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# CREATING THE ALTER EGO

DEPUTY SECRETARIES OF DEFENSE  
IN THE TRUMAN ADMINISTRATION  
1949-1953



DEPUTY SECRETARY OF DEFENSE SERIES  
SPECIAL STUDY 1

Shannon E. Mohan

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Shannon E. Mohan

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*Cover Photos:* Left to right: Deputy Secretaries of Defense Stephen T. Early, Robert A. Lovett, and William C. Foster.

*Source:* OSD Historical Office.

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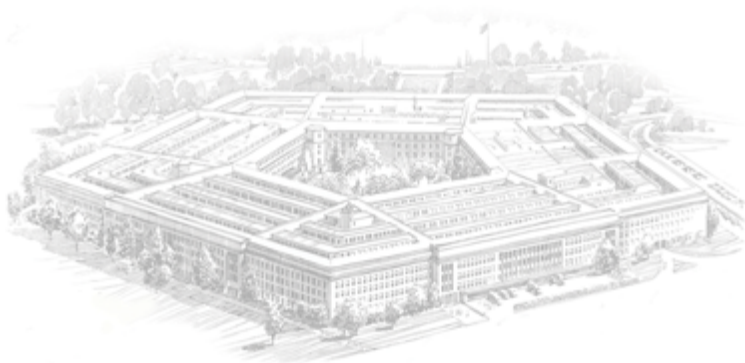
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## Foreword

In an interview with the Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office, former Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric defined the role of the deputy secretary as “the junior partner to the senior partner.” One of his successors, Paul H. Nitze, claimed that the secretary prescribes the deputy’s function: “It depends upon the secretary, what kind of person he is, and what he needs in order to make a good team.”

Throughout the history of the Department of Defense—through wars, budgetary battles, reorganizations, and a terrorist attack—the deputy secretaries have been vital in administering, shaping, and helping to carry out military and national security policy. However, the histories, identities, and influence of the 32 officeholders have received little scholarly attention. This is the first in a series of studies by the Office of the Secretary of Defense Historical Office that examines the deputies’ roles in departmental operations and the policymaking process. *Creating the Alter Ego* traces the origins of the position, includes biographical highlights of the first three deputies, and explains their responsibilities in relation to their respective secretaries. Future studies will cover successive deputy secretaries.

This publication and future titles in the Deputy Secretaries of Defense series will be made available on the OSD Historical Office website as they are completed. We invite you to peruse all of our publications at <http://history.defense.gov/>.

Erin R. Mahan  
Chief Historian  
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## Executive Summary

The position of deputy secretary of defense owes its origins to the first secretary of defense, James V. Forrestal. As secretary of the Navy, Forrestal played a significant role in unifying the armed services, but he initially opposed a civilian secretary of defense out of fear he would lose his own authority over his department and his access to the president. In compromising with Secretary of War Robert P. Patterson over the components of a national military establishment, Forrestal acquiesced to the idea of a secretary of defense, but rejected the notion of a civilian second-in-command (first designated as under secretary) lest the service secretaries' standing within the departmental hierarchy diminish. After becoming secretary of defense in September 1947, however, Forrestal realized he could not carry out the duties of his office alone. From February 1948 to April 1949, he lobbied for an under secretary. On 2 April 1949, when President Harry S. Truman signed a bill creating the position of under secretary of defense, James Forrestal was no longer secretary. The stress of being secretary, among other issues, had taken its toll, forcing the president to replace him with Louis A. Johnson.

Johnson moved quickly to fill the under secretary of defense post, recommending Stephen T. Early, former press secretary to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, for the job. While the new under secretary was an expert in handling public relations, his military experience was limited to his service in the Army during World War I. He was only in office three months when his position was redesignated deputy secretary of defense by the 1949 National Security Act Amendments, a change meant to emphasize the deputy's prominence in the department's hierarchy as second only to the secretary of defense. Despite his standing, Early's duties were undefined, and he drew on the skill he knew best: press relations. He handled many of the Pentagon's media issues during his tenure in office.

General George C. Marshall, who informed President Truman he would serve as secretary for only one year, succeeded Louis Johnson in 1950. Marshall requested Robert A. Lovett serve as his deputy secretary. The pair had run the State Department as secretary and under secretary, respectively, from 1947 to 1949. At Defense, Lovett proved to be Marshall's true alter ego, taking on many issues, including departmental budget preparation, with Marshall's complete support.

After serving one year as secretary of defense, Marshall resigned. As expected, Lovett became the fourth secretary of defense in September 1951. He would be the first of five deputy secretaries who would later become secretary of defense. Truman appointed William C. Foster, former administrator of the Economic Cooperation Administration, as Lovett's deputy. Foster functioned as an able manager of the Pentagon, chairing many organizational working groups. He also broadened the deputy secretary's role in foreign affairs by traveling abroad. Like his predecessors, Foster fashioned his role according to his own skills and experiences; in his case, this meant emphasizing management.

The experiences that each of these deputies brought to their position helped define the scope of their responsibilities and set a precedent for their successors in such areas as public relations, the budget process, and administration.



## Organizing the National Military Establishment

In the years immediately following World War II, President Harry Truman promised to unify the armed forces and bring a sense of order to national security policymaking. Two competing plans for consolidating the War and Navy departments threatened to derail his efforts. In 1945, the Army offered the president a design for an integrated military organization that included a civilian secretary of the armed forces, an under secretary, and assistant secretaries. The Navy's proposal, on the other hand, preserved the service departments' independence while providing them opportunities to coordinate military policy through a national security council. Secretary of the Navy James Forrestal, an outspoken critic of the Army's plan, believed that a secretary of defense, "no matter how brilliant or competent," would find it difficult to manage a unified department. Yet the president preferred the Army's blueprint and incorporated provisions, including those for a secretary of defense and a second-in-command first termed "under secretary," in his December 1945 message to Congress outlining his ideas for a department of defense.<sup>1</sup>

In the ensuing debates over how to implement the president's plan, critics such as Forrestal feared that the proposed hierarchy of civilian leadership would marginalize the service secretaries. In March 1946, in an effort to compromise on the organizational component of a proposed office of a secretary of defense, the position of under secretary of defense was labeled as "Special Assistant," a civilian appointed by the president with the advice and consent of the Senate. Although

<sup>1</sup> Anna Kasten Nelson, "National Security I: Inventing a Process (1945–1960) in *The Illusion of Presidential Government*, ed. Hugh Heclo and Lester M. Salamon (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1981), 231; Townsend Hoopes and Douglas Brinkley, *Driven Patriot: The Life and Times of James Forrestal* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992), 323; President Truman's Message to the Congress, 19 Dec 1945 in *The Department of Defense: Documents on Establishment and Organization, 1944–1978*, ed. Alice C. Cole, Alfred Goldberg, Samuel Tucker, and Rudolph A. Winnacker (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 1978), 7–17.

