherently hamstrung from achieving the level of managerial success for which its most optimistic advocates hoped, and no amount of organizational tinkering could change this over any short span of time.

While the following series of Joint Staff correspondences post-dates the 1958 reorganization act, it is revealing regarding the limitations of the JCS as a corporate
decision-making body. It begins in June 1959 with consideration of the FY 1961 budget submission. The following memo, quoted at length, originated with a U.S. Navy Captain who served as Military Assistant to the Chairman:

In presenting the budget this year to the Congress, it was obvious to all that the Joint Chiefs of Staff were not in agreement. An attempt was made to play down this lack of agreement by the memorandum which all Chiefs signed regarding the adequacy of the over-all Budget. This playdown was quickly negated on the public record by the testimony of the individual Service Chiefs and by the statements of reservations with regard to this year's Budget, which each Chief was required to submit to the Johnson Preparedness Subcommittee... I will admit that the critical language employed by the Committee in taking the Joint Chiefs of Staff to task for this lack of agreement is harsher than I would have anticipated. At the same time, there is no question in my mind but that their remarks are true and are not subject to reclama... Our actions at this level have now caused our split papers to be transferred to Capitol Hill. The congressmen are not finding it any easier to resolve the splits than we have at the level of the Joint Chiefs of Staff... There is some possibility that we might be able to say that we are now beginning to reorganize ourselves in accordance with the Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1958 and that the future should see a substantial unanimity of opinion among the Joint Chiefs of Staff. This I believe to be a very weak statement because it just simply isn't true. The Joint Chiefs of Staff have faced these problems since their existence, and nothing has occurred in the Reorganization Act that would cause the problems to dissolve and disappear... Perhaps our studies now under way with regard to Joint Chiefs of Staff participation in formulation of the FY '61 Budget will enable us to retrieve at least part of the ground that we have lost in the hassle this year.387

These study efforts achieved little. As Chairman Nathan Twining wrote to other Chiefs in November concerning their participation in developing the FY 1961 budget, “Although the Joint Chiefs of Staff have consumed a considerable number of hours in discussing the formulation of the FY 1961 budget, no firm recommendations regarding major military

387 Captain L. P. Gray III, USN (Military Assistant to the Chairman) memo to General Picher, June 2, 1959, CJS 111 (1959) file, Papers of Chairman General Nathan F. Twining series, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, National Archives, Washington, DC.
programs have been reached; nor have the Joint Chiefs of staff prepared a statement of military implications inherent in the data made available to date.” 388 The following June, Air Force Chief of Staff Thomas White wrote to Twining pointing out that, despite Defense Secretary Thomas Gates’ guidance, no progress had yet been made in deviating from the preparation of unilateral service budgets. He characterized the preliminary submissions he had reviewed as having “no JCS corporate significance,” and suggested that they should not yet be forwarded to the Secretary. 389

Ten months later, and only days after new Secretary Robert McNamara had received wide SASC acclaim for the thoroughness and thoughtfulness of his initial presentations to the committee, General White presented the SASC with the Air Force’s 1961 posture statement. Russell asked whether the JCS had studied the cutback in an Air Force bomber program (the B-70). White replied that the JCS as a corporate body did not study the B-70 question, although recommendations from the various services were obtained. The Army and Navy recommended various stages of R&D for the B-70, while the Air Force recommended production. White also testified that, to his knowledge, the JCS had never studied the Polaris ballistic missile submarine, and as a rule the JCS studied weapons systems only at the Secretary of Defense’s request. 390

388  Twining memo to the other Joint Chiefs of Staff, November 10, 1959, CJCS 111 (1959) file, Papers of Chairman General Nathan F. Twining series, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, National Archives, Washington, DC.

389  White to Twining, June 4, 1960, CJCS 111 (1960) file, Papers of Chairman General Nathan F. Twining series, Records of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff, RG 218, National Archives, Washington, DC.

390  Summary of Air Force posture hearings, April 11, 1961, C381/032 Congressional hearings 1961 (sec 412b – 1st, 87th Cong) file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to
If the JCS could not achieve reformers’ goals with respect to department decision-making, the fallback was the Office of the Secretary of Defense. While SASC members felt more comfortable with military rather than civilian professional judgment, in the end they understood both the necessity for civilian control and the fact that the buck in the Defense Department eventually had to stop with the Secretary. Much like the Congress, the JCS remained a corporate body based upon consensus decision-making – or more accurately “recommendation-making,” as the JCS had no executive authority. Not so for OSD. The Secretary had the capacity for real executive leadership. While members of Congress generally preferred that tough decisions had consensus Service buy-in, the absence of this did not excuse the Secretary from leading. While reform advocates continued to look for ways to streamline the JCS and increase the authority and influence of the Chairman, eyes steadily drifted to the Secretary as the individual who must ultimately run the department. The task, as many reformers came to see it, was providing the Secretary clear statutory and normative authority (i.e., both means and expectations), and then finding someone who would actually use it.

Eisenhower formally submitted his reorganization proposal to Congress on April 3, 1958. The President stressed that previous reorganization efforts had not gone far enough in centralizing departmental authority under the Secretary of Defense, in enabling the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs to effectively advise the Secretary, or in allowing for truly unified combatant commands. The President highlighted several themes in the

Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Record Group 335, National Archives, Washington, DC.
transmittal message accompanying his proposal, particularly the needs for efficiency in defense spending and the avoidance of unnecessary duplication in service programs, organizations, and missions. This language constituted an effort to turn on its head congressional criticism of his administration. Congressional fear over excessive centralization had been a rampant theme in the earlier debate over the National Security Act. Eisenhower suggested that it was this legacy that hamstrung his secretaries, and that it did so in two respects. First, he suggested the Secretary still lacked a sufficient statutory basis for exercising full authority over the Services. Second, he suggested that the legacy of the prior reorganization debates left in place the notion that the Congress remained supportive of a certain degree of Service independence, and that the Services could tap this reservoir of implied congressional intent in disputes with the Secretary. Although Congress had on two occasions since 1947 sought to clarify and enhance the Secretary's authority, Eisenhower argued that there was in fact still work to be done.

The President noted that in debates over both the original act and subsequent amendments, members of Congress had expressed fears over the consolidation of service roles and missions (for example, the consolidation of Navy air assets under the Air Force), or even the abolition of entire services (read “the Marine Corps”). The President argued that his proposals would clarify the authority of the Secretary of Defense, increase Defense Department efficiency, and sharply reduce inter-Service rivalry. He warned that to “sanction administrative confusion and interservice debate is, in these times, to court disaster.” The President urged, “We must cling no longer to statutory barriers that
weaken executive action and civilian authority. We must free ourselves of emotional attachments to service systems of an era that is no more.”

Despite the drama of his transmittal message, most of the President’s reorganization proposals did not prove controversial. The President recommended twelve changes to the National Security Act. Nine passed the Congress easily. For starters, the President requested that Congress strengthen the authority of the unified commands by providing that only the Secretary of Defense – rather than the Services – could assign or remove forces subordinate to the unified commander. Similarly, the President proposed fully removing Service secretaries and chiefs-of-staff from the operational chain of command, which would then flow from the President to the Secretary of Defense, and on to the unified and specified commanders.

Further, the President requested that Congress expand or remove restrictions on the size of the Joint Staff, and authorize the Chairman to assign the staff duties and to appoint the staff Director. He argued that this would make the Joint Staff more effective in providing planning and operational assistance to the Secretary of Defense and the President. Eisenhower also proposed allowing service Chiefs to delegate significant Service-oriented responsibilities to their Vice Chiefs, thus allowing the Chiefs to make JCS duties their primary responsibilities. Next, Eisenhower proposed repeal of the

391 Presidential message on the defense establishment, April 3, 1958, S. 3544 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

392 In fact, the Congress determined that the changes in command relationship from the President to the unified Commanders-in-Chief required no change in law. Committee deliberation on H. R. 12541, July 17, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
National Security Act provision that made the Chairman of the JCS a non-voting member. Although the JCS did not operate by voting, the President felt that the Chairman’s non-voting status tended to diminish his authority with the Service chiefs.

Last among the more noteworthy of Eisenhower’s less controversial proposals was one designed to improve the Defense Department’s organization for research and development, principally by making the Secretary’s control over funds and organization complete and unchallengeable. To achieve this, the President proposed creating a Director of Defense Research and Engineering, with enhanced pay and protocol rank, to replace the Assistant Secretary of Defense for Research and Engineering. Among other things, the Director would supervise all Defense Department R&D activities, direct those requiring centralized management, assess and remedy R&D gaps, and with the Secretary’s approval eliminate unpromising or duplicative efforts and approve promising projects for development and production.

Three of the President’s proposals did draw congressional criticism, however. The first dealt with how the National Security Act described the organization of the Service departments. Under the existing language, the departments were described as “separately administered.” The President argued that this language served as a device to allow the Services to dispute the Secretary’s authority by asserting that, under the National Security Act, the Congress intended the Service secretaries to exercise significant authority over their departments free from the Secretary's control. Secretary McElroy subsequently stressed that, while the Service departments had never directly challenged his authority, the National Security Act’s description of “separately administered” Services helped foster a divisive spirit within the department. While he conceded that the President’s
proposals did not foreclose on the possibility of further department divisiveness, he believed they would inhibit the norm of such behavior.\textsuperscript{393}

The President called for removing the “separately administered” language from the act, and replacing it with “separately organized.” He also called for the Congress to empower Assistant Secretaries of Defense to act in the Secretary’s name and with his full authority. Eisenhower argued that it was necessary for the Secretary to delegate significant duties to his assistants in order to manage the department effectively, and indicated that they needed to operate with the same clearly-defined authority with respect to the Services that the Secretary required.

The President’s second controversial proposal called for enhancing the Secretary of Defense’s authority to transfer, reassign, abolish, or consolidate Service functions. As with the previous proposal, the President argued that this was necessary to buttress the Secretary of Defense’s authority over the Department by eliminating the perception that it was Congress's intent to establish certain Service-specific preserves outside of the Secretary's control. The President also argued that this change was necessary to achieve the administrative efficiencies and the elimination of Service duplication and competition to which so many members of Congress objected.

The third proposal that drew congressional criticism involved repealing the right of Service secretaries and chiefs to present their views to Congress on their own initiative. The President subsequently labeled such conduct as “legalized insubordination.” Debate over this point proved somewhat confused. On its face, the

\textsuperscript{393} July 2, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
issue was not whether a secretary or chief had the right to offer his own opinion while testifying before Congress. The issue was whether or not a secretary or chief could request to testify before Congress on his own initiative on an issue about which he felt strongly. This right was codified in the National Security Act, but as of 1958 no secretary or chief had yet exercised it. As with the previous proposals, the President argued that the mere existence of this stipulation in the National Security Act weakened the Secretary's authority over the Department.

The House Armed Services Committee proved a vocal source of opposition to these three proposals, and offered up its own solutions as replacements. As Eisenhower wished, the bill the House reported amended the National Security Act’s language to specify that the military departments were “separately organized,” but added language that the departments would operate under the authority, direction, and control of the Secretary of Defense as “exercised through the respective secretaries of such departments.” The administration argued that this stipulation undermined one of its basic intentions for the legislation, that is, to eliminate divisiveness and duplication by removing the ability of the recalcitrant in the Services to argue that it was Congress’s intent to invest significant – perhaps independent – authorities within the military departments. Regarding the President’s provision enhancing the Secretary of Defense’s authority to transfer, abolish, consolidate, or reassign combatant functions, the House bill provided that, upon objection by at least one military service chief, the Congress could
block the Secretary’s decision with a concurrent resolution. Finally, the House bill preserved the right of secretaries and chiefs to make independent appeals to the Congress.

It was now the Senate’s turn. Russell had for some time been critical of what he perceived as wasteful and unnecessary service duplication under the weak leadership of successive Secretaries of Defense. However, Russell did not believe that another round of reorganization necessarily provided the solution. He felt that previous reorganization efforts had provided the Secretary all the authority he needed. As Russell argued in January 1958, “A strong, two-fisted Secretary of Defense, with the support of the President, can do great deal of coordinating with the department.” Similarly, in his opening statement as the SASC took up the reorganization bill that June, Russell announced to his fellow Senators:

> From some of the statements and reports supporting various reorganization proposals, a person unfamiliar with the legislative history in this field could almost get the impression that the Secretary of Defense is powerless – a mere figurehead – and that the Congress has made no provision for the unified, strategic direction of military services, and that the Army, Navy, and Air Force were going independent ways in preparing for separate wars on the land, on the sea, and in the sky. Speaking for himself, the Chair desires to assure anyone with such an impression that it is without factual foundation.

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394 A concurrent resolution requires approval from both houses of Congress but does not require the President’s signature.


396 Russell opening statement before the SASC, June 17, 1958, H. R. 12541 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
In Russell’s view, what the Department needed was a Secretary willing to use the ample power Congress had already afforded him. Reflecting on what he regarded as the crux of his difficulty with the administration’s premise, Russell subsequently noted that the tendency of bureaucracies to guard privilege was natural:

It is one of the first instincts of human nature to retain what they regard as being their power and the power to carry out their duties, and I do not think if we went so far as to abolish and do away with the separately organized theory and merge the Department that you are going to completely eliminate that because you are going to have to have some divisions within a department… And I come right back to it that this depends on two-fisted tough administration and the use of authority rather than depending on some remote psychology that will grow out of an act passed by the Congress…

Russell did not believe the problem was primarily localized at or near the Service secretary level. Individuals in these positions were generally close enough to the Defense Secretary to yield to his superior authority. At the lower bureaucratic levels, on the other hand, prerogatives and powers necessarily accrued no matter the organizational structure, and only tough administration could overcome these.

In researching the President’s proposal, the SASC staff turned up a March 1953 legal opinion from then Defense Department General Counsel H. Struve Hansel that supported Russell’s premise. Hansel concluded that the Secretary of Defense had by statute “full and complete authority, subject only to the President and certain specific restrictions… over the Department of Defense, all its agencies, subdivisions, and personnel. To make this statement perfectly plain, there are no separately administered

397 July 2, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

398 Ibid.
preserves within the Department of Defense.” On the other hand, previous SASC staff analysis had supported the merits of the President's position. In a May 1957 memo to Saltonstall regarding the mechanics of appropriations procedures – specifically, the fact that all military department appropriations requests needed specific approval from the Secretary of Defense, as exercised through the Comptroller’s Office – Darden wrote:

This procedure would appear to go a long way toward giving the Secretary of Defense the practical means of requiring more unification and less duplication, competition, and parallel action. However, as long as services are “separately administered” and combatant functions cannot be “abolished, transferred, reassigned, or consolidated,” persons who oppose some particular action of the Secretary of Defense always will have a weapon to support their argument that congressional intent expressed in the National Security Act is being flouted.

Still, Darden conceded that, whatever the organizational structure, competition would remain a reality within the Department.

Despite Russell’s misgivings about the President’s underlying premise, he agreed with the wisdom of the less controversial proposals outlined above. Even where he disagreed with the President, from Russell’s perspective the pressing issue was to find a middle ground between the House and the President in order to achieve a compromise bill. As he announced to his committee:

I am not at all impressed with the absolute necessity of this bill. I think the change of command provisions are very good, but the Department of

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399 BeLieu memo to Russell, April 4, 1958, S. 3649 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

400 Darden memo to Saltonstall, May 1, 1957, “Saltonstall, Leverett” file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Defense is very anxious to get a bill and I have been trying to help them as far as I could.\textsuperscript{401}

Russell worked behind the scenes coordinating with administration officials to strike compromise language that could achieve consensus. While all such provisions would be subject to committee debate and approval, Russell was as always the committee’s dominant figure. The SASC’s bill would be Russell’s bill. He would craft all compromise proposals before he brought them before the committee.

This was clear as the committee met to mark-up its version of the bill on July 15, 1958. Always outwardly mindful of other members’ dignity, Russell announced that he had “taken the liberty of preparing some amendments merely for purpose of discussion.” He assured the Committee that they were based on extensive discussion with the Defense Department officials, and – in a bow to bipartisanship – that Saltonstall had participated in all but one discussion.\textsuperscript{402} He further assured that he had discussed the matter with the President and some of his military advisors, and he had attempted to remain faithful to the “sense of the Committee” as developed during the prior hearings.\textsuperscript{403}

Russell first took up the House provision stipulating that the Secretary’s authority would be “exercised through the respective Secretaries of such Departments.” He announced that this language constituted the most severe dispute between the President and the House, and that the controversy about it “far overshadows any of the other

\textsuperscript{401} Committee deliberation on H. R. 12541, July 15, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{402} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{403} Ibid.
amendments.\textsuperscript{404} Russell’s version deleted the House language and added a provision that Assistant Secretaries could issue orders to the military departments only when the Secretary of Defense had expressly delegated such authority. Further, the Secretary of Defense or his designees could not bypass the secretaries of the military departments in issuing orders. Orders could only flow through the Service secretaries or their designated subordinates. Russell and Saltonstall stated flatly that the Defense Department had drafted this substitute language, while they had only changed around the wording and added minor clarifying language. Some committee members – notably Symington – argued that in fact the department required greater unification than the current bill allowed. Symington at first suggested that he wished to propose an amendment to address this, but quickly relented in the face of Russell’s implied opposition.

Russell next turned to the proposal to increase the Secretary’s authority to redefine Service functions. Where Russell had questioned the need of the previous proposal, he objected to this one outright. As he explained:

\begin{quote}
This provision of the bill has caused me more trouble than any other provision because I had no misgivings about the authority of the Secretary of Defense, but I do have some very strong feelings about the powers of Congress as an equal branch of the government.\textsuperscript{405}
\end{quote}

The President’s bill only required that the Secretary notify Congress of changes he intended to make. Russell, on the other hand, felt that it was essential for Congress retain the ability to veto the Secretary’s alteration of “major combatant functions” (the meaning of which remained undefined), even if in practice he believed that the Congress would be

\textsuperscript{404} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{405} Ibid.
reluctant to do so.\textsuperscript{406} His alternate proposal went further than that of the House. The House had insisted on a congressional veto in the form of a concurrent resolution. Under Russell’s proposal, either one of the Armed Services Committees would have the authority to determine whether the change the Secretary proposed in fact impacted a “major combatant function,” and further, if in so doing it impaired the defense of the United States. Having met this standard, the Secretary’s proposal would go to a floor vote up or down, leaving the veto decision to a single house of Congress. Russell argued that in reality it was unlikely any such vote would ever take place. However, he felt “very strongly” that the Secretary of Defense, an appointed official, should not be granted greater powers than the Congress ever granted the President. Russell further noted that the one house veto had always been a provision in the law with respect to redefining combatant functions, and that the Congress was giving the Secretary absolute authority over certain functions and capabilities, such as the supply services and weapons programs.

Saltonstall noted that Russell’s language should pacify the Marines, the National Guard, and the Reserves, as they would have the opportunity to appeal to the Congress if the Secretary became too aggressive.\textsuperscript{407} Russell intervened to clarify that he was not concerned with the National Guard or Marines, but with the integrity of the Congress.

\textsuperscript{406} Recall the discussion between Russell and Case referenced at the start of Chapter 3.

\textsuperscript{407} The Marines perennially feared that the Army designed to wrest them from the Navy and incorporate them — a fear not ungrounded. Based on their World War II victories, the Marines developed enormous prestige in the Congress. Moreover, they and an extremely effective liaison apparatus in the Congress, as well as a reputation for being exceptionally frugal with appropriated funds and for maximizing the effectiveness of every dollar they spent. The National Guard and Reserves each had very influential constituencies in the states, which translated to enormous clout in Congress.
Saltonstall continued, noting that he disagreed with Russell – as did McElroy – that it should only take the vote of one House rather than a concurrent resolution to bring about a congressional veto, but Saltonstall concluded that he would support Russell’s position. The remainder of the Committee offered no objection, and engaged in no meaningful debate.

Finally, Russell turned to the third contentious proposal, that which eliminated the ability of Service secretaries and chiefs to approach the Congress to testify on their own accord. At least with respect to the Service chiefs, he opposed this provision as too great a surrender of congressional prerogative for no conceivable gain in the Department’s efficiency or effectiveness. However, he was willing to strike a compromise by removing the right of Service secretaries to approach Congress on their own volition. He noted that the administration felt most strongly about restricting the secretaries, in any case. Saltonstall interjected, noting that in meetings with the Secretary of Defense and his advisors, they felt least strongly about this among the three amendments. The Committee passed the wording with minimal debate.\footnote{July 15, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.}

Despite their perfunctory approval of Russell’s language, many committee members worried the President’s proposal portended a wider effort to restrict the flow of information to the Congress. Along with the proposed changes to the law, Eisenhower had directed the Secretary to increase his control over Service legislative liaison activities – an action within the President’s power that did not require congressional sanction. As Jackson remarked:
As a realistic matter, it is not possible for us to know what is going on down there unless (the Services) speak out, because we all have our problems and things to attend to. Unless there is the kind of climate within the Pentagon that these people can speak out, when they feel it is of vital importance… We do not want to be involved with every petty squabble going on in the Pentagon, but I can cite a lot of cases where had they listened to these people, we would be a lot better off today.  

Russell took such concerns over information flow seriously. One episode during the SASC’s hearings had allowed Russell to demonstrate the committee’s seriousness. In mid-June, Chief of Naval Operations Arleigh Burke had testified before the committee that, despite the President’s position, he felt that two of the three House amendments were “properly included.” This issue came up during a June 21 press conference with the Secretary of Defense. McElroy commented that, although he never ordered Burke to testify a certain way, he had stressed to Burke the President’s position prior to these comments. When pressed, McElroy stated that he was disappointed in Burke and regarded his behavior as regrettable, although he insisted he would not seek to remove him as CNO.

Russell saw this as an opportunity to impress upon the administration that the “sense of Congress” demanded that senior officials – particularly the military leadership – must be expected testify to the Congress without restriction. On June 23, Russell cited McElroy’s admonishment of Burke as evidence of the necessity for Congress to

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409 July 17, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

410 Transcript of McElroy press conference, June 21, 1958, H. R. 12541 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

411 Ibid.
statutorily guarantee that the military leadership could approach the Congress on their on
volition. Russell, in turn admonished McElroy for advising the military chiefs “that their
testimony to the committees of Congress must be given in the light of their knowledge of
the views of the Executive Branch.” Russell announced that he would cancel scheduled
testimony from Army Chief of Staff Maxwell Taylor and Commandant of the Marine
Corps Randolph Pate until he was sure “they may testify in complete candor.”

Two days later, McElroy responded with a letter explaining his position. While he
argued that that his “honest statement of disappointment” did not “constitute a rebuke or
an indication of possible reprisal,” he publicly affirmed the position the department
officials should be expected to “give their personal judgments and opinions when asked
for them,” without fear of reprisal (emphasis added). This satisfied Russell, and he
resumed the hearings.

Senate floor debate on the SASC bill was, as usual, perfunctory. Eisenhower had
requested that Russell seek a formal “sense of the Senate” resolution in favor of the
Secretary’s authority. Russell declined, but in presenting the bill to the Senate, he stressed
to his colleagues that the bill should put to rest any ambiguity about the Secretary of
Defense’s authority:

(If) these provisions become law, the power of the Secretary of Defense
and persons to whom he delegates authority should be as complete as
words in a statute can make them. It is elementary that the Congress
cannot administer the laws. I hope that approval of this language will

(1958) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S.
Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

413 McElroy letter to Russell, June 25, 1958, H. R. 12541 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services,
85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
make clear that everything within the Department of Defense is the business of the Secretary of Defense, and that his instructions and policies are superior to any authority there.\footnote{Russell floor remarks (excerpts from July 17 1958, \textit{Congressional Record}), H. R. 12541 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.}

With respect to the roles and missions issue, Russell took the opportunity to likewise affirm the principle that Congress was a coequal branch of government. Despite the fact that it had willfully ceded most of the initiative for policy formulation to the Executive Branch, it had at least to remain on guard against complete submission.

To those who have any reservation about the wisdom or desirability of permitting Congress to disapprove changes in functions, I would invite attention to the fact that the functions subject to such disapproval are those established by law. The Congress approved them and if it is to surrender the complete power to negate Congressional enactments, this, to me, is almost an admission that we are unwilling or unable to discharge our constitutional obligation.\footnote{Ibid.}

Certain Senators – including Symington, Stennis, Goldwater, and Case – spoke of the need for greater Defense Department unification, if not an outright abolition of the Service departments and consolidation into a single military Service. However, none offered amendments to this affect, and all assured their support for the committee’s bill. The bill passed the Senate 80 to 0, with the sixteen absent senators indicating that, if present, they would have voted for the legislation.\footnote{It is worth noting that, throughout the late 1950s (if not earlier), there was exceptionally strong business support for streamlining Defense Department operations. This phenomenon reflected in both Committee and individual member correspondence, and had its basis in presumed efficiencies that would result from dealing with a single Department contracting authority, rather than multiple such service and defense agency authorities. For example, in a 10 July letter to Russell, Symington noted the constituent pressure he was under to help streamline Department operations. See Symington letter to Russell, July 10, 1958, H. R. 12541 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC. However, such pressures seem in no}

\footnote{Ibid.}
the House to go along, this proved relatively easy. The House adopted the Senate’s proposals, save one. Whereas the Senate’s version repealed the right for Service secretaries to testify before Congress on their own initiative, the House would not agree, and so no change to this provision of the National Security Act occurred. Now, Russell and the rest of the Congress waited to see if the Secretary of Defense would actually use his authority.

**Air Defense: Culmination**

The debates over Sputnik and defense reorganization had reinforced the conviction that the Secretary of Defense needed to increase his effectiveness in leading the department and coordinating its functions. They also reinforced the conviction that the Congress more than ever needed to hold the Secretary’s feet to the fire in this regard. Within a year, Russell had decided that an expanded annual authorization requirement was the Congress’s most effective vehicle to achieve this. Continued debate over continental air defense provided much of the impetus to this realization. So too did the urgings of one particularly outspoken member of the committee, on this issue at least – Ralph Flanders (R-VT).

To recall, the Nike-Talos controversy, which had consumed so much of the SASC’s attention since the mid-1950s, had arrived at an uneventful end in 1958. In early meaningful way to have influenced Russell’s disposition toward the reorganization bill, and it is an open question as to whether such pressures influenced other members.

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May, as the congressional debate over defense reorganization was beginning, the Army quietly announced that it was canceling Talos and focusing resources on continued development of the Nike family of systems. In looking back at the committee's handling of the Nike-Talos controversy, Stennis seemed reasonably happy with this outcome, at least insofar as the decision appeared to save a considerable amount of money.

Almost immediately, however, the debate over Service duplication in air defense reemerged – this time with respect to the Nike and the Air Force's Bomarc. The version of the Nike at issue in this case was the Hercules. Among other things, the Hercules offered improved range (80 miles, versus 25 miles for the Ajax), as well as the capability to mount a nuclear warhead for improved kill probability – although it typically employed a conventional warhead. On the other hand, the Bomarc A variant then currently in production offered a range of over 200 miles, and a B variant in development promised a range of over 400 miles. Moreover, Bomarc could be tied into NORAD’s SAGE battle command system, while Nike at least initially could not.

418 Production of certain components – computers and tracking radars – continued in order to benefit other R&D efforts ongoing. Brigadier General J. E. Bastion, Jr. (Deputy Chief of Legislative Liaison, U.S. Army) letter to Russell, May 2, 1958, Army – Talos file, Subcommittee on Real Estate and Military Construction files (82nd – 87th Congress), Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

419 The committee was skeptical about both bomber and missile intercept using nuclear warheads. They worried both about the danger of storing atomic weapons in urban areas, as well as the consequences of above ground detonations.

420 Committee deliberation on H. R. 5674, May 13, 1959, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

421 The North American Aerospace Defense Command was one of the Defense Department’s specified commands, responsible for exactly what its name implies. The Semi-Automatic Ground Environment was a
Unconvinced by Service claims that the two systems filled different roles, the SASC in its version of the FY 1959 military construction authorization bill deleted the administration's entire authorization request related to both Nike-Hercules and Bomarc, which amounted to $137 million and $92 million, respectively. In conference, the SASC agreed to a compromise that provided the Secretary of Defense with a $183 million authorization to construct whatever combination of missile sites he felt was necessary for the defense of the nation. The Secretary of Defense was free to continue both Nike and Bomarc programs if he so chose, but simply at reduced authorization level. The $183 million authorization amounted to a 20% reduction in the administration's request for construction related to continental air defense sites. The committee based this figure on its assumption about the level of savings that a rationalized air defense program should have been able to yield.422

In discussing the bill on the floor of the Senate, military construction subcommittee member Francis Case emphasized the staggering costs associated with modern weapons systems. The problem was larger than procurement; it extended into lifetime costs required to operate the systems. Deploying a system meant paying to operate and maintain it over its service lifetime. Such costs often exceeded procurement costs. Case argued that eliminating unnecessary duplication was an essential element to reigning in the cost of defense, and that the action the SASC took in reducing the military computer system that linked an array of bomber detection and tracking radars in order to better manage the enormous flow of information that operators had to sort through in order to successfully coordinate bomber intercept.

422 Committee deliberation on H. R. 13015, July 24, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
construction request for continental air defense was a necessary exercise of Congress's responsibility to force the Executive Branch to reduce duplication.423

Stennis was interested in more than economy, however. He was determined that the SASC – or at least his military construction subcommittee – should begin to take a more determined look at the substantive policy decisions underlying the department’s authorization requests. As the subcommittee report accompanying the bill explained:

This year... the committee intentionally placed greater emphasis on the major policy areas which create the forces that require the facilities... (B)ased on past experience, it has become obvious to this committee that the very act of authorizing the establishment of bases from which military operations may be conducted cannot be divorced from the broader field of policy...With this in mind, the committee as stated before, emphasized this year the major and special policy areas involved rather than a detailed review of the line items only...424

While the report complimented the Office of Assistant Secretary of Defense (Property & Installations) and the Service departments on the improved quality of their technical review procedures justifying their line item requests, the subcommittee found that the Defense Department lacked the capacity to justify its construction program in the context of approved national policies, or in support of approved long-range military plans, force levels, and objectives.

Stennis made several specific policy and programmatic recommendations that grew out of the year's military construction review, but which properly speaking were

423  Francis Case floor remarks (excerpts from August 7, 1958, Congressional Record), H. R. 13015 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

424  “Military Construction Authorization for Fiscal Year 1959” (unpublished confidential committee print of SASC report to accompany H. R. 13015), July 24, 1958 file, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
outside the bounds of real estate and military construction issues. Among the sounder provisions, the subcommittee urged the Defense Department to assign highest priority to the Polaris program and to push for earliest possible deployment. More dubiously, it also urged the Defense Department to procure additional squadrons of the Snark missile. The subcommittee also expressed concern over apparent duplication between the Jupiter and Thor IRBMs, as both headed toward operational deployment.\textsuperscript{425} The report noted that the committee understood the need for some duplication in research and development, but not in procurement and operation. The subcommittee looked to the Secretary of Defense to “make a decision based on the relative merits of the two systems.”\textsuperscript{426}

The focus of the subcommittee’s recommendations remained its concern over Nike-Bomarc duplication, however. As in previous years, the subcommittee noted its fear that spending too much on defensive systems would limit resources available for higher priority (in the subcommittee’s view, at least) offensive forces. The subcommittee also worried that the nation's limited war capabilities were insufficient.\textsuperscript{427} It assessed that the Soviet Union was likely “to disrupt the world by piecemeal tactics, subversion, and other pressures,” and wondered why the Army placed so much emphasis on point defense weapon systems “resulting in a diminution of its ground combat capability.”\textsuperscript{428}

\textsuperscript{425} Jupiter was initially an Army Program, but the Secretary had ordered all land-based IRBM programs transferred to the Air Force in 1956, so this did not represent a case of Service duplication, per se.

\textsuperscript{426} “Military Construction Authorization for Fiscal Year 1959,” Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives. Both were deployed, although all deployed missiles were deactivated for obsolescence by 1963.

\textsuperscript{427} This was a prominent concern among many defense academics and retired military personnel by this point.

\textsuperscript{428} Ibid.
noteworthy about such observations is not their originality or inherent soundness. What is noteworthy is the fact that the subcommittee was attempting to express its preferences so explicitly, concurrent with a piece of legislation that it was reporting.

While the subcommittee expressed concerns about the prioritization of air defense with respect to other capabilities, its greater concern was the process by which the department approved programs, and then developed and procured them based on momentum with no real continued scrutiny. The subcommittee found that “such programs have a habit of being approved by default through the medium of piecemeal submission on an annual basis without regard to the accumulation of long range contingent liabilities.” Members remained privately concerned that, in some instances where the Joint Chiefs of Staff could not agree on a common recommendation regarding duplicative systems, they simply chose to slightly reduce each in scope and then proceeded to develop both. Yet again, the subcommittee urged the Secretary of Defense to involve himself to ensure that the department explicitly approved and maintained air defense systems based upon their continued relevance to national military strategy. It explicitly rejected the principle that “the country can never have enough defense.”

Stennis was ultimately the driving force behind the military construction subcommittee's emerging oversight focus, although the subcommittee's other members – Case primarily, but Jackson as well – had likewise grown increasingly activist in this regard. Reflecting on the year’s work, Case noted that it was Stennis’s decision “that we

429 Ibid.

430 Ibid.
should have some general hearings and address ourselves to the policy questions that are involved, and reflect from the authorizations that are made. The Chairman wisely recognized that you cannot pick and choose our making decisions with respect to such things as Nike and Bomarc and Titan and Atlas locations and these other things… without making decisions that affect the policy here on the composition of the military establishment.” Jackson agreed: “I think we have been too prone to just deal with bricks and mortar in the abstract and not associate the military construction question itself with the broad policy that we should pursue, and I want to say that the decision of the Chairman of our Subcommittee was indeed a wise and a fortunate one. I think it is one we should follow from here on out.”

