

PRESIDENT TRUMAN'S MESSAGE TO CONGRESS
RECOMMENDING ARMY-NAVY MERGER
December 19, 1945

In my message of Sept. 6, 1945, I stated that I would communicate with the Congress from time to time during the current session with respect to a comprehensive and continuous program of national security. I pointed out the necessity of making timely preparation for the nation's long-range security now-while we are still mindful of what it has cost us in this war-to have been unprepared.

On Oct. 23, 1945, as part of that program, there was presented for your consideration a proposal for universal military training. It was based upon the necessities of maintaining a well-trained citizenry which could be quickly mobilized in time of need in support of a small professional military establishment. Long and extensive hearings have now been held by the Congress on this recommendation. I think that the proposal, in principle, has met with the overwhelming approval of the people of the United States.

We are discharging our armed forces now at the rate of 1,500,000 a month. We can with fairness no longer look to the veterans of this war for any future military service. It is essential, therefore, that universal training be instituted at the earliest possible moment to provide a reserve upon which we can draw if, unhappily, it should become necessary. A grave responsibility will rest upon the Congress if it continues to delay this most important and urgent measure.

Today, again in the interests of national security and world peace, I make this further recommendation to you. I recommend that the Congress adopt legislation combining the War and Navy Departments into one single department of national defense. Such unification is another essential step-along with universal training-in the development of a comprehensive and continuous program for our future safety and for the peace and security of the world.

One of the lessons which have most clearly come from the costly and dangerous experience of this war is that there must be unified direction of land, sea and air forces at home as well as in all other parts of the world where our armed forces are serving.

We did not have that kind of direction when we were attacked four years ago-and we certainly paid a high price for not having it.

In 1941 we had two completely independent organizations with no well-established habits of collaboration and cooperation between them. If disputes arose, if there was failure to agree on a question of planning or a question of action, only the President of the United States could make a decision effective on both. Besides, in 1941, the air power of the United States was not organized on a par with the ground and sea forces.

Our expedient for meeting these defects was the creation of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. On this committee sat the President's Chief of Staff and the chiefs of the land forces, the naval forces and the air forces. Under the Joint Chiefs were organized a number of committees bringing

together personnel of the three services for joint strategic planning and for coordination of operations.

This kind of coordination was better than no coordination at all, but it was in no sense a unified command.

In the theatres of operation, meanwhile, we went further in the direction of unity by establishing unified commands. We came to the conclusion—soon confirmed by experience—that any extended military effort required over-all coordinated control in order to get the most out of the three armed forces. Had we not early in the war adopted this principle of a unified command for operations, our efforts, no matter how heroic, might have failed.

But we never had comparable unified direction or command in Washington. And even in the field, our unity of operations was greatly impaired by the differences in training, in doctrine, in communication systems, and in supply and distribution systems, that stemmed from the division of leadership in Washington.

It is true, we were able to win in spite of these handicaps. But it is now time to take stock, to discard obsolete organizational forms and to provide for the future the soundest, the most effective and the most economical kind of structure for our armed forces of which this most powerful nation is capable.

I urge this as the best means of keeping the peace.

No nation now doubts the good will of the United States for the maintenance of a lasting peace in the world. Our purpose is shown by our efforts to establish an effective United Nations organization but all nations—and particularly those unfortunate nations which have felt the heel of the Nazis, the Fascists or the Japs—know that desire for peace is futile unless there is also enough strength ready and willing to enforce that desire in any emergency. Among the things that have encouraged aggression and the spread of war in the past have been the unwillingness of the United States realistically to face this fact, and her refusal to fortify her aims of peace before the forces of aggression could gather in strength.

Now that our enemies have surrendered it has again become all too apparent that a portion of the American people are anxious to forget all about the war, and particularly to forget all the unpleasant factors which are required to prevent future wars.

Whether we like it or not, we must all recognize that the victory which we have won has placed upon the American people the continuing burden of responsibility for world leadership. The future peace of the world will depend in large part upon whether or not the United States shows that it is really determined to continue in its role as a leader among nations. It will depend upon whether or not the United States is willing to maintain the physical strength necessary to act as a safeguard against any future aggressor. Together with the other United Nations, we must be willing to make the sacrifices necessary to protect the world from future aggressive warfare. In short, we must be prepared to maintain in constant and immediate readiness sufficient military strength to convince any future potential aggressor that this nation, in its determination for a lasting peace, means business.