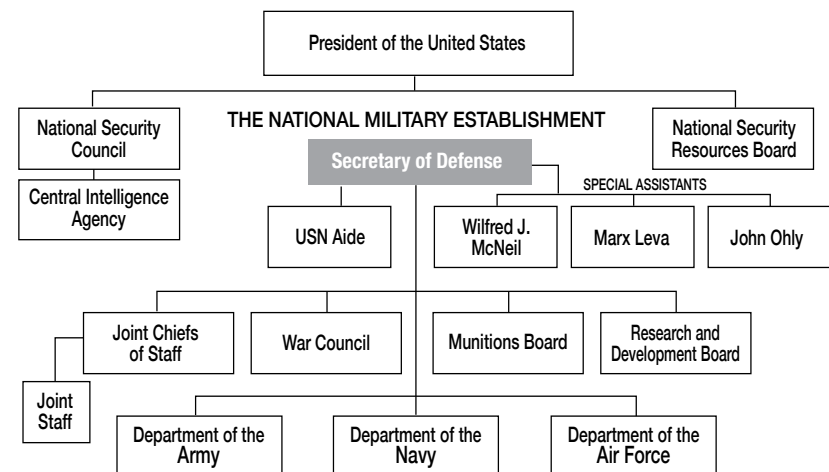
the description and duties of the special assistant foreshadowed those of the under secretary, and later, the deputy secretary of defense, the special assistant would not have the authority to interject himself between the secretary of defense and the service secretaries.<sup>2</sup>

By mid-1946, Forrestal and Secretary of War Robert Patterson, the chief proponent of the Army's plan, had found they could not agree over the components of military unification. The impasse between the two men continued until Truman intervened and ordered them to conclude an agreement acceptable to them both. By the end of the year, they finally reached an accord that met with the president's approval, which became the basis for the 1947 National Security Act. Their compromise included a civilian secretary of defense as the head of a defense organization consisting of separately administered departments of the Army, Navy, and Air Force, as well as a council of national defense.<sup>3</sup> The legislation, however, omitted a civilian under secretary of defense. As Forrestal explained in a letter to Senator Chandler Gurney (R-SD), chairman of the newly created Armed Services Committee, he preferred that the secretary "rely upon capable secretaries at the head of the individual military departments for the information and data upon which his policy is to be based. . . . It is obvious that the position of an under secretary above them in the line of succession would be anomalous, and would directly serve to reduce their stature and authority."<sup>4</sup>

The 1947 National Security Act incorporated elements of the Patterson-Forrestal agreement by establishing the National Security Council (NSC), Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and National Security Resources Board (NSRB). It also created the National

Military Establishment (NME), which was a confederation of the Departments of the Army, Navy, and newly independent Air Force, headed by a civilian secretary of defense. Truman initially offered the secretary of defense post to Patterson, but when he declined, the president nominated Forrestal for the position. The act permitted the new secretary to appoint three civilian special assistants to "advise and assist" him in carrying out his duties. These men, however, could not act in the secretary's stead. After five months on the job, Secretary Forrestal concluded that he needed more help than his three civilian assistants could provide.<sup>5</sup>

### ORGANIZATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY NATIONAL SECURITY ACT OF 1947 30 September 1947



*The 1947 National Security Act permitted the secretary of defense to appoint three civilian special assistants, but they were not empowered with any authority of their own. Secretary of Defense Forrestal lacked the requisite shared duties that the future deputy secretary of defense provided.*

<sup>2</sup> "Suggested Duties and Powers of the Secretary of Common Defense," 20 Mar 1946, folder 1946 Armed Services Unification re: Compromise Discussion, box 4, Ferdinand Eberstadt Papers (hereafter FEP), Seeley G. Mudd Library (hereafter Mudd Library).

<sup>3</sup> Steven L. Rearden, *The Formative Years, 1947–1950*, vol. 1 of Secretaries of Defense Historical Series (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 1984), 22.

<sup>4</sup> "Suggested Duties and Powers of the Secretary of Common Defense," 20 Mar 1946; ltr, James V. Forrestal to Senator Chandler Gurney, 29 Mar 1947, reprinted in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *National Defense Establishment (Unification of the Armed Services)*, 80th Cong., 1st sess., 1947, 640.

<sup>5</sup> Report to the President from the Secretary of Defense, 28 Feb 1948, folder Forrestal's Report to the President, 28 Feb 1948, box 501b, Subject Files, OSD Historical Office (hereafter OSD/HO); National Security Act of 1947, P.L. 80–253, Section 204(a), in Cole, et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 41.



## The Secretary's Alter Ego

Despite acknowledging that he could not easily discharge the duties of his office alone, Forrestal initially still seemed conflicted about adding a deputy.<sup>6</sup> As he relayed to his friend Ferdinand Eberstadt, the former Wall Street investment banker who collaborated with him throughout the military unification process, having a second-in-command meant that issues needing attention would not languish in his absence, but the presence of an intermediary between himself and his three special assistants—Marx Leva, John H. Ohly, and Wilfred J. McNeil—might inhibit them from carrying out their duties. These assistants handled, respectively, legal and legislative issues, interactions with the NSC and NSRB, and management of the department budget. While they reported directly to Forrestal, they were not political appointees, and they lacked authority to act on their own.<sup>7</sup>



Secretary of Defense James Forrestal (seated) with his three special assistants, Marx Leva (left), John Ohly (center), and Wilfred McNeil (right). (OSD Historical Office)

<sup>6</sup> The use of the term “deputy” here denotes a lieutenant. “Deputy,” as in the Pentagon’s second civilian in command, did not become part of official terminology until passage of the 1949 National Security Act Amendments.

<sup>7</sup> Ltr, Forrestal to Ferdinand Eberstadt, 13 Feb 1948, folder 36, box 15, James V. Forrestal Papers, Mudd Library; Rearden, *The Formative Years*, 60.

Throughout 1948, Forrestal’s ambivalence waned. He explained to President Truman in February 1948 that “the demands on my own time are such that I cannot provide the detailed coordination required.”<sup>8</sup>

Forrestal also conveyed his thoughts about having an under secretary of defense to the Hoover Commission’s National Security Organization Task Force. Chaired by Eberstadt, the task force convened to recommend improvements in defense organizations and operations. Eberstadt’s participation meant that Forrestal communicated his ideas for enhancing the NME directly to the task force. The task force included his suggestion for an under secretary in their February 1949 report to the president, urging that the “secretary be provided with an under secretary of defense, who shall be his full deputy and act for him in his absence.”<sup>9</sup>

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## THE HOOVER COMMISSION

The 1947 Lodge-Brown Act established the authority for the Commission on the Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government, more commonly known as the Hoover Commission after its chairman and former president, Herbert Hoover. Senator Henry Cabot Lodge Jr. (R-MA) and Representative Clarence J. Brown (R-OH), concerned with the increasing size of the federal government and the executive branch in particular, sponsored legislation to create a commission comprising congressional members, political appointees, and private sector personnel to examine the executive branch and recommend organizational changes. The 12-member commission directed the work of 24 task forces, including the National Security Organization Task Force. Ferdinand Eberstadt chaired this particular task force. See Moe, *The Hoover Commission Revisited*, 23, 25, 29.

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In December 1948, Forrestal sent a memo to Truman recommending that the president find a congressional ally to submit a bill to Congress for an under secretary of defense. In February 1949, Forrestal phoned

<sup>8</sup> Report to the President from the Secretary of Defense, 28 Feb 1948, folder Forrestal’s Report to the President, Feb. 28, 1948, box 501b, Subject Files, OSD/HO.

<sup>9</sup> Ronald C. Moe, *The Hoover Commission Revisited* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1982), 29, 39; Summary Reports of the Hoover Commission, folder Hoover Commission, 1949–1954, box 512, Subject Files, OSD/HO.



Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Millard Tydings (D-MD) to inquire how quickly such legislation might pass Congress. Within a few days of Forrestal's query, Representative Dewey Short (R-MO) introduced H.R. 2216, a bill to amend the National Security Act to provide for an under secretary of defense. In the ensuing weeks, Forrestal testified before two congressional committees in support of the bill's passage. He described the proposed under secretary as "the secretary's alter ego" and "the person who becomes Acting Secretary of Defense in the absence of the Secretary." When asked where he thought the under secretary should rank in relation to the service secretaries, Forrestal reversed his earlier opinion and recommended that the position should "outrank the secretaries of the three departments." Choosing his words carefully, he added that in meetings, the under secretary "would also have the power—I will not say the power—but he would have to have the precedence to preside where the secretaries of the departments were involved." Forrestal and Congress now concluded that managing the National Military Establishment necessitated a civilian second-in-command who ranked above the service secretaries in the departmental hierarchy. In March, Congress passed the legislation creating the position of under secretary of defense.<sup>10</sup>

On 2 April 1949, Truman amended the National Security Act by signing the under secretary of defense bill into law. The president appointed the under secretary of defense from civilian life, with the advice and consent of the Senate, provided the nominee was not within 10 years after relief from active duty as a commissioned officer in the armed forces. His authority lay in those duties prescribed by

the secretary, but he was empowered to "act for, and exercise the powers of, the secretary of defense during his absence or disability."<sup>11</sup>

Despite Forrestal's hard work in securing an under secretary, he would not benefit from it. He had labored tirelessly since becoming secretary of defense, keeping "intolerable hours," and was often plagued by anxieties, which were increasingly affecting his behavior. Forrestal's affliction, coupled with policy differences with the president over Pentagon management and foreign policy, prompted the president to replace him with Louis Johnson after the close 1948 reelection. Johnson, a major campaign fundraiser for Truman, had previously served in the War Department. On 28 March 1949, only days before Truman's signature authorized the under secretary of defense, Johnson, with Forrestal present, took the oath of office as the second secretary of defense. The task of finding an under secretary began.<sup>12</sup>

## The First Under Secretary of Defense

Admiral Robert L. Dennison, Truman's naval aide, recommended Stephen Tyree Early to Secretary of Defense Johnson. Press reports speculated that Johnson had endorsed Early's nomination because the president disapproved of the two other potential nominees Johnson suggested—World Bank President John J. McCloy and United Steamship Lines CEO John Franklin—because of their ties to his political nemesis, Thomas Dewey. Dennison judged Early, a Democrat, as a "good executive" for the Pentagon. On 6 April, Johnson sent a memo to the president advocating Early for the position, a nomination Truman endorsed. Early became the first under secretary of defense on 2 May 1949.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Forrestal, *Forrestal Diaries*, 539; House Committee on Armed Services, *Full Committee Hearing on H.R. 2216, to Amend the National Security Act of 1947 to Provide for an Undersecretary of Defense*, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 1949, 406, 408, 410; Under Secretary of Defense, H.R. 2216, 81st Cong., 1st sess., *Cong. Rec.* 95, daily ed. (7 Mar 1949); H 1937; Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Report of Proceedings: Hearings Held before Committee on Armed Services, Nominations under Reference Nos. "W," 176, 177, 181, 184, 186, 187, 188, H.R. 2485, S. 277, and H.R. 2216*, 10 Mar 1949, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 1949, 44, 46. In 1947, when the committee was debating the National Security Act, committee members appeared unconcerned with the lack of an under secretary of defense. Like Forrestal, they feared undermining the service secretaries' stature, but deferred designating one of them as the officer in charge in the secretary's absence. Chairman Tydings noted in 1949 that such a role would have been "too much of a responsibility and too heavy a load in respect to one at the expense of the other two." See *ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> P.L. 81–36 (2 Apr 1949) in Cole, et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 81.

<sup>12</sup> *Report to the Commission on Organization of the Executive Branch of the Government by the Committee on National Security Organization*, vol. 2, 15 Nov 1948, folder Eberstadt Task Force, box 527A, Subject Files, OSD/HO; Keith D. McFarland and David L. Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America: The Roosevelt and Truman Years* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 147, 149.

<sup>13</sup> Admiral Robert L. Dennison, interview by Jerry N. Hess, 10 Sep 1971, 18–20, Harry S. Truman Library (hereafter HSTL); McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 160; Drew Pearson, "Steve Early and Louis Johnson," 13 Apr 1949, Merry-Go-Round, *Bell Syndicate, Inc.*; Memorandum to the President, 6 Apr 1949, folder OF1285, box 1760, Papers of Harry S. Truman, Official File (hereafter HSTOF), HSTL.



Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson swears in Under Secretary of Defense Stephen Early, 2 May 1949. (National Archives)

Johnson and Truman were already well acquainted with Early. Johnson and Early, a Crozet, Virginia native, had served with the Army's 80th "Blue Ridge" Division during World War I. The pair also knew each other from the Roosevelt administration when Johnson was the assistant secretary of war and Early was press secretary. Early briefly worked as Truman's press secretary after Roosevelt's death in April 1945, a gesture the new president appreciated. "During these recent difficult weeks," Truman wrote Early shortly after assuming the presidency, "you have been such a help to me in getting acclimated to my new duties and responsibilities."<sup>14</sup>

In May 1945, Early resigned as Truman's press secretary after accepting the job of vice president of Pullman Inc. His relatively quick

summons back to Washington in April 1949 "came . . . as a surprise."<sup>15</sup> Rumors circulated in the aftermath of his nomination that rather than have a military expert as under secretary, the image-conscious Johnson preferred to have his own press agent in order to prepare for a possible presidential campaign in 1952. Early certainly fit the bill since he had been a reporter for the United Press from 1908 to 1912 and the Associated Press between 1913 and 1917. After World War I ended, he served in the American Expeditionary Forces' General Headquarters and became the assistant officer in charge of the *Stars and Stripes*, the Army's newspaper that General Pershing had published for American armed forces in France from February 1918 through June 1919. He enhanced his public relations credentials during his tenure as FDR's press secretary. In the April 1949 under secretary of defense confirmation hearing, the Senate overlooked Early's limited military expertise. As Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Tydings noted, Early was not "a stranger and we know his record in the government." The Senate easily confirmed him and Johnson swore him in on 2 May.<sup>16</sup>

Early and Johnson enjoyed a cordial relationship despite Johnson's reputation for arrogance. Johnson's demeanor did not faze Early, and he often spoke candidly to his boss without fear of retribution. While Early reportedly had a bad temper, he served as a "moderating influence" on the "impulsive actions" of the secretary of defense. He proved to be a loyal subordinate, quickly settling a dispute between

<sup>15</sup> "Nomination A Surprise, Says Early," *New York Times*, 9 Apr 1949.

<sup>16</sup> Levin, *The Making of FDR*, 22, 24, 36–37, 43, 437; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 160; Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Report of Proceedings, Hearings Held before the Committee on Armed Services, Nomination of Stephen T. Early of Virginia to Be Under Secretary of Defense*, 13 Apr 1949, 81st Cong., 1st sess., 2–4; Library of Congress, "American Memory: *The Stars and Stripes: The American Soldiers' Newspaper of World War I, 1918–1919*," <<http://www.memory.loc.gov/ammem/sgphtml/sashtml/sashome.html>>; Senate Armed Services Committee, *Nomination of Stephen T. Early of Virginia to Be Under Secretary of Defense*, 1.

According to Levin, Early and FDR revolutionized White House press relations by making use of press conferences. Each of them held their own press conferences several times a week, and the pair also instituted Roosevelt's Fireside Chats. Levin labeled him the first modern press secretary because of his astute handling of news from the White House. See Levin, *The Making of FDR*, 12, 14.