Behind the scenes, however, much of the stimulus for this changing mood again came from the subcommittee's sole staff member, retired Army Colonel Kenneth BeLieu. In the previously referenced discussion, Case also called out BeLieu for the importance of his contribution to the subcommittee’s work. Jackson implied that BeLieu should be credited with the substance of the report, while Stennis framed the policy-orientation. While it is not really possible to determine the degree to which BeLieu was stimulating rather then responding to member interests, in likelihood it seems much more the former. BeLieu was both experienced and ambitious. His career as an Army officer had supplied him the basis in experience to form strong, informed opinions. He was also energetic. He had no desire to treat his staff position as merely something to occupy his time in

431 Jackson also noted that Case and Stennis did most of the work, and he was too often absent. July 24, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

432 Ibid.
retirement. He still wanted to accomplish things. BeLieu left the military construction subcommittee after 1958 to become Johnson’s Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee staff director (he also served as staff director of Johnson’s Aeronautical and Space Sciences Committee, which the Senate formed in response to Sputnik).\footnote{Gordon Nease replaced BeLieu.} He left the committee entirely in early 1961 to become Assistant Secretary of the Navy for Installations and Logistics, and eventually became Under Secretary of the Army under Nixon.\footnote{In February 1965, Johnson appointed BeLieu as Under Secretary of the Navy, although he returned to private life that July. In 1969, Nixon appointed him as Deputy Assistant to the President for Congressional Relations, a position he held until becoming Under Secretary of the Army.} At a minimum, it seems clear that BeLieu exercised a strong hand in developing the specifics of policy and program concerns expressed in the committee’s reports. More likely, he was planting the seeds in Stennis’s mind in the first place. Even so, in Stennis he found an eager and energetic recipient who had a predisposition to more aggressive oversight, and who would push the subcommittee down this track.

In order to prepare for the development of the CY 1959 bill, Stennis instructed BeLieu in the summer of 1958 to contact the Defense Department and in turn focus its attention on justifying the relationship between the national military strategy and the actual construction program.\footnote{BeLieu letter to Assistant Secretary of Defense Bryant, August 25, 1958, “Armed Services Committee – Legislation” file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 85th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.} Beyond the strategy, Stennis required greater programmatic detail, including cost breakouts by category (e.g., Research and Development, Facilities, Personnel, Operations and Maintenance), in order to place specific real estate and construction costs in a broader, long-term programmatic
context.\textsuperscript{436} Stennis instructed the Defense Department to have its witnesses prepared to address the following areas in particular: continental air defense; ballistic missiles; the Strategic Air Command; antisubmarine warfare capabilities; Army aviation; anti-ballistic missiles overseas bases; and family housing.\textsuperscript{437}

As in years past, air defense would remain the most contentious issue. One of the most significant exchanges between Stennis and McElroy on this issue took place not before the SASC, but before the defense subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee, where Stennis was also a member. McElroy testified in May 1959 that the primary threat to the U.S. homeland at the time came from Soviet bombers armed with standoff attack missiles, although Soviet ICBMs would in the future develop into the greater threat. Neither the Nike-Hercules nor the Bomarc could defend against ICBMs.\textsuperscript{438} With respect to the bomber threat, Soviet standoff attack capabilities made it imperative to push defenses as far to the periphery of the homeland as possible. This minimized the usefulness of point defense systems like the Nike. McElroy testified that Bomarc B – with its anticipated four to five hundred mile range – offered the best option for missile defense.

\textsuperscript{436} Stennis required that the cost data covered the full span of the program, from its inception through to its estimated completion, or – anticipating McNamara’s five year Future Year Defense Program – “through the next five years, if more applicable.” Unsigned memo outlining FY 1960 military construction authorization process, undated, S. 1086 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 86th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{437} “Military Construction Authorization for Military Departments, Fiscal Year 1960” (unpublished committee print accompanying H. R. 5674), May 13, 1959 file, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{438} The Army was attempting to develop a variant of the Hercules, as well as a new Nike Zeus system, for the anti-ballistic missile role.
intercept of Soviet bombers. However, McElroy allowed that Nike-Hercules was still useful for point defense of a few high priority sites.

Stennis weighed in. He understood why McElroy supported Bomarc, but not why he continued to recommend additional Nike facility construction. Stennis continued:

Now, if I vote to recommend (further construction) to the Congress, I am saying to my colleagues and the American people that I believe that (new funding) is more important there than it is to go toward modernizing the Army, so to speak, with weapons and modernizing the Navy ships and increasing our Marine landing teams and Army combat battalions, and I just do not believe that that is true... I am beginning to think that the Department of Defense itself would welcome a congressional decision on this matter and then you could move on into a more positive program.

Responding with unusual candor, McElroy replied that Stennis had “touched us in a place where I would call us vulnerable.” Stennis responded that he was not trying to embarrass the Secretary. McElroy replied that Stennis was not embarrassing him. Surprisingly, McElroy offered:

This is one where we have not done very well in making a decision. As far as I am concerned, it would not bother me if you held our feet to the fire and forced us in connection with this budget.

Stennis replied that he was confident the Congress would follow through in this respect. One can only wonder how many sets of eyes rolled throughout the Defense Department.

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439 In arguing this, McElroy pointed out the best long-range bomber defense system included the Bomarc along the F-108 interceptor aircraft, both of which capabilities would be integrated using SAGE.

440 Testimony quoted in “Military Construction Authorization for Military Departments, Fiscal Year 1960,” Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

441 Ibid.

442 Ibid.

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at this exchange. McElroy quickly tried to recover, responding with a May 19 letter to
defense appropriations subcommittee chairman Chavez:

The thing which I said would not be disturbing to us would be for the
Congress to press us to present to it a master plan covering the number of
Bomarc and Nike sites we believe are required, together with their
locations. Nothing in this suggestion was meant to indicate that there
would not be a place for both the Nike-Hercules and the Bomarc.\textsuperscript{443}

The damage was done, however.

Action returned to the Senate Armed Services Committee, as it began work on the
military construction authorization bill. Stennis and several other SASC members were
now more convinced than ever that they needed to use the leverage afforded by denying
new construction authorization to force a choice on air defense. Many remained generally
supportive of Bomarc, although some, including Russell, were skeptical that Bomarc
would prove to be anything more than a waste of taxpayer dollars.\textsuperscript{444} Stennis and Case
urged, however, that the committee take no action on Bomarc, and instead force the issue
with respect to Nike. In the end, the committee agreed, recommending the Senate vote to
end construction of Nike sites in the United States, and cut $17.3 million of the $22.4
million in new construction authority that the Army had requested for the program. The

\textsuperscript{443} McElroy letter to Senator Chavez on air defense plan, May 11, 1959, Air Defense Program file,
Subcommittee on Real Estate and Military Construction files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th
Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{444} Committee deliberation on H. R. 5674, May 13, 1959, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th
Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46,
National Archives, Washington, DC.
remaining funds would go for overseas construction of facilities that the committee
judged to have sufficient tactical value.445

Despite the committee’s skepticism with respect to the Nike-Hercules, it still was
not so much trying to kill the program as to force the Secretary to make a decision about
Service roles and missions. On June 12, 1959, McElroy followed up on his promise to
submit an air defense “master plan.”446 In part, the plan called for an overall reduction in
the number of sites, and a general review of both the Nike and Bomarc systems. The
Armed Services Committees responded by modifying the military construction bill to
allow Nike-Hercules to go forth. Overall, the SASC concluded, “Although the proposed
plan leaves much to be desired, it is a step in the right direction and a step that probably
would not have been taken except for the insistence of the committee.”447

The committee had already taken this lesson to heart. In its original version of the
bill, Russell had added a provision – section 412(b) – that mandated annual authorization
for procurement programs involving missiles and aircraft. This amounted to the most
significant change in committee oversight procedures in its history, at least in terms on
long-range consequence rather than immediate magnitude. By the late 1950s, missile and
aircraft programs accounted for huge portions of the defense appropriations bills the
Congress passed each year. Yet, as we have seen, these appropriations were based on

445 “Military Construction Authorization for Military Departments, Fiscal Year 1960,” Transcripts of
Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

446 This plan was a product of the Furnas Commission, a.k.a., the Ad Hoc Panel for the Evaluation of the
Bomarc Weapons System.

447 Senate Committee on Armed Services, Military Construction Authorization for Military Departments,
committee concerns for the remainder of the decade and into the 1960s.
large, non-specific standing authorizations. Given the debates of the past several years regarding Defense Department misprioritization and mismanagement, the SASC decided it could no longer accept this status quo, particularly in comparison to the line item detail in the military construction authorization bills that the Congress passed each year. The absence of more detailed authorization measures for other program categories more vital to the nation’s security and economic health amounted to an abdication of its legislative responsibility.448

Interest in annual authorization of other portions of the defense budget originated neither in 1959 nor with the SASC. House Armed Services Committee chairman Carl Vinson was long among the most forceful and influential proponents of the U.S. Navy. The HASC had at various times over the preceding decade sponsored bills to require annual authorization of at least portions of the Navy’s shipbuilding program. For example, in 1956 the HASC reported a bill to require “the continual submission to it of plans for major conversions and modernizations as a part of its annual shipbuilding program in order that the Congress shall have a complete picture of the combat readiness and efficiency of the Navy.” The HASC was concerned with the steady growth of the Soviet submarine and surface fleets. Beyond combat readiness, the House also sought to guarantee that it had a voice in ensuring “orderly progress” in procurement and

448 “Military Construction Authorization for Military Departments, Fiscal Year 1960,” Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
modernization decisions that affected the naval industrial and technological bases – an issue that had both strategic and constituent service aspects.449

The bill received a cool reception when it reached the Senate Armed Services Committee. Stennis presided in Russell’s absence. The Vinson-Trammell Act of 1934 authorized the Navy to build up to the limits established in the 1922 Washington Naval Treaty. As of 1959, this act still formed the basic law authorizing naval tonnage. Changes since then had come as amendments to the act. Prior to 1934, however, practices were the same as under the HASC’s proposed legislation. Saltonstall noted that, during World War II, the Naval Affairs committee authorized a substantial number of tons so the Navy wouldn’t have to come back to request particular ships. Since World War II, the House had produced bills most years listing the entire ship-building program in order to give the Congress an opportunity to examine it. These bills served only an informational purpose; none had passed the Senate, and in some years they did not receive a vote in the House. Much of the HASC impetus for these bills came from the lack of overlapping committee membership in the House. Senior HASC members could not get a cut at the shipbuilding program in their chamber’s Appropriations Committee in the way many SASC members could.450

The SASC had called Navy witnesses including CNO Arleigh Burke to testify regarding the bill. Saltonstall questioned the need for annual authorization, since new

449 Committee deliberation on H. R. 7993, March 22, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

450 Ibid.
ships were subject to appropriations anyway. Saltonstall conceded that the bill would give the SASC “a closer supervision of the shipbuilding program.” However, on balance he felt annual authorization would add to the workload of the Navy and SASC, without adding sufficient value. He also feared that provisions introducing reprogramming requirements could impose a penalty on national security by dragging out the time necessary to implement technological improvements. Darden noted that, procedurally, the significance of authorizing language was unclear. Even if the SASC refused to authorize a ship that the Navy had requested, for example, the Navy could still in theory turn around and ask for appropriations for the ship. Burke suggested, however, that there would be a “strong moral difficulty” in crossing the Armed Services Committees in this way.451

In any case, with Russell absent Stennis was not prepared to act on a bill that would introduce such a significant change in committee procedures. He moved to suspend discussion on annual authorization to a later date. When discussion resumed, Russell concurred with denying the move to authorization of the entire shipbuilding program, and the committee so voted. However, while Stennis agreed with the committee’s vote, the idea of moving to more deliberate authorization procedures had apparently intrigued him. He commented that annual authorization of the shipbuilding

451 Ibid.
program involved “a rather far-reaching policy matter that I don’t believe we ought to do in a bill *that way at least*.”

Ralph Flanders was the most forceful early advocate for the SASC to assume a more aggressive policy oversight role. Flanders, a former business man and president of the Federal Reserve Board of Boston, had served on the committee for years, but lacked a position that gave him any real clout. One instance of his growing interest occurred as the SASC began preliminary discussion regarding the agenda for the 1955 posture hearings. Harry Byrd (D-VA) was the presiding officer in Russell’s absence. After discussing whether Russell should conduct the hearing himself on other members’ behalf – the consensus was that it did not matter, provided all members’ questions and views were properly represented – Symington asked if the SASC would entertain discussion of the year’s defense budget. Byrd replied that the SASC did play a role in passing the budget. Flanders interrupted, arguing that the budget was “deeply concerned with the questions which will come up at this meeting,” to which Byrd responded that he assumed the committee would get some information on the budget from the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Flanders protested, “But we have to know what the general purposes, what the general plans, are, what the general strategy of the Department is before we, as senators, can pass on the budget.” Byrd simply changed the subject.

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452 Committee deliberation on H. R. 7993, April 1, 1956, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

453 Committee deliberation preliminary to defense posture hearings, January 18, 1955, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
When the SASC debated the defense reorganization bill in 1958, Flanders took this as an opportunity to make another push for a more aggressive oversight role. He latched onto expanded authorization powers as a means to that end. Flanders’ ideas were unformed. Still, he anticipated the SASC’s 1959 decision to expand annual authorization. It troubled Flanders that the committee lacked a holistic view of the defense program. He apparently believed that if the department presented the committee with a thorough presentation rather than a disconnected subset of individual items, then many of the disputes between the Services over roles and missions, and between the President and Congress over program and budget priorities, could be resolved. As committee members repeatedly brushed aside Flanders petitions without comment and tried to move discussion to points they felt were more germane, Flanders repeatedly interrupted to bring conversation back to his concerns. He had already planned to retire at the close of the 1958 congressional session. Flanders announced to the committee, “I would like to leave as a legacy on my departure from this scene of action a more well-thought-out plan of carrying out the responsibilities of this Committee.”

This grabbed Russell’s attention. Any criticism of how the committee functioned was an implicit criticism of Russell’s leadership. Russell prided himself on his thorough leadership and his dutiful concern for the prerogatives of other members, at least within reason. He was sensitive to the implication that he had been somehow remiss in executing committee business or in meeting his obligations to other members, and his response addressed both issues. He conceded that there had been “a weakness” in the

454 July 15, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
committee’s procedures over the past several years, in that the SASC may not have received sufficiently detailed justifications from the Defense Department in all cases. He protested, however, that he always saw to it that members received whatever information from the Defense Department they requested – “unless there was an extra good reason why it was not submitted to us.” Turning to the budget, he allowed that some of the existing authorizations were wider than he would desire in a perfect world. He argued, however, that times were less than perfect:

I confess that some (standing authorizations) are very wide… Now in times of peace we used to sit down here and argue about whether the Army is going to have 360 thousand men or 375 thousand, but since Korea we took those ceilings off and we just appropriate whatever is necessary to maintain the Army at the size that the Congress and the Administration agrees is appropriate for the defense of the country.  

Flanders pressed on, however. He allowed that even if the Committee did not pursue annual expanded authorization procedures, it should still demand that the Secretary of Defense present a systematic, holistic budget justification each year that laid out the entire program at one time. He allowed that reprogramming would be necessary as conditions changed over the course of the year, but as matters then stood Flanders had lost confidence that the Secretary of Defense had any real plan beyond disjointed pieces. Russell promised that next year the committee would, in Flanders’ memory, request “some briefings to get the picture of what the Defense Department is going to have.” He then returned to marking up the reorganization bill.  

455 Ibid.  
456 Ibid.
After a short while, Flanders again interrupted. Excusing himself for having developed an obsession, he directed the committee’s attention to language in the bill that stated that the intent of the Congress was to “provide a comprehensive program for the future security of the United States.” He protested that the bill did not ensure a program, only a structure in which a program might be developed. He stated rhetorically, “Are we going to ask for a program, that is my question.” He then excused himself to go to lunch.457

As a final farewell gesture, Flanders sponsored Senate Concurrent Resolution 110. The text of the resolution laid out Flanders concerns that: 1) The spiraling cost of defense was becoming a danger to the economic life of the nation; 2) The “perfectly natural anxieties” of the military leadership were contributing to the spiraling complexities of weapons and the burdensome costs these imposed; and, 3) The Congress was lax in exercising its shared responsibility for national defense by focusing on line-item appropriations at the expense of over-arching policy. Flanders’ measure called for the Secretary of Defense to present to the Armed Services Committees a report outlining the strength and organization of the Department in all major budget categories within 30 days of the start of each Congressional session.

As the Committee met in early August 1958 to discuss pending Defense Department nominations, Flanders interjected his resolution onto the agenda. He stated that his intent was to give the SASC an “opportunity to concern itself with overall defense policy.” He argued that a more robust policy oversight role fell well within the

457 Ibid.
committee’s area of authority, but that the committee was failing to exercise this authority. He declared, “I have in my hands here a list of all of the actions taken by this committee in this second session of the Congress up to July 28. Not one of those 132 actions relate to the defense policy.”

Styles Bridges, another veteran of both the SASC and Appropriations, interjected that the latter committee carefully reviewed all items, and that the Armed Services Committee should not duplicate that work of the appropriators. Flanders noted that he, too, had the privilege to represent both committees. He protested that the hearings supporting the appropriations bills focused on line-item scrutiny and failed to adequately consider the basic policy questions that should determine the budget. He noted in particular that appropriations hearings gave insufficient attention to the requirements for fighting “small wars,” an issue that had come increasingly in vogue in defense circles over the latter 1950s. Flanders argued that his proposal was a complement to the functioning of the Appropriations Committee. In the face of his colleagues’ opposition, Flanders allowed that maybe the committee should not exercise the authority he was urging. However, he wanted the committee to acknowledge that “if it does not take jurisdiction it is because it does not want to, and it is a matter of policy for this committee not to take jurisdiction on the major questions of the national defense.”

At this point, Russell weighed in. Always cordial, Russell reasoned with Flanders that the committee did in fact take positions on substantive policy questions:

458 Committee discussion of S. Con. Res. 110, August 7, 1958, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
(The Defense Department) cannot proceed to construct these aircraft carriers or any other instrumentalities of war that are going to cost any money unless this committee passes a law authorizing it, and we do have hearings on every authorization bill. Of course we do not renew them every year. We report a bill that relates to the size of the Navy or Army, we did pass a general bill authorizing a very large tonnage to be presented by the Navy in categories of ships but I just don’t think this is a matter that ought to go to the Congress…

Russell suggested that he was willing to see Flanders’ proposed annual reporting requirement for the Defense Department become a rule of the committee, but he was disposed neither to altering authorization procedures nor to reporting Flanders’ resolution for a full Senate vote.459

Flanders responded that upon his appointment to the committee he was surprised that the SASC did not take a more assertive defense oversight role beyond the confines of “adult education.” Russell replied that the Congress was ill-suited to decide questions of policy; this was more properly an executive function. Bridges agreed, arguing that Congress could not and should not attempt to substitute its judgment on policy matters for that of military professionals. Flanders allowed that the Congress was not well-suited to make decisions on matters that occasioned tremendous debate among professionals in the Defense Department. However, he still struggled with the fact that Congress retained the responsibility to decide on the budget, and he did not believe this could be done effectively by holding to a line-item review in the Appropriations Committees. He still believed that the Armed Services Committees had some responsibility for coming to grips with the policy issues that set the framework for the budget.460

459 Ibid.

460 Ibid.
Russell conceded that Flanders’ point might be valid, and with this opening Flanders focused on the concern that he knew many members shared: the mounting size of the defense budget. Even if all members liked spending for their own states, most felt that they still needed to impose some sort of top-line to guard against damage to the overall economy. Flanders argued that the basis for his proposal had all along really been focused on getting the budget under control. Only if the Armed Services Committees had the opportunity to take a “comprehensive, unified look” at the defense program could the Congress achieve this. Russell readily conceded that the budget had grown too large for even the Executive Branch to control effectively, a development he found “regrettable.” However, at this point, Russell still remained opposed to implementing any measure of authorization reform as an answer.\textsuperscript{461} This ended the debate for 1958.

By the next summer, however, Russell had completely reversed himself. Russell sponsored section 412(b) to the FY 1960 military construction bill, which when finally passed into law required annual authorization for procurement of aircraft, missiles, and naval vessels. His decision to support section 412(b) was a stark transition. The previous August, Russell had argued that Congress was ill-suited to decide questions of policy.\textsuperscript{462} Now nine months later, Russell was telling committee colleagues that authorization reform “would mean more work and more responsibility in this committee but at least it

\textsuperscript{461} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{462} Ibid.
would put us in the policy area where, in my judgment, the Armed Services Committee should be.”

Section 412(b) was Russell’s creation. Nothing resembling it existed in the original House bill. The final version was, however, a product of compromise. The language in the original Senate version was as follows:

No money may be appropriated after December 31, 1959, to or for the use of any armed force of the United States for the design, development, or procurement of any aircraft or missile unless the appropriation of such money has been specifically authorized by legislation enacted after that date.

Russell drafted the language himself. During committee mark-up, Saltonstall indicated his desire to include annual authorization for naval vessels as well. Russell agreed in principle, but noted that he wanted to keep the initial application of this new measure limited to aircraft and missiles in order to avoid bogging down the legislative process. Saltonstall and Jackson both enquired as to whether other Army and Air Force procurement should also be included. Russell indicated that the committee would consider expanding annual authorization at a future date.

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463 May 13, 1959, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

464 “H. R. 5674” (unpublished committee print), May 11, 1959, H. R. 5674 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 86th Congress, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

465 May 13, 1959, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
Defense Department components expressed a number of concerns with the new requirement.\textsuperscript{466} In particular, the Secretary of Defense requested that the amendment not pertain to design and development – as the original Senate language called for – because “the requirement for design authorization would entail detail in a degree not usually available at any given time,” and because this “could cause appreciable delay in initiating high priority design and development projects.” Further, the Secretary claimed the language would increase the difficulty of incorporating design changes once production began.\textsuperscript{467}

In an analysis of the Secretary’s request that he prepared for Russell, Darden weighed the pros and cons. While he had no strong recommendation, Darden noted that he believed the committee’s intent was to oversee the complete system acquisition process. If design and development were not subject to authorization, Darden felt this would violate the committee’s intent. In particular, the Defense Department might present the \textit{fait accompli} argument that amounts spent for design and development made procurement necessary. Darden noted that design and development requests probably did not lend themselves too much specificity, and the back-up material presented to the committees could probably not be as detailed as with respect to procurement. Nonetheless, he also pointed out that presumably the Appropriations Committees

\textsuperscript{466} For his part, Eisenhower strongly opposed section 412(b). In the message accompanying the first presidential budget submission following its passage, Eisenhower complained about duplication of oversight between the authorization and appropriations committees, and lamented the heavy burden on the time of executive personnel. In the following year’s budget message, Eisenhower urged that annual authorization be repealed altogether. See Gordon, The Military Budget, 24-25.

\textsuperscript{467} Darden letter to Russell regarding the Defense Department’s suggested changes to 412(b), July 13, 1959, H. R. 5674 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 86th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
received at least some form of design and development justification, and he did not see a difficulty in requiring the Defense Department to present similar material to the Armed Services Committees.468

Whether reacting directly to the administration or in response to Vinson, Russell agreed to eliminate the requirement for design and development authorization during the House-Senate conference on the bill. Russell probably did so because his ambitions for annual authorization were limited in the first place, because he saw this initial application of the measure as a test bed, and because he sought to balance the new process against unnecessarily burdening the Defense Department with new reporting requirements. During the debate over Sputnik, many focused on the need to eliminate hurdles to rapid technological development. The department’s argument that the new language as applied to design and development would impose an undue hindrance no doubt proved persuasive. In any case, the department’s argument did not remain persuasive for long, as we will see. Russell agreed to other compromises as well. At Vinson’s urging, Russell finally agreed to add annual authorization of naval vessels. In addition, the conferees postponed the start date for an annual authorization requirement for one year, meaning the provision would take effect after December 31, 1960. The interim year was intended give the committees and opportunity to test and refine their implementation procedures.

Russell’s committee colleagues had clearly influenced his decision to author section 412(b). Stennis’s experiences with using authorizations to force the Secretary’s hand, coupled with Flanders’ vehement determination, were key to causing Russell’s

468 Ibid.
change of heart. During committee mark-up of the section, Russell was explicit about the impact Flanders’ arguments had on his thinking. Flanders had persuaded him that “the (the committee) had in effect yielded the most vital part of its function and its role in the defense of the country, at least in the matter of making decisions, to the Appropriations Committee.” He elaborated:

The more I thought about that – at first blush, it did not impress me and I was rather inclined to brush it aside, I suppose, because I have also been a member of the Committee of Appropriations who authorized the funds. But we have an example of it here now. (The military construction) subcommittee has devoted weeks to the consideration of an authorization bill for... surplus properties that usually totals less than $2 billion a year and, by contrast, the aircraft and missile appropriations every year in the appropriation bill is much more than that, and yet those contracts are let under a general language... Now, the more I have thought about it, the more I have become convinced that we could have possibly avoided this great duplication between the three services in the development and procurement of all of these missiles that have cost us billions of dollars, if we had required them to come before this committee and get a specific authorization for those missiles...469

The record is less clear on Stennis’s role in prompting Russell’s change of mind. While it seems plausible, one can only speculate whether Stennis privately threw his support to Flanders’ proposal. The move to annual authorization of a greater portion of the defense program seems in line with where Stennis was headed in his thinking, and Stennis had considerably more influence with Russell at both a professional and a personal level than did Flanders. At a minimum, one can be certain that Russell took notice of Stennis’s subcommittee activities with respect to using authorization requirements as leverage in forcing department decisions.

469 May 13, 1959, Transcripts of Executive Sessions files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives. Appropriations for aircraft, missiles, and naval vessels for FY 1960 amounted to approximately $9 billion.
Russell did not seek to radically alter the balance of power in policy-making between the Executive Branch and the Congress. As staff member Ed Braswell noted, “Senator Russell was a great believer in separation of powers; he didn't believe in the Senate trying to be the president.” Referring to annual authorization, Braswell felt Russell’s concept was for Congress to act as a “corporate board of directors rather than the plant manager.”470 Russell intended to use annual authorization primarily as means to check that the Defense Department was both efficient and wise in exercising what remained essentially Executive Branch responsibilities for decision-making and management. Russell was also at times willing to use annual authorization as a vehicle to prompt greater Defense Department responsiveness to congressional concerns, but this was a secondary motive. Beyond the “board of directors” analogy, one could also posit that Russell now intended the SASC to act as a court of appeals. While the SASC under Russell’s leadership was unlikely to try to develop its own case, it was willing to hear claims from aggrieved Defense Department components arguing that the Secretary of Defense was making flawed program decisions. In Russell’s view, annual authorization was not a hammer with which to beat the Defense Department. At most, it was a lever with which to push the Secretary of Defense in the direction that the SASC and Russell wanted him to go.

Stennis no more aspired to transform the Armed Services Committee into a plant manager than did Russell. Even with Russell’s recent change of heart, however, Stennis stayed out ahead of his mentor in terms of his ambitions for the committee’s oversight.

470 T. Edward Braswell, interview, oral history interview II, transcript, LBJ Library.
role. In particular, Stennis believed that Congress needed to probe more deeply with respect to investigating and offering recommendations on the Defense Department’s activities. In November 1960, as soon as it became clear that the Kennedy-Johnson ticket had won the presidential election, Stennis called Russell from his home in DeKalb, MS, to express his desire to take over Johnson’s Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee.471 Russell readily agreed. As we will see, Stennis’s handling of the subcommittee differed markedly from that of his predecessor.

CHAPTER 7
OVERSIGHT IN THE McNAMARA YEARS, PART I

The decision the Armed Service Committees took in 1959 to expand the annual authorization requirement into the more substantive portions of the defense program was perhaps the most significant in the joint history of the two committees. While section 412(b) initially applied only to a limited – albeit highly visible, expensive, and consequential – portion of the military procurement budget, the scope of annual authorization legislation expanded steadily over the next two decades to encompass virtually the entirety of the Defense Department’s annual budget request. In 1962, the Armed Services Committees expanded the authorization requirement to all new research, development, testing, and evaluation (RDT&E) associated with aircraft, missiles, and naval vessels. The following year, they extended the requirement to all Defense Department RDT&E. In 1965, the committees required authorization of appropriations for tracked combat vehicles, and tightened the requirements for authorization of emergency funds used to support procurement and RDT&E. Three years later, the committees passed a measure requiring the Defense Department to program toward a congressionally mandated average annual strength for the Selected Reserve and each of the Reserve components of the Armed Forces. Authorization requirements continued to
expand after 1968, so that by 1980 virtually the entire annual defense budget was subject to congressional authorization.\footnote{New authorization requirements included procurement of "other" weapons, consisting largely of artillery, air defense, small arms, and crew fire-weapons (1969); the average annual active duty personnel strength (1970); military training student loads (1972); civilian employment of the Department of Defense (1973); ammunition facilities (1975); and operations and maintenance (1980).}

Other significant changes took place in the modes of committee oversight after 1960. First, Stennis’s takeover of the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee chairmanship substantially increased the committee’s workload and the scope of its activities, and reoriented the subcommittee’s primary focus from waste and mismanagement to substantive policy issues. Second, in terms of style, the degree of rancor between certain committee members and members of the Executive Branch increased over the 1960s. This development occurred because personalities changed, both on the committee and within the Executive Branch. It occurred in part because member frustrations grew as their reach exceeded their grasp in implementing oversight and affecting Defense Department decisions. It occurred finally because, as the scope of authorization grew and as the War in Vietnam intensified, the stakes increased and the intellectual and emotional heat understandably intensified. It is important to qualify these points, however. While these trends were real, the severity of their impact on overall committee behavior during the 1960s was marginal to moderate rather than extreme. Russell still ran the committee, and these trends – evident primarily among other committee members – did not meaningfully affect his attitudes toward oversight and cooperation with the Executive Branch.
Lastly, another major change in congressional style became apparent during the 1960s. Senators outside the Armed Services Committee began to attempt to influence congressional deliberations and legislation on issues under SASC jurisdiction. Some such “assaults” came from other Senate committees, a practice already demonstrated during the 1950s, particularly where clear jurisdictional boundaries were lacking or could reasonably be brought into question. More novel during the 1960s was the practice of attempting to attach floor amendments to major defense legislation. Such behavior was unheard of during the previous decade, and cannot be accounted for simply by the fact that the scope and thus the consequence of authorizations grew dramatically during the 1960s. A fundamental change in behavioral norms was ongoing. Again, however, the most significant consequences did not become evident until the mid-1970s, although the initial impact was apparent by the middle of the 1960s.473

It is worth noting that, while the tone of verbal exchange between some committee members and the Kennedy and Johnson administrations grew harsher, no increase in partisan and prerogative-based rancor colored the SASC’s internal dynamics. Committee operations under Russell’s velvet glove remained cordial as ever. Even during the 1950s, of course, politics had not stopped at the water’s edge. Partisan politics – frequently stoked by presidential ambition – had been at least an occasional reality during the Eisenhower era. Committee members, however, were generally able to keep the tone relatively “responsible” during that decade. While impossible to quantify, the

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473 By the mid-1960s, the trend was least evident with respect to amending defense committee legislation. It was more evident with respect to other committees infringing on the margins of SASC jurisdiction, or in minority efforts to formally wrestle away portions of that jurisdiction, as with the unsuccessful efforts to strip the SASC of its CIA oversight responsibilities.
inflammatory tone of the rhetoric coming from some members grew worse in the 1960s. So too did the general feeling of genuine strain in congressional-executive relations.  

Again, the depth of this feeling varied among the members. Russell and Saltonstall – two of the three most consequential Senators – perhaps felt it the least, and felt it only strongly over the handling of the Vietnam War (a topic largely beyond the scope of the following chapters). Stennis, the other of the most consequential members, felt it most acutely of the three – largely because, of the three, he aspired to the most aggressive form of oversight, and because he as yet enjoyed the least stature and access among them. Despite his frequent frustrations, however, Stennis as always kept his tone responsible, and his professional struggles did not lead him to develop personal animosities. Others on the committee – particularly Thurmond and Goldwater – were both more flamboyant in their rhetoric, and harbored greater personal animosities. However, they lacked the real influence necessary to meaningfully vent these hostilities.

McNamara became convinced that Goldwater was using his chair on the SASC to criticize the administration in order to bolster his 1964 presidential campaign. While this was not an unprecedented occurrence, McNamara viewed the manner in which he did so as cheapening the political discourse and threatening the credibility of the nation’s military posture. For example, in January 1964 Goldwater charged, “I wish the Department of defense could tell the American people how undependable the missiles in our silos actually are.” In response, McNamara called Goldwater’s comments “completely misleading, politically irresponsible and damaging to national security.” On this issue Russell sided with McNamara, at least with regard to the baseless nature of Goldwater’s charges. For more information, see: 1) James Kendall (Preparedness Subcommittee staff director) memo to Stennis, January 13, 1964, Chronological File – 1964 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC; 2) “Comments on Missile Dependability,” February 1, 1964, Reading File Feb 1964 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC; 3) Recording of Telephone Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, September 18, 1964, 7:54PM, Citation #5607, Recordings of Telephone Conversations - White House Series, Recordings and Transcripts of Conversations and Meetings, LBJ Library.

Margaret Chase Smith was rather harsh in her recollection of McNamara, recounting that she found him flatly dishonest in his testimony before the committee on several occasions. Margaret Chase Smith, interview, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
The changes in tone to which these members contributed, however, *could* have real repercussions for committee oversight operations and Executive-Congressional relations, as an Executive under fire has the tendency to “cover-up” by becoming increasingly careful about the type and rate of information it willingly hands to potential critics. The record, however, suggests that in practice the impact of this on SASC operation was also minimal. Stennis certainly felt frustrated in his ability to conduct subcommittee investigations at times. More importantly, however, there is no indication that Russell felt this way. Given his enormous access, it seems reasonable to conclude that, whatever the administration chose to release or not release to his committee, Russell was never denied access to information. Russell seems to have been content that committee members and staff got enough of the information they required to dispose of their constitutional duties. If anything, the new Secretary of Defense with whom the committee shared the first seven years of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations had a propensity to overwhelm Congress with information, if not necessarily always the information particular members desired or felt they required.