We would be taking a grave risk with the national security if we did not move now to overcome

permanently the present imperfections in our defense organization. However great was the need for coordination and unified command in World War II, it is sure to be greater if there is any future aggression against world peace.

Technological developments have made the armed services much more dependent upon each other than ever before. The boundaries that once separated the Army's battlefield from the Navy's battlefield have been virtually erased. If there is ever going to be another global conflict, it is sure to take place simultaneously on land and sea and in the air, with weapons of ever greater speed and range. Our combat forces must work together in one team as they have never been required to work together in the past.

We must assume, further, that another war would strike much more suddenly than the last, and that it would strike directly at the United States. We cannot expect to be given the opportunity again to experiment in organization and in ways of teamwork while the fighting proceeds. True preparedness now means preparedness not alone in armaments and numbers of men but preparedness in organization also. It means establishing in peacetime the kind of military organization which will be able to meet the test of sudden attack quickly and without having to improvise radical readjustment in structure and habits.

The basic question is what organization will provide the most effective employment of our military resources in time of war and the most effective means for maintaining peace. The manner in which we make this transition in the size, composition and organization of the armed forces will determine the efficiency and cost of our national defense for many years to come. Improvements have been made since 1941 by the President in the organization of the War and Navy Departments, order the War Powers Act. Unless the Congress acts before these powers lapse, these departments will revert to their pre-war organizational status. This would be a grievous mistake.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are not a unified command. It is a committee which must depend for its success upon the voluntary cooperation of its member agencies. During the war period of extreme national danger there was, of course, a high degree of cooperation.

In peacetime the situation will be different. It must not be taken for granted that the Joint Chiefs of Staff as now constituted will be as effective in the apportionment of peacetime resources as they have been in the determination of war plans and in their execution. As national defense appropriations grow tighter, and conflicting interests make themselves felt in major issues of policy and strategy, unanimous agreements will become more difficult to reach.

It was obviously impossible in the midst of conflict to reorganize the armed forces of the United States along the lines here suggested. Now that our enemies have surrendered, I urge the Congress to proceed to bring about a reorganization of the management of the armed forces. Further studies of the general problem would serve no useful purpose. There is enough evidence now at hand to demonstrate beyond question the need for a unified department. A great many of the reasons for establishing a single department have been brought out already in public discussion and in Congressional committee hearings. To me the most important reasons for combining the two existing departments are these:

1. We should have integrated strategic plans and a unified military program and budget.

With the coming of peace, it is clear that we must not only continue, but strengthen, our present facilities for integrated planning. We cannot have the sea, land and air members of our defense

team working at what may turn out to be cross purposes, planning their programs on different assumptions as to the nature of the military establishment we need, and engaging in an open competition for funds.

Strategy, program and budget are all aspects of the same basic decisions. Using the advice of our scientists and our intelligence officers, we must make the wisest estimate as to the probable nature of any future attack upon us, determine accordingly how to organize and deploy our military forces, and allocate the available manpower, material, and financial resources in manner consistent with the over-all plan.

Up to the present time the make-up and balance of our armed forces have not been planned as a whole. Programs and budget requests from the Army and Navy have been formulated separately, on the basis of independent concepts of mission and function.

These separate programs and budgets have not been considered together until after they have passed out of military hands and even out of the hands of the Secretaries of War and the Navy. The whole job of reconciling the divergent claims of the departments has been thrust upon the President and the Congress.

This war has demonstrated completely that the resources of this nation in manpower and in raw materials are not unlimited. To realize this is to comprehend the urgent need for finding a way to allocate these resources intelligently among the competing services. This means designing a balanced military structure reflecting a considered apportionment of responsibility among the services for the performance of a joint mission.

From experience as a member of the Congress, I know the great difficulty of appraising properly the-over-all security needs of the nation from piecemeal presentations by separate departments appearing before separate Congressional committees at different times. It is only by combining the armed forces into a single department that the Congress can have the advantage of considering a single coordinated and comprehensive security program.