<sup>14</sup> Linda Lotridge Levin, *The Making of FDR: The Story of Stephen T. Early, America's First Modern Press Secretary* (Amherst, MA: Prometheus Books, 2008), 17–19, 32; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 36, 160; ltr, Harry S. Truman to Stephen Early, 31 May 1945, folder Early, Stephen T., box 1665, HSTOF, HSTL.



*Deputy Secretary of Defense Stephen Early (left) confers with Secretary of Defense Louis Johnson. In the absence of clearly defined duties, Early relied on the skill he knew best, public relations, and handled many Pentagon public relations issues during his tenure in office. (OSD Historical Office)*

Johnson and Senator Elmer Thomas (D–OK) over the use of government aircraft, when Johnson caused a stir on Capitol Hill by suggesting that congressmen use commercial flights rather than procure military aircraft for unofficial travel. Early intervened and brokered a compromise amenable to both Johnson and Senator Thomas; henceforth, military planes could only be used for official government business. Early “did the job so neatly,” according to journalist Hanson

Baldwin, and the quarrel dissipated before the newspapers could exploit the rift.<sup>17</sup>

### From Under Secretary to Deputy Secretary

In February 1948, Secretary of Defense Forrester had expressed his dissatisfaction with the 1947 National Security Act’s limits on his authority. Truman concurred with the need to update the act, conceding that “we have now had sufficient experience under the Act to be able to identify and correct weaknesses without impairing the advantages we have obtained from its strengths.” He drew largely from the Hoover Commission’s National Security Organization Task Force’s report and in March

<sup>17</sup> Jack Alexander, “Stormy New Boss of the Pentagon,” *Saturday Evening Post*, 30 Jul 1949; Doris Condit, *The Test of War, 1950–1953*, vol. 2 of Secretaries of Defense Historical Series (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 1988), 15; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 160; “Steve’ Early’s Job Is to Muzzle the Loud-Mouth Brass in Pentagon,” *Washington Daily News*, 8 Apr 1949; John H. Ohly, interview by D. M. Condit, 28 Apr 1977, 8, Oral History Collection, OSD/HO; Hanson W. Baldwin, “Defense Friction Eases,” *New York Times*, 28 Jul 1949.

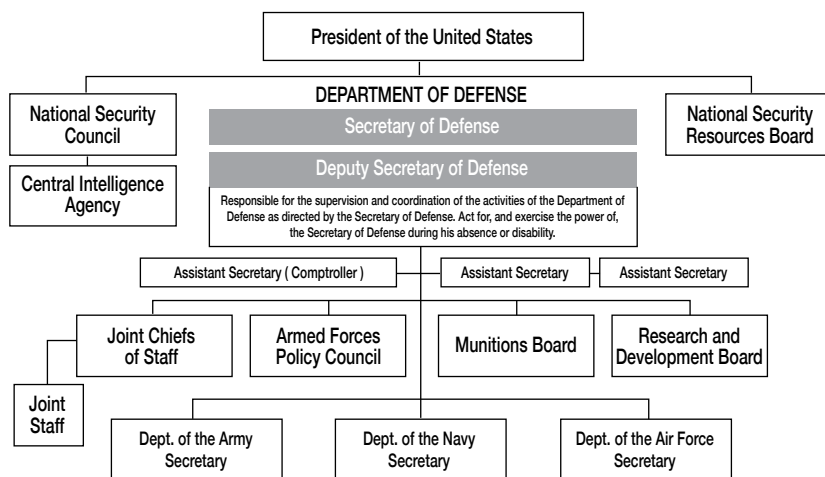


*Deputy Secretary of Defense Stephen Early (2nd from right) looks on as President Truman hands out pens after signing the 1949 National Security Act Amendments into law. The Amendments redesignated “under secretary of defense” to “deputy secretary of defense.” (Abbie Rowe, National Park Service, Harry S. Truman Library & Museum/OSD Historical Office)*

1949 sent a message to Congress delineating a plan to improve the act. The resulting amendments, which he signed into law on 10 August 1949, elevated the National Military Establishment into a cabinet-level Department of Defense and demoted the three military departments to a subordinated status.<sup>18</sup> The title and structure of Early’s position also changed. Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Tydings “considered [it] necessary” to rename the number two civilian position from under secretary of defense to deputy secretary of defense to enhance the officeholder’s authority. Tydings surmised that the service secretaries would be more inclined to take orders from a deputy rather than an under secretary. The specifications for the duties of the deputy were similar to those for the under secretary, with

<sup>18</sup> Cole et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 79; Truman quote also found in Douglas T. Stuart, *Creating the National Security State: A History of the Law That Transformed America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008), 196.

## ORGANIZATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY NATIONAL SECURITY ACT AS AMENDED 10 August 1949



*The 1949 National Security Act Amendments redesignated the position of under secretary of defense to deputy secretary of defense. The deputy took precedence in the Defense Department immediately after the secretary. Forrestal's three special assistants were made assistant secretaries of defense, but they ranked below the deputy in departmental hierarchy.*

one critical exception. The deputy would “take precedence in the Department of Defense next after the secretary of defense.”<sup>19</sup>

### Early's Role in the Pentagon

Stephen Early's day-to-day role as under secretary and then deputy secretary of defense was not clearly defined when he took office, so he drew on the experience he knew best—press secretary. Throughout his tenure, he recommended public relations strategies to Johnson

that he believed the newspapers, and subsequently the American people, would accept. For example, when the Soviet Union shocked the United States by exploding an atomic bomb in late August 1949, shattering the four-year-old American atomic monopoly, Truman reportedly met with Secretary Johnson, Deputy Secretary Early, and Secretary of State Dean Acheson to discuss whether he should issue a statement. Early suggested to the president that he inform the American people before the Soviets had the opportunity to exploit their breakthrough as an act that signaled nuclear parity with the United States. On 23 September, the president announced that the Soviets had detonated their first atomic device. Columnist Walter Lippman praised the president's revelation, an affirmation of Early's sage advice, writing, “had he [Truman] waited to let the Soviet government announce the news, or let it leak out, there might well have been panicky agitation.”<sup>20</sup>

Another notable example of Early's success in handling public relations occurred in August 1950, two months after North Korean forces invaded the South. Early appeared on *Battle Report—Washington*, a White House-produced television show broadcast by NBC, along with Commerce Secretary Charles Sawyer; Senator Brien McMahon (D-CT), chairman of the Atomic Energy Committee; and Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve Tom McCabe. He summarized the situation and commended the U.S. military effort:

It is the first time in history, as far as I know, that any nation has made a successful piecemeal commitment of its armed forces in the face of a moving hard striking enemy army, and won the initial decision. I refer to the failure of the enemy to drive the American advance forces out of Korea. The communists confidently expected to do this.

<sup>19</sup> Herman S. Wolk, “The Quiet Coup of 1949,” *Air Force Magazine*, Jul 1999, 79; “Senators Approve Johnson Powers,” *New York Times*, 26 Apr 1949; Cole et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 81, 89. See *ibid.* for additional organizational changes made by the 1949 amendments.

<sup>20</sup> Robert J. Donovan, *Tumultuous Years: The Presidency of Harry S. Truman, 1949–1953* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 98–101; Drew Pearson, “Red-A-Bomb Set Off Debate Here,” *Merry-Go-Round, Washington Post*, 24 Dec 1949; Walter Lippman, “End of the Atomic Monopoly,” *Today and Tomorrow, New York Herald Tribune*, 27 Sep 1949.