**McNamara and the Senate**

Anyone who expected section 412(b) to generate a radical restructuring of Executive-Congress influence on defense legislation (and there were few who did) ended up disappointed. Changes in Armed Services Committee moods and procedures aside, the countervailing reality during the 1960s was the strength, energy, and durability of Robert McNamara’s tenure as Secretary of Defense. The vigor of his tenure was in marked contrast to the perceived lethargy of Eisenhower and his first two Secretaries of Defense.
Wilson and McElroy. While the scope of authorization procedures and the reach of preparedness subcommittee activities steadily expanded, the simple fact is that Robert McNamara was exactly the kind of Defense Secretary that SASC members – Russell and Stennis in particular – were looking for throughout the 1950s.

This gives the lie to the often-held view that McNamara had universally poor relations with Congress.\textsuperscript{475} McNamara’s relations with key members of the House were decidedly worse than with the SASC leadership.\textsuperscript{476} Even with the SASC’s leaders, points of friction certainly existed in a number of areas. The divergence of their views with the Secretary could be extreme – particularly again over Vietnam. Nonetheless, Russell, Stennis, and most other key committee members remained fundamentally satisfied with McNamara as a manager. They might disagree with certain specific decisions, but in general he exercised precisely the kind of control over the department that they wanted from a Secretary of Defense.

McNamara was no better prepared from the perspective of professional experience to take on the job of Defense Secretary than were either Wilson or McElroy.\textsuperscript{477}

\textsuperscript{475} For an extended discussion of what McNamara identified as the sources of his difficulties in congressional relations, see Robert McNamara, interviewed by Walt W. Rostow, January 8, 1975, oral history interview I, transcript, internet copy, LBJ Library, http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/McNamaraR/McNamara1.PDF.

\textsuperscript{476} As McGiffert noted, “The House Armed Services Committee was a very difficult body to deal with after Mr. Vinson left. Before Mr. Vinson left, not so much so because I think Mr. Vinson and Mr. McNamara had high degree of mutual respect; and although they tangled on some things, it was never on a personal basis.” McGiffert, interview, JFK Library.

\textsuperscript{477} On the other hand, Eisenhower’s last Secretary of Defense – Thomas Gates – had more than a decade’s experience in the Defense Department prior to his appointment. Like McNamara, Gates was lauded for his energy, and many initiatives for which McNamara eventually got the credit – or blame – actually commenced under Gates. Kennedy reputedly even considered asking Gates to stay on as Defense Secretary. Arthur M. Schlesinger, \textit{A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House} (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 129. However, upon second thought the President and his advisors concluded that such would be too
By his own admission, when he took his oath he “hardly knew the difference between a nuclear weapon and a conventional weapon.”\textsuperscript{478} His last military experience dated to 1946, when he was discharged from the Army after having achieved the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Army Air Forces (AAF) during World War II. He spent most of his short military career working in the AAF’s Office of Statistical Control, after which he joined Ford Motor Company and rose to become its first president from outside the Ford family. He received this appointment the day after John Kennedy’s election.

McNamara first came to the attention of the Kennedy transition team based on the recommendation of Robert Lovett. Lovett had been Secretary of Defense under Truman, and the Kennedy team approached him as a potential repeat candidate. Lovett quickly declined, but suggested McNamara instead. When the Kennedy team first approached McNamara to consider the position of Secretary of Defense (or Treasury as an alternative), McNamara flatly declined. A direct appeal from Kennedy persuaded McNamara to change his mind.\textsuperscript{479}

On December 12, 1960, Johnson informed Russell of McNamara’s selection. Within a week, McNamara was on the road paying visits to both Russell and Vinson at their Georgia homes. McNamara’s choice for a deputy, Roswell Gilpatric, followed suit.


\footnote{\textsuperscript{479} Schlesinger, 131-133.}
shortly after. Early on, Lovett cautioned McNamara on the importance of nurturing positive relationships with Russell and Vinson. As Lovett recalled:

I urged him to remember that both of these gentlemen had just as much interest in national security as he himself had and that his task would be either a success or a failure, depending on whether or not he was able to obtain their full trust and their confidence. It was not necessary for him to attempt to be either unctuous or subservient to them in the development or articulation of policy but it was always necessary for him to be completely frank and forthright and to remember that they could be enormously helpful if he would give them a chance, both in warning him away from pitfalls and in helping him to make proper use of the machinery of the government, about which I ventured to suggest that he was not as well informed as they.\(^{480}\)

McNamara largely heeded Lovett’s advice in terms of developing close working relationships, although he remained perhaps less willing to heed their advice than Lovett may have been. Nonetheless, on numerous occasions both in public and in private, McNamara professed his respect for both Georgians.\(^{481}\) McNamara’s director for legislative affairs, David McGiffert, found that McNamara’s respect for these men was genuine, and was based largely on their capacities to be fair-minded, to listen, to think through all sides of a problem, and to accept disagreement without rancor. Because of

\(^{480}\) Robert Lovett, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.

\(^{481}\) For example, McNamara made the following remarks in a speech honoring the two men: “As the newest pupil in the Russell-Vinson school for Secretaries of Defense – a school that goes back long before the Department of Defense was invented – I am particularly honored to be asked to speak to this evening. As every newcomer soon discovers, the common coin of Washington is advice, but the rarest commodity is the wise counsel from the two men whose combined experience covers almost three-quarters of a century.” McNamara remarks in Atlanta Georgia, November 11, 1961, General 11/61-12/61 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC. For albeit brief comments on his respect for Russell, see McNamara, interview, LBJ Library.
this, they could be persuasive in getting McNamara to change his mind – although this
was evidently not a frequent occurrence, at least on major program issues.\footnote{McGiffert, interview, JFK Library.}

There were those in Congress for whom the Kennedy administration and all
associated with it were tainted from the start. In some southern conservative circles, for
example, the progressive portion of Kennedy’s program left a bitter taste.\footnote{Kennedy was never able to gain significant support among the southern congressional delegation for many aspects of his political program. This did not translate into personal animosity, however, particularly with the more prominent southerners and particularly after an initial feeling-out period. Kennedy made a point of actively reaching out to the southern leaders, to positive personal − if not legislative − effect. O’Brien felt that “the better acquainted the President and these members became, the greater the tendency was on the part of the southern Democrat to at times even seek opportunities to be helpful without violating his established record or his constituency attitudes.” He also noted that, despite a common perception that Kennedy’s progressivism and Catholicism inevitably spoiled him for Southern voters, Kennedy received a higher percentage of the popular vote in Georgia, for example, than he did in Massachusetts. See O’Brien, interview VIII, LBJ Library. On the other hand, Kennedy was among the last Democratic Presidents to benefit greatly from the vestiges of the Solid South. Kennedy won the popular vote in eight of the eleven former Confederate states, losing only Virginia, Tennessee, and Florida. However, all of Mississippi's electors and six of eleven Alabama electors refused to vote for Kennedy and instead cast their Electoral College votes for non-candidate Senator Harry Byrd (D-VA). Johnson won a majority of the eleven former Confederate states in 1964, as well as all the former Border States, although he lost the Deep South states of Louisiana, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and South Carolina. Jimmy Carter was the last Democratic candidate to win a majority of the former Confederate states, taking all but Virginia in 1976. Bill Clinton came relatively close, winning four of eleven in both 1992 and 1996."}

Among those skeptical or hostile to Kennedy’s New Frontier, the President’s assistants and advisers
looked like “a bunch Harvard and ADA men” who oozed arrogance and elitism.\footnote{This quote came from Russell, in describing McNamara’s second round of Service secretary appointments after 1963. ADA stood for Americans for Democratic Action, a liberal advocacy group founded in 1947. Russell note on conversation with McNamara, October 14, 1963, 10/14-31/63 file, Intra-Office Communications series, United States Senatorial Papers, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries.} This view was not limited to conservative circles. Many in the Washington establishment, including leading lights of the Democratic Party, felt that Kennedy’s men were
“inordinately cocky,” driven by the premise that Eisenhower’s tenure had been “eight years of drift.” Kennedy’s team believed they could govern better.

While the “inordinately cocky” stereotype applied most directly to Kennedy’s inner circle, it fit McNamara as well. Superficially, he was a Harvard graduate, and while a Republican he was not strongly conservative. Substantively, he was arrogant. He did not suffer fools gladly, and he had an expansive notion of what constituted a fool. He did little to reign in this trait in dealing with Congress. McNamara was generally reluctant to place much effort in ingratiating himself with congressional audiences. According to Gilpatric’s diagnosis, McNamara did not understand how the political process on the Hill worked, and was not disposed to expending the time or effort to learn. McNamara didn’t like to pay courtesy calls. He preferred to delegate such responsibilities to his congressional liaison officers and other subordinate officials. He simply found it difficult to deal with people he did not respect intellectually, and this applied to a good many members of Congress. Perhaps most importantly, McNamara did not appreciate the importance of good congressional staff relations. In Gilpatric’s words:

It was one thing to go up and see Senator Stennis and explain the whole thing to him or to Senator Russell or Margaret Chase Smith, but if you or somebody on your behalf hadn’t done the spade work with their staff, you were just wasting your time. I mean, there are pleasant relations, but you weren’t going to get anything done. And McNamara didn’t think that was an effective way of operating... And it took him a long time to realize that

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485 Clark Clifford, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.

486 See Gilpatric, interview, JFK Library.

487 McGiffert, interview, JFK Library. “And then he would get these fellows over for lunch from time to time, which was relatively easy if the individual involved was a guy who he felt would talk responsibly or rationally on the subject, and very difficult if the individual involved was someone who he thought would go off on byways.”
someone, like myself or Cy Vance or others, had to go up and do a lot of missionary work and go to tedious luncheons with the staff and do a lot of just plain ass kissing with certain key people on the Hill.\textsuperscript{488}

Moreover, when he looked to the Hill’s military committees, McNamara was inclined to see servants of narrow regional, bureaucratic, and industrial constituencies, rather than representatives of “all the people.” As McNamara later elaborated:

For example, (the defense committees) were dominated by southerners. The chairmen generally were southerners, the members disproportionately southerners. Southerners, as we all know, have had a different view of the military requirements of the nation and the national security of the nation, and how it might best be achieved, than have the rest of the people… (In addition, the committees) were dominated by reserve officers – men who were honest, sincere, patriotic individuals, but men who held commissions in the reserve and guard of the United States and were really spokesmen for – consciously or unconsciously – spokesmen for the military interest as opposed to the national interest. They saw things through the narrow parochial views of the military. Men such as Thurmond and Goldwater, for example.\textsuperscript{489}

Despite this inclination, McNamara was able to form mutually respectful and constructive relationships with specific members who did not fit the stereotype he formed. However, such relationships were the exception, and were formed despite McNamara’s preconception of the Congress and those who dwelled there.

Despite his general dismissiveness of the Congress, most of McNamara’s severest problems with respect to congressional opposition came from the House. With respect to the Senate, his greatest difficulties arose outside the Armed Services and Appropriations

\textsuperscript{488} Gilpatric, interview, JFK Library.

\textsuperscript{489} McNamara, interview, LBJ Library. While Russell would likely not have been so sanguine that McNamara and his staff represented a true national interest, he almost certainly would have agreed with the remainder of McNamara’s arguments.
McNamara’s command of information, and even what some regarded as his willingness to “overwhelm” congressional audiences with it, ingratiated him with Russell and other SASC members. Recalling McNamara’s tenure, Saltonstall remembered McNamara’s stubbornness and their frequent disagreements, but he spoke admiringly of McNamara’s extraordinary command of the factual data on which he based his positions. While Saltonstall’s remarks implied criticism of McNamara’s judgment on certain points, he acknowledged that – particularly with respect to systems development and procurement – McNamara wielded a powerful influence on the committee. While the committee on occasions reversed or altered certain of McNamara’s decisions, these were exceptions to the rule.

Russell’s overall high regard for McNamara remained throughout the Secretary’s tenure. Early on, Russell commented, “Secretary McNamara is a gifted man and has been tireless in his efforts to increase the efficiency of our procurement system as well as to avoid duplication of activities within the Department of Defense.” After having battled McNamara for four years, Russell still remarked, "I have the highest regard for Mr.

\[490\] This is consistent with McGiffert’s view, for example. McGiffert, interview, JFK Library. The Senate Government Operations Committee’s investigation into the TFX aircraft contract decision was a prime example, as we will see.

\[491\] Saltonstall, interview, JFK Library.

\[492\] Excerpts of Russell remarks at the Valdosta, GA, Chamber of Commerce dinner, January 24, 1964, 11/29/63-12/31/64 file, Richard Russell series, WHCF Name Files, LBJ Library.
McNamara's administrative ability. It is awesome to watch him work on the business affairs of the far-flung defense establishment."  

Here was finally a Secretary who was willing to use the powers the Congress had granted to really administer the Defense Department. While Russell disagreed with McNamara on many issues, Russell was honest enough with himself to recognize that McNamara was performing the precise function Russell and others demanded during the Eisenhower years, and which Russell felt the Congress was incapable of effectively exercising. If, after Russell had marshaled his arguments and presented his views, McNamara still remained unmoved, then Russell generally either agreed to allow McNamara to have his way, or at most attempted to kick the can down the road to the next fiscal year. Russell had always adopted the rule that he would support a well-meaning Executive, and he found McNamara not only well-meaning but enormously able.

Among McNamara’s first self-appointed tasks in office was to sort through the list of proposed and ongoing research, development, and procurement programs, and to cull it to a subset that was sufficient to provide adequate deterrence and war fighting

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494 For example, the committee noted: “It is gratifying to note that the Secretary is making use of the authority the Congress has vested in him to streamline the Defense Establishment as it has been the position of this committee that the Secretary of Defense needs no additional authority to accomplish desirable changes but need only exercise the authority given him by the Congress. It is hoped that such changes as have been made and others yet to be accomplished will go far to eliminate many of the examples of wasteful duplication and competition between the services which have all too frequently come to the attention of the committee.” Military Construction Authorization, Fiscal Year 1963”, June 14, 1962 file, Transcripts of Executive Sessions (74th to 88th Congress) files, Committee on Armed Services, Records of the United States Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
capabilities at a reasonable cost. The 1950s was a period of rapid advance along a broad range of military R&D projects related to nuclear delivery systems and other emerging technologies. By the late 1950s and early 1960s, many of the projects were developed and entering deployment, all the while new R&D was ongoing. Pursuing the entire range of procurement and R&D options was simply unaffordable. McNamara was aggressive in culling the list, a process that made him a great many congressional opponents. Among the major programs – some of which had already been deployed, others of which were still in development – that McNamara killed were: the Thor and Jupiter IRBMs; the Atlas ICBM; the Snark cruise missile, and Skybolt missile; the rail-based mobile Minuteman ICBM concept; the first variant of the Titan ICBM; the Air Force’s Dyna-Soar space plane concept; and the Air Force’s Aircraft Nuclear Propulsion program. McNamara also remained a skeptic of new bomber development and of nuclear propulsion for Navy surface ships.

Congressional opposition to these moves developed for a number of reasons. Some became sold on the strategic rationale for these programs in the 1950s, and could not see a good reason for abandoning them in the 1960s. Others simply saw these as blows to the interests of their corporate constituents. Some Air Force partisans came to view McNamara as anti-Air Force, given the large number of high profile programs cut from that Service. Others worried that McNamara was too willing to abandon promising new R&D, and too confident that the U.S. was reaching a stable deterrent capability that did not require aggressive continued technological competition with the Soviets.

Russell fell most squarely in this last group. While in the committee room he often in the past voiced support for many of the programs McNamara terminated,
McNamara was generally able to persuade him that the rationale for ending them was sound. The two main exceptions were continued bomber development and naval nuclear propulsion, as we will see. However, Russell remained deeply concerned that McNamara and other administration officials were too content in their belief that U.S. deterrent capabilities – particularly the Polaris and Minuteman forces the nation was in the process of deploying – would create a stable balance with the Soviets without continued investment in at least certain emerging technologies and capabilities. While Russell believed in discussing arms limitations, he did not trust the Soviets to negotiate a verifiable halt to the arms race. Given this, he felt the U.S. had to accept the arms race as a fact of life, and press ahead technologically in order to prevent the Soviets from one-upping the U.S. and creating a destabilizing balance in their favor. As SASC colleague Peter Dominick (R-CO) summed it up in a 1971 interview:

> I think the main problem that (Russell) felt and we all felt, was that there was an enormous amount of research started by the Secretary of Defense and then cut off and then would start in on something new, and cut off, so that we never came to the development really, of anything that we felt would be of assistance in the defense field… This was the source of really an enormous frustration because what we had really was a unilateral limitation on defense forces during the whole decade of the sixties. And this concerned Senator Russell very much because he felt that while we were standing still, the Soviets were moving rather rapidly. And events have certainly proved that out.495

At the start of the 1963 session, the chairmanship of the defense appropriations subcommittee opened up. Russell decided to relinquish his chairmanship of the

495 Dominick, interview, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies.
agriculture subcommittee and move over to the defense spot. McGiffert wrote to Kennedy’s White House chief of legislative liaison, Lawrence O’Brien, that he was convinced Russell did so because of a deep concern “that our defense policies are going in the wrong direction (particularly in the de-emphasis of strategic manned aircraft) and that our disarmament policies involve a give-away.” While Russell claimed that he made the move simply to lessen his workload, McGiffert was convinced that Russell desired “to acquire greater influence over the defense budget and hence over defense policy.”

Despite McNamara’s eminence, the Congress retained significant powers over the defense program. Unfortunately for the members of the defense committees who desired a stronger defense than McNamara was inclined to provide, the Congress did not have the correct powers. The Congress could always use the power of the purse to say “no” or “less” to a particular request, and at the times its members so chose. The fact is, however, that the great program debates of the 1960s were generally about Congress urging McNamara to accept “more” or “something else.” On debates framed in these terms, the Congress had decidedly less leverage. Congress was free to authorize and appropriate funds beyond what McNamara requested. The President was then free to impound the funding. Members could offer trades, extend debate and revisit an issue over years,

496 Throughout his career, Russell maintained strong support for farming interests – particularly the family farm; thus his chairmanship of the agriculture subcommittee.

497 For example, Russell had grave concerns with the 1963 Test Ban Treaty. Whether at Russell’s direction or not, Stennis’s preparedness subcommittee conducted inquiries throughout 1964 and 1965 to monitor agreed upon test ban safeguards intended to ensure Soviet compliance.

investigate, make the Department investigate itself and report, and generally just try to make the Secretary’s life miserable if he did not comply with their wishes. They could not force him to spend, however. Less tough or confident secretaries could sometimes be cowed this way. In the 1950s, Eisenhower was the real backstop in such most cases. McNamara, however, lacked neither toughness nor confidence. Once McNamara set his feet, he was exceedingly difficult to move.

It is worth noting that Russell’s declining health was a factor in committee operations during the 1960s. He entered the decade at over sixty years old and suffering from emphysema. These factors sapped his energy and his emphysema on occasion required prolonged periods of convalescence. In both 1965 and 1968, Russell spent much of the Senate session hospitalized at Walter Reed. While he still advised committee operations during these periods, the interim chairmanship in each case fell to Stennis. If nothing else, this provided the soon-to-be chairman some valuable on the job training.

**Authorization in Practice**

The remainder of the next two chapters focuses on two aspects of SASC oversight during the 1960s. The first looks at how the committee put its new authorization requirement into practice. Annual authorization provided the Armed Services Committees with their primary lever to positively shape the U.S. defense program. The committees steadily expanded the scope of this requirement over the course of the decade (and the next) largely in relationship to the set of issues that the aimed to influence. The second aspect of committee operations on which the narrative will focus involves Stennis’s effort to reform preparedness subcommittee procedures to increase the
Stennis’s substantive policy focus, and to better able the subcommittee to assist its parent in executing the authorization function. Stennis’s success in the latter regard is difficult to discern, as the primary product Stennis could offer the committee was a broader information and analysis base, and it is impossible to tease from the record how this influenced committee decisions. Stennis initially took his cues from existing committee concerns, and then developed products that tended to reinforce these concerns. As the decade progressed, however, his subcommittee developed a capacity to reach out and find new issues to bring forth, rather than warming over existing ones. In any case, Stennis’s activities on the subcommittee are primarily of interest in identifying how his oversight concept evolved over the decade.

Unfortunately, the documentary record with which to assess committee performance in implementing its new authorization requirements is sparse. No transcripts associated with mark-up of the procurement and R&D authorization bills are exist at all. The remaining official committee records of the period, along with official Executive Branch archival collections and the private collections of individual senators, provide a broad but incomplete picture of committee operations. By far, the best available sources are the committee and conference reports that describe committee actions, objectives, and (in the latter case) compromises that account for each year’s actual authorization bill. These, of course, were available to contemporary researchers as well.

499 Transcripts of some classified hearings are in existence, although at the time this dissertation was researched they had not been cleared for public disclosure.
In describing the impact of the new authorization requirements to the Senate in 1962, Russell concluded that they had not yet amounted to anything “earth-shaking in their significance.” At a minimum, however, Russell stated:

I am convinced that this procedure affords a much broader base of information and understanding in the Congress. Moreover, it affords the appropriate legislative committees an opportunity to express their judgment in areas for which they have responsibility.\textsuperscript{500}

If the new requirement added to the committee’s information base, it also added to the committee’s workload, both for members and staff. Yet the full committee added no additional staff, and the limitations inherent when four professional staff members are required to handle the full suite of legislative and other requirements traditionally before a congressional committee \textit{and} adjudicate an entirely new and significantly complicated authorization measure are self-evident. Moreover, the full committee adopted no revised subcommittee structure organized along functional lines to assist in adjudicating the authorization bill (as became the practice during Stennis’s chairmanship). Russell did at times establish \textit{ad hoc} subcommittees to dispose of specific issues. The routine mechanics by which the committee developed and marked-up the procurement and R&D authorization bill is frankly unclear, although one suspects the details fell largely to Russell and Darden, with other members and staff participating in a decidedly secondary role.

The irony with regard to the expanding scope of the annual authorization requirement during the 1960s is that, while section 412(b) originated in the Senate as the

\footnote{\textsuperscript{500} Russell floor statement on H. R. 9751, Bill Files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, National Archives.}
“Russell Amendment,” virtually every expansion of the authorization requirement that occurred thereafter through 1968 originated in the House. The reason for this lay largely with the competitive dynamic that existed between the House Armed Services and Appropriations Committees, a dynamic that was largely absent in the Senate due to overlapping memberships. As one Army legislative liaison officer responsible for coordinating with the Armed Services Committee staffs prior to the FY 1962 posture and authorization hearings commented in a memo to his superiors: “I was struck by the difference in approach of (the Senate) committee to the question of these hearings from that of the House committee. In (the Senate) committee there is no feeling of competition with the Appropriations Committee.”

Moreover, because of their single assignments, House members tended to see themselves as issue experts, while Senators tended to be generalists. The same Army officer quoted above commented to his superiors subsequent to the FY 1962 posture hearings (during which SASC members criticized the Army for inability to clearly articulate its mission and requirements):

HASC are genuine experts in military affairs… Unlike the Senate, they are not bored by an explanation of the Army's philosophy of logistics. By the same token, their reaction to the more simplified presentation of the Air Force and Navy is somewhat perfunctory. This year, Mr. Vinson didn't even stick around for the Air Force and Navy presentations. In the Senate, on the other hand, members serve on several committees. Their interests are divided and they, in general, do not acquire the degree of expertise in a given field that House members do. In speaking of the Army's

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presentation, Mr. Darden said: “In my opinion, the older members of the Committee have no idea how the Army fights. They can't visualize what the Army would do in general war, or how they would do it.” He went on to say, “You Army people probably think of this matter as being too simple and obvious to be worth the Senator's time. Believe me, it is not. I doubt if it is possible to over-simplify the problem for this particular audience.”

It seems unlikely that Darden intended to include Russell in his reference to “older members.” In any case, the generally greater level of focus and expertise within the HASC may have driven its members – enabled by an ambitious committee staff – to seek the use of annual authorization as a lever against the Executive Branch. Perhaps the HASC’s generally lower opinion of McNamara was also a factor. In any case, the HASC quickly latched on to the authorization function as a tool to expand its jurisdiction and attempt to enforce its preferences with respect to the Defense Department’s programs and budget.

The length and detail of committee reports accompanying the authorization bills increased steadily over the decade, and not simply because the scope of the requirement increased. In any case, this is a poor measure of effectiveness. The committees tended to scrutinize department authorization requests selectively, rather than wholesale. Most items apparently got through with minimal attention. Instead, the committees focused on a few specific areas about which they were particularly concerned. True to Braswell’s

502 Colonel George B. Sloan memo to the Chief of Legislative Liaison, February 2, 1962, C381/032 Congressional Hearings (Sec 412b) 1962 file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Record Group 335, National Archives, Washington, DC.

503 As noted previously, Vinson maintained a generally favorable opinion of and a positive working relationship with the Secretary. Vinson retired from the House in January 1965, however. His successor, Mendel Rivers of South Carolina, along with several other ranking members, were regarded as having significantly less positive views of McNamara. See McGiffert, interview, JFK Library.
“plant manager” versus “board of directors” analogy, the committees focused their attention on a few high priority and high profile issues – particularly those that retained at least one strong Service proponent in opposition to the decision McNamara put before the committees. The most significant such cases involved continued investment in manned bombers and naval nuclear propulsion, as well as anti-ballistic missile systems to defend the homeland. In rare cases, the committees moved to kill systems that had broad department-wide support. The best such example involves the Fast Deployment Logistics Ship concept. Finally, we will examine a case that demonstrates Russell’s ability to force action on an otherwise unwilling Secretary of Defense – although one that falls outside the bounds of authorization issues. This involves Russell’s campaign to force the Defense Department to deploy battleships against North Vietnam.

**The Manned Bomber**

The most contentious program issue between McNamara and the Armed Services Committees during the 1960s centered on the latter’s concern that the Defense Department intended to cease all new procurement of manned bombers for the U.S. Air Force. At times, the debate appeared to rage – and in the minds of some members indeed did rage – over specific programs, rather than the Department’s general commitment to the manned bomber concept. However, Russell’s primary concern was the latter rather than the former. In particular, he doubted the wisdom of placing sole reliance for strategic deterrence and strike missions on land and sea-based ballistic missiles, and at the same time abandoning the capabilities heavy bombers offered in conventional warfare.
Bomber programs had long been a point of controversy between Presidents and Congresses. Symington’s airpower hearings provide an example. Section 412(b) included aircraft in part for this reason. Not surprisingly, this ongoing controversy reared immediately as the Armed Services Committees began implementing the new authorization requirement. Within a year, it became the single most overtly public dispute between an Armed Services Committee and the Defense Department during the decade.

Support among both Armed Services Committees for continued investment in bombers was extremely high, although the exact nature of that support varied considerably. While some members supported bomber programs almost uncritically across the board, others were more discriminate in choosing among programs to support or oppose. Russell fell in the latter camp. While for a time he might demonstrate a strong commitment for a particular system, he was also willing to cut losses if development either failed to mature, or matured in a direction out of step with anticipated changes to the future combat environment. The FY 1962 authorization bill presents the first case of Russell’s eagerness to support continued bomber investment, but to discriminate among programs based on their worthiness.

During FY 1961 the Air Force had two bomber types in production, the B-52 and the B-58. The B-58 was a high-speed jet bomber capable of twice the speed of sound, but with range and bomb load capacities only about one-third that of the B-52, a subsonic aircraft. The B-52 was the mainstay of the Strategic Air Command. It first entered service in 1954, and by FY 1961 had spawned several variants with overall production in the hundreds of aircraft. The B-58, on the other hand, only began full production in 1959, and experienced a variety of operational problems both before and after this date. It was
extremely expensive to procure and maintain, and demonstrated serious reliability issues; approximately one-quarter of the planes procured were eventually lost to accidents.

Besides the two types already in production, the Air Force was in the process of developing the B-70 (also known as the XB-70 during its experimental stage, and the RS-70 as its concept evolved over the 1960s). The Air Force initially conceived of the B-70 as a high-altitude bomber capable of flying at three times the speed of sound with a range (but not a maximum payload) that would rival the B-52. Like the B-58, the B-70 experienced a range of development problems during the 1950s. Unlike the B-58, the Air Force senior leadership entered the 1960s fully committed to the B-70 program.

The Air Force’s uncertainty with respect to further procurement of the B-58 had a ripple effect on the attitudes of certain SASC members toward the program. Those with seats on the Appropriations Committee, for example, had for a number of years heard Air Force leaders testify in very positive terms about the program in order to justify continued funding, only to see the Service repeatedly turn around and either defer or cut back portions of the program. In March 1959, for example, the Air Force signed a contract for 40 additional B-58s, only to reduce the increment to 32 that August, and then to 20 in December. With respect to the FY 1961 appropriation, the Air Force testified that it still supported the program and required funds for 30 additional planes, but soon thereafter rumors began to circulate that the Air Force was considering another reduction, if not outright termination of all new production. Stennis wrote to Lyndon Johnson in 1960 describing his frustration with Air Force behavior (the B-58 was built in Ft Worth, TX). Stennis complained, “Reducing procurement numbers after testifying to us on the Hill is not without precedent on part of the Air Force.” He felt that the Air Force had
repeatedly burned the Appropriations Committees by making changes “after supporting testimony was provided to our various committees specifically requesting our support for higher numbers of aircraft.”\textsuperscript{504} If Stennis’s attitude was indicative, the SASC was predisposed to look unkindly upon further funding of the B-58 program as it entered deliberation on the FY 1962 authorization bill.

Testimony during the 1961 posture hearings only strengthened this inclination. Air Force Chief of Staff General Thomas White stated that he still supported continuation of the B-58 program, but if required to prioritize he would choose to fund both B-70 development and additional B-52 procurement ahead of the B-58.\textsuperscript{505} The committee also heard testimony that in its “D” budget, the Air Force sought to continue B-52 procurement in FY 1962, but requested nothing for B-58 procurement. The “D” budget was the Air Force’s pure requirements estimate, unconstrained by budget guidelines.\textsuperscript{506}

Production for neither the B-52 nor B-58 was scheduled after FY 1962, and the new Kennedy administration’s FY 1962 budget requested no additional funds for any future bomber procurement. This greatly concerned both Armed Services Committees, but each took a slightly different tack in its version of the year’s authorization bill. Despite the lack of a Defense Department funding request, each committee approved new

\textsuperscript{504} Stennis letter to Johnson, undated, B-52 Program file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.


\textsuperscript{506} Unattributed memo “Comparison of House and Senate versions of S. 1852,” undated, S. 1852 (1961) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
procurement authorization in an effort to prompt the President and Secretary of Defense to change their minds. The House approved $337 million for the procurement of whatever combination of B-52 and B-58 aircraft the department might choose. The SASC, on the other hand, approved an additional $525 million specifically for procurement of 52 B-52s – a wing’s worth, plus seven spares. This allowed for no additional procurement of B-58s, even if the Secretary had changed his mind and decided to procure more.\footnote{In its action, the SASC for some reason did not actually mention the B-52 by name, instead including the somewhat cryptic language “long-range manned aircraft for the Strategic Air Command.” The implication of this language was generally evident, however. Jim Wright, future Speaker of the House and representative of the Fort Worth district in which the B-58 was built, quickly wrote to Russell extolling the virtues of the aircraft and expressing his concern that the Senate’s language precluded further B-58 procurement. Russell responded that, yes, this was precisely the implication. He added parenthetically that his real fear was that the Department would procure no additional bombers after the B-52 production line’s scheduled closure the following year. Wright letter to Russell with response, May 19, 1961, S. 1852 (1961) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.} In the end, the House-Senate conference agreed to the SASC’s language, and the Appropriations Committees agreed upon $525 million in additional funding. McNamara, however, refused to spend any of this, and Russell understood full well that Congress had no recourse to force such spending.

McNamara never stated that he categorically opposed the manned bomber concept on its merits. He explained his decision to forego additional B-52 procurement with the rationale that future bomber demand was uncertain, and that additional aircraft would not be needed in 1962 or 1963, but in the 1967-9 timeframe as older models reached the end of their service lives. He argued that the B-52 production line could be reopened quickly and efficiently, and the Department would bear any additional cost
penalty if reopening the line proved necessary. On the other hand, McNamara never found much value in the B-58. In 1965 he announced that the department would begin to phase out the aircraft that year, five years ahead of schedule. The Air Force retired all B-58s by 1970.

In an October 1961 memo to President Kennedy, McNamara explained at length his general reservations about the role of manned bombers in the nation’s defense. He insisted that he based these reservations not on a “simple belief that bombers are becoming obsolete, either because ballistic missiles are based on more advanced technology, or because of prospective improvements in enemy air defenses.” He readily acknowledged that bombers provided capabilities beyond what missiles could provide. However, with respect to the nation’s strategic nuclear forces, McNamara believed firmly that these needed to be either hardened and dispersed, or continuously mobile in peacetime. Bombers on the ground were far too vulnerable to ICBM attack. Keeping bombers on airborne alert made at least a portion of the force continuously mobile, but this was costly and McNamara worried about the hair-trigger aspect of this posture, as well as “other limitations.” He estimated the five year cost of the extra B-52

508 Aviation Daily article “McN sees no benefit in continuing B-52 line,” recorded in June 21 edition of Current News, a Defense Department news service, “CN 6/30-21/61” file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.