2. We should realize the economies that can be achieved through unified control of supply and service functions.

Instances of duplication among Army and Navy activities, and facilities have been brought to the attention of the Congress on many occasions. The degree of unity that was accomplished during the war in strategic planning and in theatre command is in striking contrast with the separatism that prevailed in the whole range of supply and service functions.

It will never be possible to achieve absolute coordination of the supply and service functions of all services. Neither the War Department nor the Navy Department has been able to eliminate all duplication even within its own organization. But there is no question that the extent of waste through lack of coordination between the two departments is very much greater than the waste resulting from faulty coordination within each. If we can attain as much coordination among all the services as now exists within each department, we shall realize extensive savings.

Consolidation of the departments will, for example, reduce the volume of supplies that need to be procured. Supply requirements, for example, begin with a calculation of so many items per man to be supplied. But to this basic figure must be added margins of safety, to account for items in storage, transportation lags, breakdowns in delivery, emergency demands, and so forth.

In these margins, savings can be made through unified systems of supply. As the volume handled in any supply system grows, the percentage factor which has to be added for reserves is reduced.

In the same way, both the Army and the Navy must add a margin of safety to their requirements for production plants, depots, hospitals, air training fields and other types of construction common to both services. When the requirements are pooled, the total amount of margin may be reduced.

The same is true of personnel. Each service must add a margin of safety in estimating its requirements for doctors, nurses, skilled mechanics and other types of specialists. The total margin is greater if the computations are made separately. Another source of economy will be the pooling of facilities and personnel in localities where at present both services have to operate, but where from the nature of the circumstances, facilities and personnel are not fully used.

Other examples of duplication could be cited. Business men have to deal with separate buyers, who may use separate specifications for items which could as well have the same specifications.

Separate inspectors are stationed in their plants.

During this war, instances occurred where the purchase of all available quantities of certain items by one service resulted in acute shortages in the other service. Parallel transportation and storage system required extra overhead.

As the war progressed, it is true that increased cooperation reduced the extent of waste and conflict. But voluntary cooperation in such matters can never be expected to be fully effective. A single authority at the top would inevitably achieve a greater degree of economy than would be obtained under divided direction.

3. We should adopt the organizational structure best suited to fostering coordination between the military and the remainder of the Government.

Our military policy and program are only a part of a total national program aimed at achieving our national objectives of security and peace. This total program has many aspects, and many agencies of the Government must participate in its execution.

Our military policy, for example, should be completely consistent with our foreign policy. It should be designed to support and reflect our commitments to the United Nations Organization. It should be adjusted according to the success or lack of success of our diplomacy. It should reflect our fullest knowledge of the capabilities and intentions of other powers. Likewise, our foreign policy should take into account our military capabilities and the strategic power of our armed forces.

A total security program has still other major aspects. A military program, standing alone, is useless. It must be supported in peacetime by planning for industrial mobilization and for development of industrial and raw material resources where these are insufficient.

Programs of scientific research must be developed for military purposes, and their results woven into the defense program. The findings of our intelligence service must be applied to all of these.

Formulation and execution of a comprehensive and consistent national program embracing all these activities are extremely difficult tasks. They are made more difficult the greater the number of departments and agencies whose policies and programs have to be coordinated at the top level of the executive branch. They are simplified as the number of these agencies can be reduced.

The consolidation of the War and Navy Departments would greatly facilitate the ease and speed with which the armed forces and the other departments could exchange views and come to agreement on matters of common concern. It would minimize the extent to which inter-service differences have to be discussed and settled by the civilian leaders whose main concern should be the more fundamental job of building over all national policy.

4. We should provide the strongest means for civilian control of the military.

Civilian control of the military establishment—one of the most fundamental of our democratic concepts—would be strengthened if the President and the Congress had but one Cabinet member with clear and primary responsibility for the exercise of that control. When the military establishment is divided between two civilian secretaries, each is limited necessarily to a restricted view of the military establishment.

Consequently, on many fundamental issues where the civilian point of view should be controlling, the Secretaries of the two departments are cast in the role of partisans of their respective services, and real civilian control can be exercised by no one except the President or the Congress.

During and since the war, the need for joint action by the services and for objective recommendations on military matters has led inevitably to increasing the authority of the only joint organization and the most nearly objective organization that exists—the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But the Joint Chiefs of Staff are a strictly military body. Responsibility for civilian control should be clearly fixed in a single full-time civilian below the President. This requires a Secretary for the entire military establishment, aided by a strong staff of civilian assistants.