His sober yet optimistic remarks evoked praise from Senator Warren Magnuson (D-WA), Representative Frank Boykin (D-AL), and Under Secretary of the Navy Dan Kimball.<sup>21</sup>

Early's personal crafting of Pentagon messages led to a clash with the Defense Department's Office of Public Information (OPI). Forrestal had created the office in March 1949 to handle military public relations, but Secretary Johnson rarely used it. Instead he preferred to let his immediate staff and Early handle his press affairs. OPI Director William Frye was annoyed when he perceived the deputy secretary overstepping his bounds. In December 1949, Early ordered Frye to permit the three armed services to handle their own press releases, seemingly violating the spirit of unification that the Department of Defense was working hard to promote. The directive lasted only four days. The ensuing confusion prompted newspapermen to speculate as to which man was actually in charge of Pentagon public relations.<sup>22</sup>

Despite Frye's objection to perceived interference in his domain, Early did have authority over OPI. Not long after Early became deputy, OPI was informed that Early would handle "all top level public relations

matters, . . . make a decision, or would take them up with Mr. Johnson."<sup>23</sup> The *New York Times* reported that Early had assumed the "burdens of the Pentagon's public information problems." Under the 1949 National Security Act Amendments, Early had authority over matters Johnson delegated to him. In August 1950, Johnson informed the Armed Forces Policy Council (AFPC), the secretary's policy advisory group, that at his request, Early "had . . . assumed the responsibility of reviewing [Defense Department] speeches and articles for policy and propriety." The Pentagon press pool also knew him, and they preferred to get information from him rather than navigate through the "cumbersome existing public relations set-up." Bureau of the Budget Director Frank Pace Jr. recalled that Early was "very persuasive with Mr. Johnson . . . who put a lot of store by him."<sup>24</sup>



*Deputy Secretary of Defense Stephen Early meets with the press in his Pentagon office, September 1950. (National Archives)*

Johnson's reliance on Early's public relations acumen was borne out in the administration's dispute with General Douglas MacArthur. In late August 1950, MacArthur, the commander of U.S. and United Nations forces in Korea, accepted an invitation to send a statement to the Chicago meeting of the Veterans of Foreign Wars. His telegraphed missive suggested the United States intended to militarize Formosa by supplying arms to the Nationalist government, a direct contradiction of Truman's publicly stated objective. With the United States military already engaged in combat, the

<sup>21</sup> Ltr, John Steelman to Stephen Early, 7 Aug 1950, folder "Battle Report—Washington," box 61, Stephen T. Early Papers (hereafter STEP), Franklin D. Roosevelt Library (hereafter FDRL); "U.S. Forces Are Hailed in Early Report," *Hartford Courant*, 14 Aug 1950; Remarks by Stephen Early, Deputy Secretary of Defense on National Broadcasting Company Television Program, "Battle Report—Washington," 13 Aug 1950; memo for Dorothy, 14 Aug 1950; Ltr, Warren G. Magnuson to Stephen Early, 16 Aug 1950; Memorandum, Office of the Deputy Secretary: all in folder Speech, NBC-TV "Battle Report—Washington," box 61, STEP, FDRL.

As part of the White House's efforts to keep the country informed of the war, Assistant to the President John Steelman produced "Battle Report—Washington" from his West Wing office. He appeared on each episode and invited high-ranking administration officials to discuss the Korean conflict and its impact on the American people. See Nancy Bernhard, *U.S. Television News and Cold War Propaganda, 1947–1960* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 116–117.

<sup>22</sup> Rearden, *The Formative Years*, 81–83; "Changing of OPI—Departmental Relations by Deputy Secretary Early," Dec 1949, folder OPI Historical Background Information Compiled by Mr. Althaus, Apr 1950, box 1192, Subject Files, OSD/HO; Ltr, E. John Long to William Frye, 12 Jan 1951, folder Bill Frye, 1947–1950, box 1192, Subject Files, OSD/HO; "Defense News Unified," *New York Times*, 21 Dec 1949; "Question: Who's Boss of Defense Press Division?" *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 Dec 1949.

<sup>23</sup> "The Problem of Unified Public Relations (Second Phase), Secretary Louis Johnson, March 28, 1949 to September 18, 1950," folder Public Relations in a Unified Military Establishment, First Phase, box 1192, Subject Files, OSD/HO.

<sup>24</sup> Austin Stevens, "Early Steps Down as Defense Deputy," *New York Times*, 13 Sep 1950; Minutes, Armed Forces Policy Council, 29 Aug 1950, Unification Tab, Binder 1950, box 4, John Ohly Papers, OSD/HO; Frank Pace Jr., interview by Jerry N. Hess, 17 Jan 1972, 86, HSTL.

president wanted to avoid further hostilities, particularly a dispute with the communist People's Republic of China over the hotly contested issue of Taiwan. Secretary Johnson, however, did not necessarily disagree with MacArthur's assertion and balked at reprimanding him. Early, an old friend of MacArthur's, feared the public relations consequences for the administration if the president openly clashed with the popular general, and he advised Johnson not to issue the president's order demanding MacArthur withdraw his statement. The president would not yield his position and ultimately forced Johnson to rebuke MacArthur.<sup>25</sup>

### Breaking Free from “Shackles and Handcuffs”

Shortly after the flare-up over the MacArthur statement, Early informed President Truman that he was stepping down. He originally intended to serve as deputy for only a year, the length of his leave of absence from Pullman Inc., but after the outbreak of the Korean conflict he agreed to remain at his post. Nevertheless, he felt his time as deputy had been especially taxing. He told reporters that Congress should have been more precise in crafting the language for the deputy secretary's duties so that he would not “have had to function as the alter ego of the defense secretary.” As he confided in a letter to an acquaintance, the overwhelming burden of being deputy “has had the effect of shackles and handcuffs—of making me a virtual prisoner in the Pentagon.” Initially, a sense of duty compelled him to stay: “As long as our boys are leaving their homes to engage in hostile forces in South Korea or elsewhere, I cannot find it within myself to leave.” By 1 September 1950, however, Early wrote Truman, “The time has come when I can

no longer deny or evade the immediate need for a change in the manner of my life.”<sup>26</sup>

Johnson was on his way out as well. His intransigence over the MacArthur statement, an ongoing clash with Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and other policy differences with the president prompted Truman to ask for his resignation. Early broke the news to Johnson after the disbelieving secretary discounted press reports of the president's growing displeasure. In a last act of public relations management, Early edited Johnson's letter of resignation, which was effective on 12 September 1950. Early stepped down on 30 September. With Johnson's forced resignation and Early's near-simultaneous departure, the president faced a complete turnover in Pentagon leadership.<sup>27</sup>

### “Secretary Marshall's Good Right Arm”

After Truman appointed former Secretary of State George Marshall to be the third secretary of defense, Marshall requested that the president select Robert Abercrombie Lovett as the deputy secretary of defense. Truman phoned Lovett at his home in Locust Valley, New York, on the morning of 29 September 1950 and offered him the job. Lovett immediately accepted, knowing that he could not turn down either the president or Marshall.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Donovan, *Tumultuous Years*, 264; Arnold A. Offner, *Another Such Victory: President Truman and the Cold War, 1945–1953* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002), 384–385; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 328–331; Condit et al., *The Test of War*, 177; Levin, *The Making of FDR*, 31; Annex, 26 August 1950, *Foreign Relations of the United States [FRUS]*, 1950, vol. 6, *East Asia and the Pacific* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1976), 454–459, <history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1950v06/pg\_454>; Michael Schaller, “MacArthur, Douglas,” *The Oxford Companion to American Military History*, ed. John Whiteclay Chambers II (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 405–406.

