The Defense Reform Debate
edited by Asa A. Clark IV, Peter W. Chiarelli, Jeffrey S. McKitrick, and James W. Reed
Johns Hopkins
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reviewed by Steven E. Miller

In the public debate over defense issues, one of the striking developments of recent years has been the emergence of a broad-based assault on U.S. conventional defense policies and practices. What is unusual about this assault is that it comes from members and supporters of the defense establishment, who are almost without exception proponents of augmenting U.S. defense capabilities, and not from the usual liberal critics who can be counted on to oppose much of what the Pentagon does and wants. This new breed of critic—found among civilian defense analysts, in the Congress, and in the defense establishment—accuses the Pentagon of a startling variety of deficiencies in matters large and small. Indeed, the collection of complaints amounts to a comprehensive indictment of contemporary U.S. defense policy.

That policy, critics charge, lacks sound strategic thinking and clear strategic priorities. The Pentagon is, depending on the critic, planning to fight the right war in the wrong way or, worse, the wrong war in the wrong way. And the military is said to give bad advice, or none at all, to its civilian superiors as a result of a cumbersome, poorly organized decision-making process and overweening service parochialism. Furthermore, it makes bad decisions, promotes the wrong officers, buys the wrong weapons, educates its officers badly, plans poorly, and ineffectively organizes its combat units.

Moreover, the U.S. military is overcome by bureaucratic sclerosis, is marked by rampant careerism, and cultivates a managerial ethic that produces "warriors" who will be more fit to run the Sears and Roebuck company than to cope with the modern battlefield. In the end, one wonders whether the U.S. defense establishment does anything right and whether the reality can possibly be this bleak. Clearly, if the critics are correct, U.S. security is jeopardized by the disastrous condition of its military. Much less clear, however, is the extent to which the critics are correct.

The Defense Reform Debate illuminates this controversy by examining the array of issues that have become contentious in the debate about reforming the U.S. military. There are five large areas of dispute:

Strategy. Should the United States accord highest priority to naval forces and maritime contingencies or to ground forces and European contingencies?

Doctrine. Should NATO plans for war in Europe emphasize attrition or maneuver approaches to warfare?

Force structure. Should the U.S. Army emphasize an addition of heavy armored divisions designed primarily to combat Soviet armored forces, or should it invest in more lightweight divisions better suited to Third World contingencies?

Weapons acquisition. To what extent should the United States acquire highly sophisticated but extremely expensive weapons systems that can be purchased only in relatively small numbers, as opposed to simpler, cheaper weapons that can be bought in larger quantities?

Defense organization. To what extent would reorganization of the defense establishment improve the quality of U.S. defense capabilities?

This volume, the product of a conference at West Point, consists of 24 essays that provide more than one perspective on each of the questions at hand. It is a sort of defense sampler, which gives a taste of the various positions in the debate.

The idea of military reform has been pushed into prominence by a relatively small, but aggressive, determined, and articulate group which has come to be known as the military reform movement. They have been consistently, often savagely, critical of virtually all aspects of U.S. defense policy. A loose coalition of individuals with different and sometimes conflicting axes to grind, they are bound by a profound conviction that the continuation of "business as usual" in the Pentagon is both dangerous and unacceptable. They also share a David versus Goliath mentality that portrays them as the virtuous possessors of defense truth, pitted against the obtuse, unresponsive leviathan in the Pentagon. Despite the odds, they persevere in calling for a veritable revolution in U.S. defense policy because they believe that nothing less will suffice. Their views are well represented in The Defense Reform Debate, particularly in essays by William Lind, Steven Canby, Jeffrey Record, and Pierre Sprey. All raise important issues and offer clear alternatives to present policy or practice.

These relentlessly critical reformers have been little scrutinized, and the greatest merit of this book, by including skeptics as well as proponents of reform, is that it puts them under the magnifying glass. The net result is damaging to the reform movement because, although nearly everyone has a kind word to say about the service the reformers have performed in raising significant and often neglected issues, their views attract considerable criticism. The reformers are accused of advocating platitudes or vague, sometimes unrealistic, prescriptions; of basing their analysis on false dichotomies (maneuver versus attrition warfare,
warriors versus managers) or unsubstantiated charges (for example, about the poor quality of the officer corps); and of political ineptitude, born of their counterproductive arrogance and self-righteousness, that limits the likely impact of their ideas, good or bad.