510 Airborne alert involved keeping a portion of the bomber force aloft in a fully combat-configured state in order to avoid the possibility that the entire force could be caught on the ground and destroyed in the event of a surprise nuclear attack. McNamara did not specify what the “other limitations” of this posture were. However, two serious nuclear weapons accidents (a.k.a., “Broken Arrows”), one off the coast of Spain in 1966 and one at Thule, Greenland, in 1968, contributed to the 1968 end of the airborne alert program.
wing the Congress proposed was actually $1.4 billion, including supporting tankers and air-launched missiles, and assuming ground alert only.\footnote{While the B-52 (“H” variant only) could carry a variety of air launched missiles, McNamara was probably referring specifically to the Skybolt, designed to be an air-launched ballistic missile with a nuclear warhead. The Skybolt could be used to suppress Soviet air defenses or attack primary Soviet targets directly. The prospect of fielding the Skybolt initially breathed new life into the B-52 program, as this appeared to be a way to maintain the aircraft’s relevance, when otherwise its low speed would make it useless in the face of Soviet bomber defenses. The Skybolt never proceeded beyond development, however. McNamara cancelled it in December 1962, a decision for which he received wide congressional criticism. While some critics supported the Skybolt directly, others feared more generally that this simply amounted to McNamara driving another nail into the manned bomber’s coffin. Moreover, McNamara received criticism for the appearance of duplicity. For example, in the same memo the above paragraph is citing, McNamara claimed, “Ironically, it now appears that prior defense suppression with missiles (e.g., B-52 with Skybolt), is a much more effective way than speed to ensure penetration.” McNamara used this argument against B-70 development with congressional audiences, who were then quite critical when McNamara turned on his heels and killed the Skybolt program at exactly the same time he was trying to do the same to the B-70.}

Turning his attention to the B-70, McNamara pointed out that the Air Force had initiated the program before the US had successful ICBM and Polaris programs. In his view, the B-70’s focus on high speed to allow successful penetration of air defenses essentially duplicated rather than complemented the capabilities of the ICBM force. The B-70 as initially designed could not seek out targets of unknown or uncertain location, or attack mobile targets. McNamara pointed out that the Air Force was examining a strike-reconnaissance concept for the B-70 (i.e., the RS-70). However, while this alternative intrigued McNamara, he felt it was still far too early to make a production decision.\footnote{Ibid.}

As the debate over the manned bomber’s future entered calendar year 1962, the focus shifted squarely to the B-70. As mentioned previously, the B-70 had a troubled development program during the 1950s. This was in part because the Air Force intended the B-70 to share several components with other programs that were themselves troubled,
and eventually cancelled.\footnote{These were the F-108 and the Aircraft Nuclear Propulsion (ANP) program. ANP included the X-6, a modified B-36 that was designed to be partially nuclear powered, which in theory would allow the aircraft to remain aloft for days at a time. The Eisenhower administration cancelled both F-108 and X-6 in the 1950s. The Kennedy administration ended the ANP program completely in 1961.} Moreover, the B-70 always had strong critics outside the Air Force. In particular, Eisenhower personally lacked faith in the B-70 concept, at one point in 1959 saying that the “B-70 left him cold in terms of making military sense.”\footnote{GlobalSecurity.org, “B-70 Valkyrie Cancellation,” http://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/systems/b-70-can.htm.} This was primarily because it could not be available in large numbers for approximately a decade, by which time the ICBM would be the mainstay of the strategic nuclear force.

In December 1959, the Air Force announced that the B-70 program was being reoriented to produce two prototypes only, and that development of most sub-systems was canceled. Incidentally, this included termination of subcontract work at Lockheed’s Marietta, GA, plant.\footnote{Memo to Russell, undated, Correspondence August-December 1959 file, Armed Services Committee subseries, Legislative series, United States Senatorial Papers, Richard B. Russell Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia Libraries.} In a press release announcing the 1960 posture hearings, Russell stated that he fully expected “the Committee to explore the future role and capability of the Strategic Air Command as a result of the decision to curtail the B-70 program.”\footnote{SASC press release on posture hearings, January 15, 1960, Armed Services Committee – General (1960) file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 86th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.} Such would prove but one increment of pressure in an election season during which Democrats roundly criticized the Eisenhower administration for an insufficient commitment to the nation’s defenses – a season that culminated in Eisenhower’s famous “military-industrial complex” speech of January 1961. For whatever reason, the B-70 got
a reprieve in CY 1960. In August, the Defense Department restored the B-70 to a development and test program and approved 12 prototypes.\textsuperscript{517}

Despite its rhetoric during the campaign, the new Kennedy administration was as cool to the B-70 as Eisenhower had been in 1959. As McNamara’s Deputy Secretary Roswell Gilpatric later recalled:

Both McNamara and I came to the Pentagon absolutely convinced that the B-70 was a turkey. In fact, I’d gone down myself and talked to (Maurice) Stans – he was Director of the budget – trying to fight the B-70... It was just a question of how we could, you know, bring it off and deflect this tremendous head of steam that developed with this huge industrial base. I forgot how many states. Thirty or forty states with subcontractors and the Air Force and (prime contractor) North American (Aviation) and all...\textsuperscript{518}

The Air Force leadership was unwilling to let the B-70 go down without a fight, however. General Curtis LeMay served as Air Force Chief of Staff from 1961 until 1965. Eugene Zuckert served as Secretary of the Air Force during the same period. Zuckert recalled that the B-70 was “LeMay’s baby.”\textsuperscript{519} In Zuckert’s view, LeMay’s support was almost visceral – based more on LeMay’s professional judgment that the B-70’s primary importance would be its deterrence value, rather than any specific warfighting role. The Air Force leadership developed a strategy to maintain the program that was partly cynical (i.e., an effort to save the program at any cost), but also partly a genuine attempt to redefine the requirement for the aircraft such that it filled a real gap in U.S. capabilities.

\textsuperscript{517} It is unclear how this affected Lockheed’s Georgia plant, if at all.

\textsuperscript{518} Gilpatric, interview JFK Library.

\textsuperscript{519} Zuckert, interview JFK Library.
Joseph Charyk served as Air Force Assistant Secretary for Research and Development from 1959 to 1963. He recalled how Zuckert worked to transform the program. Despite concerns about the B-70s ability to penetrate Soviet air defenses, as long as ballistic missile accuracy – and thus ability to destroy hardened targets – remained poor, one could argue for the relevancy of the B-70 as a high-altitude, high-speed bomber.\footnote{While it had low-altitude capabilities that made it more survivable, its combat range in such cases was questionable.} This remained the case through the late 1950s. By 1961, however, it was evident that improvements in ICBM accuracy would soon eliminate the traditional rationale for the B-70, at least in a nuclear conflict. Zuckert pushed the Air Force to develop “some new capabilities and some new arguments.”\footnote{Joseph Charyk, interview, transcript, Oral History Project, JFK Library.} This led to the concept of adding a reconnaissance capability, which in turn might allow the B-70 to attack targets of opportunity throughout the Soviet Union as it “mopped-up” after an ICBM attack. This was a capability missiles could not provide. By the end of 1961, the Air Force had redubbed the aircraft the RS-70. The “RS” referred to the aircraft’s “reconnaissance and strike” missions. According to Charyk, this redefinition in turn sparked the interest of McNamara’s Director for Defense Research and Engineering, Harold Brown, and so the aircraft at least temporarily gained new life at the OSD level. Both Zuckert and Charyk acknowledged that the change in the aircraft’s designation was, in Charyk’s words, a “gimmick.” Both also implied, however, that they sincerely believed that underlying this gimmick was a legitimate concept. On the other hand, both also acknowledge that their
critics could never get beyond the gimmick to trust the Air Force’s sincerity in attempting to test a new concept.

These maneuvers had limited impact on congressional support for the B-70. Like LeMay, many in Congress supported manned bombers viscerally. As Gilpatric noted, North American Aviation’s wide sub-contractor base did not hurt, either. What helped more, though, was the Air Force’s continued commitment to the program. Such commitment could not hold the support of the more objective members of the defense committees indefinitely, in the absence of success in the development program, but it could hold most members for a while. Moreover, the Air Force was aggressive in maintaining congressional support. As noted previously, Zuckert freely acknowledged that, when he came to the Air Force, there was a significant lobbying effort in place (“blue suits going up to the Hill,” in his words). While he insisted that he and LeMay officially stopped the practice, he implied that at some level there always remained some degree of contact that could not be stopped from on high. Whatever the back channel flow, however, the Air Force remained committed to the B-70 in its official testimony and correspondence with the defense committees.

Eisenhower had originally requested $358 million for B-70 development for FY 1962. Kennedy cut this to $220 million. The Bureau of the Budget had recommended the

522 Zuckert, interview JFK Library.

523 Ibid. This included the flow of information to senators who were also reserve officers. Zuckert noted that Goldwater was among these, although he did not find Goldwater particularly effective as an advocate for the B-70.
President consider outright cancellation. However, McNamara preferred an approach that, at a minimum, would allow further exploration of capabilities that might prove useful in other applications. The $220 million would fund development of six prototype aircraft that would “provide for the orderly demonstration of Mach 3 flight with an air frame potentially useful as a bomber,” (emphasis added) and thus “preserve an option” to field a full wing of B-70s around 1970, if events warranted.

This cutback caused some degree of heartburn within the Armed Services Committees. Neither mounted a challenge to Kennedy’s budget request in order to increase funding for FY 1962, but this was mainly because development fell outside the scope of the authorization requirement as finally codified in section 412(b). The sum for B-70 development was included in the Defense Department’s authorization request as information only – although the administration also perhaps hoped that including some reference to continued development would ease the bitter pill of no new procurement funding for the B-52 or B-58. During hearings, most SASC members including Russell and Stennis spoke out in favor of expedited development and production of the B-70, but went no further. Carl Vinson noted that the HASC was at first concerned with the cut, but came to concur that the Kennedy program permitted an “orderly development” of the

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524 McNamara and David Bell (Director, Bureau of the Budget) memo for Kennedy, March 10, 1961, Defense Department General 3/61 file, National Security Files, JFK Library.

525 Ibid.

526 Russell floor statement on H. R. 9751, Bill Files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, National Archives.

527 Memo on status of the President’s budget, April 18, 1961, 4/18-28/61 file, Presidential Office Files, JFK Library.
program. The Congress did increase funding for B-70 development in the appropriations bill, but the Kennedy administration simply impounded the extra money.

The Kennedy administration’s FY 1963 budget request proved far more controversial. The Defense Department’s request for that year included an additional $171 million for continued system development, but no funding for procurement. The HASC took issue with the administration’s lack of urgency in moving to actual RS-70 deployment, and decided to force the issue by including $491 million in its version of the bill – the original $171 million for development, plus $320 million for production planning and long lead-time procurement – and included language “directing” the Defense Department to utilize no less than this amount in FY 1963. As part of this, the HASC version also added language requiring authorization for research and development of the RS-70 specifically.

This sparked a mini constitutional crisis. A series of SASC staff memos analyzed the situation. Beyond the obvious limitation that an authorization bill did not automatically generate an accompanying appropriation, the SASC staff’s bottom-line conclusion was that the HASC had no constitutional basis for its action “directing” the Defense Department to obligate funds. The memos noted that, while appropriations had a constitutional basis, the requirement to first authorize appropriations was only a congressional rule. As such, there was no basis for an authorization to form a requirement for expenditures. Thus, the SASC staff concluded that House language practically speaking amounted to nothing more than a statement of committee intent. The staff

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suggested that if a similar provision were included in an appropriations act and subsequently disregarded, this *might* present a question of whether the President was complying with his constitutional obligation to ensure that the laws are faithfully executed. However, the staff doubted whether in any practical sense this could be enforceable in a court of law. Further, the staff found that constitutional historians generally viewed the Congress’s power to raise armies and maintain navies as negative; that is, it was meant to restrain the Executive. There was “a dearth of source material of what the Constitutional framers intended if the Congress desired to provide a larger and better equipped army or navy than the Executive Branch proposed.” The staff concluded that Congress lacked any realistic enforcement power in this area short of impeachment, and that such a course was utterly impractical given the issue at hand.529

Whatever the SASC’s assessment, the White House felt that Vinson’s action was provocative enough that, politically, it could not afford to simply dismiss it.530 Kennedy instead chose to engage Vinson directly, and invited the chairman to a one-on-one discussion that came to be called “the walk in the Rose Garden.” The two men resolved to seek a compromise. The White House dispatched Lawrence O’Brien and Ted Sorensen, Special Counsel to the President, to Capitol Hill to attempt to resolve the matter. The meeting, which took place in Vinson’s office, provides an interesting insight into the influence that congressional staff members are sometimes able to wield. O’Brien

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529 Series of unattributed memos on legal weight of Vinson’s RS-70 authorization measure, Defense – RS-70 Program file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

530 “Politically” in a congressional relations sense, not a partisan sense.
recalled that Vinson was typically courteous and low-key. However, Vinson had one of his staff members along, and as the conversation progressed it became clear to O’Brien that it was this staff member who was the one determined to press a confrontation. As O’Brien recalled:

He was the one that was just absolutely adamant about any kind of compromise or adjustment, and even as Vinson talked, this fellow would move into the conversation in very strong protest... Frankly, after a lengthy conversation, Vinson started to debate with his own staff fellow. As I recall it, the ultimate conclusion was that Vinson overruled the staff member, said that he found this unacceptable and we would shake hands on it... So we resolved that, what could have been a very serious setback for us in terms of our relationship with Carl Vinson... It was clearly the role that this fellow had achieved with Vinson that hit me, that he could deign to keep insisting and rebutting his boss and basically refusing to acquiesce. It became a matter of Carl Vinson having to persuade his own man.\textsuperscript{531}

The compromise that Kennedy’s staff members were able to strike included the following. Vinson agreed to rescind the language directing the Defense Department to obligate funding. In turn, the Defense Department would immediately initiate a new study of the RS-70 program “in the light of the recommendations and the representations of the Armed Services Committee.”\textsuperscript{532} It would also continue development activities on certain components (as McNamara had already intended). This compromise allowed Vinson to claim that “the Committee has made its position crystal clear – and the

\textsuperscript{531} Lawrence F. O’Brien, interviewed by Michael L. Gillette, October 30, 1985, oral history interview III, transcript, internet copy, LBJ Library, \url{http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/archives.hom/oralhistory.hom/obrienl/OBRIEN03.PDF}.

\textsuperscript{532} House Armed Services Committee press release, March 1, 1962, H. R. 9751 (1962) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Department is now going to take a good hard look at that position.”\textsuperscript{533} Practically speaking, however, Vinson achieved little of substance.\textsuperscript{534}

The most significant change to develop out of this affair came largely at the SASC’s instigation. As mentioned above, the House added language to its bill requiring authorization for research and development related to the RS-70. The SASC memos referenced above concluded that, as this provision was consistent with the original Senate intent regarding section 412(b), this language should be retained in the Senate’s version.\textsuperscript{535} However, Russell decided that the HASC provision did not go far enough. His version of the bill instead expanded the annual authorization requirement to include all research and development of aircraft, missiles, and naval vessels. The new requirement would start in FY 1964.

Russell justified this change before the Senate by noting that development frequently constituted a longer and more costly portion of a program’s life than procurement, and that the transition stage between the two was often murky. Moreover,

\textsuperscript{533} Vinson press release, March 21, 1962, H. R. 9751 (1962) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{534} Regarding Russell’s stature in the Senate generally, O’Brien attributed it to “the nature of the man. He was an impressive fellow, impressive to meet, and to conduct business with. I found him very courteous and a thoroughly decent fellow who had strong views... He was by nature the sort of the fellow that would gravitate to leadership.” With respect to the B-70 dispute with Vinson, O’Brien offered the following: “Well, Russell was a giant in the Senate. There was something about his demeanor. He was different than Vinson... I think that President Kennedy looked upon Russell as somewhat of a giant in the Senate. I wouldn't suggest that President Kennedy was in awe of him, but I would suspect that he had the same reactions that I did, that it was easier to deal with Vinson than with Russell. I'm not too sure that if you had a similar situation and walked in the Rose Garden with Russell, that it might have worked out the same way. Russell was not an antagonist, none of them were. But Russell was sort of in a class by himself.” O’Brien, interview, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{535} Memos on legal weight of Vinson’s RS-70 authorization measure, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.
many of the crucial policy decisions that the Armed Services Committees were obliged to review occurred during the development stage. Russell also placed an economic spin on the issue – that if programs were to be reduced or eliminated, then the development period required greater scrutiny. The expectation of program reductions ran counter to the trend in committee rhetoric and actions with respect to McNamara’s Defense Department, at least on major projects. However, as we will see Russell was more on target more than one might have expected, at least in terms of overall R&D expenditures. Finally, Russell buttressed his proposal with the argument, “It is undeniably true... that a more extensive Congressional examination of military activity causes a more thorough review and consideration in the Executive Branch.”

As always, there was no doubt that Russell’s proposal would pass the Senate. The Defense Department, however, was unenthused about greater congressional involvement in the department’s administration of research and development programs. While the Department hoped that Vinson might be cooperative in helping to defeat this provision as he had in 1959, in the current climate there was little chance of this. Within a few weeks, Kennedy signed Russell’s provision into law, along with the rest of the authorization bill. The bill included the entire $491 million that the HASC had proposed. Of this, the

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536  Russell floor statement in presenting bill, undated, H. R. 9751 (1962) file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

537  Section of legislative highlights memo covering the defense authorization bill, April 4, 1962, 4/62 file, Presidential Office Files, JFK Library.
Appropriations Committees approved $363 million.\textsuperscript{538} While the record is unclear, it is unlikely that McNamara approved expenditure of anything in addition to the original request.

The Secretary still thought of the B-70 program as little more than a developmental test bed for some new and interesting component capabilities. However, North American Aviation was still progressing toward construction of three prototype versions, scheduled for an early 1964 delivery. In September 1962, JCS Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer advised McNamara that, if the department intended to begin receiving full production models in 1968, it would need to make a procurement decision no later than 1964 in order to influence the FY 1966 budget.\textsuperscript{539} The Joint Chiefs, however, were as usual not united on the urgency of this course of action. The Army and Navy viewed the RS-70 primarily as a reconnaissance plane. While they supported it having some sort of strike capability, they were unwilling to commit to procurement in the numbers the Air Force desired. The Navy in particular was skeptical of the plane’s technical feasibility.\textsuperscript{540}

On the other hand, congressional support generally remained high during deliberations over the FY 1964 budget. During the SASC’s posture hearings, Russell reiterated his concern over McNamara’s lack of commitment to further bomber development. In particular, he highlighted the bomber’s conventional warfare

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\textsuperscript{538} That is, the budget that the President would present to Congress in early 1965. Section of legislative highlights memo covering the defense appropriations bill, July 30, 1962, 7/16/62-7/31/62 file, Presidential Office Files, JFK Library.

\textsuperscript{539} Lemnitzer memo to McNamara, September 29, 1962, “RS-70, Skybolt – Nov 1962” file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{540} McNamara notes on conversation with the Joint Chiefs, November 5, 1962, “RS-70, Skybolt – Nov 1962” file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.
\end{footnotesize}
capabilities, although McNamara countered that other aircraft in the inventory – older B-47s and F-4s, as well as the new TFX – could fill any potential capability gap. McNamara informed the White House that Vinson had privately expressed his conviction that the RS-70 was no longer desirable. However, the majority of HASC members still felt strongly to the contrary. Moreover, the controversy of the previous year had contributed to McNamara’s growing difficulties in congressional relations. McNamara received noticeably harsher treatment from the HASC during hearings in 1963 than in previous years, for example.

Despite Lemnitzer’s previously noted advice (which applied more particularly to the FY 1965 budget request), the Defense Department requested no additional authorization for the RS-70 program in its FY 1964 budget, although it intended to continue expending funds previously appropriated for development. In its version of the FY 1964 authorization bill, on the other hand, the House added $363.7 million for

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541 Summary of Defense Department posture hearings, February 19, 1963, 381/032 Posture Hearings – SASC Summaries file, “Chief of Legislative Liaison Security Classified Records Relating to Congress, Investigations, Plans, and Projects” (E 97) series, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army, Record Group 335, National Archives, Washington, DC. McNamara was the principal advocate of the TFX program, which turned out to be an overly ambitious effort to satisfy both the Air Force’s requirement for a deep strike fighter-bomber and the Navy’s requirement for a fighter for carrier air defense. OSD expected the TFX program to yield variants adapted to each Service’s specific need, but with a high degree of commonality to allow for economies of scale. Eventually renamed the F-111, the TFX concept was never very popular with anyone outside of OSD. However, while the program was the subject of considerable congressional controversy, most of this took place in venues other than the Armed Services Committees. For example, although Henry Jackson was the principle Senate opponent of the TFX, most of his activities manifest in the Government Operations Committee rather than the Armed Services Committee. The Armed Services Committees eventually terminated the Navy variant, the F-111B, in 1968 in response to ongoing Navy opposition to the aircraft. The Air Force produced 159 of its variant, the F-111A, and operated these between 1969 and 1990.


development of two more RS-70 prototypes, bringing the total to five. Russell supported this provision, although he felt the Congress should offset this increase with cuts elsewhere. Despite the SASC’s concurrence with the House, the committee’s report acknowledged that the gesture was probably futile unless the Kennedy administration had a change of heart. It concluded, “In any event, the Congress will have discharged its responsibility – to provide the authorization and funds for weapons that may be needed for national defense.”

The Defense Department never chose to develop the two additional prototypes that the Congress authorized. Instead, as calendar year 1964 rolled around, the RS-70 program entered its death throes. The Defense Department actually requested $37.1 million in additional funding for continued development for FY 1965. However, because of slipping schedules and cost overruns, the Defense Department – with the concurrence of Zuckert and LeMay – cut the program from three to two prototype planes. During the 1964 posture hearings, Russell tacitly acknowledged that the program was doomed. Beyond the technical and cost problems, the basic justification for an aircraft like the RS-70 was falling apart. As Charyk noted, “as our regular reconnaissance capabilities began to improve and new concepts began to emerge, it was pretty clear that the number of so-called targets of opportunity (after a general nuclear exchange) would probably be

544 Ibid., 5.

545 McNamara note on reduction in B-70 program, March 5, 1964, Reading File March 1964 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.

relatively few and relatively uninteresting. And so, again, the justification of a big expensive weapons system for a rather incremental job became the question.”

North American was able to finally deliver the two prototypes. The first aircraft flew its maiden voyage on September 21, 1964, with the second following suit – after further schedule delays – in July 1965. In May 1966, the second aircraft was able to finally achieve sustained Mach 3 flight. However, the following month that aircraft was lost during a photo opportunity when it collided in formation with an accompanying fighter aircraft. In March 1967, the Air Force transferred the remaining aircraft to the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, where it continued its flight research program. However, by 1969 the aircraft was out of commission and on display at the Air Force Museum at Wright-Patterson Air Force Base near Dayton, Ohio.

As the RS-70 program entered its terminal phase, however, the Air Force was struggling to push a second long-range bomber concept – first termed the Advanced Manned Strategic Aircraft (AMSA) and then the B-1 program – past its formative stage into full-fledged development. In 1961, the Air Force began to study concepts for a low altitude subsonic bomber. As study efforts progressed, the concept evolved to include a supersonic capability at high altitude, in addition to near-supersonic low altitude flight. In January 1964, at the Air Force’s prompting, the Joint Chiefs recommended to McNamara that the Defense Department initiate program definition for this “follow-on strategic aircraft system,” and that the department release funds necessary to support advanced

547 Charyk, interview, JFK Library.
development of long lead-time items, particularly related to avionics and propulsion. The Joint Staff based this recommendation on two considerations: 1) “That strategic aircraft in general can be justified on the basis of diversity, flexibility, responsiveness, reliability, and the need for timely reconnaissance;” and, 2) that B-52s and B-58s would be reaching the end of their service lives in the early 1970s.

McNamara did not concur. He pointed out that Air Force studies had not yet yielded specific aircraft specifications that demonstrated it would be superior to the capabilities that the B-52 provided, nor had the Service produced a formal requirements document justifying the capability in the first place. Moreover, he was not convinced that the B-52 fleet would be at the end of its useful life by the early 1970s. Therefore, he was unwilling to make the suggested budgetary actions.

This dispute quickly filtered up to the Congress, and McNamara was forced to reiterate this same opposition in a February 1964 letter to Russell. In this letter, the Secretary allowed that, if and when the Air Force rectified the gap with respect to a requirements document, he “would certainly be willing to consider reallocating funds for

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548 Recommendation was part Joint Chiefs of Staff Memo 37-64, referenced by McNamara in subsequent memo to Chairman Maxwell Taylor dated February 1, 1964, Reading File Feb 1964 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC. For reference, the program definition phase aimed to “provide technical and management data on which to base contracting decisions. It does not replace or supplement studies establishing the proposed design and utility of the system.” This definition was also from McNamara’s response to Taylor with respect to the JCS recommendation.

549 Ibid.

550 Subject to several service life extension upgrades, B-52Hs – the final variant produced – remain in service in 2007. These aircraft have seen service in virtually every major conflict in which the US has been involved since the 1960s, including Vietnam, Operation Desert Storm (Iraq, 1990-1991), Operation Enduring Freedom – Afghanistan (operation ongoing since 2001; dates of B-52 service uncertain), and Operation Iraqi Freedom (operation ongoing since 2003; dates of B-52 service uncertain).

551 McNamara memo to Taylor, February 1, 1964, Papers of Robert McNamara.
that purpose.” While the specific milestones in the Department’s funding decisions are unclear, McNamara did release a steady stream of funds over the 1960s to continue development. However, in those years McNamara’s commitment was far short of the hundreds of millions of dollars the Air Force requested for full development.

McNamara’s basic skepticism over the requirement for a new long-range bomber remained firm over his tenure. The best the Armed Services Committees were able to do to further their objectives was to aid the Air Force in keeping the debate alive, the development programs ongoing, and the option open for future procurement. The committees continued to authorize development funding, sometimes clearly in excess of what McNamara was willing to utilize. For example, the Defense Department requested only $5 million for AMSA development in FY 1965. Congress instead authorized and appropriated $52 million, based in part on Air Force testimony regarding the poor state of B-52 readiness. McNamara gave some ground, agreeing to obligate $28 million – largely for propulsion and avionics development – but only in order to keep “the option” of a new manned bomber alive. McNamara also decided that year to forego upgrades to older B-52 as uneconomical, further antagonizing congressional bomber advocates.

For FY 1966, the SASC under Stennis’s direction added $82 million to the Air Force R&D account, specifically for accelerated AMSA development. In addition to

552 McNamara to Russell, February 21, 1964, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

553 Draft of Stennis floor speech on conference report regarding AMSA, undated, S. 800 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 89th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

554 The Air Force had requested $121 million from OSD for that year, but McNamara granted only $39 million, of which $24 million was the remaining unobligated balance from the previous fiscal year. The
the old rationales – that bombers provided significant capabilities that missiles did not allow, that older B-52s would soon be outmoded, that the F-111 (formerly TFX) was insufficient, and that the JCS supported the AMSA – Stennis also began to consider the argument that modernization of the U.S. nuclear triad weakened the Soviet Union by forcing it spend resources on defense when it might not otherwise have so chosen, thereby undermining its economy. Stennis had advanced similar arguments during the air defense debates during the late 1950s, then arguing that the Soviets hoped to undermine the U.S. economy with over-burdensome defense spending. In any case, Stennis acknowledged that it was unlikely that that administration would use the additional funding. Stennis rationalized the action as an indication of Senate resolve.

However, the HASC had increased the Department’s AMSA request by on $7 million. In conference, the Senate receded, accepting the rationale that McNamara's repeated delays meant that any added funding could not be efficiently expended during FY 1966.

$82 million that the Committee added amounted to the balance required to reach $121 million. Senate Committee on Armed Services, Authorizing Appropriations During Fiscal Year 1966 for Procurement of Aircraft, Missiles, and Naval Vessels, and Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation for the Armed Services, 89th Cong., 1st sess., 1965, S. Rep. 144, 17.

555 For latter rationale, see draft of Stennis floor speech regarding AMSA, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives.

556 Stennis’s “Opening Statement” prior to mark-up of the authorization bill, March 30, 1965, ASC Agenda 1965 file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 89th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

However, Stennis argued on the Senate floor that the next year would be “inevitably the year of decision.”

Not so. For the remainder of the Johnson administration, McNamara and Congress maintained the dance of the proceeding years wherein the Congress approved as much or more than the Department requested, and the Secretary deferred the decision for full development and eventual deployment. The 1960s debate over manned bombers highlights the adage that, in Washington, debates rarely end – they are often only deferred to the next decision cycle. In the end, a new administration was necessary for Air Force and congressional bomber advocates to realize their goal. In 1969, the Nixon administration approved prototype construction of the B-1A. The first of these planes flew in December 1974. The Carter administration cancelled the program in 1977, however, although flight tests on four delivered prototypes continued into the 1980s. The Reagan administration restarted the program in 1981, although specifying alternate capabilities that resulted in the Air Force recasting the program as the B-1B. Although the first production model began test flights in October 1984 and the Air Force eventually procured 100 of the aircraft, no B-1B saw combat until the Operation Desert Fox strikes on Iraq in December 1998. Since then, however, B-1Bs have operated in all major U.S.

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558 Draft of Stennis floor speech regarding AMSA, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, National Archives. The focus on FY 1967 grew from Air Force testimony that the Department could defer a decision on AMSA deployment to “fiscal year 1967 at the latest,” in order to have an aircraft ready at the end of the B-52 program life. The Air Force argued the F-111 could replace B-52s in series C through F, which would retire before series G and H. However, the F-111 could not replace the older B-52 A and B models or their proposed AMSA follow-on because the F-111s would have limited range even when extended, could not carry the same amount of ordnance, and would require overseas bases for recovery. “Explanation of Provisions of Authorization Bill”, April 2, 1957, AS – Gen 1965 file, Legislation series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
military operations, including Allied Force (Kosovo), Enduring Freedom (Afghanistan), and Iraqi Freedom.

**Authorizing R&D**

Recall that Russell offset his support for increased RS-70 authorization in FY 1964 with a call for cuts elsewhere. Among the places Russell looked for budget cuts was the Department’s research and development request. For FY 1964, Russell proposed a three percent across-the-board-reduction in R&D funding. By way of rationale, Russell told his fellow committee members that he was confident there were “unnecessary and unrewarding expenses in these accounts.” While he explained that he generally disfavored across-the-board cuts, he concluded that “at this stage in our relatively new consideration of this subject a reduction of this type is safer than to specify the places where it is to be made.” He explained to the Senate that, in making the cuts, he did not intend that the Defense Department should place less effort or emphasis on R&D programs. The decrease was meant instead to encourage careful management and administration. This cut passed the Senate and won the House’s concurrence in conference. It no doubt helped Russell’s argument that McNamara privately conceded that the “reduction can be accepted without a serious impairment of our RDT&E effort.”

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559 Russell prepared statement for mark-up session, undated, S 843 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 88th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

560 McNamara letter to Russell, April 24, 1963, H. R. 2440 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 88th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Russell was less concerned about efficiencies in the R&D program than about finding offsets for increases in funding he preferred elsewhere in the authorization bill. With this action, however, Russell started a trend. Prior to FY 1964 the Congress “systematically appropriated more for RDT&E than was requested. Beginning with the introduction of annual authorizations, appropriations were consistently below the requested amounts.”\(^{561}\) While the Armed Services Committees sometimes took the budget axe to specific programs, more often they (or at least the SASC) applied across the board cuts to the Defense Department’s request. In FY 1965, for example, the House made line-item reductions in the R&D request totaling $365 million, offset by a $52 million increase for a follow-on bomber, and $40 million for a new Air Force interceptor. The Senate, on the other hand, once again applied a three percent across-the-board reduction, or a $145 million cut. The SASC also made a line item cut in the Air Force’s Mobile Medium-Range Ballistic Missile (MMRBM) program, increasing the House’s cut from $35 million to $70 million, and restricting the remaining $40 million in the Department’s request to the continued development of a stellar inertial guidance system. Whether directly because of this or not, the department terminated the MMRBM program in 1964.\(^{562}\) The SASC included the House’s increase for a follow-on bomber, but nothing for the interceptor program. In conference, the Senate won on all points. In particular, the conferees concluded that reductions should be lump sum to allow the Defense

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\(^{561}\) John R. Gist, “The Impact of Annual Authorizations on Military Appropriations in the U. S. Congress,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 6, no. 3 (August 1981), 439. Recall that Russell was by now also the chairman of the defense appropriations subcommittee.

\(^{562}\) The basis for the SASC’s opposition to this program is unclear.
Department “the flexibility of distributing the reductions according to the Department’s own priority list, with the exception of the MMRBM program.”

McNamara, it should be noted, was less acquiescent in the FY 1965 cuts than he had been the previous year. In a February letter to Russell requesting that the House reductions be restored in full, McNamara noted his concern “with the serious impact that such a reduction in RDT&E funding will have on the continuing execution of the very important activities in this field.” He noted that he already decreased service requests by $1.7 million during his budget review in preparation for the Department’s submission. McNamara also noted the irony that the Defense Department (and by implication, McNamara himself) had in the past been charged with insufficient support for basic research. The Congress had the power to “No,” however, and it said no to McNamara in this case.

This pattern of across-the-board reductions with a handful of line item increases or decreases occurred two of the next four years as well. For FY 1966, with Russell hospitalized at Walter Reed, Stennis proposed a five percent reduction in the “military science” R&D accounts – mostly basic research conducted by universities and industry – for a total reduction of $44 million. The House, on the other hand, arrived at an overall $114 million reduction by looking at specific line item cuts. This time, the Senate accepted the House position. However, the conference report specified that, in order for


564 McNamara letter to Russell, February 21, 1964, H. R. 9637 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 88th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
the department to cope with changing conditions, “reductions could be taken in program areas other than those indicated and could be on the basis of military priorities of each department.”565 With Russell back at the helm for FYs 1967 and 1968, the Congress agreed to a few line item increases or decreases to major projects (most of which were related to bomber development and are discussed elsewhere in this chapter), but generally left the department’s R&D requests untouched. However, with Stennis back in control for FY 1969, the SASC once again proposed a three percent across-the-board reduction in R&D. This occurred in a year dominated by a congressional mood favoring fiscal austerity, particularly in the defense budget, and thus one should not be quick to make a correlation between Stennis’s presence as chairman and the committee’s propensity to cut R&D funding over these last four years. In any case, this cut held in conference, although with some additional modifications in Navy R&D at the House’s insistence.