<sup>26</sup> Austin Stevens, “Early Steps Down as Defense Deputy,” *New York Times*, 13 Sep 1950; ltr, Stephen T. Early to Reese H. Taylor, 5 Jul 1950, folder Correspondence, Chron File, May-Oct 1950, box 58, STEP, FDRL; ltr, Stephen T. Early to President Truman, 1 Sep 1950, folder L. J. Resignation, 1950, box 597, Subject Files, OSD/HO.

<sup>27</sup> McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 339–349; ltr, Stephen T. Early to President Truman, 1 Sep 1950 cited in note 26. Early briefly returned to the Truman White House in late 1950 to serve as acting press secretary in the aftermath of Press Secretary Charlie Ross' death. In August 1951, Early suffered a heart attack and was hospitalized. Although he showed signs of improving, he died of a second heart attack on 11 August at the age of 61. He was buried at Arlington National Cemetery. Some of his former Pentagon colleagues served as honorary pallbearers, including Secretary of the Army Frank Pace Jr., Secretary of the Air Force Thomas K. Finletter, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar N. Bradley. See “Stephen T. Early Is Dead at 61; Press Aide to Two Presidents,” *Washington Post*, 12 Aug 1951; B. C. Mossman and M. W. Stark, *The Last Salute: Civil and Military Funerals, 1921–1969* (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1991), 57–58.

<sup>28</sup> Paul P. Kennedy, “President Appoints Lovett Deputy Secretary of Defense,” *New York Times*, 29 Sep 1950.



## FROM GENERAL TO SECRETARY OF DEFENSE

The National Security Act's original provision forbade the appointment of individuals for the positions of secretary and deputy secretary who had within 10 years of their nomination been on active duty as commissioned officers in the armed forces. Public Law 81-788, passed on 18 September 1950, amended the act to permit Truman's appointment of General Marshall as secretary of defense. This act was only in effect for the duration of Marshall's term as secretary. For the amendment, see Cole et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 114; also Forrest C. Pogue, *George C. Marshall: Statesman, 1945–1959* (New York: Viking, 1987), 150, 424–429; Condit, *The Test of War*, 36.

The Yale-educated Lovett already had experience being Marshall's alter ego. After serving as a special assistant to Secretary of War Henry Stimson in 1940 and then as assistant secretary of war for air in 1941, Lovett became Marshall's under secretary of state in 1947. The travel demands of the secretariat and Marshall's declining health kept him away from Wash-



Secretary of Defense George Marshall (left) and his alter ego, Deputy Secretary Robert Lovett. (National Archives)

ington for extended periods during his tenure, and Lovett often functioned as acting secretary of state in Marshall's absence. Their relationship was so harmonious that Lovett later characterized their collegiality as almost familial. "I was his alter ego. We worked together almost as brothers."

As deputy, Lovett was known as "Secretary Marshall's good right arm." Yet, despite their

close connection, Marshall always referred to Lovett by his surname. Lovett never objected to his boss' formal manner and fondly recalled his association with Marshall: "I loved that absolutely magnificent man. There was none finer, more dedicated or with more ability." The feeling was mutual.<sup>29</sup>

Marshall and Lovett's Pentagon operated quite differently from Johnson and Early's. Years later, Lovett remarked that he "felt completely at home in the Department of Defense." His comfort proved essential, as Marshall agreed to serve as secretary of defense for only one year and insisted that Lovett succeed him. The pair engendered a cooperative relationship with Secretary of State Acheson and the State Department; this interdepartmental harmony had been lacking under Johnson and Early. Whereas Johnson never articulated Early's responsibilities, Marshall made them plain. Lovett's official duties were, according to Marshall, to "carry out the policies I have announced. He is in charge of operations." As Colonel Marshall Carter, Secretary Marshall's executive secretary, recalled, "There was never any question about who was boss, never any question in Marshall's mind that the job would be done by Lovett as Marshall wanted it done when Marshall was out of town. Everyone knew when Lovett took a decision, that it was Marshall's decision too." Lovett chaired meetings of the Staff Council, the 11-member group of assistant secretaries tasked with coordinating OSD staff work. He was also a member of the AFPC.<sup>30</sup>

As deputy secretary, Lovett was a statutory member of the newly created Psychological Strategy Board (PSB) charged with coordinating State, CIA, and the military services' policies on psychological warfare. While American military personnel were engaged in combat with Communist forces in Korea, policymakers in the United States were considering other means for waging war. Since its inception, the CIA had responsibility for covert operations, but as more noncommunist nations appeared to be threatened, the Departments of State and Defense were increasingly drawn into devising plans for psychological warfare to counter communism. Interagency rivalry over this strategy prompted the president to create a separate entity to coordinate political, military, economic, and propaganda policies

*Men of the Pentagon: From Forrestal to McNamara* (New York, Washington, and London: Frederick A. Praeger, 1966), 118.

<sup>30</sup> Lovett interview, 7 Jun 1976, 3; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 330; Lockett, "Leave It to Lovett," 31; Condit, *The Test of War*, 485.

<sup>29</sup> Edward B. Lockett, "Leave It to Lovett," *Collier's*, 30 Jun 1951, 70; Edward B. Lockett, "Again the Marshall-Lovett Team," *New York Times*, 29 Oct 1950; Robert A. Lovett, interview by Doris E. Condit, 7 Jun 1976, 11, Oral History Collection, OSD/HO; Carl W. Borklund,

under development by governmental departments. On 4 April 1951, Truman issued a directive initiating the PSB and ordered membership to include the under secretary of state, deputy secretary of defense, and the director of central intelligence. The PSB reported to the NSC. Deputy Secretary of Defense Lovett attended PSB meetings in July and August 1951 and was the first of three consecutive deputy secretaries engaged with PSB activities. Since every course of action the PSB considered required funding, and since Lovett was involved in the Pentagon's budget, he was acutely aware of the costs of fighting the Cold War.<sup>31</sup>

### “The Smoothest Negotiator You’ve Ever Seen”

Whereas Stephen Early involved himself with Pentagon public affairs, Lovett spent a large portion of his tenure as deputy helping prepare the Defense budget. He had been an investment banker with Brown Brothers Harriman & Company between 1926 and 1940. Given Lovett's expertise, Secretary Marshall trusted him to work on the budget. Nevertheless, the task of parceling funds for the Korean conflict, for long-range strategic planning, and for basic departmental operations was not an easy one, even for a man with Lovett's business acumen.<sup>32</sup>

During the Truman administration, defense spending rose dramatically to meet the demands of waging the Cold War. The president built up military force levels to augment units fighting in Korea and to adhere to projected defense plans. NSC 68 recommended a rapid military buildup, but the

<sup>31</sup> Directive to the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defense, and Director of Central Intelligence, 4 Apr 1951, *FRUS 1951*, vol. 1, *National Security Affairs, Foreign Economic Policy*, 58–59; Scott Lucas, “Campaigns of Truth: The Psychological Strategy Board and American Ideology,” *International History Review* 18, no. 2 (May 1996): 288. Deputy Secretaries of Defense William C. Foster and Roger M. Kyes (February 1953–May 1954) were the other two deputies to serve on the PSB before President Eisenhower replaced it with the Operations Coordinating Board in September 1953. See Executive Order 10483, Establishing the Operations Coordinating Board, 2 Sep 1953, The American Presidency Project, <<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=60573>>.