Samuel Huntington, for example, comments that many of the advocated reforms seem desirable but concludes that "it is hard to see how they fit together and what they add up to." Richard Betts, in one of the book's best essays, finds the reformers guilty of strategic romanticism, doctrinal fetishism, and voodoo attitudes toward military technology. In an excellent overview of the reform debate, John Oseth says: "It is not enough to formulate or repackage familiar ideas. Insights must be shown to be new and useful, not simply clever, and the burden of proof is on the reformers." He further argues that to be effective the reformers must "set aside the solitary grandeur and arrogance of radical chic in favor of the practical struggle to communicate and persuade."

One can see in the reformers' contributions to the book some of the sins with which they are charged. For example, maneuver warfare, a favorite notion of the reformers, seems to be anything creative that works on the battlefield. Or, to take another specific example, William Lind urges a change in the military promotion system to favor officers with battlefield "character." But how does one measure character? Does this mean that every brash and imperious officer should be treated as a potential Patton and every mild-mannered fellow dismissed as an accountant in uniform? It is hard to disagree with Lind's belief that effective officers will be needed on the battlefield, but it is equally hard to see how his recommendation offers a workable solution to that problem.

Undoubtedly it is good for the reformers to have their views subjected to critical scrutiny, and ultimately their impact will be determined by their ability to respond persuasively to the challenges raised by their critics. All too often, the defense debate degenerates into an annual contest over how much should be spent, with the disputants fighting for the marginal one or two percent more or less. This book focuses on the equally important question of how our defense dollars should be spent and provides a thorough survey of the various choices we face. It deserves attention because few questions of political choice are more important than how our society decides to provide for the common defense.

Steven E. Miller teaches defense studies in the political science department at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in Cambridge. He is the editor of Strategy and Nuclear Deterrence (1984).

Decisionmaking for Arms Limitation
Edited by Hans Guenter Brauch and Duncan Clarke
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reviewed by Michael Krepon
The arms control community, as co-editor Duncan Clarke notes in the last chapter of this useful book, usually has firm ideas about how current policies ought to be changed. The hard part is figuring out how to get from here to there.

Until supporters of arms control learn more about implementing their policy preferences, success will elude them, regardless of their mastery of technical detail or their rhetorical power. In short, after a quarter-century of relying on that old bromide, "political will"—as in, "Arms control will succeed when American Presidents show the political will"—arms controllers would do well to search for more specific remedies.

Toward this end, the contributors to Decisionmaking for Arms Limitation suggest that a greater appreciation of bureaucratic structure would be helpful. As co-editor Hans Guenter Brauch states in his introduction, "organization matters"; there is an "identifiable relationship" between the manner in which arms control decisions are reached and the outcome of policy deliberations.

In search of organizational lessons, individual chapters provide details on national arms control decision-making in the United States, the Soviet Union, France, Britain, West Germany, and Norway. These essays are most useful for serious students of comparative government and arms control. Rose Gottemoeller's chapter on Soviet policymaking is necessarily sketchy but still quite helpful. The most constant features of Kremlin decision-making, in her view, are centralization, compartmentalization of information ("assuming greatest access, and therefore the greatest impact, to staff advisers near the top of the system"), and the top-heavy influence of the Ministry of Defense.

Chapters on the evolution and organization of decision-making for arms control in NATO countries provide a wealth of information. We learn, for example, that the French Defense Council includes the Minister of Finance as well as those of Defense and Foreign Affairs. In the United Kingdom and West Germany, political leaders opted not to replicate Washington's autonomous Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, choosing instead to beef up the staffs of their foreign secretaries. NATO parliaments have little say in arms control matters (at least in comparison with the U.S. Congress), although the German Bundestag seems best organized to do so since the creation in 1968 of a subcommittee on disarmament and arms control drawn from members