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CHAPTER 8
OVERSIGHT IN THE McNAMARA YEARS, PART II

Authorization in Practice (continued)

The Nuclear Navy

As with the manned bomber, the Navy shipbuilding program and nuclear propulsion presents another case of recurrent congressional pressure over time. Congressional interest and concern over the Navy’s shipbuilding program dated back for several decades. Before section 412(b), of course, the real focus of congressional efforts resided in the appropriations process. The Armed Services Committees had little ability to influence the shipbuilding program, aside from expressing their preferences one way or another during the annual posture hearings, during nominations of relevant Navy and OSD officials, or through various speeches or other appeals to members of the Executive Branch. During the 1950s, the Congress had two main concerns regarding the shipbuilding program. The first centered on the use of nuclear propulsion, although the focus was more submarines than surface ships. Second, Congress was particularly concerned about the ultimate number and pace of deployment for the Polaris ballistic missile submarine program.566 During the later 1950s, the Congress repeatedly

566 While such submarines were commonly referred to as “Polaris,” this was actually the name of the missile they carried rather than the submarine class itself. The 41 submarines ultimately procured that
appropriated more funds than the Eisenhower administration was willing to obligate in a given year. The administration simply impounded the excess funds, sometimes obligating them in a subsequent year. Beginning in 1960 and culminating under McNamara, the Defense Department finally committed to a rapid acceleration of the Polaris procurement program, arriving at a final program of 41 boats by the end of the 1960s.

While the SASC was not a focal point in the Polaris debate, it did score one notable success toward its goal of committing the nation to naval nuclear propulsion. The case offers an insight into the more subtle forms of congressional influence. Admiral Hyman Rickover is commonly considered the father of the U.S. nuclear navy. His assignment to the Navy’s Bureau of Ships soon after World War II exposed him to nuclear propulsion concepts, and he became a staunch advocate. In 1949, the Navy also appointed him to the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission’s Division of Reactor Development. Soon after, the Navy elevated him to direct the Naval Reactors Branch in the Bureau of Ships. This combination of assignments placed him in a uniquely influential position from which to advocate for both civilian and military uses of nuclear power. He oversaw the launch of the world’s first nuclear powered submarine, the Nautilus, in 1954. Moreover, Rickover was profoundly adept at cultivating good congressional relationships, a trait which served his career profoundly well.

In forcefully pursuing his objectives within the Navy, Rickover was not shy about creating friction with peers and superiors alike. In 1958, then Rear Admiral Rickover was up for promotion to Vice Admiral. As Stennis recalled events years later, Rickover had carried variants of the Polaris missile actually fell across 4 submarine classes: the George Washington (5 boats), Ethan Allen (5), Lafayette (19), and Benjamin Franklin (12) classes.
already been passed over for promotion twice. A third pass would have resulted in a forced retirement. The Armed Services committee received the promotion list and Rickover's name was not on it. The committee did not have the authority to place names on a promotion list, but it had the authority to take names off or hold up the entire list. The SASC had long enthusiastically supported Rickover’s advocacy of nuclear propulsion, and so held up the promotion list until the Defense Department asked that it be sent back. When it was returned a few days later, it included Rickover's name. The SASC approved the nominations the next day.\(^{567}\) Rickover remained an admiral in the Navy – receiving the rank of full Admiral in 1973 – until the Reagan administration finally forced him into retirement in 1982 at the age of 82.

Even after passage of 412(b), the Armed Services Committees were slow to raise nuclear propulsion concerns to prominence in the authorization process. In FY 1963, the Navy sought approval for its first aircraft carrier since 1957. This previous carrier – the \textit{USS Enterprise} – was the first built with nuclear propulsion. By 1962, the Navy had either commissioned, was testing, or was constructing three other nuclear powered surface ships. These were the \textit{USS Long Beach} guided missile cruiser, and two guided missile frigates of different classes, the \textit{USS Bainbridge} and the \textit{USS Truxton}.\(^{568}\)

\(^{567}\) Stennis memo for the record on “Admiral Hyman G. Rickover,” undated, JCS Recollections file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library. Rickover also received a Congressional Gold Medal that year, which the Joint Committee on Atomic Energy sponsored.

\(^{568}\) The \textit{USS Long Beach}, was the only ship of its class built, and launched in 1957, commissioned in 1961, and decommissioned in 1995. The \textit{USS Bainbridge}, also technically a single-ship class but a cousin to the conventionally powered \textit{Leahy}-class, was commissioned in 1962, and decommissioned in 1996. The \textit{USS Truxton} was likewise a single-ship class, but also similarly a cousin to the conventionally powered \textit{Belknap}-class. It was launched in 1964, commissioned in 1967, and decommissioned in 1995. The \textit{USS Enterprise}, still again a single-ship class, is still in service as of 2007, with an expected decommissioning date in 2014-2015. Naval nomenclature here is difficult. Under current terminology, the US Navy’s escort
However, McNamara was a skeptic of nuclear propulsion in surface ships. This was largely because he felt the significant increase in construction cost more than offset their superior performance characteristics – i.e., increased cruising range and duration without the limitation of frequent refueling. He directed the Navy to build the FY 1963 carrier – eventually named the *USS John F. Kennedy* – with a conventional power plant. Surprisingly, this decision occasioned minimal SASC protest. This was in part because the debate over the B-70 ongoing at the same time sucked much of the oxygen out of the room.

At least as important, however, was the fact the Navy appears not to have prodded the Congress to pick a fight with McNamara. During the 1962 posture hearings, CNO George Anderson indicated his support for an additional carrier with conventional power. He stated that, if the Navy bought a nuclear powered aircraft carrier, it could not buy the other ships it needed without more funds.\(^569\) This statement is a snap shot in time and does not necessarily represent the full picture of how the Navy pitched its program that year. However, assuming this position was representative of the Navy’s attitude, the vessels include cruisers, destroyers, and frigates. The US Navy would now consider all escort ships discussed in this section – including the *Long Beach*, the *Bainbridge* (along with its conventionally powered *Leahy*-class cousins), and the *Truxtton* (along with its conventionally powered *Belknap*-class cousins) – to be cruisers, guided missile cruisers at that. However, the *Long Beach* was the only one of these designated a cruiser in its day (classified as CGN, the last letter signifying nuclear propulsion). The *Bainbridge* and *Truxtton*, their conventionally-powered cousins, and the ships of the *California*-class discussed below were all technically termed destroyer leaders (classified as either DLGN or DLG, depending on power plant), but commonly called frigates. The reclassification of destroyer leaders took place in 1975, as part of a general reclassification to bring U.S. naval nomenclature in line with that which most other nations used.

CNO publicly undercutting a requirement for a nuclear powered carrier minimized the likelihood that the Congress would seek to countermand the Secretary of Defense, given the almost futile difficulty the Congress had in getting an administration to make a major procurement investing that it preferred not to make. On the other hand, we will see instances later in the decade when the Congress was willing to press exactly that case, with the Navy sitting at least somewhat on the sidelines worrying that an Executive-Congressional dispute over nuclear propulsion would jeopardize the steady development of its overall ship building program. In this vein, Anderson’s testimony suggests something else revealing about the dynamic of the nuclear propulsion debate. The controversy was not over whether the Navy would build ships, as was the case with the controversy over the Air Force’s manned bomber programs. Instead, the debate revolved around the issues: What type of ships would the Navy build, how many, and on what schedule? Anderson’s comment suggests that he was more concerned with getting a new carrier of some sort approved in FY 1963 (along with other portions of his ship building program) than in fighting for a carrier with nuclear propulsion. One suspects the threat to stretch out the Navy’s shipbuilding program by funding fewer ships a year was a powerful lever for the Secretary of Defense.

Congress did authorize and appropriate funds for a conventional carrier for FY 1963. Soon, however, the Navy developed reservations. In September 1963, the Secretary of the Navy wrote to McNamara urging that the carrier be built with nuclear propulsion. At the same time, the Navy had underway a study of the relative effectiveness of nuclear versus conventional propulsion. McNamara had chartered the study in order to “expand the particular issue of the FY 1963 carrier to a general policy issue.” Noting the Congress
had already acted, McNamara denied the Navy’s request to reopen the propulsion specifications for the *Kennedy*. However, the general policy issue of future carrier propulsion remained open. While the Navy lost the battle, it eventually won the war. The next time the Defense Department requested a carrier – the *USS Nimitz* in FY 1967 – it proposed and received a nuclear power plant. The United States has never constructed a conventionally powered carrier since the *Kennedy*. The role of the Congress in McNamara’s decision to approve nuclear propulsion for the *Nimitz* is difficult to discern. There was no apparent public controversy between the Executive and Congress over the issue. However, McNamara made the decision amidst a climate of growing congressional concern over nuclear propulsion in other classes of surface ships.

The HASC struck the first discordant note with respect to naval nuclear propulsion in its version of the FY 1966 authorization bill. It added one nuclear powered guided missile frigate that the Navy had requested from OSD, but which the Johnson administration chose not to request from the Congress. This was the only major escort vessel – cruiser, destroyer, or frigate – included in the bill. The Committee’s report criticized the Department of Defense for having “procrastinated and vacillated in its approach to nuclear powered surface ships.” It was not simply that McNamara had not recently approved any new nuclear powered escort vessels, however. The Department

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570 McNamara letter to Navy Secretary Fred Korth, October 10, 1963, Reading File Oct 1963 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.

571 The *USS Kennedy* is expected to decommission in fall 2007. As mentioned previously, its predecessor, the *USS Enterprise*, is expected to remain in service until 2014-2015. Its successor, the *USS Nimitz*, is scheduled to remain in service until the early 2030s.

had not requested authorization for new construction of any major escort vessels since 1961, irrespective of power plant. In any case, by this action the HASC intended to affirm not only the need for the ship in question, but to make an overt demonstration clearly expressing its will to the Executive Branch with respect to nuclear propulsion in surface ships.573

In its version of the FY 1966 authorization bill, the SASC – with Stennis as interim chairman – did not authorize the additional nuclear powered frigate that the House included. However, in conference the SASC receded, and Congress included the ship in the final version of the authorization bill. During the appropriations process, the Congress did not fund the entire ship, but did approve funds for procurement of long lead-time items. However, the Defense Department obligated none of the funding in FY 1966. McNamara argued that the frigate’s cost was not justified. The ship’s primarily role would be providing air defense for the Enterprise battle group, with some anti-submarine warfare capability as well. The Secretary found that the battle group already had sufficient air defenses, and that if more were required then there were more economical ways for achieving this.

The Armed Services Committees returned to the issue again in FY 1967. In the President’s budget, the Defense Department requested authorization for two conventionally powered guided missile destroyers. These would be the first of a new class, and as mentioned above, the first large escorts vessels that McNamara had approved since 1961. In its version of the bill, the HASC included authorization for the

573 Ibid.
requested destroyers. It also extended the authority granted the previous year for
collection of a nuclear frigate, and provided new authority for a second. Similar to
Vinson’s attempt in 1962 with respect to manned bombers, the HASC also included
language directing the Secretaries of the Navy and Defense to “proceed with the design,
engineering, and construction” of the two frigates.574

The Senate, on the other hand, provided authority for a single nuclear powered
frigate (essentially reauthorizing the frigate from the previous year), and struck the two
conventionally powered destroyers from its version of the bill.575 In its report, the SASC
recognized the higher initial cost of nuclear-powered surface ships, but argued that the
operational advantages of nuclear power were worth the price.576 Also influencing the
SASC’s recommendation was the fact that, as mentioned previously, the Defense
Department was requesting a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier for FY 1967 as well. The
committee rationalized that construction of a similarly powered frigate would allow the
Navy to place two nuclear-powered escort vessels with each nuclear-powered carrier. In
his floor statement, Russell noted that the committee’s action did not mean it was
insisting that all new escort vessels must have nuclear propulsion, but rather that the
committee’s action amounted to a reasonable increase. In contrast to the House, however,

574 “S. 2950 and H.R. 13456 Procurement of Aircraft, Missiles, Naval Vessels, and Tracked Combat
Vehicles, and Research, Development, Test, and Evaluation, and Military Pay for the Armed Forces”
(unpublished confidential committee print), undated, S. 2950 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services,
89th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

575 Ibid.

576 Senate Committee on Armed Services, Authorizing Appropriations During Fiscal Year 1967 for
Procurement of Aircraft, Missiles, Naval Vessels, and Tracked Combat Vehicles, and Research,
the SASC did not include language directing construction. Russell believed the Congress did not have the ability to so direct the Executive Branch, and therefore regarded such language as a futile over reach.

The Navy had mixed feelings about the actions in the Armed Services Committees. In April, just prior to SASC mark-up of its version, Henry Jackson prompted SASC staff member Charles Kirbow to sound out the Navy’s opinion on the matter. Kirbow met with the principal aide to then CNO David McDonald, and carried back the message that, in formulating its FY 1967 budget request, the Navy originally preferred including a single nuclear frigate, as well as three conventionally powered destroyers. McNamara early on refused to permit inclusion of the nuclear frigate, however. The aide indicated that, with respect to the current debate, the CNO personally preferred one nuclear frigate over the two conventionally powered destroyers in its budget request. This was not the position that Secretary of the Navy Paul Nitze took, however. As with the FY 1963 aircraft carrier, Nitze was now more concerned with getting new ships at all rather than arguing over the source of propulsion. Nitze was also a McNamara supporter, having originally served on McNamara’s OSD staff as Assistant Secretary for International Security Affairs. In any case, Nitze and MacDonald (against the CNO’s recommendation) met personally with Russell in early May after the Senate

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577  Kirbow memo on navy shipbuilding preferences, April 12, 1966, S. 2950 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 89th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
had passed its version of the bill in an attempt to persuade Russell that getting the conventionally powered destroyers was the Navy’s priority.578

Russell was not persuaded. In a rare instance of thorough record-keeping, Russell’s prepared notes for the House-Senate conference on naval vessel procurement are available and lay out his rationale for his committee’s action. Russell was agnostic as to whether the Congress should authorize one or two nuclear-powered frigates. His concern was that, if the conference committee allowed both the nuclear frigate(s) and two conventional destroyers, then McNamara could simply say the Navy only needed two ships and proceed with construction of the destroyers alone. Likewise, there was no guarantee that the House Appropriations Committee would fully fund all authorized ships. In either case, including both types of vessels in the authorization bill made it unlikely that the nuclear frigate would actually be built. Moreover, Russell felt the Congress should focus its efforts on authorizing and appropriating the nuclear frigates in order to make its position as a proponent for nuclear propulsion completely clear to the Defense Department. Including both vessel types at this point sent a mixed message on congressional preferences. Congress could argue that, by including the two nuclear frigates and no conventional destroyers, it was providing the same number of ships the Defense Department requested, with the same type of weapon systems, but with the added advantage of nuclear propulsion. Moreover, despite Nitze’s argument, Russell pointed out that the Navy had notified the Armed Services Committees that in any case it

could not award contracts for the destroyers until FY 1968. If McNamara refused again to build the nuclear frigates, Congress could always authorize the conventional destroyers the following year without bringing any harm to the Navy’s shipbuilding program. 579

The conference crafted a compromise position. In a nod to the House, the conference re-authorized the previous year’s frigate, approved procurement of long lead-time items for the second frigate, and retained authorization for the two destroyers. However, the conference also approved the following language:

No contract for the construction of either of the conventionally powered guided missile destroyers authorized by this Act shall be entered into until the contract for the construction of the nuclear powered guided missile frigate authorized by this Act has been entered into, unless the President finds that such a contracting sequence would not be in the national interest. 580

This language also effectively dismissed the “directing” language included in the original House bill that Russell regarded as futile and misguided. The compromise language offered the President the escape clause of finding that the Congress’s action was inconsistent with national security, which is interesting in that it seems inconsistent with the original intent of both Armed Services Committees. The record does not indicate the origins, but perhaps House conferees feared that the Senate’s actions would result in no new ship construction – despite Russell’s claim that the Navy could not award the destroyer contracts until the following fiscal year. It does not appear that the President


weighed in on this issue. In any case, the Defense Department awarded no contracts for either vessel type in FY 1967.

So the Defense Department and the Congress revisited the issue yet again in FY 1968. In its budget request, the Defense Department again requested two conventionally powered destroyers. This time, the position of the two Armed Services Committees flipped from the previous year. The SASC approved the Defense Department’s request, while the House committee deleted the destroyers and inserted two nuclear-powered frigates in their place, again essentially re-authorizing those approved the previous year. The Defense Department also requested, and the SASC approved, $30 million for contract definition of a new class of escort ships then referred to as DX/DXG. While the record is not entirely clear, the DX would presumably have been a smaller escort vessel, primarily focused on anti-submarine warfare, and would not necessarily operate as part of a carrier battle group. The DXG, on the other hand, would have been a “major fleet escort.” The HASC in its version of the bill prohibited the Navy from using any of the funds for design of a DXG that lacked nuclear propulsion. The committee intended this to reinforce its position that “all new major fleet escorts should be nuclear powered.”\footnote{Referenced in House Committee on Armed Services, \textit{Authorizing Appropriations for Aircraft, Missiles, and Naval Vessels, 1968} (Conference Report), 90th Cong., 1st sess., 1967, H. Rep. 270, 5.} In conference, the SASC accepted the House position with respect to approving two nuclear-powered frigates in place of the requested destroyers. The conferees also approved the $30 million for DX/DXG contract definition, and agreed that the Navy could use the funds to study any power plant type for the DX, but only nuclear propulsion for the DXG.
In January 1968, Clark Clifford replaced McNamara as Secretary of Defense. This change permitted the Congress at least a temporary victory in its extended battle for naval nuclear propulsion. In June 1968, the Navy awarded contracts for both frigates authorized in the FY 1968 bill. While these were the only two ships of the class built (the California-class), the DXG program resulted in four additional nuclear powered guided missile frigates (the Virginia-class). The Navy commissioned all six between 1974 and 1980. However, these were the last nuclear powered escort ships the US built. New technology and economics eventually doomed nuclear propulsion for the US Navy’s major escort fleet. Emerging gas turbine technology became cheaper to build and required significantly smaller crews to operate. Over the course of the 1990s, the U.S. Navy decommissioned all nine of its nuclear-powered escort vessels. While some were at the end of their service life spans, the Navy scrapped the newer vessels rather than face the significant cost of refueling their nuclear reactors. Nuclear propulsion remains a mainstay in modern U.S. Navy submarine and aircraft carrier designs, however.

**National Missile Defense**

Deployment of an anti-ballistic missile (ABM) system to protect the territorial United States has been among the most controversial defense issues in American political discourse since Johnson announced the deployment of a “thin” nation-wide system (a.k.a., project Sentinel) in 1967.\(^{582}\) Some have argued that Johnson’s decision to proceed

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\(^{582}\) For the remainder of the chapter, ABM refers to those systems specifically designed to intercept ballistic missile attacks against the continental United States. For details on the post-1968 debates in the Senate, see Frye.
with Sentinel was “at least in part to placate conservative senators.”\textsuperscript{583} Although this claim appears valid, the documentary record on the president’s decision is unfortunately vague in this respect. This case also illustrates a rare occasion of intra-committee conflict between Russell and other members who did not share their chairman’s initially cautious approach to ABM deployment.

The German use of V-2 rockets against Great Britain in World War II first illustrated the desirability and difficulty of fielding successful ABM defenses. During the first post-war decade, however, anti-bomber systems received considerably greater R&D priority than ABM defenses. The ABM systems available for deployment in the 1960s and 1970s had their roots in the Army’s Project Nike. The first ABM system the Defense Department considered for deployment was the Nike Zeus. R&D on the system began in 1956, as it became clear the Soviets were pressing to develop an ICBM capability. The Nike Zeus shared components with the Nike Ajax and Hercules systems that predated it. The intent was to intercept incoming missiles high in the atmosphere. The system included an interceptor missile armed with a nuclear warhead that would destroy incoming missiles through a combination of blast and radiation effects, a set of radars to acquire, discriminate, and track incoming missiles, and a battle management computer system necessary to handle the large quantities of data required to successfully screen for possible decoys and steer the interceptor missile to target. The Nike Zeus first test fired in 1959.

\textsuperscript{583} Morton H. Halperin, “The Decision to Deploy the ABM: Bureaucratic and Domestic Politics in the Johnson Administration,” World Politics 25, no. 1 (October 1972), 72. Similarly, Alton Frye concluded that Johnson approved Sentinel “in part to meet what he construed as a requirement of congressional politics.” Frye, 44.
The new Kennedy administration deferred initial production in 1961, however, citing problems in its radars and battle management system, its “vulnerability” (presumably, that of its radars) to enemy attack, and “its very large cost in relation to the protection received.”584 The administration allowed that this deferral might delay the initial operating capability, which was scheduled for October 1965. This action occasioned no serious criticism within the Armed Services committees during 1961 or 1962. Russell had on a number of occasions during the late 1950s expressed his skepticism that the Nike Zeus would prove a successful system. SASC members generally expressed concern that the Zeus’s nuclear warheads might prove dangerous to store near cities in peacetime. They also wondered how much damage to the homeland the system would cause in its own right even assuming it was successful, as it would blanket the U.S. with a series of atmospheric nuclear detonations.

In the early 1960s, the Army began development of an alternate ABM system – the Nike X. This system promised a more advanced radar that with improved battle management capabilities. It also consisted of two interceptors, the Zeus missile and a newer, much faster terminal intercept missile named the Sprint. Over time, the Army modified the Zeus missile to achieve a longer range and to accommodate a larger nuclear warhead. The Sprint, too, carried a nuclear warhead, although with a much lower yield than the original Zeus. The Army continued to advocate for both Nike Zeus and Nike X

584 McNamara and David Bell (Director, Bureau of the Budget) memo for Kennedy, March 10, 1961, Defense Department General 3/61 file, National Security Files, JFK Library. The memo argued, “Demonstration for psychological or prestige reasons of our technical capability of intercepting an ICBM would be accomplished by the present research and development program without going into actual production.”
systems. In late 1962 the newly appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Army General Maxwell Taylor, voiced his support for immediate procurement and deployment of Zeus side by side with continued development of Nike X in order to achieve an ABM initial operating capability as soon as possible. McNamara, on the other hand, opposed the deployment of the Nike Zeus system on performance and cost grounds, although he favored continued development of its missile to support rapid deployment of Nike X as soon as its development process warranted. As McNamara’s Director for Defense Research and Engineering, Harold Brown, explained to the SASC, the Nike Zeus system would be ineffective against expected Soviet penetration aids, while deployment would slow incorporation of the Zeus missile into the Nike X system. In any case, the Defense Department projected that Nike X deployment would occur shortly after the Nike Zeus’s initial operating capability, and the fielding and rapid replacement of the Nike Zeus would yield a bill of $2.8 billion. More conservative estimates still put this sum close to $1.5 billion.

Brown’s logic was persuasive to Russell, but not to all members of the committee. When the SASC met in early April 1963 to mark-up the FY 1964 authorization bill, Strom Thurmond moved to add an amendment that would authorize an additional $196 million for production of Nike Zeus components. The committee voted this down 9 to 4, although a number of the opposing votes were cast as proxies – that is, absent members

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586 Brown letter to Russell, April 9, 1963, H. R. 2440 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 88th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
provide certain attending members the right to cast their absentee votes as the attending members saw fit. Subsequently, Thurmond lobbied members of the committee to reconsider the vote. When the committee reconvened the following week, Russell explained his position as follows:

Because of the enormous destructive power of atomic weapons it seems questionable whether an extremely expensive anti-missile system can be justified unless it is likely to destroy all or nearly all of the missiles that might be directed against us in a mass attack. Until there is more evidence that this can be accomplished without unreasonable danger from our own defensive blasts to our own population the Chair thinks we probably should not commit ourselves to production of this system.”

Nonetheless, Republicans Goldwater and James Beall who were absent from the previous vote and had given their proxies to Saltonstall – and Saltonstall had of course voted with Russell – asked that their votes be changed in favor of Thurmond’s amendment. Two other members who had been absent, Jackson and Sam Ervin (the latter the most surprising, given his membership in Russell’s Southern Bloc), asked that their votes be cast in favor of Thurmond’s amendment as well. These changes allowed Thurmond’s amendment to pass 8-7. As Russell was later to recount, this was the only time he ever lost a vote in the SASC.

Undeterred in his opposition to this course of action, however, Russell took the matter to the floor of the Senate, and in a secret session – the first such floor session since World War II – he secured a vote of 58-16 against Thurmond’s

587 Russell statement to committee, April 9, 1963, H. R. 2440 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 88th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

amendment. This effectively terminated the Nike Zeus program. The larger $15 billion authorization bill subsequently passed on a voice vote.

Russell was not an opponent of ABM in principle, only of deployment given the state of the art. During the 1964 posture hearings, McNamara summarized the state of the art as follows. He offered that Nike X was nearing completion of its development phase, and by the end of the calendar year the department would face the decision as to whether it was “wise” to proceed with deployment. However, while earlier McNamara had expressed his support for Nike X, he now suggested that the system was “far from adequate protection for our civilian population,” and would need to be accompanied by a multi-billion dollar fallout shelter program to achieve sufficient protection of the U.S. populace.

Russell, however, believed in the need for an eventual ABM deployment as soon as the technology matured. In a September 1964 telephone conversation with Johnson, Russell confided that he had been pushing McNamara “like hell” to finish development on Nike X. Although he originally had doubts about the system’s feasibility, he had concluded that it could work. In fact, two days earlier while having lunch with McNamara he had learned that the system was almost operational. Russell stressed that his only two critical concerns with the state of the nation’s military capabilities

589 Thurmond demanded the secret session to present classified intelligence supporting his position.

590 Summary of Defense Department posture hearings, February 3, 1964, Records of the Office of the Secretary of the Army.
were ABM defense and anti-submarine warfare. Russell intended to see to it personally that these gaps were addressed.591

The following year’s authorization bill passed with no deployment decision, however, although the Congress approved $390 million for continued development. As McNamara and the JCS deliberated in December 1965 on the President’s FY 1967 budget proposal, they agreed to still further development in the sum of $417 million. The debate around deployment centered on its scope and its timing. Whatever reservation McNamara had about any form of deployment – and the precise change over time in his thinking is difficult to document – the most he was willing to concede at this time was a “thin” system geared toward the then rudimentary Chinese threat. He opposed any full-scale deployment designed to mitigate the Soviet attack capability. While he doubted that such a defense could be achieved in reality at any cost, such a system undermined his concept of stable deterrence through assured destruction.592 Moreover, McNamara did not yet support the decision to deploy even the thin system, and included no request for procurement funding in the Department’s FY 1967 budget submission.

The Joint Chiefs, on the other hand, unanimously supported initial procurement funding, and this in turn was important in galvanizing the Armed Services Committees in favor of deployment. For FY 1967, the Congress authorized $167.9 million in additional funding beyond the department’s request for Nike X, most of which fell into the

591 Conversation between Lyndon B. Johnson and Richard Russell, September 18, 1964, 7:54PM, LBJ Library.

592 McNamara memo to Kennedy, December 6, 1965, Reading File Dec 1965 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.
procurement category. As suggested in the SASC’s report accompanying its version of the bill, this action was to serve as a prod to the administration to decide on deployment in that budget year. The committee noted that the additional funding could allow a one-year reduction in the time necessary to achieve an initial operating capability. After outlining the manner in which a thin system could serve as the baseline for future expansion into a more robust defense, the report argued that the committee was not attempting to define the ultimate scope of the deployment. However, the time between an initial deployment decision and achievement of operational capability was so long that the committee considered the financial cost of saving a year as being “reasonably priced insurance.”


Despite congressional pressure, the Johnson administration made no deployment decision in 1966. In 1967, it proposed to the Soviet Union that the two nations begin treaty negotiations on the future of ABM deployment. The Soviets rejected this offer. Prior to this failure to establish negotiations, the Defense Department included $291 million in new authorization in its FY 1968 request as contingent funding, should the Johnson administration choose to deploy in the 1967-68 time frame. The SASC approved this request. The committee noted that its members supported the then ongoing ABM negotiations. They feared, however, that the Soviet Union would drag out negotiations, thereby causing an unreasonable slip in deployment timelines. Failing progress in negotiations on a reasonable timeframe, the committee supported rapid ABM deployment. Even in the context of an ABM treaty with the Soviets, the committee
recommended that negotiations consider the permissibility of a “thin” system that would guard against an attack on the scale the People’s Republic of China or other potential new nuclear powers were or could soon be capable.\(^{594}\) In September 1967, McNamara announced the decision to proceed with deployment of a thin system, soon termed Sentinel. While congressional pressure was an important contributing factor, it is not possible to cleanly disentangle this from any other factors that weighed in Johnson’s decision.

Despite mounting public and congressional opposition (outside the defense committees), Sentinel made it through the remainder of the Johnson administration unscathed. However, in 1969 the newly elected Nixon administration, acting at least partially in response to Sentinel critics, scaled back the system and renamed it Safeguard. Rather than a thin nationwide system, Safeguard would be a more limited defense of Minuteman missile silos against Soviet attack. Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty negotiations began in 1969, and resulted in part in the 1972 ABM treaty that allowed both the U.S. and Soviet Union a single ABM site. The U.S. developed its sight at Grand Forks, North Dakota, with the aim of protecting a portion of the U.S. Minuteman ICBM force. The site became operational in 1975, but combined congressional opposition and continued Defense Department feasibility concerns led to the site’s decommissioning and placement in mothball status five months later.

Prepositioning, the Fast Deployment Logistics Ship, and U.S. Global Strategy

In 1967, the Congress executed an action rare, if not unique, in its post-World War II history – at least up to that point. It moved to decisively kill a major procurement program, contrary to all senior Defense Department civilian and military professional advice, and it did so entirely because it objected to the manner in which that program would enable an aspect of the national military strategy to which the Congress objected. Congress frequently acts in ways that reduce major programs on the margin, whether through limiting R&D, reducing the requested lifetime program buy, or truncating production at some mid-point of the procurement schedule. In 1967, Congress eliminated the Fast Deployment Logistics Ship (FDL) program at its inception, and in so doing, it killed the concept of maritime prepositioning – essentially, storing war supplies aboard ships in a region where one expects to conduct operations in order to facilitate faster unit deployment – for over a decade. The Congress did so with U.S. interventions in Vietnam and Congo in the back-drop, and it explicitly intended to send the message – down Pennsylvania Avenue and across the Potomac to the Pentagon – that the U.S. was not the world’s policeman. The senator in the lead on this, and the one without whom this action would not have occurred, was Richard Russell.

The concepts of rapid maritime deployment and prepositioning developed in the early 1960s, based on the requirement to find ways of rapidly deploying units to potential “hot spots” in the Middle East, South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. At least in part, the massive C-5A cargo aircraft – built by Lockheed in Georgia – was also designed to
facilitate this requirement. The Army and Navy first proposed the FDL concept in 1964. The ship would carry heavy wheeled and tracked vehicles and helicopters without disassembly. Vehicles could be driven or towed on and off the ship directly (a.k.a, “role-on/roll-off”) rather than loaded in containers, although this provided a less efficient utilization of space and made the ship more costly to build. The ships were also to be capable of “over-the-beach” off-loading. The Defense Department initially conceived of FDLs as a trans-oceanic delivery mechanism. Their high speed would allow ships to deliver cargo within the first critical days of a conflict from the continental U.S. to a distant area. However, McNamara developed the concept of using them as prepositioning ships.

The FDL made it into the President’s budget for FY 1966 as a procurement request for four ships, the first installment of an intended thirty-ship buy. The request made it through the HASC. However, the SASC was more skeptical. As mentioned previously, Russell was hospitalized during much of the 1965 congressional session. His role on this issue, if any, is uncertain. In any case, at this point the SASC’s concerns dealt more with program definition than global operations. It moved to reduce authorization to two vessels. The committee report noted that the department had not completely refined the ship’s characteristics. Moreover, the committee worried that the ship’s use in a prepositioned capacity did not warrant the cost of role-on/roll-off capability. It further noted that the FY 1966 program included funds to convert World War II-era Victory-

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595 The C-5 is large enough to carry virtually any piece of Army equipment. However, its huge size means that it requires exceptionally long, sturdy runways and thus in most cases it needs to transfer its payloads to smaller aircraft if the end destination lacks the facilities to accommodate the C-5A, although airdropping of supplies is also sometimes an option.
class ships to forward mobile depots, for use until the FDLs become available sometime in 1970s. This minimized the risk in delaying FDL procurement.\textsuperscript{596} Despite McNamara’s assurance that the FDL program had operating cost and military readiness advantages over one based on modified \textit{Victory} ships, the Senate won its point in conference. Congress authorized only two ships, and appropriated funds for this purpose.

The Defense Department, however, obligated none of the funding in either FY 1966 or FY 1967. Design work was nearing completion, however, with Ingalls Shipbuilding of Pascagoula, Mississippi, as the likely contractor. In FY 1968, the Defense Department requested an additional $233 million to begin procuring the class. The department estimated a total procurement and operating cost in the range of $2 billion. The HASC gave its approval in its version of the bill. With Russell in the lead, however, the SASC instead eliminated authorization completely, and expressed its disapproval for construction of the entire class. The committee once again mentioned concerns over program cost. However, the report clearly stated that the overriding concern was that the program could create “an impression that the United States has assumed the function of policing the world and that it can be thought to be at least considering intervention in any kind of strife or commotion occurring in any of the nations of the world. Moreover, if our involvement in foreign conflicts can be made quicker and easier, there is the temptation to intervene in many situations.”