<sup>32</sup> Borklund, *Men of the Pentagon*, 116–118; Memorandum by the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Nitze) to the Secretary of State, 22 Mar 1950, *FRUS 1950*, 1:202; Condit, *The Test of War*, 232.

initial document did not consider cost. In January 1950, work had already begun on the fiscal year 1952 budget, spanning July 1951–

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### NSC 68

National Security Council paper number 68, or NSC 68, was a top-secret memorandum completed in April 1950 by a joint State-Defense Department working group chaired by State's Policy Planning Staff director, Paul Nitze. Drafted in response to a nuclearized Soviet Union, NSC 68 called for a buildup in American conventional and nuclear forces to counter the “Kremlin's design for world domination.” Secretary of Defense Johnson did not take an active part in preparing NSC 68, as he had a particularly acrimonious relationship with Secretary of State Dean Acheson, and he disagreed with any policy reassessment that might impact the economy. Deputy Secretary Early also had no role in shaping NSC 68. In 1951, the task of budgeting for the suggested military buildup fell to Deputy Secretary Lovett, a former consultant to the working group that drafted NSC 68. See Curt Caldwell, *NSC 68 and the Political Economy of the Early Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Nicholas Thompson, *The Hawk and the Dove* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2009), 111–114; McFarland and Roll, *Louis Johnson and the Arming of America*, 226.

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June 1952, but planners revised spending estimates to account for the Korean conflict. Deputy Secretary Lovett surmised that overall force levels would dramatically decrease with an early victory, as UN forces appeared to gain an advantage on the Korean peninsula. Optimism waned in late November 1950, however, after Chinese Communist forces drove UN forces out of North Korea. This sudden shift in events precipitated a reconsideration of military plans.<sup>33</sup>

Deputy Secretary Lovett, working closely with Assistant Secretary of Defense (Comptroller) Wilfred McNeil, had the thankless task of reconciling the broad military expansion proposed under NSC 68 with the grim realities of the rapidly escalating Korean War and regular departmental appropriations. Lovett created a special working group comprising high-level officials from the three military

<sup>33</sup> Walter S. Poole, *History of the Joint Chiefs of Staff: The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy*, vol. 4, 1950–1952 (Washington, DC: Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 1998), 35–36; Condit, *The Test of War*, 230.



Lovett confers with Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Omar Bradley (left) and General Matthew B. Ridgway (center). (National Archives)

departments to finalize the Defense Department's fiscal policy. He became the first deputy secretary of defense to negotiate with the individual services over materiel and the first deputy to testify before the House and Senate appropriations committees on budgetary issues, setting a precedent for future deputies' involvement in crafting the department's budget. One general remarked that Lovett was "the smoothest negotiator you've ever seen. He'd spent his life negotiating loans. In the Pentagon he negotiated, but he always got his way." Ultimately, the Defense Department had to revise its spending and the Pentagon submitted three separate supplemental fiscal year 1951 measures to Congress. The fiscal year 1952 Defense budget was the largest appropriated sum since the end of World War II. Years later, when McNeil reflected on his involvement in the fiscal year 1953 budget, he pointed out that he was "rather the action agent in carrying out the agreement between Marshall, Lovett and the administration. I certainly didn't dream up all the ideas."<sup>34</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Condit, *The Test of War*, 242–243, 250, 256, 260, 486; Memorandum for the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 18 Aug 1951, CD 381 (War Plan NSC 68), box 272, Records of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, Record Group 330, Decimal File 1951, National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD (hereafter NARA II); Statement by the Honorable Robert

## From Deputy to Secretary of Defense

In early September 1951, a fatigued Secretary of Defense Marshall informed the president that he was resigning, completing his promised year of service. His term had been particularly trying due to the ongoing Korean crisis and the furor in April over Truman's relief of General MacArthur as commander of U.S. and UN Forces for threatening to expand the Korean War at a time when the Truman administration was attempting to broker peace. According to Lovett, MacArthur, who was not close to Marshall, erred in "considering himself omnipotent, or probably worse, by thinking everybody else considered him omnipotent." Although Lovett was not directly involved in the president's decision to dismiss MacArthur, Marshall spent seven days testifying before Congress on this issue. Deputy Secretary Lovett proved to be the one constant for Marshall during his tumultuous days as secretary. Marshall said he "trust[ed] Lovett's judgment," describing his deputy as "most congenial and utterly selfless." Truman immediately nominated Lovett to succeed Marshall as the fourth secretary of defense. Lovett's close collaboration with Marshall ensured a continuity of leadership that the president needed while the fighting continued in Korea. Lovett's popularity with Congress also meant a smooth and speedy Senate confirmation. He was the first of five deputy secretaries of defense to become secretary of defense.<sup>35</sup>

A. Lovett on 7 May 1951 before the Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives, on the FY 1952 Budget for the Department of Defense; Statement by the Honorable Robert A. Lovett on 7 June 1951 before the United States Senate Committee on Appropriations on the FY 1952 Budget for the Department of Defense: both in folder Budget FY 52, Jan-Jun 1951, box 767, Subject Files, OSD/HO; Borklund, *Men of the Pentagon*, 120–121; Wilfred McNeil, interview by Doris Condit and Ronald Hoffman, 7 Jun 1976, 3, Oral History Collection, OSD/HO.

<sup>35</sup> Condit, *The Test of War*, 97, 103–108. For MacArthur's position, see Walter Waggoner, "Truman Names MacArthur to Head UN Forces in Korea," *New York Times*, 9 Jul 1950; Lovett interview, 7 Jun 1976, 23; Pogue, *George C. Marshall*, 491; Edward B. Lockett, "Again the Marshall-Lovett Team"; John G. Norris, "Secretary of Defense Is Succeeded by Deputy," *Washington Post*, 13 Sep 1951.

## “Another Lovett”

Secretary of Defense Lovett entered office on 17 September 1951. To fill the deputy secretary of defense post, Truman nominated William Chapman Foster. The former World War I Army Air Service pilot had substantial experience in both business and government. In 1922, he joined the Pressed & Welded Steel Products Co., Inc., and by 1946, he had become its president. He spent World War II as a member and chairman of the War Department’s Purchase Policy Advisory Committee. In 1944, he was appointed to the Purchase Division of the Army Service Forces and served as assistant director, deputy director, and then director. He was made a special representative to the under secretary of war on procurement issues for the Army Air Forces. From 1946 to 1948, he served as under secretary of commerce. In 1948, he became the deputy administrator for the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), the entity which oversaw the European Recovery Program (also known as the Marshall Plan), and by 1950 he was the administrator.<sup>36</sup>

Although Lovett and Foster spoke only briefly before Foster’s confirmation hearing, Lovett conveyed his hopes that Foster would act as a true deputy with full authority to oversee any type of issue in Lovett’s absence. The press praised Foster’s nomination, and, as the *Washington Post* observed, the Pentagon was getting “another Lovett” since Foster’s administrative skills were equivalent to those of the new secretary. Lovett happily turned over management of the Pentagon to his deputy, which Foster interpreted as “procurement [and] relations with the budget preparation.” The Senate confirmed him on 21 September and he took the oath of office three days later.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Condit, *The Test of War*, 36–37; Biographical sketch printed in Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing on Nomination of William C. Foster to Be Deputy Secretary of Defense*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., 1951, 11–12.