There is no basis for the fear that such an organization would lodge too much power in a single individual—that the concentration of so much military power would lead to militarism. There is no basis for such fear as long as the traditional policy of the United States is followed that a civilian, subject to the President, the Congress and the will of the people, be placed at the head of this department.

The safety of the democracy of the United States lies in the solid good sense and unshakable conviction of the American people. They need have no fear that their democratic liberties will be imperiled so long as they continue fulfilling their duties of citizenship.

5. We should organize to provide parity for air power. Air power has been developed to a point where its responsibilities are equal to those of land and sea power, and its contribution to our strategic planning is as great. In operation, air power receives its separate assignment in the execution of an over-all plan. These facts were finally recognized in this war in the organizational parity which was granted to air power within our principal unified commands.

Parity for air power can be achieved in one department or in three, but not in two. As between one department and three, the former is infinitely to be preferred. The advantages of a single department are indeed much clearer when the alternative is seen to be three departments rather than the present two.

The existence of three departments would complicate tremendously every problem of coordination that now exists between the War and Navy Departments, and between the services and the rest of the Government.

The Cabinet is not merely a collection of executives administering different governmental functions. It is a body whose combined judgment the President uses to formulate the fundamental policies of the Administration. In such a group, which is designed to develop teamwork wisdom on all subjects that affect the political life of the country, it would be inappropriate and unbalanced to have three members representing three different instruments of national defense.

The President, as Commander in Chief, should not personally have to coordinate the Army and Navy and Air Force. With all the other problems before him, the President cannot be expected to balance either the organization, the training or the practice of the several branches of national defense. He should be able to rely for that coordination upon civilian hands at the Cabinet level.

6. We should establish the most advantageous framework for a unified system of training for combined operations of land, sea and air.

Whatever the form which any future war may take, we know that the men of our separate services will have to work together in many kinds of combinations for many purposes. The Pacific campaign of the recent war is an outstanding example of common and joint effort among land, sea and air forces. Despite its successes, that campaign proved that there is not adequate understanding among the officers and men of any service of the capabilities, the uses, the procedures and the limitations of the other services.

This understanding is not something that can be created overnight whenever a combined operation is planned and a task force organized. The way men act in combat is determined by the sum total of all their previous training, indoctrination and experience.

What we seek is a structure which can best produce an integrated training program, carry on merged training activities where that is appropriate, and permit officers to be assigned in such a way that an individual officer will learn first-hand of other services besides the one in which he has specialized. The organizational framework most conducive to this kind of unified training and doctrine is a unified department.

7. We should allocate systematically our limited resources for scientific research.

No aspect of military preparedness is more important than scientific research. Given the limited amount of scientific talent that will be available for military purposes, we must systematically apply that talent to research in the most promising lines and on the weapons with the greatest potentiality, regardless of the service in which these weapons will be used. We cannot afford to waste any of our scientific resources in duplication of effort.

This does not mean that all Army and Navy laboratories would be immediately or even

ultimately consolidated. The objectives should be to preserve initiative and enterprise while eliminating duplication and misdirected effort. This can be accomplished only if we have an organizational structure which will permit fixing responsibility at the top for coordination among the services.

8. We should have unity of command in outlying bases.

All military authority at each of our outlying bases should be placed under a single commander who will have clear responsibility for security, who can be held clearly accountable, and whose orders come from a single authority in Washington. Reconnaissance planes, radar sets, and intelligence and counter-intelligence measures at a United States outpost are not intended to serve separate services for different purposes. Unification of the services offers a far greater guarantee of continued unity in the field than does our present organization.

9. We should have consistent and equitable personnel policies.

There have been differences in personnel policies between the Army and the Navy during the war. They began with competitive recruitment for certain types of persons and continued in almost every phase of personnel administration. In rates of promotion, in ways of selecting officers, in the utilization of reserve officers, in awards and decorations, in allowances and in point systems for discharge, the two services have followed different policies.

This inconsistency is highly undesirable. It will be reduced to a minimum under a unified organization.