Here, Russell was clearly acting out of his mounting discontent over the war in Vietnam, and his fear that the U.S. might become involved in other proxy fights

\textsuperscript{596} “Explanation of Provisions of Authorization Bill”, April 2, 1957, Mississippi State University Library.
throughout the Third World, most notably in Africa. As he wrote in April 1967, “(T)he prospect of sending three or four divisions to enforce United Nations sanctions against Rhodesia and South Africa has chilled my enthusiasm” for the FDL concept.597 Later in the year, Russell became even more concerned about potential intervention in Congo. In its report, the committee noted that there were other options for preposition where treaties required it. In Western Europe, the US could preposition war stocks on land. The C-5A would also be capable of transporting most bulk equipment that ground combat forces required.598 In conference, the House and Senate agreed to eliminate funding for FDLs.599

1968 saw Russell once again hospitalized, and Stennis again as presiding chairman. The Defense Department – perhaps expecting a more receptive audience in the interim chairman – again requested funds to procure the first four FDLs in the program. McNamara and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, General Earl Wheeler, made strong appeals, noting that the Service Secretaries and the JCS were unanimous in their support for the program.600 Members of Stennis’s personal staff encouraged him that there was now a sufficiently strong case for the FDL.601 Under Stennis’s leadership, the SASC


598  Senate Committee on Armed Services, Authorizing Appropriations During Fiscal Year 1968, 5-6.

599  House Committee on Armed Services, Authorizing Appropriations for Aircraft, Missiles, and Naval Vessels, 1968, 5.

600  Darden memo to Stennis, March 12, 1968 S. 3293 file, Bill files, Committee on Armed Services, 90th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

601  Spell memo to Stennis, March 2, 1968, Memos to Senator Jan-June ‘68 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
agreed to authorize $183.6 million for procurement of four ships. On the floor, moreover, the Senate voted down an amendment from Senator Clark to delete the authorization, by a margin of 31 to 28. However, the House had this time around denied funding for the FDLs. As the bill headed to conference, new Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford appealed to Stennis for assistance in getting at least two ships authorized, and Stennis promised his support. 

Stennis was unable to deliver, however. The conference approved no FDL procurement. The conference report explained that the Senate receded given the fiscal climate and the lack of an immediate requirement, although funding was eliminated “without prejudice.” Russell’s role in this is not entirely clear, but it appears to have been decisive. In an August 1968 staff meeting, Clifford noted that Stennis and Rivers had met personally to resolve the dispute. Rivers previously told Clifford that if the Senate pushed hard enough, they would get one or maybe two FDLs. Clifford’s notes explain that, “In the showdown Russell’s influence was felt. He is against the FDL.”

Despite further discussion in the Defense Department in 1969, the Nixon administration did not subsequently place the FDL program in its budget request – a fact

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603 Stennis memo for the record regarding phone call with Clifford, July 16, 1968, “Senator’s memos to himself, 1968” file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.


605 Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, August 12, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.
which no doubt owed in part to Russell’s continuing chairmanship of the Appropriation Committee. Again, however, few ideas of this sort ever really die, and the concept of maritime prepositioning lived on. In 1979, in response to the Iranian Revolution and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, the Carter administration returned focus on developing rapid deployment forces. The Marine Corps aggressively developed this concept, and use of Marine prepositioned stocks was judged so successful in the 1991 Persian Gulf War that the Defense Department directed the Army to implement the concept as well. Today, all military services maintain preposition war reserves.

*The Battleship New Jersey and Vietnam*

The final case deviates from the focus on congressional authorization of the defense program. It looks instead at the decision to use the battleship *New Jersey* for coastal bombardment during the Vietnam War. While the record is murky, the evidence suggests that Russell almost single handedly forced this decision upon the Defense Department. This case presents among the most obvious – if in some respects the most imprudent – illustrations of the magnitude of Russell’s influence.

The U.S. Navy awarded the contract for the battleship *New Jersey* in 1939, and commissioned the ship in 1943. Following extensive service in World War II, the Navy first decommissioned *New Jersey* in 1948. The Navy soon reactivated the ship for use during the Korean War, before deactivating it a second time in 1957. The genesis of the decision to reactivate the ship for use in the Vietnam War apparently dates back hearings before the SASC in early 1966. The committee received testimony that the U.S. military was deficient in its ability to attack targets beyond the range of the smaller naval vessels
on station off the Vietnamese coast during periods of foul weather, when aerial attack was impossible. In Vietnam, periods of foul weather constituted much of the year. Many of the sites the US military desired to attack provided staging or fire support to forces operating in South Vietnam near the Demilitarized Zone near the 17th parallel. Whether on his own or resulting from Navy advice, Russell latched onto the idea of reactivating the New Jersey.\(^{606}\) The Johnson administration was cool to the idea, however.\(^{607}\) In March 1966, JCS Chairman Wheeler wrote to Russell that, while operationally feasible, “considerations including the time to activate, the cost, and the prospect of a diminishing requirement for naval gunfire in South Vietnam” prevented the Defense Department for concurring with his proposal.\(^{608}\)

Russell continued to press the issue quietly behind the scenes, however. Although the exact nature of the discussion is opaque, Russell’s personal papers contain numerous cryptic references to his ongoing efforts. In May 1967, McNamara partially succumbed, approving a Navy study to assess the work and expense required to reactivate a battleship.\(^{609}\) Finally, on August 1 of that year, Russell scribbled a note to himself: “Now

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\(^{606}\) While the mission for the New Jersey might be thought of as “coastal bombardment,” the term is somewhat misleading with respect to Vietnam. The ships 16 inch guns were capable of firing shells to ranges in excess of 23 miles inland, while the average depth of the 250 mile strip of central Vietnam between the 16th and 18.5th parallels is between 30 and 40 miles. The 23 mile range inland is decremented, of course, by whatever distance off shore the ship is required to operate.

\(^{607}\) Braswell recalls there being “some underhanded support” for the proposal, presumably from the Navy. Braswell, interview I, LBJ Library.


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have approval to reactivate New Jersey – Battleship – a long battle won.” 610 The next day, Stennis penned a congratulatory letter to Russell, commending him for the “unrelenting efforts to make the Department of Defense get those battleships in shape... I know that if you had not stayed with it like you did that it would have never been done.” 611

The New Jersey was the only one of the mothballed battleships activated for use in Vietnam. The Navy formally recommissioned the ship in April 1968. It was subject to refit at the Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, finally departing for the Pacific in mid-May. It docked at Long Beach in June, departing in early September and finally reaching station off the Vietnamese coast late that month. While the military used the New Jersey extensively during its six month tour in theater, the Defense Department quickly again deactivated the ship after it reached its homeport of Long Beach in 1969, citing reasons of economy. The New Jersey was, however, reactivated for a third time between 1982 and 1991, and deployed off the coast of Lebanon in 1983-84, before the Navy finally donated it in 2000 for use as a museum.

**Stennis and the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee**

Outside its handling of the authorization bill, the other most interesting and persistent development in the SASC’s implementation of its oversight function involved Stennis and the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee. This development paints an

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interesting contrast to the authorization bill. The latter was a significant and meaningful change in the SASC’s oversight function, even if the committee could not always use this lever to compel the changes in the Defense Department’s policies that the committee desired. However, in its development of the authorization bill, the committee under Russell’s leadership made almost no institutional changes that might better enable it to dispose of its responsibilities. It added no permanent subcommittees to examine aspects of the bill. It added no staff resources (although the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 did not allow this in any case).\textsuperscript{612} It made no systematic use of external analytical organizations, such as the Legislative Reference Service or the General Accounting Office, although it did so on occasion.\textsuperscript{613} This critically limited the committee’s ability to examine in real depth any more than a handful of issues at any time. The committee was more apt to deliberate seriously on a few key themes – e.g., manned bombers or naval nuclear propulsion – than to comprehensively reexamine the Defense Department’s program each year.

This mode of behavior owed not so much to a lack of vision on Russell’s part as to a lack of desire. During the 1960s, Russell was generally satisfied with how the SASC operated. Russell understood the development of Defense Department policies to be

\textsuperscript{612} It is unclear whether Russell would have favored hiring additional staff members to support full committee operations. He never seems to have been comfortable operating a large staff, as Stennis and Johnson were. Moreover, he never apparently expressed dissatisfaction with the level of staff support available to him, nor with the depth with which the committee could examine the defense program due to its limited staff resources. Finally, Russell understood that his control of information supported his power as chairman, and that more staff resources might better enable other members to develop independent positions that challenged those he advocated. It was alright for Johnson and Stennis to operate subcommittees large staffs, because he trusted them and he knew they would conform to his wishes. He trusted other committee members less in this regard – Symington and Thurmond, for example.

\textsuperscript{613} In 1970, the Legislative Reference Service became the Congressional Research Service.
largely an executive function. He had no desire to implement policy analysis mechanisms that would “reinvent the wheel” within the Congress. In the areas where Russell might have desired to modify Department actions, he understood the Congress’s hand to be relatively weak constitutionally. If his own personal stature and influence were insufficient to move the Executive Branch, he saw no reward in adding other institutional layers to the SASC that could achieve no more, but might serve as a check on his personal ability to control the committee’s functioning.

In contrast, Stennis desired to systematically alter the preparedness subcommittee’s activities toward a more aggressive, policy-focused oversight role, as opposed to its traditional focus on waste, fraud, and abuse. Stennis also attempted to focus subcommittee investigations in order to assist the larger Senate Armed Services Committee in executing its oversight responsibilities, including its handling of the authorization bill. However, Stennis’s ability to achieve real effects in these areas was severely limited, and it is very difficult to attribute any meaningful successes to his efforts. Besides its “spotlight” and “bully pulpit” aspects, the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee had no real levers with which to influence the Executive Branch. While Executive officers will often go to lengths to avoid the burden and potential embarrassment of a congressional investigation, investigations in-and-of themselves lack the compulsory aspect that legislative and budgetary actions generally carry. Investigations can prompt other congressional actions, and this possibility with respect to the broader SASC was among Stennis’s goals. However, no preparedness subcommittee action was likely to achieve an effect in the SASC that Russell did not support or intend. As we have seen, Stennis self-identified as a trusted subordinate of Russell’s. He was in
no way a committee maverick. That is how he cemented his position as Russell’s protégé in the first place. It is certainly possible that the various subcommittee activities shaped the climate of opinion within the SASC over the course of the decade, whether on individual issues or on the proper manner of SASC oversight generally. These, however, are the hardest measures of influence to assess, and the record supports no conclusions beyond the speculative.

Well before Johnson took the oath of office as Vice President, Stennis was thinking ahead to how he would reorganize the subcommittee’s operations. In November 1960, Stennis turned to Kenneth BeLieu to frame some ideas on the way ahead. While BeLieu’s response was consistent with the direction in which Stennis was already facing, it is interesting to note how BeLieu’s thoughts once again focused Stennis’s mind. The day after he received BeLieu’s memo, Stennis included almost verbatim the latter’s recommendations in a letter that he sent Russell outlining his thoughts on the proper subcommittee role and relationship to the broader committee.614

Stennis began by noting that he had always thought of the preparedness subcommittee as an adjunct to its parent committee. Stennis stated as his bottom-line goal, “Frankly, I would want to operate the work of the Preparedness Subcommittee in such a way as to implement the policies of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and give the Committee a chance to make itself felt in the operations of our vast, far-flung military program.” He recommended that the subcommittee should adopt the procedure of “inspecting and reviewing programs and policies that have been approved by the

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614 BeLieu memo to Stennis, November 29, 1960, Preparedness Subcommittee General file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
Senate Armed Services Committee and enacted into law.” This would include issues like military construction, personnel and pay scales, major weapons systems, and procurement and supply management. Such activities would serve as a feedback loop to the full committee for consideration in future authorizations. Stennis suggested this could also support the Appropriations Committee, which did not have a staff large enough on its own to independently examine the military program as a whole. Stennis was also careful to avoid appearing that he intended to over-step his bounds. In a bow to Russell’s overarching committee leadership, Stennis concluded, “Of course, the most valuable assistance I would have would be access to you for your valuable and sound counsel and guidance.”  

Russell’s response was positive but cool. He still felt that the subcommittee’s primary purpose should be to investigate specific charges of waste and mismanagement, either as referred to it or as the subcommittee discovered on its own initiative. The subcommittee was also empowered to make appraisals of the Executive Branch’s administration and execution of the laws within the SASC’s jurisdiction, and to report the results to the full committee. Stennis’s reform proposals largely fell into this latter area. Russell cautioned Stennis about moving ahead too aggressively:

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You realize, I am sure, that the Subcommittee is not a legislative one. I think that in determining the extent of the Subcommittee’s activities, you would be well advised to remember the likelihood of you later becoming Chairman of the full Committee and to avoid any precedents that might plague you then… The best advice I can offer at the moment is not to spread yourself too thin by undertaking too many subjects initially.  

Upon becoming SASC chairman eight years later, Stennis quickly faced the dilemma of which Russell warned, as we will see. Still, Russell trusted Stennis implicitly. He was inclined to give Stennis fairly free reign, in a manner that he would not have applied to other more maverick committee members – perhaps to any other committee member.

Despite Russell’s caution, Stennis pressed ahead with a rather ambitious agenda for the subcommittee. In early 1961, he outlined his general concept to the other subcommittee members. The subcommittee staff would stay on alert for topics of interest. At the subcommittee’s direction, the staff would conduct a preliminary investigation. Based upon this appraisal, the subcommittee would decide whether to hold hearings. Stennis intended the subcommittee to have the capability to conduct multiple ongoing investigations at any one time. He outlined a number of issues that he was considering as a preliminary agenda. Highly ambitious was his desire for “a quick and intensive study” into Army, Navy, and Marine Corps modernization, the entirety of U.S. worldwide treaty commitments, the permanence and need for foreign bases, the need for the U.S.’s present troop strength abroad, and “related questions.” Stennis’s reach exceeded his grasp on this one, and this topic went unexecuted. The subcommittee soon, however, began an

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616 Russell letter to Stennis, January 13, 1961, 1964, “Stennis, John” file, Correspondence files, Committee on Armed Services, 87th Congress, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
investigation into “strategic weapons and weapons delivery systems.” Stennis meant this to complement McNamara’s ongoing internal review of such programs. Stennis also informed the other members that he had no plans to make any “personal” additions to the staff, except to find a competent staff director to replace the departing Kenneth BeLieu. Stennis wanted a director with knowledge of government and military programs, and experience in investigations and preparation for hearings.617

Stennis soon hired James Kendall for the role of staff director. Kendall was a former Assistant Attorney General of Mississippi, and had considerable previous experience as a trial lawyer. He directed a staff that averaged four to five investigators, plus a similar number of clerical personnel. Most of the subcommittee’s investigators had backgrounds as either attorneys or with the military. While there was some turnover concurrent with the Johnson-Stennis transition, thereafter the staff demonstrated remarkable continuity. The majority of investigators working for the subcommittee in 1969 had been there in 1959 as well. In addition, Stennis followed the practice of supplementing the subcommittee staff with GAO personal, although never for more than short-term assignments on the order of a few weeks.618

Stennis soon realized, however, that he lacked adequate staff resources to carry out the scope and depth of activities he desired. In a May 1963 letter to Russell, Stennis outlined some of his frustrations. He in particular wanted to obtain Russell’s permission to hire a lead investigator – “an A-1, experienced, tough-minded and go-getter type” – in

617  Stennis letter to Russell, November 30, 1960, Mississippi State University Library.

618  Stennis letter to Russell, May 24, 1963, Kendall Staff Memos 1963 file, Staff series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
order to “get our teeth more into the job and thereby better utilize the Preparedness staff we already have, and also to prevent other investigating subcommittees whose staffs are rather aggressive from moving over into our field as to investigating matters which very properly belong to the Armed Services Committee” (emphasis added). Johnson had routinely been able to bring in top-flight lawyers from outside in order to lead subcommittee investigations, at least for temporary periods. Johnson did so particularly during both his Korean War and post-Sputnik series of investigations. Stennis noted that his current staff was experienced and able in support, but none were of the type to act as a really aggressive lead investigator. Stennis singled out Kendall as a hard worker, a good lawyer, and effective in planning and carrying out hearings. However, Stennis felt Kendall simply lacked the experience to be chief investigator. It does not appear Russell gave his consent, or at least not initially. The record shows no additions to the subcommittee staff following soon after this request.619

Early on, Stennis directed his staff to aggressively seek out issues warranting subcommittee inquiry. This included monitoring the press – particularly Hanson Baldwin articles – and the speeches of members of Congress for possible leads. He directed the staff to develop contacts and to cultivate relationships with influential newsmen and writers.620 This could serve to gain both information and notoriety for the subcommittee’s activities. In an effort to coordinate the subcommittee’s activities with the full

619 Ibid. Given the sparseness of the record, however, this is not definitive. Incidentally, the best sources for compiling lists of subcommittee staff members are generally the records of the various Defense Department legislative liaison offices.

620 Stennis memo to his staff, June 23, 1961, Memos 1961 file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
committee’s posture hearings, Stennis directed the staff to use these hearings as a start point for potential inquiries. He also gained Russell’s permission to have subcommittee staff members attend all posture sessions. In addition, Stennis repeatedly solicited Darden’s advice on identifying issues that warranted further investigation, and several of Darden’s suggestion developed into full subcommittee inquiries.621

In fairness, the sea change in the pattern of subcommittee operations that Stennis sought had its roots in Johnson’s post-Sputnik investigations. Prior to that event, the subcommittee’s focused had been the traditional set of waste, fraud, and abuse issues, with Johnson remaining largely detached from, and uninterested in, subcommittee activities – at least after the Korean War series of investigations concluded. In 1955, for example, the subcommittee generated reports on “The Facts with Respect to Corporate Profits and Return on Net Worth of Airframe Manufacturers, 1942-1954,” “Concentration of Defense Contracts, July 1950-December 1954,” “Review of Procurement Program, Air Force Passenger Seats,” and “Lack of Use of Military Property and the Cost to the Government of Overestimating Military Requirements” – all presumably worthwhile points for inquiry, but hardly indicative of a orientation toward substantive policy issues. The entirety of the subcommittee’s 1958 efforts, on the other hand, revolved around its missile and satellite program investigation. The subcommittee

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621 The record suggests that Darden saw value in Stennis’s efforts. For example, Darden recommended in early 1964 that the subcommittee hold informational hearings on the Nike X. As he noted, “Much of this work is classified but the Congress really gets little information about progress and development in this field except superficially during hearings on the procurement and research authorization. I think some objective hearing would be helpful to the subcommittee and the full committee in evaluating an eventual decision to produce or not to produce this anti-ballistic missile system” For whatever reason, however, Stennis did not follow-up on this line of inquiry. Darden memo to Stennis, January 3, 1964, Chronological File – 1964 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
published its initial findings in 1959, and continued to hold hearings on the matter through the remainder of Johnson’s tenure. While it continued to examine issues related to its traditional focus on waste and abuse during those years, it also started to branch out into other more substantive policy areas such as “Major Defense Matters and the Berlin Situation” (1959) and reports on Army modernization, the B-58 program, and B-70 program (all in 1960). The subcommittee also began to receive hearings from the CIA Director during those years.

Under Stennis, the subcommittee accelerated the pace of its substantive policy reorientation. Its substantive policy focus soon outstripped anything that had occurred under Johnson other than at the 1957-1958 height of the Sputnik hearings. This was both a mark of the new chairman’s greater interest, as well as the greater amount of time he could devote to subcommittee activities in comparison to his predecessor. The subcommittee did not abandon investigation into charges of waste, fraud, and abuse, but such matters became a decidedly secondary focus. Stennis instead emphasized examination of the hot-button defense issues of the day. As mentioned previously, in 1961 and 1962, the subcommittee held extensive hearings into strategic weapons and weapons delivery systems, a topic that also dovetailed nicely with the full committee’s new authorization function. These hearings were for committee rather than public

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622 According to a classified memo prepared for McNamara, Stennis’s stated purposes for investigation included determination of: 1) the basis for decisions regarding weapons systems; 2) the details of the U.S. ICBM programs as they then stood and how they were expected to develop over the next several years; 3) the relationship of U.S. deterrents to existing intelligence estimates, and, 4) the details of Soviet and U.S. strategic technical capabilities.” According to the memo, the committee most directly focused on the question of “our total ultimate requirement for missiles and more specifically the basis on which such a conclusion is reached.” Summary of testimony presented to the Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee, undated, Secretaries’ and Chiefs’ Comments file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.
education; the entire series of hearings was held in executive session and went unprinted. From 1962 to 1963, the subcommittee also investigated arms control and disarmament matters, including 1963 hearings examining prospects for a nuclear test ban treaty. Most of these hearings were classified, although the subcommittee released sanitized portions along with an interim report. After the Senate ratified the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963, the subcommittee established a special subcommittee with Jackson, Symington, and Smith as members to monitor implementation of treaty safeguards geared at verifying Soviet compliance.

In 1964, the subcommittee began investigation into a topic that consumed it for much of the remainder of the decade – the war in Vietnam. Many of the associated hearings likewise took place at the secret or top secret level, and were never printed in any form. Over the next several years the subcommittee’s activities ranged widely, from investigations into the general world situation and the nature of U.S. military operations, to extensive investigation of unit readiness, equipment, and training. These activities – particularly those related to readiness – caused a great deal of discomfort for the Johnson administration and contributed to Stennis becoming a relatively outspoken and hawkish critic of the administration’s handling of the war. Like Russell, Stennis had always been highly skeptical of the wisdom of U.S. involvement in Southeast Asia.623 Like Russell,

623 Stennis wrote the following after a long discussion in the latter’s hospital room at Walter Reed Hospital in February 1968. “(W)e talked at length about the war in Vietnam. We expressed and re-expressed our opinion we have held for so long in that we just must back up our boys and also stop sending them in there to the certain destruction of so many without closing the Port of Haiphong and thus deny the enemy the benefit of unrestricted traffic of war supplies from Russia and elsewhere through the Port.” Stennis went on to note that he was not yet ready to advocate withdrawal, but would come around to this position if the U.S. was not prepared to close the port and “turn loose even more military strength on them.” Stennis resume of the highlights of his work and experiences from January 31 through February 17,
Stennis now felt that, having committed the flag, the U.S. needed to follow-up with whatever level of overwhelming force was required to win a successful outcome. As the conflict in Vietnam and the scale of U.S. involvement intensified through 1966 and 1967, the subcommittee also began a series of hearings – parts of which were publicly released – into the country’s ability to meet the totality of its worldwide military commitments.\textsuperscript{624}

While Stennis’s overriding goals in framing the subcommittee’s activities were true to the intentions he laid out to Russell back in 1960, he also intended to derive certain other professional and political gains. Most importantly, he sought to increase his personal notoriety on defense issues among a set of audiences that spanned the Congress, various corners of the Executive Branch, and his home state constituents. His hope was that, by raising his stature on these issues, he could increase the degree to which administration officials at least had to consult him matters in which he took a personal interest. This might even increase his actual level of decision-forcing influence on such matters. Increased stature might also serve to deter others in the Senate from infringing on his and the SASC’s proper areas of jurisdiction, a trend that had become apparent by the late 1950s and that would only increase in momentum over the next decade.

\textsuperscript{624} As part of the inquiry, and in order to “guard against generalization and airy assurances to the effect that we are fully capable of meeting all of our commitments,” the subcommittee developed a series of hypothetical near-future planning scenarios that it submitted to the chairmen of the military services and against which it intended to frame questioning during succeeding hearings. See: 1) “Worldwide Commitments Inquiry”, December 7, 1966, Chronological File 1966 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC; and, 2) Stennis letter to Admiral David McDonald (Chief of Naval Operations), January 1, 1967, Stennis, John (March) file, Congressional Correspondence 1967 (E 40) series, Records of the Department of Navy, RG 428, National Archives, Washington, DC.
In some respects, however, Stennis’s most important audience was his home state constituency. Stennis’s reputation in Mississippi suffered a serious setback after the 1960 presidential election, when he refused to support a slate of “opposition” electors opposed to the national Democratic Party’s civil rights platform. He instead backed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket. The backlash was so fierce that he genuinely feared defeat in his 1964 reelection bid. While Stennis already had a public relations operation ongoing, the event spurred him to redouble his efforts. Reinforcing to his constituents that he was a prominent and influential senator on defense issues – and by implication one who thereby benefited the state of Mississippi – was a cornerstone of these efforts.

Stennis did not intend, however, to use his subcommittee’s activities to create a public spectacle – for his or anyone else’s benefit – at the expense of Executive Branch officers. While his activities at times caused a stir, his basic intent remained what he regarded as responsible oversight. While Defense Department officials would no doubt have preferred to avoid congressional investigation on the whole, they generally regarded Stennis’s activities as fair-minded and balanced. Stennis was obviously able to moderate his own behavior, and could similarly moderate that of his staff and of any official subcommittee publications – although he sometimes permitted members to publish their concurring or dissenting opinions with minimal editorial control. He was not similarly able, however, to constrain the questioning or the general public utterances of the other subcommittee members. Both Kennedy and Johnson administration officials on the one hand, and Russell and Stennis on the other, regarded

625 He publicly supported Barry Goldwater’s presidential bid that year.
Thurmond and Goldwater as the worst offenders against committee “responsibility.” Yet both had seats on the preparedness subcommittee (although Goldwater temporarily left the Senate after 1964).

In early 1963, the subcommittee held hearings into the state of Cuba’s military buildup. In commenting on the hearings, McGiffert noted that the atmosphere, “if not unfriendly, has been uncooperative, particularly when compared with past relationships.” While he did not note the degree to which Stennis or the subcommittee staff was involved, he felt the subcommittee was “clearly trying to so mold its procedure as to maximize the opportunity to bring out any differences of opinion within the intelligence community.” Incidentally, this was approximately the same time during which administration officials were finding the HASC to be similarly confrontational, in contrast to past precedent. This was also the time at which the Senate Government Operations Committee was beginning to hold contentious hearings into the TFX contract award. Clearly the Kennedy-McNamara honeymoon had ended by this point. However, as the preparedness subcommittee concluded its Cuba investigation in late

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627 Senator John McClellan (D-AR), the chairman of the Senate Government Operations Committee, led the investigation. Both within the Defense Department and the Senate, however, this investigations was generally seen having come about at Henry Jackson’s urging. Jackson – also a member of the Government Operations Committee – was apparently disgruntled by the fact the TFX contract award went to General Dynamic’s Convair Divisions (Ft. Worth, TX) instead of Boeing (headquartered in Jackson’s home state of Washington). While Jackson’s motives seem self-serving on their face, the contract award to General Dynamics was itself seen by many as an act of patronage to Vice President Johnson (For example, see Kendall memo to Stennis, December 7, 1962, Kendall Staff Memos 1963 file, Staff series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library, which covers both these points). There was no doubt considerable pressure from the Texas congressional delegation in favor of the General Dynamics proposal, particularly as this would serve to offset the loss associated with the shut down of B-58 production. For allegations, see Sorensen, Def 9/18/61-11/8/61, 9/30/61 Gilpatric to Sorensen.
spring, McGiffert commented that the committee staff, particularly Kendall, had conducted themselves fairly, particularly in light of “pressure from Thurmond and possibly Goldwater.” McGiffert concluded that the intelligence community felt the report was factually accurate, “although we would of course not fully agree with some of the adjectives used.”

At about the same time, the administration faced a pending subcommittee investigation into an aircraft vertical takeoff and landing (VTOL) R&D contract. McGiffert wrote to O’Brien that any committee hearings on the topic would not be pleasant, but at least with the preparedness subcommittee the Defense Department would benefit from a more “responsible” subcommittee staff than existed on certain other Senate investigating committees. When the hearings concluded a few months later, McGiffert noted that they “went as well as could have been expected,” adding parenthetically that the absence of Thurmond and Goldwater from the proceedings aided this outcome. McGiffert once again cited the “responsible” manner in which Stennis conducted the hearing, and anticipated a judicious final report that would not unduly sensationalize the culpability of senior leaders for having made incorrect decisions.

Over the course of the decade, it became increasingly common for members far less maverick than Thurmond and Goldwater to behave in ways that administration

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629 “Responsible” is quoted from the original. McGiffert memo to O’Brien, May 27, 1963, 27 May 63 file, Lawrence O’Brien White House Staff Files, JFK Library.

630 McGiffert memo to O’Brien, June 18, 1963, 18 June 63 file, Lawrence O’Brien White House Staff Files, JFK Library.
officials found confrontational, if not caustic. In the face of such behavior, the administration in turn tended to withdraw into a shell that limited Stennis and his staff’s own freedom of action, at least with respect to the degree he and his staffers could gain access in order to question individuals and obtain records. This was particularly true when investigators went into the field to establish the evidentiary basis for an inquiry. However, it would be incorrect to ascribe the unresponsiveness and insularity of successive administrations solely to the behavior of the likes of Goldwater and Thurmond. Administration officials were fundamentally uncomfortable with the handover of large amounts of sensitive or classified information to the Legislative Branch, no matter the purposes for which it was intended, however responsible. A Russell could demand access to virtually whatever information he wanted – if he wanted – at least for his eyes only. Stennis was not yet “a Russell,” and the average committee member had nowhere near Russell’s level of access.

As 1964 rolled around, the flavor of administration concerns began to center more and more on the type of information that the subcommittee was requesting rather than how it would be used, although the latter concern remained as part of the subtext. These concerns manifest not only in OSD, but within the Services as well. For example, Navy officials noted that, with respect to information regarding posture, weapon systems, and inventories, “the detail and sensitive nature of the information being requested this year

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631 Margaret Chase Smith, for example, was no great fan of McNamara’s. In her words, “Well, McNamara and I differed so greatly. I did not find him the honest man that a lot of people did. In fact, there were three times that I asked him questions in truly executive meetings where not even the staff was present, and he would, with a very straight determined way, give us an answer. Then, a few days later, come up and apologize for not telling me the truth.” Margaret Chase Smith, interview, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
gives cause for concern.” They noted similar concerns were developing at least within the Air Force as well. While Navy officials were comfortable in providing oral briefings to the subcommittee staff, the written presentation of the data to Congress created security concerns with which the Navy leadership was too uncomfortable to acquiesce. On the general topic of congressional access, the Navy leadership recommended forwarding the matter for discussion at the Joint Chiefs of Staff level, with a possible request for guidance from the National Security Council.632

Shortly thereafter, in response to a request for information related to nuclear command and control, McNamara wrote to Stennis proposing a series of oral briefings to subcommittee members. This would apparently have repeated the approach used during the 1961 strategic weapons and delivery systems inquiry. According to McNamara’s proposal, no staffers would be present, and members could only use information as background. McNamara further requested that the number of members to receive briefings be held to an absolute minimum. He noted that the approach had the unanimous backing of the Joint Chiefs as being responsive to congressional needs while protecting national security.633 This came only days before Goldwater charged in public that the Defense Department was not being truthful to the American people about the reliability of America’s ICBM force. In particular, Goldwater suggested that “electronic impulse” from nuclear detonations might erase the “memory portion” of nuclear guidance systems.


633  McNamara letter to Stennis, January 3, 1964, “Reading File Jan 17-Jan 2, 1964” file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Kendall noted to Stennis that the latter information was “highly classified and considered very sensitive.”

Despite actions such as this, McNamara’s proposition went over like a lead balloon with Kendall. Kendall conceded that having Goldwater and Thurmond on the subcommittee was probably influencing OSD policy. However, he and the other staff members were by now frustrated by what he regarded as “the now customary delay” in Defense Department responses to information requests. Such delays were not limited to OSD, but were department-wide and were not being adequately redressed despite OSD claims that it was attempting to rectify the matter. Kendall wrote to Stennis that, if the trend were not reversed, he would be unable to do his job and the subcommittee would be unable to properly execute its functions. Regarding McNamara’s suggested system of briefings, Kendall conceded that he had allowed this in 1961 when he was “green on the job and didn’t know any better.” However, in retrospect it was clear that such a system was “an almost complete waste of time” in terms of the subcommittee’s ability to use the information conveyed to meaningfully support its investigative activities. It was also contrary to how the Eisenhower administration had operated during the Sputnik investigation. Kendall also accused McNamara of shifting classification levels in order to release only information that supported the Secretary’s preferred policies. Kendall

634 Kendall memo to Stennis, January 13, 1964, Chronological File – 1964 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC. Electromagnetic pulse is a phenomenon wherein a nuclear explosion at high altitude (among other possible sources) creates a powerful electromagnetic field that in turn induces currents in exposed electronic equipment that are high enough to cause short-circuits, rendering the equipment unusable.

635 One suspects this was primarily evident of two things – the different attitude among Eisenhower and his deputies, and Johnson’s greater stature and influence, as well as his more adversarial style.
went so far as to suggest that Stennis had been too willing to give ground in the name of security, thereby undermining subcommittee investigations. Lastly, Kendall noted that various legislative liaison officers had told him that OSD policy prohibited them from sharing information, and also that they feared for their careers if such charges on their parts were publicized.\footnote{Kendall memo to Stennis, March 14, 1964, Chronological File – 1964 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.}

Stennis’s response on this particular issue is unrecorded, as is his decision on whether or not to submit to McNamara’s suggested policy. The record is clear, however, that there was never a true resolution of the broader access issue. Ready access to information and individual testimony remained a constant source of irritation between the Defense Department and the subcommittee. Stennis was forced frequently to call, write, and meet with senior Department officials in order to address specific grievances. Stennis won some and lost some of these confrontations. Occasionally, the frustrations flared into open displays of emotion, usually in private conversations but occasionally on the floor of the Senate.\footnote{An example of such occurring in private is an October 1965 OSD memo of a conversation between McNamara and Stennis, in which the latter charged “with great emotion” that the Executive Branch was “dwarfing and running over” the Legislative Branch, although he stipulated he was not, in the memo’s words, “referring solely or even primarily to actions of the Defense Department, but rather was thinking of the total Executive Branch and its behavior.” This may have been a reference in part to the Johnson administration’s Civil Rights program. Memo on conversation, October 8, 1965, Reading File October 1965 file, Papers of Robert McNamara, Record Group 200, National Archives, Washington, DC.}

An example of the latter occurred in April 1966, in reference to a memo from Deputy Secretary of Defense Cyrus Vance that directed department witnesses to testify at variance to official policy only when “pressed” for a personal opinion. Stennis

argued that such a policy was “a menace to the legislative branch of the Federal
Government.” He continued:

I am further convinced that if it is not challenged it will harm the Congress
in years to come in performing their major functions, that is, the setting of
policy, the appropriating of money, and the following of that money as it
is spent… Perhaps, Mr. President, the Congress is partially to blame for
not asserting itself more forcefully in this matter. It is time, however, that
we stand upon the high and solid ground that Congress is a co-equal, not a
subordinate, branch of our government. We must not assent to or
acquiesce in any departmental fiat or directive which restricts our right to
inquiry, hinders our search for the truth, or unreasonably restricts or
controls the free and full flow of information to us as we seek to discharge
the obligation laid upon us by the Constitution.638

Such occasions, however, were not indicative of a growing hostility on Stennis’s part
toward the Defense Department or toward particular officials. If Stennis felt such
hostility, there is no evidence that he allowed it to systematically color the manner in
which he executed his official duties. In fact, his private reminiscences on the end of
McNamara’s tenure continued to credit the Secretary for his management of the
Department, even as Stennis criticized him for his management of the war.639 Stennis
remained committed to the principles of responsible oversight, such that to the end of
1968 Defense Department officials could continue to cite the degree to which the

638  Kendall memo to Stennis, April 29, 1966, Chronological File 1966 file, Preparedness Investigating
Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate,
Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

639  In a memo to no one other than himself, Stennis wrote: “This is the last time for Mr. McNamara to
present a budget and reminds all of us of what an amazing job he has done in the last seven years. He has
been highly successful in many ways although he has not been outstanding at all in his part in the war. He
did bring new business methods into the Pentagon and he ran the Department rather than let the Generals
and Admirals run it. One of his main troubles, though, was that he wanted to run the battlefield the same as
he wanted to run the business end of the Department and thereby contributed to a far from successful policy
as to the war in Vietnam.” Stennis resume of the highlights of his work and experiences from January 31
through February 17, 1968, Mississippi State University Library.
committee’s official products presented their findings in a manner that minimized public harm to the Defense Department.\textsuperscript{640}

So what did Stennis accomplish with his reorientation of Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee activities during the 1960s? Certainly, his actions increased his stature with the Executive Branch. Already prominent with respect to military construction, administration officials now had to keep his views and preferences in mind as they made decisions across the full spectrum of policy and program issues. Subcommittee reports received attention at the highest levels of Executive Branch, even if their recommendations were often quickly discarded. For example, McNamara appears to have summarily dismissed all subcommittee findings that grew out of the 1961 strategic weapons inquiry that varied with his preferred policies. However, Stennis’s subcommittee chairmanship meant that McNamara could not afford to be personally dismissive of Stennis. McNamara politely met with Stennis to discuss the report’s findings, and this laid the groundwork for a polite meeting between Stennis and Kennedy, after which Stennis was able to write to McNamara, “Your considerate attitude gave us the assurance that our views will receive full and serious consideration in the difficult decisions which lie ahead.”\textsuperscript{641} As Stennis’s stature increased, so did his level of access – at least to senior Executive Branch personnel. Private meetings with the President now became a more common occurrence for Stennis. The President would invariably appear

\textsuperscript{640} Notes from Department of Defense staff meetings, September 30, 1968, Clark Clifford Papers, LBJ Library.

\textsuperscript{641} Stennis letter to McNamara, September 9, 1961, Stennis, John file, Congressional Correspondence 1958-1961 (E 6) series, Records of the Department of Navy, RG 428, National Archives, Washington, DC.
“appreciative” and assure that he “would look into (the) matter carefully.”\textsuperscript{642} Likewise, Stennis’s subcommittee activities caused an increase in the level of courtship from Defense Department legislative personnel. For example, in early 1964 McGiffert wrote to McNamara that, since subcommittee actions over the past several months had produced so high a volume of inquiries, it warranted including Stennis among the group of senators to whom the Department should pay official pre-posture hearing visits.\textsuperscript{643} However, as we have seen, Stennis’s level of access to information did not grow at the same rate as his stature or access to administration officials. He by no means approached Russell’s level, for example. His access on a particular issue was neither automatic, nor necessarily extendable to his chosen staff representatives (as Russell’s tended to be with respect to Darden, at least).

Did Stennis’s subcommittee activities lead to a meaningful increase in his ability to influence decision-making? This question is almost impossible to answer satisfactorily without delving deep into the weeds, over and over again, to chart all possible inferences of influence and then carefully investigating whether the inferences were in fact genuine. At a macro level, the answer appears to have been generally, “No.” As Russell pointed out in 1961, the preparedness subcommittee had no legislative function. As an investigative committee, it could at most attempt to shape the climate of opinion in which the Executive Branch and the Congress made decisions. Stennis could not use

\textsuperscript{642} Note on Stennis’s meeting with the President, July 28, 1965, Tickler File – 1965 file, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee files (88th to 92nd Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.

\textsuperscript{643} McGiffert memo to McNamara, January 6, 1964, Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee (1963-1964) file, Subject Files 1962-1964 (E93), Records of the Department of Navy, RG 428, National Archives, Washington, DC.
subcommittee activities to decisively influence congressional deliberations on a specific issue, much less to compel the Executive Branch to do much of anything. While subcommittee activities no doubt influenced a range of decisions on a micro level – i.e., small, discrete decisions that do not shift broad swaths of policy but that certainly shape it on the margins – these are very difficult to chart, much less to somehow derive a “score” of committee influence.

Focusing on direct decision-making influence largely misses the point of what Stennis was trying to achieve, however. He understood that, unlike his previous military construction subcommittee, the preparedness subcommittee had no decision-making authority. Stennis’s goal from the outset was instead to use the subcommittee to enable better decision-making in the broader SASC, primarily in terms of providing it better information and analysis. It is difficult to point to a full committee decision that preparedness subcommittee action brought about. On the other hand, it is impossible to believe that the plethora of subcommittee investigations into substantive policy issues – investigations that may never have taken place had Stennis not assumed the chairmanship – did not shape the thinking of the broader SASC membership, and influence how they subsequently deliberated on issues before the full committee. While Russell ultimately “decided” how the full committee would act, it is equally hard to believe that Stennis’s activities had no impact on him – whether outright in terms of specific recommendations, or in terms of more subtly shaping how his thinking on specific issues, or oversight generally, developed over time. Stennis certainly provided the full committee a far broader basis of information and analysis than its members would have gained alone from the full committee staffing and mark-up procedures. On the other hand, one could
rightly also point out that the subcommittee developed such information with a perspective that tended to reinforce rather than challenge or broaden preexisting committee biases. Nonetheless, in the basic goal of enhancing the full committee’s information base, Stennis must be credited with having achieved his desired effect, even if one can claim with no certainty that he achieved anything more.

With respect to influencing the Executive Branch, the “score” is even less in Stennis’s favor. It is virtually impossible to find an instance in which the subcommittee made a major policy or programmatic recommendation that was at variance with administration policy, and in which the administration opted to alter course in response to subcommittee action, unrelated to the activities of other congressional committees that wielded more decisive levers of power. In late summer 1965, for example, Kendall wrote to Stennis summing up the impact of some recent subcommittee actions. Kendall cautioned that the memo “must be read and used with caution and some degree of skepticism. In many cases, it is impossible for us to prove that the investigation was the direct and proximate cause of the subsequent action.” He further noted that, with respect to many of the issues he was to discuss, many other congressional committees had taken an interest in shaping the issue. With these caveats in tow, Kendall was still forced to dig deep in an effort to discern attributable impacts. For example, he noted that a staff inquiry the previous fall had raised doubts about the reliability of certain Navy ship-to-air missiles. Shortly thereafter, the Navy awarded a contract for the development of a new and improved missile.644 In a similarly obscure case, Kendall noted that the development

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644 He also noted that the Navy had not advised the subcommittee of this action; he had learned it only in the course of routine visit to a defense contractor’s plant.
of the Redeye and Mauler air defense systems had been under subcommittee scrutiny for more than a year, during which time the subcommittee raised many critical questions about the programs. Subsequently, the department abandoned Mauler and delayed Redeye production until it had worked out certain technical difficulties.645 As we have seen, relatively “small” decisions on construction related to air defense systems in the late 1950s led to significant changes in congressional procedure, and at least moderately significant changes in Defense Department programs. None of the instances Kendall mentioned – or any other such instances derived from the preparedness subcommittee’s record – appear to have resulted in anything so significant, however.

In the same memo, Kendall addressed a topic of critical significance – the war in Vietnam. Admittedly an expansive issue, it consumed more of the subcommittee’s time than any other. Kendall concluded that “our continuous inquiries into military operations in Vietnam have had a discernible impact. Following our hearings last year a task force was created to study the problems we highlighted. From this flowed improved ordinance and other corrective actions. Higher performance aircraft were introduced and the fiction that we were ‘advisors’ only was abandoned.”646 It seems credible that subcommittee investigations did in fact bring to light certain issues that the administration was forced to address, when it otherwise either may have chosen not to, or may not have even been aware of at a senior level. Moreover, some of these issues no doubt had a great impact on the lives of affected individuals, particularly Americans soldiers in the war zone. Again,


646 Ibid.
however, at a macro level there appears to have been no significant subcommittee impact on the course of administration conduct in Vietnam.\textsuperscript{647} Perhaps the most significant impact of Stennis’s time as preparedness subcommittee chairman was the opportunity for professional development that it offered him, as he looked ahead to his eventual chairmanship of the full Senate Armed Services Committee.

\textsuperscript{647} For example, in their individual interviews as part of the oral history project accompanying the official John Stennis manuscript collection at Mississippi State University, both George Reedy and Cyrus Vance expressed the viewpoint that Stennis had no influence on the Johnson administration’s Vietnam policy – this despite the fact that one often finds such interviews to have at least a minimally eulogistic quality. See: 1) Cyrus Vance, interviewed by Jeff Broadwater, July 14, 1992, transcript, Oral History Project, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library, http://library.msstate.edu/congressional/oralhistory/Vance_july.pdf; and, 2) Reedy, interview, Mississippi State University Library.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUSION

Transition to the Stennis Era

John Stennis served as Senate Armed Services Committee chairman from 1969 through 1980. Even a cursory evaluation of his tenure suggests that, with respect to both its internal operations and its external relations (particularly vis-à-vis the rest of the Senate), the Armed Services Committee under Stennis was a different body than it had been under Russell. One history sums up the Stennis era as follows:

The committee confronted assaults on its jurisdiction, an erosion of public support for the military, and a weakening of U.S. military power relative to the Soviet Union's. The committee played an important role in reversing these trends by the end of the decade... Chairman Stennis successfully led the committee through this difficult era. He kept the panel focused on the key problems that grew out of the Vietnam War: the neglected state of the nation's weapons programs and the need to replace the draft with a viable manpower system. Despite powerful challenges from anti-Pentagon forces, the committee never lost a floor fight on a major weapons system that it reported.648

It may well be that Stennis tallied a record of success in managing defense legislation that rivaled Russell’s. Still, Stennis achieved this in a very different manner than Russell. Russell used his enormous stature and his considerable levers of influence to dominate Senate decisions on defense legislation, and to steer aside all serious challenges in areas

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under his jurisdiction. Stennis, on the other hand, worked to adapt the committee’s mode of operations in order to *defuse* such challenges, before they could develop sufficient mass to fully circumvent SASC authority.

To put the differences between the Russell and Stennis chairmanships in context, they owed to variations in individual style and power, and to changes in the overall Senate environment. In terms of both institutional power distributions and the norms of member behavior, the Senate changed significantly between the late-1960s and the mid-1970s. On the one hand, the norm of deferential respect for chair authority rapidly eroded.649 This resulted in internal party reforms and changes in congressional procedures that increased the powers of both the party conferences and the average individual committee member, each at the expense of the chairmen.650 At the same time, norms of apprenticeship and specialization were also eroding. This resulted in members taking an active interest in a broader range of policy issues, including those related to the defense

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649 As cited elsewhere in the study, see in particular Fred Harris and Alton Frye for explanations of evolving Senate norms.

650 In its committee history, for example, the Center for Legislative Archives notes that the 1974 Congressional Budget and Impoundment Control Act “required that the Armed Services Committee provide target amounts for the national defense budget category to the newly-established Senate Budget Committee.” Moreover, “Senate Resolution 60, adopted in 1975, authorized Senators to hire personal staff to support their committee assignments,” while a “1977 amendment to the Legislative Reorganization Act authorized the Republican minority to establish the committee’s first separately-funded minority staff.” Center for Legislative Archives, “A Brief History of the Committee: The Stennis Era, 1969-1980.”

Fred Harris notes that, in 1971, the Democratic conference added a procedure to allow the conference to approve or disapprove by secret ballot at the start of each session all committee chairs and committee assignments. Senate Republicans adopted a rule two years later allowing Republican members of a given committee to elect their ranking member, subject to conference approval. In 1975, Senate Democrats adopted a formal resolution providing that Senate Democratic Steering Committee nominations of committee chairs would come before a full conference vote if one fifth of its members demanded such a vote. Harris concluded, “These new procedures almost surely affected the attitudes and behavior of committee chairs and ranking members, making them less autocratic. Quite significantly, however, the changes still have never caused any Senate chair or ranking member to be deposed.” Harris, 123.
program. At the same time, many also looked for cuts in the defense budget to fund increased domestic spending, or for deficit reduction. Moreover, the norm of deference to executive leadership with respect to national security was likewise eroding. This was due partially to the failures in Vietnam that demonstrated Executive Branch ineffectiveness and poor judgment.\textsuperscript{651} It was also partially a response to Nixon administration deceptions, power abuses, and outright crimes – many of which had their origins, or at least more limited precedents, under previous presidents. In any case, these actions demonstrated to many in Congress a high-handed presidential disdain for their prerogatives, if not the law itself. A general proliferation in the numbers of personal and professional staff members, and in the number public policy organization focused on defense and foreign policy issues, further abetted the abilities of individual members both within and outside the defense committees to develop independent information and opinions with respect to the defense program. Many of these changes were already evident in the mid-1960s, yet Russell had successfully beaten back all assaults on his authority. Nonetheless, the magnitude of Senate change increased dramatically after 1968, and it seems unlikely that Russell could have long damned these torrents. If anything, change might have come sooner without his continued presence.

In any case, these changes were rapidly undercutting the normative leg of Russell’s power base in obvious ways. It seems reasonable to suspect that they were also weakening his “personal power” leg, as the types of relationships and client networks that

\textsuperscript{651} Frye argues that, in the debates over weapons systems after 1968, some members felt “that military judgments on new weapons systems were likely to be no better than what they considered their proven misjudgments on the course of the war.” Frye, 21.
Russell could hope to form were no doubt also shifting. Aggressiveness in reporting among the media and policy advocacy organizations meant that members were more likely to be held accountable for their votes, and thus were perhaps less likely to trade them. Moreover, although politics had always been high stakes, it was becoming increasingly partisan and personal – abetted by the fact that members traveled more and socialized together less.652 The Democratic and Republican parties were becoming more nationally homogenous and more ideologically pure. As the old Establishment types left the Senate for retirement or the cemetery, they were increasingly likely to be replaced by the types of “true believers” that the Establishment disdained for their inability to compromise.

Particularly among veteran members, Russell could at least still draw on an enormous reserve of stature in the Senate – both as an expert on defense, and as a respected senior senator with a considerable capacity and willingness to do favors (or not).653 Aiding this was the fact that Russell likewise still maintained an enormous institutional power base – particularly his Appropriations Committee chairmanship. Stennis was weaker in both respects. While widely acknowledged as expert in defense matters, he at least as of 1969 had not grown to match Russell’s stature. Moreover, with the exception of his Armed Services Committee chairmanship, he lacked Russell’s wide institutional power base – and the SASC chairmanship had arguably always been among

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653 Russell is widely considered to have drawn inward over the course of the 1960s, becoming increasingly detached from the life of the Senate. This probably owed in part to his worsening health, along with the fact that he felt alienated from the evolving Senate. For example, see Fite, 468, 475.
the less important of Russell’s institutional strengths. Finally, nothing suggests that Stennis ever matched Russell in terms of personal power among any of the significant Senate constituencies. Stennis was in for some hard times.

While the foregoing accounted in part for the changes in committee operations under Stennis, so too did the fact that Stennis always had a different oversight concept than Russell. Stennis was more aggressive and judicial in his efforts to develop a broad evidentiary basis to support committee deliberations. Stennis was apt to be as secretive as Russell on sensitive matters, and perhaps as likely to try to enforce his preferences at the expense of a broader consideration of alternate views that might take Senate decision-making in other directions. Still, one would have expected the character of committee operations to change under Stennis regardless of external factors. The precise manner in which things changes, however, owed in part to the external pressures Stennis increasingly confronted, along with the weaker position from which he confronted them. Finally, it must be said that, at least initially, Stennis lacked Russell’s imposing stature, certitude, and confidence in committee. While Stennis knew where he wanted to take the committee, he did not always know how to handle his fellow members in order to get there.654

654 For example, in her oral history interview for the Richard Russell Library, Margaret Chase Smith noted that “Senator Russell was a leader and... he was pretty orderly in his leadership and this we haven't had for the last two or three years. It was very evident two years ago in the Armed Services Procurement Bill and again on the Appropriations Defense Bill. Senator Stennis was acting Chairman and Senator Stennis had been closely associated with Senator Russell for so very long and I have been associated with him and have great admiration for him but he was not acting on his own and was not able to have the control that Russell had and I think that was the reason why we were so late in getting out the bills in the last two years. Lack of leadership that Senator Russell had always given us.” Margaret Chase Smith, interviewed by Hugh Cates, oral history, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Collection, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.
The following pages are far from comprehensive in scope in terms of describing SASC operations and external relations under Stennis – either over time, or even as a snapshot of the first few years. They are simply meant to give a flavor of how Stennis went about coping with the opportunities and challenges he faced. After taking over as chairman, for example, Stennis soon reorganized the SASC’s subcommittee structure to correspond with major portions of the authorization bill. In order to develop a better evidentiary basis for committee decisions, Stennis promptly required the Department of Defense to furnish quarterly reports on procurement contracts for major weapons programs, particularly with respect to cost estimates, production schedules, and performance characteristics. Collectively, these reforms were meant to assist the committee in deliberating on the annual authorization bill. Over the course of the decade, Stennis continued to increase the Defense Department’s reporting requirements, and to push the department to provide access to an array of program planning documents.

She was a little more generous in her judgments for a similar interview for the John Stennis Collection, noting “I know of no one else who could have taken the Committee over as he did and carry on as Senator Russell did.” She pointed out that Stennis had a way of “anticipating potential troubles on the Committee and using the means of appeasement with those who were not always as loyal to him as they should have been for what he did for them.” She also noted, “Stennis, like myself, was pretty much brought up by Senator Russell and he followed along… Of course, Senator Russell, in my opinion, was a great man.” Margaret Chase Smith, interview, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

Another of Russell’s associates noted that, at least initially, “Senator Stennis wouldn't move without calling in Senator Russell and used to provoke Senator Russell because he couldn't get his work done, because Senator Stennis would want to know what decisions to make on armed services and he said to my daughter one day and shook his head and said… he's going to have to learn to run that committee by himself one of these days. I'm getting tired of this.” Phil Campbell, Georgia state legislator and agricultural commissioner, and later Under Secretary for Agriculture, interviewed by Gilbert Fite, January 27, 1982, oral history, Richard B. Russell, Jr. Collection of the Gilbert Fite files, Richard B. Russell Library for Political Research and Studies, The University of Georgia.

655 Kendall memo on “Preparedness,” November 26, 1969, “PISC from 1968 to” file, Correspondence files (86th to 88th Congress), Committee on Armed Services, Records of the U.S. Senate, Record Group 46, National Archives, Washington, DC.
Stennis quickly found that, as full-time chairman, he could not invest himself directly in all committee activities as he could with respect to subcommittee work. He officially appointed Kendall as staff director – a position Darden held unofficially – and directed Kendall to delegate more of his responsibilities to other staff members so that Kendall could serve as an “assistant Senator” helping Stennis with the “hard ones.”

Kendall soon advised Stennis that proper oversight of the authorization bill would require the full-time attention of at least three professional staff members, with further assistance from the preparedness subcommittee staff. Even then, the full committee would have to continue to focus on “specific issues of major importance, rather than covering everything with the same brush.” Kendall noted that, over the preceding years, he had been dissatisfied with the degree to which the full committee had made use of preparedness subcommittee staff expertise and reporting. While Kendall noted genuine desire to use the preparedness subcommittee to increase overall knowledge and expertise among committee members, he also noted – echoing Russell’s caution eight years earlier – “Any subcommittee or task force set up for the purpose of dealing with specific subject matters either in the posture hearings or otherwise should be carefully handled and closely supervised by you. It is rather clear that the development of special pockets of expertise within the Committee might create some serious problems of control.”

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656  Stennis memo to Kendall, undated, “Senator’s memos to himself, 1968” file, Personal series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

While Kendall and Stennis initially retained big plans for the role of the preparedness subcommittee in overall committee operations, things did not work out that way. For exactly the reasons Russell and Kendall warned, Stennis refused to allow another member to take over the subcommittee. In particular, Symington the next most senior Democrat on the SASC, and as we have seen, he had by then lost Stennis’s trust. For a while, Stennis stayed on as subcommittee chairman. However, he was too busy to remain involved in its activities, much like Johnson during the previous decade. As one Stennis aide noted, “It had an office and it had a staff, but it didn't do anything as a subcommittee. They did everything as full committee staff... I'd say that he probably, having been here long enough to be cynical about how members operated, didn't need another major chairmanship behind him undercutting him, so he dismantled it... lost interest in it.”

Among the hardest issues Stennis had to confront initially was the challenge to SASC jurisdiction coming from other committees, particularly the Joint Economic Subcommittee on Economy in Government, headed by William Proxmire. Proxmire was particularly interested cost over runs in defense procurement contracts. Stennis quickly found that the new reporting requirement with respect to major weapons systems came in handy for attempting to defuse the activities of critics like Proxmire. Stennis had early on directed the SASC staff to make more effective use news releases, noting that while

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658 Why he did not react similarly to other members chairing the subcommittees with jurisdictions over potions of the authorization bill is unclear – perhaps because he retained an overall integrating function.

personally he did not care for a great number of these, nor “for front line publicity,” he had “decided that those who oppose the policies of the Committee are very apt in this field and very effective, so as a matter of offsetting the affirmative action of the other group, we must have a definite, positive program in this field.”\textsuperscript{660} Stennis was not shy about using such news releases to beat other committees to the punch, in an effort to dominate the public relations battle over the defense budget.\textsuperscript{661}

Throughout the remainder of the decade, the SASC continued to face jurisdictional challenges to its authority – both as other committees continued to encroach into the SASC’s sphere, and as the Senate even attempted to officially peel away areas long under the SASC’s jurisdiction. Advocates of intelligence oversight reform, for example, finally succeeded in 1976 in stripping the committee of its role in CIA

\textsuperscript{660} Regarding SASC public relations policies, see Stennis memo to Braswell and Kendall, September 25, 1969, SASC 1969 (Chairman) file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library. Regarding the work of GAO personnel, see Stennis Memo to staff, March 30, 1969, JCS memos to ASC staff (1970) file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.

\textsuperscript{661} In July 1969, for example, Kendall informed Stennis that he had received a tip indicating that Proxmire was requesting the Defense Department to release information on possible cost over runs on a number of major weapons systems. He noted, “The Defense Department, as I am understand it, has deliberately dragged its feet on furnishing this information and is very late with it. However, they may have reached the point where they can’t hold up the information any longer. I feel, and they concur, that if and when it is delivered Senator Proxmire, he will use it in such a manner as to get maximum publicity value from it.” Kendall suggested that Stennis preempt any pending action on Proxmire’s part by releasing information the SASC had already received in relation to the committee’s quarterly reporting requirement. Stennis previously chose not to release this information, as it might have prejudiced the floor debate on the authorization bill. Kendall continued, “I have recommended very strongly to the Department of Defense that, if the decision is reached that the information must be delivered to Senator Proxmire, before doing so they discuss the matter with you and give you at least 48 hours notice so that we can review the situation and decide what to do about a press release… (so) as to take some of the sting out of any release or public statement that Senator Proxmire might make.” Kendall made clear that he did not request that the Defense Department hold up delivery of information to Proxmire. Stennis’s response to this suggestion is not recorded, but the record does include similar future recommendations on Kendall’s part, the recurrence of which suggests that Stennis did not object to the tactic. Kendall memo to Stennis, July 13, 1969, Receipt of 4 Additional Reports file, Committees series, John C. Stennis Collection, Mississippi State University Library.
oversight, with the establishment a Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. The committee likewise continued to face repeated challenges on the floor of the Senate to the legislation it reported, a practice previously almost unheard of. Despite this, Stennis’s actions to increase both the reality and the public appearance of greater SASC activism appear to have reaped at least some of the hoped for dividends. For example, Alton Frye concluded that Stennis’s tenure brought increased respect for the Armed Services Committee’s efforts, as the committee “began a determined campaign to demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its responsibilities for overseeing the Defense Department,” a contrast to its previous “rubber stamp” image.662

**Appraising the Russell Era**

As Warner Schilling pointed out over four decades ago, with respect to any decision-making structure, the “best” design for the organization tends to be “that which distributes power and responsibility in such a fashion as to facilitate the policies you favor and make difficult the policies you oppose.”663 That is, in most cases it is of questionable relevance to argue about what somehow constitutes an objectively perfect organizational scheme. Individuals design organizations with the subjective intent of achieving certain specific outcomes. While organizations can be poorly or irrationally


designed with respect to their capacities to achieve intended outcomes, the first question when assessing an organizational design is: “What are the intended outcomes?”

Roughly the same can be said about concepts of congressional oversight. Leading members of Congress generally do not exercise oversight simply for the sake of doing so, and it is tenuous to attempt to define an objective and universal goal for oversight, much less an objective process. There is certainly a degree of rote procedure involved in reviewing annual legislative and budget submissions, and it is sometimes tempting to view the amount of work and complexity associated with this as indicative of congressional effectiveness. However, those who attempt to assess oversight effectiveness by looking at things like hours of testimony, numbers of mandatory Executive Branch reporting requirements, or pages of committee documents produced have selected poor measures. The well-documented and dramatic increases in these quantities of outputs between the 1960s and 1970s serve more as a testament to the proliferation of congressional staffs than any assessment of quality or value.  

Influential members of Congress conduct oversight (or not) in order to achieve certain specific outcomes, and it is these that the observer needs to identify and assess – or shape, if that is one’s intent. While individuals outside the Congress (or inside the Congress but without positions of authority) can debate proper norms, modes, and outcomes for oversight, the actual practice of oversight in all eras depends greatly on the goals and interests of those members and staff positioned to control the process. At times in the Congress’s history, oversight processes have been relatively open, in terms of the...

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664 Larger staffs tend to be an enabler of a more thorough oversight process, if that is what one intends. They do not in themselves generate a more effective process.
number of individuals positioned to influence; at other times, processes have been relatively closed. During most of the 1950s and 1960s, oversight of the defense program occurred almost completely toward the later extreme. Throughout these two decades, a great many individuals outside and some within the Congress had strong feelings about how the Congress should exercise its role in national security decision-making, both with respect to the defense program and more broadly. Some advocated concepts that were aggressive – even adversarial – with respect to the degree they would peer into and either marginally modify or substantively alter Executive Branch decisions and procedures. At least with respect to the defense program, however, these decades remained an era during which most basic decisions about how the Congress would handle oversight defaulted to the defense committees and their leading members. Within the Senate, Richard Russell exercised a dominating – if not singular – position of authority, and the decisions he made in committee almost universally won Senate ratification. While a minority of senators advocated assertive or confrontational policies with respect to the Executive Branch, this inclination was contrary to Russell’s basic intent. At the highest level, Russell was a fundamental believer in the need for presidential leadership backed by a broad bipartisan consensus, and this principle provided the context in which he

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665 Members generally found it easier or more interesting to form strong opinions about aspects of foreign policy, for example, than the more tedious intricacies of the defense program – unless of course they either advocated a specific program (generally with economic ties to their states or districts), or wished to restrain or cut programs generally to divert funding to other areas.

666 Members’ motivations of course transcended the range from sincere policy concern to base political calculation, and both ends often melded into one. Within the Senate, however, such strongly motivated individuals generally either: 1) Did not constitute a determined majority on a given issue; 2) Constituted a fractured majority (i.e., a majority advocated “change,” but could not agree on the specifics or even generalities of change); or, 3) Most importantly, did not constitute a systematic majority that favored a consistently similar platform over time. This latter condition only really began to materialize by the late 1960s, and this became among the catalysts for the congressional reforms of the early to mid 1970s.
fashioned the remainder of his oversight concept, as well as his attitude toward the actions of his Senate colleagues.

Russell had come of age professionally in an era of increasing presidential initiative and congressional deference, forged in part by war and depression, but more basically in the context of expanding federal commitments and bureaucracies that the Congress consistently acknowledged it was poorly equipped to manage on its own. The emerging Cold War only added to Russell’s inclination in favor of presidential leadership. To Russell, national security required deterrence and tough diplomacy, with each founded on strong and ready military forces and the credible threat of their use. The achievement of these in turn required strong international leadership, military professional expertise, and executive managerial efficiency. The Congress was in its own right capable of none of these.

Within the bounds of his capacity, Russell was determined to ensure the Congress avoided a repetition of the 1930s, when members bound the President’s ability to prepare the nation for war. Congress was at best questionably proficient in managing the nation’s defense in good times; it was critically deficient in perilous times. Russell was among the Senate’s greatest admirers, and demonstrated enormous institutional patriotism. Nonetheless, he regarded the Congress as fundamentally corporate, generalist body that operated upon consensus and compromise. While both the Congress as an institution and its individual members retained certain prerogatives and certain definite responsibilities with respect to national security policy-making and oversight, in Russell’s view the Congress needed to tread carefully into areas requiring executive leadership. The
Congress simply lacked the specialized expertise and clean lines of authority necessary to replicate effective executive decision-making.

Beyond this, Russell feared the divergence of views within the Congress, as well as members’ temptations to play cheap politics with national security. The notion that a basic Cold War Consensus existed during the 1950s and 1960s is in many respects a fiction. Even its key practitioners – Johnson as a particular example – could be intensely political on specific issues, while still executing a policy of “responsibility” overall. More to the point, however, whatever consensus appeared to have existed was not somehow “natural,” but the product of intensive cultivation. Leading senators achieved a measure of consensus in part through debate and persuasion, but also in part by marginalizing to the degree possible their colleagues with fundamentally alternative views. As a believer in the necessity for presidential leadership, Russell was among both the first architects and last care-takers of this enforced consensus.667

Russell’s concern over the parameters of Senate behavior extended far beyond the likes of Johnson, and even beyond individuals like Symington, Jackson, Goldwater, or Thurmond – although he would work to restrain them all when necessary. While men such as these might at times offend Russell’s notion of responsible oversight, they neither fundamentally disagreed with Russell’s belief in presidential leadership, nor the national security goals that Russell expected such leadership to further. The real threats in Russell’s mind were the blocs of individuals who advocated fundamentally different platforms of policies, and who aggressively sought to implement them. In the Truman

667 His activities in this regard took place well beyond the bounds of the defense program, although a fuller description of these efforts remained beyond the scope of this study.
and Eisenhower years, the threat to Russell’s notion of executive leadership came principally from Republican isolationism – the likes of Taft, Bricker, and Jenner on the more respectable side; the likes of Joseph McCarthy on the least. After 1958, it came instead from Democratic liberals. The isolationist and liberal blocs alike challenged the fundamental premises of how Russell believed the Executive Branch and Congress should interact on national security. Russell in turn worked to ensure that their views and their votes remained in the minority.

As such, Russell’s oversight concept had as much to do with maintaining the tone of debate and decision-making within the Senate as it did with engaging Executive

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668 In most cases Russell supported Johnson’s efforts to “defend” Eisenhower against his party’s isolationists, although as always he preferred to work quietly behind the scenes. Russell was not always out of sympathy with the Republican efforts, but the general principle of presidential leadership mattered more. With respect to McCarthy, Russell appears to have been in sympathy with the senator’s initial efforts to look for Communist sympathizers in the State Department. Russell soon soured on McCarthy’s tactics and the ill repute they brought to Senate, however. Russell was particularly disturbed when McCarthy looked to target the Army. While Russell apparently never moved publically against McCarthy, it is interesting to note the role that lesser SASC members played in his censure. Although not yet a SASC member (she joined the SASC in 1952), perhaps not yet a Russell favorite (the record is unclear as to when they began their close acquaintance), and acting long before McCarthy’s censure, Margaret Chase Smith was among the first senators to publically criticize McCarthy’s behavior with her June 1950 “Declaration of Conscience” speech. Ralph Flanders introduced the 1954 resolution calling for McCarthy’s censure. Three of the six members of the committee under Arthur Watkins’ (R-UT) lead charged with reviewing the censure resolution were Francis Case, John Stennis, and Sam Ervin. As of 1954, these last four either were, or were soon to be, SASC members; during its research phase, this study only examined committee records from 1955 on, so exact membership dates for all are uncertain. Finally, many attribute Millard Tydings (D-MD) 1950 defeat in his Senate reelection bid to the opposition activities of McCarthy and his supporters. Earlier in 1950, Tydings had chaired a subcommittee of the Foreign Relations Committee charged with examining McCarthy’s allegations of Communist influences in the State Department, and had largely rejected McCarthy’s allegations. Coincidentally, Tydings was also in 1950 the chairman of the Armed Services Committee, and his defeat cleared the way for Russell to assume the chairmanship.