Any bill which is enacted to carry out these recommendations cannot provide immediately the ultimate organization plan to accomplish unification. It can only prescribe the general organization of the authorities at the top levels of the unified department.

I recommend that the reorganization of the armed services be along the following broad lines:

(1) There should be a single department of national defense. This department should be charged with the full responsibility for armed national security. It should consist of the armed and civilian forces that are now included within the War and Navy Departments.

(2) The head of this department should be a civilian, a member of the President's Cabinet, to be designated as the Secretary of National Defense. Under him there should be a civilian undersecretary and several civilian assistant secretaries.

(3) There should be three coordinated branches of the Department of National Defense: one for the land forces, one for the naval forces and one for the air forces, each under an assistant secretary. The Navy should, of course, retain its own carrier-, ship- and water-based aviation, which has proved so necessary for efficient fleet operation. And, of course, the Marine Corps should be continued as an integral part of the Navy.

(4) The under-secretary and the remaining assistant secretaries should be available for assignment to whatever duties the President and the Secretary may determine from time to time.

(5) The President and the Secretary should be provided with ample authority to establish central coordinating and service organizations, both military and civilian, where these are found to be

necessary. Some of these might be placed under assistant secretaries, some might be organized as central service organizations and some might be organized in a top military staff to integrate the military leadership of the department.

I do not believe that we can specify at this time the exact nature of these organizations. They must be developed over a period of time by the President and the Secretary as a normal part of their executive responsibilities. Sufficient strength in these department-wide elements of the department, as opposed to the separate service elements, will insure that real unification is ultimately obtained. The President and the Secretary should not be limited in their authority to establish department-wide coordinating and service organizations.

(6) There should be a chief of staff of the Department of National Defense. There should also be a commander for each of the three component branches—Army, Navy, and Air.

(7) The Chief of Staff and the commanders of the three coordinate branches of the department should together constitute an advisory body to the Secretary of National Defense and to the President. There should be nothing to prevent the President, the Secretary, and other civilian authorities from communicating with the commanders of any of the components of the department on such vital matters as basic military strategy and policy and the division of the budget.

Furthermore, the key staff positions in the department should be filled with officers drawn from all the services, so that the thinking of the department would not be dominated by any one or two of the services.

As an additional precaution, it would be wise if the post of Chief of Staff were rotated among the several services, whenever practicable and advisable, at least during the period of evolution of the new unified department. The tenure of the individual officer designated to serve as Chief of Staff should be relatively short—two or three years—and should not, except in time of a war emergency declared by the Congress, be extended beyond that period.

Unification of the services must be looked upon as a long-term job. We all recognize that there will be many complications and difficulties. Legislation of the character outlined will provide us with the objective, and with the initial means whereby forward-looking leadership in the department, both military and civilian, can bring real unification into being.

Unification is much more than a matter of organization. It will require new viewpoints, new doctrine, and new habits of thinking throughout the departmental structure. But in the comparative leisure of peacetime, and utilizing the skill and experience of our staff and field commanders who brought us victory, we should start at once to achieve the most efficient instrument of national safety.

Once a unified department has been established, other steps necessary to the formulation of a comprehensive national security program can be taken with greater ease. Much more than a beginning has already been made in achieving consistent political and military policy through the establishment of the State-War-Navy coordinating committee.

With respect to military research, I have in a previous message to the Congress proposed the establishment of a Federal research agency, among whose responsibilities should be the promotion and coordination of fundamental research pertaining to the defense and security of the nation. The development of a coordinated Government-wide intelligence system is in

process. As the advisability of additional action to insure a broad and coordinated program of national security becomes clear, I shall make appropriate recommendations or take the necessary action to that end.

The American people have all been enlightened and gratified by the free discussion which has taken place within the services and before the committees of the Senate and the House of Representatives.

The Congress, the people and the President have benefited from a clarification of the issues that could have been provided in no other way.

But however strong the opposition that has been expressed by some of our outstanding senior officers and civilians, I can assure the Congress that once unification has been determined upon as the policy of this nation, there is no officer or civilian in any service who will not contribute his utmost to make the unification a success.

I make these recommendations in the full realization that we are undertaking a task of greatest difficulty. But I am certain that when the task is accomplished we shall have a military establishment far better adapted to carrying out its share of our national program for achieving peace and security.