669 By the late 1960s, he was fighting a desperate rear guard action. Change cut across much of Senate life during the 1970s – from party reform, to committee reform, to a revolution in staff, to changes in committee jurisdiction, to changes in legislation, an on. Most importantly, these changes were backed and abetted by a fundamental change in Senate norms from those existing two decades before. Regardless of his enormous stature and influence, had Russell lived past 1971 he almost certainly could not have continued to resist the push for change, even in the areas under his direct jurisdiction. On the other hand, many such changes – to intelligence oversight, for example, and possibly to the practice of amending defense legislation on the floor as well – would likely have come sooner without Russell’s countervailing efforts.
Branch decisions and processes. Russell’s record demonstrates ambivalency toward open debate, free inquiry, and wide dissemination to information. Part of this owed to Russell’s penchant for protecting national security secrets, or otherwise confidential information. Beyond this, however, Russell understood that information occasioned debate, and thus enabled advocacy for alternate policies, both from the sincere and from the politically calculating. At times he supported wide ranging and largely public inquiries, as with the Truman-MacArthur controversy or Johnson’s post-Sputnik investigations. On the one hand, such events were so significant that they required a hearing – a venting. On the other hand, as alternate views and calculated political maneuverings would by the nature of things emerge at such times, Russell felt it was important to bring the focus of the debate under his committee’s umbrella, where the tone of the debate could be shaped or channeled.

Not that Russell was utterly cynical. Russell felt deeply that the Senate had the responsibility to examine these great issues, as well as more mundane issues associated with most defense legislation. The prerogatives of individual senators, moreover, demanded that they receive access to at least certain information, as well as the ability to advocate for their preferences. Still, while debates had to be held, they also had to be won, and Russell was determined to win them. His enormous access to Executive Branch information and deliberations, his multiple positions at the focal points of Senate business with respect to defense, and the considerable time and capacity he had for preparation all easily exceeded even his fellow committee members, and cumulatively these factors provided him an enormous informational advantage in whatever forum he was called upon to debate.
Rather than actively attempting to stifle debate, Russell relied on what amounted to concepts of deterrence and containment to keep oversight decisions in his close hold. Even outside committee, where Russell’s direct authority quickly attenuated, his less direct levers of power were still widely understood. These included his ability to control legislative favors in the defense bills, to influence the flow of bills generally through the Policy Committee, or to similarly influence the flow of committee assignments through the Steering Committee. While Russell generally did not twist arms, he generally did not need to. His wide power base, coupled with his enormous stature and informational advantage, were enough to deter most colleagues from challenging him in areas under his direct jurisdiction. Senate norms of the day that encouraged apprenticeship and deference to chair authority abetted this deterrence policy, to the point that the normative factor was almost as important as Russell’s personal attributes. In the few cases where Russell could not deter opponents, his ability to sway large blocs of votes meant that he could contain his opponents by out-voting them, as he did successfully on proposed changes to intelligence oversight procedures for two decades, or as he did with respect to Thurmond’s attempt to increase the authorization for ABM funding in 1963.

Although Russell was a strong proponent of presidential leadership and an equally strong skeptic of the Congress’s competence to substitute its own judgments for those of the Executive Branch, Russell did not intend his committee to be a mere rubber stamp for Defense Department proposals. Russell understood that the Constitution gave the Congress the responsibility to pass the legislation and appropriations necessary to support and maintain the military establishment. He also believed that, while the Congress had for good reason ceded the initiative on developing proposals in these areas to the
President and his deputies, the Senate (or he as its proxy) still had a responsibility to offer its informed consent on Executive Branch proposals. Russell believed firmly that, while it was essential for national security that the Defense Department received the resources it needed, it was equally important that the Department make sound justifications for its requests. These justifications needed solid strategic rationales. They also needed to demonstrate economic efficiency. Individual programs had to show proper financial management. More importantly, the Department’s overall program needed to acknowledge that resources were not unlimited. In particular, Russell and his colleagues expected the Defense Department senior leadership to make tough decisions to eliminate wasteful duplication and unnecessary inter-Service competition, in order to ensure that the country was getting a high return on the funds it invested in its military. Above all, Russell and his colleagues expected the Department’s leadership to demonstrate strong managerial competence rooted in specialized professional expertise. Such expectations had been at the root of all congressional delegations of authority since the 1920s.

Russell’s concept of the proper division of labor between the Executive Branch and the Congress essentially cast the latter as a Board of Directors that would not attempt to make policy in most cases, but would attempt to ensure that the Executive Branch was demonstrating competent management. As such, Russell also accepted that the Congress had an appellate function. In a limited number of cases, principally those where at least one strong Service proponent remained opposed to a given Department-level decision, the Congress would review and either substitute its alternate judgment legislatively (a judgment likely to very close to what that Service proponent advocated), or more likely
return the issue to the Defense Department for a relook, and probably a revisit in the next year’s legislative program.

Leaving aside for the moment any value judgment about the wisdom or propriety of Russell’s oversight concept, the most immediate objective flaw was that Russell never developed a committee infrastructure sufficient to properly execute it. Regardless of whether Russell intended to develop substitute policy-level recommendations for the defense program, he never put in place the subcommittee or staff support structures necessary to make informed, independent evaluations of Defense Department legislative and program requests other than in a marginal, piecemeal manner. While the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946 had limited standing legislative committees to four professional staff members, there were potential work-arounds. Johnson, for example, hired a larger investigative staff to support his Preparedness Investigating Subcommittee activities. While the subcommittee’s function as an investigating committee made it a special case that Russell could not easily have replicated for legislative functions, Russell could have attempted to use the subcommittee’s operations to support full committee activities, as Stennis later proposed. There were also opportunities to utilize GAO or Legislative Reference Service (now the Congressional Research Service) personnel to supplement committee staff resources. Russell and his subcommittee chairmen used these resources, but rarely. While Russell introduced the first formal subcommittee structure in 1955, he never reorganized it in the 1960s to better handle the committee’s new functions with respect to annual authorization.

Much of the reason Russell did not so modify committee infrastructure owed to the fact that more staff and more subcommittees challenged chair authority. Russell was
particularly concerned about creating individual bailiwicks from which committee members could pursue their own interests, particularly if they varied from his objectives or his concept of responsible oversight. Only Russell’s most trusted subordinates received subcommittee chairmanships with real substance or authority. Russell trusted few of his colleagues this much – really only Stennis and Johnson among the Democrats, and only fellow Democrats could chair subcommittees. Given Russell’s stature and legislative effectiveness, an alternate infrastructure might not have challenged his authority directly. However, it challenged his ability to control the debate, and thus to enforce his version of consensus.

The great procedural reform Russell did implement was the expansion of the annual authorization requirement into ever larger segments of the defense program beginning in 1959 and continuing throughout the 1960s. This development serves as a testament to Russell’s open-mindedness and adaptability, but not to his vision. Russell would likely not have come to this point without a push from his committee colleagues, Flanders and Stennis in particular. With respect to the annual defense program submission, Russell had been initially content during the mid-1950s to see the SASC limit itself to posture hearings in which the Department explained its priorities and dispositions, as well as to authorization of the military construction program. This was in large part because Russell also wielded significant – perhaps dominant – influence on the Appropriations Committee, and the entire defense program received a look in that forum as a part of the annual budget process. Collectively, Russell’s colleagues were able to demonstrate to him that – at least with respect to the authorization requirement – standing committee procedures prior to 1959 were ineffective in implementing the Board of
Directors function Russell had in mind for the SASC. While Flanders made the most direct case for the wisdom of expanded annual authorization, Stennis had set the example in the first place through his handling of programs related to continental air defense as chairman of the real estate and military construction subcommittee beginning in the middle 1950s.

Again, the entire rationale for Congress having ceded so much managerial authority to presidency in the first place had been the presumption that the Executive Branch would prove more effective in this regard. Throughout the 1950s, however, SASC members remained consistently frustrated with the Defense Department’s inability to demonstrate that it was making program investment decisions based upon clear strategic priorities, that it was eliminating wasteful duplication and inter-Service competition, and that it was in fact investing sufficiently in key capabilities to maintain the United States military advantage and to meet strategic challenges posed by the Soviet Union and, increasingly, the People’s Republic of China. While discontent manifested at least as early as Symington’s 1955 air power subcommittee investigation, Stennis’s scrutiny of continental air defense systems as part of the military construction authorization process proved of greater long-term consequence. Stennis focused first on potential duplication between the Army’s Nike system and the Talos, which the Navy originally developed, but which the Air Force was attempting to adapt to land-based use. After the SASC successfully pushed the Secretary of Defense to resolve this issue, a similar controversy soon developed involving Nike and the Air Force’s Bomarc.

In neither case did the SASC want to have to make a choice between systems. However, committee members could not accept that deployment of two apparently
competing systems was in the national interest, particularly given that the defense program appeared to contain several under-funded capabilities that committee members regarded as higher priorities than continental air defense. The SASC wanted someone in the Defense Department to decide, on the basis of greatest efficiency and effectiveness. Perhaps more fundamentally, members wanted to feel confident that the Defense Department leadership was making sound managerial decisions, and they did not feel this way. Given their druthers, committee members would have preferred that the Joint Chiefs of Staff develop unified recommendations based upon best military judgment. The JCS mechanism often failed to function in this manner, however, and in this case committee members defaulted to the expectation that the Secretary of Defense would manage the Department decisively and effectively. Here, too, committee members consistently felt disappointed. As such, committee members became increasingly inclined to explore ways they could prompt the Defense Department to exercise better management. In particular, Stennis had steadily arrived at the conclusion that, in recommending the approval of the annual construction program, his subcommittee was by default passing judgment on the propriety of the broader programs construction supported. He soon also arrived at the conclusion that authorization language could be used as a tool to enforce better decision-making upon the Defense Department.

Despite such lingering concerns among committee members, without the shock to the system that the 1957 Soviet Sputnik launch provided, these concerns may never have coalesced in section 412(b). The Sputnik launch occurred in the context of preexisting and widely held fears within the Congress that the U.S. strategic margin was evaporating. In the minds of many SASC members, Sputnik clearly validated their concerns regarding
Defense Department duplication and mismanagement. They increasingly viewed the Eisenhower administration as simply incapable of committing the managerial energy or the proper human and material resources to prioritizing and developing capabilities critical to the nation’s defense. As Eisenhower followed upon the Sputnik launch with his own defense reorganization proposals, Russell repeatedly voiced his skepticism with respect to Eisenhower’s main premise – that the Secretary of Defense lacked a sufficiently clear basis of statutory authority to effectively run the Department. In Russell’s view, Eisenhower’s Secretaries had simply lacked the spine to use their authority. The debates over Sputnik and defense reorganization reinforced the conviction that the Secretary of Defense needed to increase his effectiveness in leading the Department and coordinating its functions. These debates also reinforced the conviction that the Congress more than ever needed to hold the Secretary’s feet to the fire in this regard.

By 1959, Russell had conceded to his colleagues the utility of expanding the annual authorization requirement, in order to provide the SASC a procedural lever with which to exercise greater scrutiny of the Defense Department’s managerial effectiveness across a broader range of the defense program. Section 412(b) focused initially on the strategic deliver systems about which the committee was then so concerned, with the expectation that similar further expansions of the requirement might follow in the coming years. Russell started out with no intention of using the new requirement to attempt to substitute the Congress’s judgments for those of the Defense Department’s professionals. Instead, he intended to use the authorization requirement as Stennis had used it with respect to apparent duplication in continental air defense systems – as a prod to get the
Defense Department to relook an issue about which committee members were concerned, although with the expectation that a relook would prompt a change in policy. The congressional defense committees had for some time before Sputnik been concerned about deficiencies in the Department’s management of its various ballistic missile programs. Committee members had not been shy about voicing these concerns, although to little effect. Had the Armed Services Committees involved themselves earlier on the yearly details of the defense program, Russell reasoned they might have been able to prompt the Department leaderships to higher managerial effectiveness and less duplication, thereby allowing the U.S. to maintain its strategic advantage.

Moreover, Russell simply decided he could no longer accept the status quo with respect to standing lump-sum authorizations for key elements of the defense program, particularly in comparison to the line-item detail in the military construction authorization bills that his committee recommended to the Senate each year. The absence of more detailed authorization procedures now amounted in his view to an abdication of the SASC’s legislative responsibility to provide to the broader Senate considered recommendations with respect to the defense program, as a basis for the Senate’s informed (if perfunctory) consent. While the Senate Appropriations Committee had picked up a portion of the SASC’s responsibility in this regard, Russell came to agree with his colleagues’ arguments that the Congress’s Appropriations Committees were not sufficiently focused on policy-level oversight to substitute for program review on the part of the Armed Services Committees.

The question then became how the Armed Services Committees would actually implement the new authorization requirement in the coming years. Russell continued to
opt against structural changes on the SASC that might facilitate more thorough implementation of the new requirement. With Johnson’s departure from the Senate, Stennis remained the only of Russell’s deputies whom Russell regarded as both competent and trustworthy enough to invest real substantive responsibility. It is highly unlikely that Russell would have permitted anyone else from undertaking the range and seriousness of activities Stennis pursued as chairman of the preparedness subcommittee after Johnson’s departure. Stennis’s actions in this regard amounted to the most significant changes to substantive committee practice during the 1960s outside of the expanding authorization requirement – the deliberations over which Stennis meant to influence through his subcommittee activities. Despite Stennis’s intentions, however, it remains almost impossible to determine if they had any of their desired effect on the parent committee in general or on Russell’s thinking, much less on Executive Branch decision-making.

In terms of program review, the SASC under Russell’s leadership moved out slowly in attempting to use section 412(b) to real substantive effect. Its counterpart committee in the House moved out faster, particularly with respect to the HASC’s attempts to use authorizing legislation in order to “direct” the Executive Branch to obligate funds the Congress appropriated (or would in theory appropriate after the authorizers finished their work), but which the administration preferred not to spend. Russell generally rejected this approach. With respect to funding decisions, Russell

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670 Russell understood that the appropriations process as it had existed up to that point only allowed federal spending, it did not require it. Russell in no way believed that section 412(b) had changed this fact. In Russell’s view, the Congress’s only potential recourse with respect to presidential intransigence in this
understood that, while the Congress was always able to say “No,” it had a hard time effectively telling the President, “Do more.” Regardless of any considerations on Russell’s part about the wisdom of propriety of the Congress attempting to so direct the Executive Branch, practically speaking Russell felt the House committee’s action amounted to instigating a game of chicken it was guaranteed to lose. Why bother?

Outside this area of difference, the Armed Services Committees tended to approach the authorization requirement similarly. Both were generally cautious in making significant alterations to Executive Branch proposals, particularly when no strong Service proponent advocated deviation. The ASCs were particularly careful to avoid imposing risk on the defense program through their actions. If, for example, they were inclined to hold up a procurement request in order to force the administration to reexamine its position and revisit the issue in the next budget cycle, they preferred to have a green light from the affected Service assuring that a temporary pause in procurement imposed no significant risk. This caution was more evident with respect to procurement than R&D. Committee members were particularly skeptical that there was not significant slack in the basic research accounts – almost by definition, there is – and when they looked for savings in order to authorize excess procurement beyond the administration’s requests in other areas, they tended to look to basic research to pay the bill. Finally, the committees tended to be selective in their approach. Lacking the resources to scrutinize all portions of the authorization request systematically and evenly, they tended to focus on a few key issues, particularly those that remained subject to regard was impeachment for refusing to faithfully execute the laws the Congress had passed. Of course, Russell felt that any thought of impeachment was ridiculous.
dispute within the Department. While there were a few exceptions to these general practices – most notably, Russell’s cancellation of the FDL program – these exceptions served to prove the rule.

Rather than asserting the committee’s will with respect to individual program decisions, Russell’s primary goal in enacting section 412(b) had always been ensuring effective Defense Department self-management. Russell approved the measure in the context of Eisenhower’s comparatively weak Secretaries of Defense. Coincident with 412(b)’s initial implementation, however, the Armed Services Committees were instead presented with a Secretary whose energy and confidence – although not his experience or preparation – arguably eclipsed that of any of his predecessors. The countervailing reality to the growing Armed Services Committee assertiveness of the late 1950s was McNamara’s tenure as Secretary of Defense during much of the 1960s. Not that Russell had a problem with this. Robert McNamara was exactly the kind of Secretary that SASC members – Russell in particular – had been looking for throughout the Eisenhower administration. Despite all the specific program disputes that appeared over McNamara’s tenure, Russell, Stennis, and most other key committee members remained fundamentally satisfied with McNamara as a manager until the day he left office.

The irony of this, however, is that while Russell remained so satisfied with McNamara’s management of the Department in comparison to Eisenhower and his Secretaries (or at least Wilson and McElroy), other aspects of the national security polices that the Kennedy and Johnson administrations pursued caused Russell to question basic aspects of his default support for presidential leadership. The fundamental assumption underlying Russell’s support for presidential leadership was that the national
security objectives and strategies the President and his deputies adopted would be acceptable to Russell. This basic agreement was more important to Russell than individual cases of dispute. With Eisenhower, this premise basically held. While Russell increasingly came to question the Eisenhower administration’s managerial effectiveness and the parsimoniousness with which it invested in certain strategic and conventional force capabilities, he remained fundamentally comfortable with Eisenhower’s notions of deterrence through the threat of massive retaliation, as well as Eisenhower’s disposition toward limiting America’s liabilities with respect to foreign military operations, if not necessarily with respect to allied commitments.

The Kennedy and Johnson administrations increasingly turned this relationship on its head. On the one hand, they proved somewhat freer in terms of investment – at least in an aggregate budget sense – and had found a competent manager to run the Department. On the other, Russell came to regard them as dangerously interventionist (except in Cuba, where Russell felt it mattered most), with an equally dangerous proclivity to pursue arms control policies that amounted to a give away. Russell also found the Johnson administration hopelessly incompetent in its Vietnam war policy, particularly with respect to its restraints on escalation. Overall, Vietnam proved Russell’s single greatest frustration throughout his long tenure in the Congress. He must have regarded his failure to counsel Johnson away from escalation in 1964 as his worst error of judgment – particularly since he had understood the pitfalls that lay ahead so clearly. He was at least determined not to repeat this mistake with respect to potential U.S. intervention later in the decade, particularly with respect to developments in the Congo. Furthering the irony, Russell’s outspoken criticism of the Johnson administration’s handling of the war, along
with his efforts to restrain the administration’s appetite for intervention elsewhere, may have had the effect of legitimizing outspoken Senate criticism, both among the likes of Fulbright as well as among the body of “middle” senators neither prominent in the defense and foreign policy committees, nor outspoken on the Left. Russell did not intend to promote this, although he must have reconciled himself to the fact that it was a possible consequence. Russell certainly did not intend for it to have a ripple effect onto the defense program, which he intended to continue to manage closely – despite the gathering sentiment in favor of Senate democratization, more open oversight processes, and the reinvestment of defense dollars in favor of other budget priorities.

With respect to defense oversight and the Senate, the 1950s and 1960s can be considered nothing other than the Russell Era. Over his long tenure, Richard Russell was highly successful in imposing his oversight concept on the Senate, and in achieving his objectives with respect to the defense program. This latter success was in large part because his goals with respect to influencing the executive phase of that process were modest. Russell’s primary objectives remained ensuring that America had a strong and ready military, and that the Congress generated at least the appearance of a broad consensus in support of presidential leadership. While he generally achieved these goals while he remained SASC chairman, achievement came at a cost. With respect to his deference to presidential leadership on war powers, Russell by the end of his tenure came to worry that his support for strong conventional forces had simply enabled the sort of broad foreign interventionism he despised. Vietnam produced for Russell a crisis of conscience. In his view, the war had caused America to commit its reserves and to
undermine its military readiness, with no end in sight and no foreseeable gain
commensurate for what the nation had invested. All the while, America’s adversaries
were gaining in relative strength, abetted by America’s own arms control policies.
Russell understood that, at least with respect to Vietnam, he had helped enable this
outcome. This wore on him. His instinct remained to increase the ferocity of the
campaign against North Vietnam, although not the level of America’s ground
commitment. This development does not appear to have spawned a wholesale belief on
Russell’s part that in fact the Congress could do better than the presidency in formulating
national security policy. Far from it. At most, it appears to have caused a reassessment on
Russell’s part regarding the degree to which he *personally* could trust decision-making on
great policy-level questions to the Executive Branch. Over the almost twenty years he
chaired the SASC, Russell became incrementally disposed to insert himself on more and
higher-level policy questions, albeit if only on the margins and only with respect to
specific issues about which he became interested. Still, for all the mistakes Presidents had
demonstrated over the preceding decades, Russell doubted that placing more decisions at
the disposal of his 534 congressional colleagues would have produced anything of more
overall value to the nation.

With respect to the closed oversight process Russell enforced in the Senate in
order to implement his goals, Russell understood that he had put in place an oversight
concept out of step with the emerging liberal majority in his own party. Keeping the
defense program and the other aspects of national security policy Russell controlled or
could influence out of hands of the liberals – or the isolationists before them – had largely
been Russell’s point, and he saw little room for compromise with the emerging majority,
even if in the end his successors might not be able to sustain these practices he had put in place. While Russell remained sincerely convinced that he was at all times presenting his Senate colleagues with his best recommendations with respect to the defense program and the national interest, he was also always more concerned with enforcing the appearance of consensus on defense policy more than he was with working to compromise in order to build it. By the end, Russell understood he was fighting a delaying action, as he had long fought and finally lost with respect to civil rights. Russell was either confident that he could hold out in this more specialized area of the nation’s interest, or he proceeded with fatalism. As it turned out, it largely fell to Stennis to fight the fights or make the compromises necessary to maintain committee and chair prerogatives to the degree possible, as the opposition tide crested through the early to mid 1970s. However, it seems unlikely that Russell would have found these eventual concessions as in any way detracting for the success in leading the Senate that he had demonstrated for two decades.

With respect to Russell’s secondary goals of using the SASC as a sort of Board of Directors, and in a more limited role as a Court of Appeals, Russell probably would have acknowledged that he had more limited success. This is in part because these goals involved dealing with the Executive Branch, which Russell neither could dominate as he could the Senate, nor was inclined to try. Where the SASC did demonstrate success in a Board of Directors capacity, this success in many respects came at the initiative of Russell’s committee colleagues. It was Stennis who first used authorization as an oversight tool to enforce better Defense Department self-management. It was Flanders who pushed Russell to broaden the oversight requirement. Russell would likely have
done neither on his own. If Sputnik had not occurred, or if a Secretary with McNamara’s energy and confidence had come sooner, Russell may never have sponsored anything akin to section 412(b) in the first place. Despite McNamara’s success as a manager in Russell’s eyes, however, Russell over time came to flirt with operating at a broader policy level. The most obvious case came with respect to the FDL program, which Russell killed in the context of his efforts to disavow the principle that the U.S. military should act to police the world. Overt actions like this were highly rare, however. While Russell’s enormous access and his penchant for confidentiality allow for the possibility that Russell may have accomplished other similar actions behind the scenes, this remains anyone’s guess. The available record is almost mute, although Russell’s notable if questionable success in pushing McNamara to reactivate the battleship New Jersey for use in Vietnam serves as a testament to Russell’s considerable influence even with the Executive Branch when he chose to use it.

With respect to the SASC operating in an appellate role, this only became operative after the committee moved to execute 412(b) and its successor measures to expand the authorization requirement. Thus, all such actions took place in the context of McNamara’s tenure. When McNamara made up his mind, he was exceedingly difficult to move. With respect to issues like the manned bomber or nuclear propulsion for Navy surface ships, about the best that the Armed Services Committees could do was to keep debate alive and program development ongoing from one budget cycle to the next. Less tough or confident secretaries might have been easily worn down by constant congressional pressure. Eisenhower was the backstop to his Secretaries in the 1950s. McNamara lacked neither toughness nor confidence, however, although even he became
increasingly worn down toward the end of his tenure. A younger McNamara may have been less likely, for example, to relent on Sentinel deployment, although the calculations that went into that decision remain opaque. On manned bombers and naval nuclear propulsion, McNamara never finally relented, although the Armed Services Committees eventually won on these points with his successors. Again, perhaps Russell achieved compromises behind the scenes on issues about which McNamara cared less. The record is largely mute, and McNamara’s temperament suggests that if examples existed they were few.

It is difficult to draw enduring lessons learned from studying the Russell Era. The era was a product as much of the times as the man. The environment in the Senate today – both in terms of norms and institutional power structures – is so different that another Richard Russell would be impossible. No one could develop the all encompassing power base, no one can wield such leverage in committee, and no one can expect such deference from his or her colleagues. The post-Russell Era brought greater openness to the defense oversight process in the Senate, and a wider set of views and interests are able to influence Senate deliberations today than in Russell’s time. On the other hand, power is also more fractured today, and more individuals are able to wield influence without real responsibility for the outcomes. It is certainly easier today to insert both pet projects and petty, if not outright ugly politics into the oversight process. In the end, answering whether oversight is better in the post-Russell era – besides being inherently subjective – requires a level of comparative analysis that is unfortunately beyond this study’s scope.

In attempting such an analysis, however, one might consider some of the following issues. While Presidents and Secretaries of Defense were never particularly
inclined to act upon Russell’s private advice and recommendations when such ran
counter to their own preferences, how much productive informal discussion even takes
place today? Has the proliferation of individuals with whom the Executive Branch must
deal and share information caused Presidents and their deputies to withdraw further from
interacting with the Congress, except where perfunctorily required? If Russell was
limited in his ability to decisively influence Executive Branch decision-making, one must
at least credit him with attempting to keep the discourse civil and relatively non-partisan.
In doing so, however, he demonstrated a marked willingness to go along with national
security policies about which he disagreed – particularly in “operational” policy areas
outside the defense program, and particularly earlier in his tenure. Has anything really
changed in the post-Russell Era? Recent actions with respect to the Congress’s role in
war powers suggest that, when the rubber hits the road and theoretical debates over war
powers become real, there has been no substantive change in the Congress’s inherent
deferece to executive leadership. In general, while the Congress is certainly willing to
make more line-item changes in the defense program today, is it fundamentally more
effective in either policing Defense Department self-management, or in influencing
higher level national policy and prioritization decisions?

One enduring feature between the Russell Era and today is the reality of
presidential power and initiative with respect to national security policy-making. The
argument some have made that the last thirty years has seen a critical diminution in
presidential power seems at best near-sighted, with a field of vision taking in neither the
substantial growth in presidential power preceding its mid-1970s high water mark, nor
the factors – particularly those involving presidential behavior – that sparked the
congressional backlash. If today the presidency as a branch of government is not as powerful as at its 1970s peak, then it is close enough for comfort. In any case, despite inevitable ebbs and flows in presidential power with respect to the other branches, the enduring reality of presidential ascendency is unlikely to change anytime soon. Leaving aside issues of external threat or the requirements associated with the international role the U.S. has chosen since World War II, one only has to recall that the root cause accounting for the growth in presidential leadership involved the steady expansion of budgets and bureaucracies associated with a modern industrial state, along with the Congress’s inability to cope with these changes. Nothing on the horizon seems likely to result in any fundamental change to the complexity of government, nor the requirement for executive leadership. Despite the changes in staff, committee structure, and legislative process that have taken place over the last century, the Congress today seems no better equipped than its predecessors.

Notwithstanding the inherent subjectivity of oversight goals and concepts, and despite the shifts in norms and organizational power distributions within the Congress that have taken place over the past decades, there are still aspects of Russell’s oversight concept and his approach to executive-congressional relations that are worth considering as one develops his or her own notions of proper contemporary oversight. While on the surface, issues of proper committee structure and staff utilization seem a good place to start, this is probably the least relevant aspect of the Russell Era. The theoretical tradeoffs

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671 The presidency is more than the President; it is the administration. The President as an individual of course has his own difficulties in getting both “his” people in the administration, and those below the administration in the bureaucracies, to do what he wants. This has always been true.
in developing robust staff and subcommittee structures are much the same today as previously. One the one hand, these offer the possibility of more thorough, searching, and structured analyses of Executive Branch proposals, as well as a broader basis for developing ideas for committee adaptation or independent policy recommendations. On the other, these increase the potential for the formation of individual bailiwicks that fracture power and responsibility, and enhance the likelihood of injecting pet projects and petty politics into the policy-making process. The minimal relevance of Russell Era lessons, however, owes to that fact that the Congress has already opted decisively in favor of more staff and subcommittees, and there seems little likelihood of going backward in the regard. In the era of the individualist senator – assuming that is where we are and where we will stay – large staffs and choice subcommittee assignments are too tempting to forego. While there are no doubt still lessons to be learned and applied with respect to the operation of staff and subcommittees in the current environment, more contemporary studies seem a better place to start.

Of more relevance to the present are Russell’s understanding of the Congress as a generalist and consensus-oriented body, and his associated understanding of the Congress’s weaknesses in attempting to replicate executive functions, given the complexity of modern government. Despite the growth in staff and subcommittee structures, the Congress simply cannot replicate the level of specialized professional expertise resident within the Service bureaucracies. Even the Office of the Secretary of

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672 Congress is in this respect a consensus-oriented body not because it finds consensus easy to generate, but because it is often reduced to either impotence in the absence of consensus, or to least common denominator solutions in its presence.
Defense and the Joint Staff apparatuses cannot fully replicate this expertise or specialized knowledge. As such, in most instances the Congress is wiser focusing its efforts on program review and assessment, rather than developing individual program recommendations of its own. At a higher level, the Congress properly has a role in weighing policy recommendations and relative strategic priorities, although in the context of what by necessity will remain largely an executive process with respect to policy initiation and formulation. Such an approach is broadly consistent with Russell’s notion of the Congress exercising a Board of Directors function, with a limited appellate role. The real question, however, is: “At what point should the Congress begin placing limits on itself?” Russell’s concept was not binary, as he discovered for himself over the course of his tenure. Russell began his chairmanship largely content to focus on the adequacy of the justifications for individual legislative or program proposals that the Defense Department submitted. He adapted to begin to both privately and publically question the somewhat larger issues associated with Department managerial effectiveness, in terms of how the leadership set priorities and integrated individual Service programs into a single Department-wide program. He adapted further to look for tools his committee could use to force better management upon the Department and to arbitrate among the Services and OSD when he felt Department decision-making was inadequate. He adapted finally to allow that there would be times when he would assert himself to either direct the Department to enact policies he preferred (the battleship New Jersey in Vietnam), or to foreclose the possibility of policies he opposed (FDL as an enabler for global intervention). When the Richard Russell of 1968 stood back and contemplated how far his oversight concept had changed based upon the policy questions he was forced to
address, he must have been amazed at how far he had come. This was no longer the Richard Russell of 1951, or even 1961. The two constants, however, were: 1) He did not advance up the oversight rungs casually without considering the merits of the case; and, 2) He preferred to restrict to himself or to his most trusted associates the option to exercise the more assertive forms of oversight at all. The former constant is worthy of consideration for all those in positions of oversight responsibility as they look to execute their duties. The latter constant has been so overtaken by events as to make it essentially unrepeatable, although in all times there will be the relatively more influential in Congress who will at least consider restricting the openness of the process to better ensure that their preferred policies win out.

Lastly, Russell’s over-riding concern for civility and responsibility in the process should evoke at least some measure of sympathy from any audience, even if those audiences cannot accord similar sympathy to the ways and means he used to achieve these ends. With respect to his views on national security policy, Russell was a genuine patriot who as a rule attempt to put country first, even if the rule did not apply in all cases.673 This was among the fundamental qualities that drew so many of Russell’s Senate colleagues to him, allowed them to trust his judgment and perhaps put aside their own policy interests or concerns, and even allowed them to discount the darker side of his legacy with respect to civil rights when estimating the man. While it is trite to make appeals to our political leaders to attempt to put political differences aside in order to govern for the common good, it is also to some degree necessary for us as voters and

673 Lockheed and the C5 is a possible example, although detailed examination of the merits of this case remained outside the study’s scope.
citizens to look for such qualities in our leaders. The appeal is trite because political differences are a reality, and adjudicating them is why we have legislatures and courts systems. Still, those who believe in partisanship for partisanships sake and look on compromise as sell-out have brought an ugliness to our politics that at least demeans our democracy, whether or not it diminishes us on the international stage. While Russell committed sins against Senate democracy in the name of enforced consensus, they were at least no worse than the sins of those in both parties who routinely poison our politics with concern for nothing other than party and personal advancement.

The basic questions today in framing proper oversight procedures are much the same as in Russell’s day. How does one strike the balance between accepting the need for (or at least the reality of) executive leadership, and thus allow the executive departments the leeway to manage themselves free of undue burdens, yet still proactively engage to ensure executive managerial competence? What are sufficient levels of oversight and openness to generate informed congressional consent, while staying within the Congress’s own competencies and without fracturing congressional power and responsibility? How can we achieve a governing consensus when there is so much fundamental disagreement over policy and priorities, and what are the consequences domestically and internationally if consensus eludes us?

Unfortunately, those who regard cooperative, consensual policy-making as a good are likely to remain disappointed. When speculating on the possibility for some sort of new Era of Good Feelings within the Congress, and between it and the President, one must be cautioned when remembering that the relative consensus of the Russell Era was in large measure an enforced and artificial consensus achieved through the
marginalization of alternate viewpoints. Whether similar consensus was possible in another form is a counterfactual. Yet, even if one sees value in Russell’s approach, it is irrelevant. Neither the norms nor the institutional power distributions that were essential to enabling Russell’s approach exist today. With this in mind, one must conclude that the chances for a new era of consensus and constructive politics in the near future are pretty dim, particularly taking the present day as a starting point.
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