Deputy Secretary Lovett became the fourth secretary of defense and served in that capacity for the remainder of the Truman administration. In his post-Pentagon endeavors, he was a member of several presidential commissions and continued to work for Brown Brothers Harriman. He died in 1986.

<sup>37</sup> Memorandum for the Record re: Conversation with Mr. William C. Foster, Deputy Secretary of Defense, 1951–1953, on 25 Oct 1977, Oral History Collection, OSD/HO;

Foster proved to be an adept administrator. He met regularly with the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Omar Bradley, and presided over regular meetings of the Armed Forces Policy Council. On Fridays, he chaired the Staff Council meetings of the assistant secretaries and other officials, who coordinated the staff work within OSD. In October 1952, Secretary Lovett designated him chairman of the seven-member Munitions Allocation Council within OSD to advise the secretary on weapons and ammunition. By June 1952, Foster also presided over meetings of the Defense Management Council, the entity which replaced the Johnson-era Defense Management Committee charged with improving the organizational structure of the department. And because of his experience at ECA, he also juggled military and economic assistance issues, testifying before congressional committees on 12 separate occasions from 1951 to 1952 on topics ranging from the Defense budget to the Mutual Security Act, which provided military and economic aid to America’s allies. He considered himself more “technically minded than Lovett” as a result of his coursework in engineering at MIT and closely collaborated with the Research and Development Board advising the secretary of defense on national security, science, and technology.<sup>38</sup>



*Deputy Secretary of Defense William Foster proved to be an adept administrator for Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett. (OSD Historical Office)*

William C. Foster, interview by Alfred Goldberg and Samuel A. Tucker, 27 Feb 1974, 27, Oral History Collection, OSD/HO; John G. Norris, “Secretary of Defense Is Succeeded by Deputy,” *Washington Post*, 13 Sep 1951; Senate Committee on Armed Services, *Hearing on Nomination of William C. Foster to Be Deputy Secretary of Defense*, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., 1951, 2; Nomination of William C. Foster to be Deputy Secretary of Defense, 82nd Cong., 1st sess., *Cong. Rec.*, 21 Sep 1951, S 11859.

<sup>38</sup> Condit, *The Test of War*, 22, 485; Congressional Appearances—Deputy Secretary of Defense, 9 Jul 1952, folder Deputy Secretary Foster’s Appearances on Capitol Hill, box 17, Biographical Files, OSD/HO; Foster interview, 27 Feb 1974, 3, 5.



The 1949 National Security Act Amendments empowered the secretary and the deputy secretary with “direction, authority and control over the Department of Defense.” On 1 June 1951, the directive system emerged as a means for disseminating information. Directives served as the medium whereby the secretary published “policy guidance, instructions and orders for the direction and control of all Defense Department activities.” The deputy had the power to sign these documents in his own right and on behalf of the secretary. Deputy Secretary Foster issued a Defense Department directive establishing the Defense Supply Management Agency, which created one uniform cataloging system and supply standardization mechanism that complied with the 1951 Defense Cataloging and Standardization Act. In addition, as a PSB participant, he hoped to better coordinate psychological and covert planning within the Defense Department. He authorized an April 1952 directive creating the Office of Psychological Policy within the Office of the Assistant to the Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs.<sup>39</sup>

### Foster’s Foray into Foreign Affairs

Although consumed with managing the Pentagon, Foster became immersed in the major foreign policy issues occupying the Truman administration. The Korean War continued to be the chief foreign and military priority, and Foster later surmised that this conflict alone occupied 25–30 percent of his time in office. New trouble spots, such as Indochina, and issues involving the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) also required the administration’s attention.<sup>40</sup>

The week before Foster entered office, he was part of the American delegation in Ottawa at the seventh session of the North Atlantic

Council (NAC), a NATO committee comprising the foreign ministers of member nations. Despite not having been confirmed yet, Lovett asked him to attend, and he was both “economic minister and defense minister” for the United States at a critical time for the NAC. Since NATO’s inception in 1949, participating nations had been concerned with force levels, the cost of maintaining these units, and the collective defense of the Alliance. At the Ottawa meeting, NAC planned to study existing NATO defense plans in relation to each member nations’ political and economic capabilities. Foster arranged the meeting in which participants selected three representatives, W. Averell Harriman (U.S.), Jean Monnet (France), and Hugh Gaitskell (U.K.), known as the “three wise men,” to oversee the review.<sup>41</sup>



*Deputy Secretary of Defense William Foster (back row, 2nd from left) visited troops in Korea as part of his 24-day inspection tour of American military installations in Asia. (National Archives)*

<sup>39</sup> P.L. 81–216 in Cole et al., *Department of Defense: Documents*, 88; “Proposal for the Reissuance and Indexing of Department of Defense Directives”; “Department of Defense Directive 5025.1,” 2 Feb 1954, Directives System, 1950–59: both in folder DoD Directive System Establishment, box 608, Subject Files, OSD/HO; P.L. 82–436 and Department of Defense Directive 5126.7; Department of Defense Directive, 21 Apr 1952, folder 300.6 Office Memoranda-General, box 21, Staff Member and Office Files, HSTL.

<sup>40</sup> Foster interview, 27 Feb 1974, 19.

<sup>41</sup> Department of State Press Release, 14 Sep 1951, folder NATO 1951, box 88, Subject Files, OSD/HO; Foster interview, 27 Feb 1974, 17–18; “Pact Nations Form Executive Bureau,” *New York Times*, 20 Sep 1951; Establishment of the Executive Bureau of the Temporary Council Committee, 11 Oct 1951, NAC-01-The North Atlantic Council, Series TCC-Temporary Council Committee, document TCC-D/1-Rev1, <<http://archives.nato.int/establishment-of-executive-bureau-of-temporary-council-committee-2;isad>>. Before the final review and report were completed, Sir Edward Plowden replaced Hugh Gaitskell.

In October 1952, Foster embarked on a 24-day inspection tour of the United States' Asian military installations, becoming the first deputy secretary of defense to travel abroad. His itinerary included stops in Tokyo, Seoul, Taipei, Manila, Saigon, Bangkok, Rangoon, Singapore, New Delhi, Cairo, Frankfurt, Naples, and Lisbon. Upon his return, he reported that the morale of the troops in South Korea was high, but he did not anticipate a rapidly negotiated armistice in the near future. He also indicated that in Indochina, where French forces had been fighting the Communist-backed Vietminh since 1946 in an effort to retain control over their former colony, pro-French forces had been built up and were assuming a large portion of the fighting. In a rare instance of discord between Foster and Lovett, the two were at odds over American policy toward Vietnam. While Foster believed that the French were angling for greater American involvement so that the United States could assume more of the burden of fighting the Communists, Lovett favored increasing American logistical support to the French. Theirs would not be the last disagreement on the matter; Vietnam would occupy the attention of the ensuing 12 deputy secretaries of defense and their respective presidential administrations for the next two decades.<sup>42</sup>

## Conclusion

Deputy Secretary of Defense Foster and Secretary of Defense Lovett worked together harmoniously during their service in the Pentagon. On 16 January 1953, only days before their tenures were about to expire, Lovett presented Foster with the Certificate of Appreciation, at the time the Department of Defense's highest civilian honor. The citation lauded Foster for his "initiative, brilliant leadership and foresight" and for making a "significant contribution toward [the] improvement of [the American] military position and national security." Foster and his predecessors had served their respective secretaries admirably.



*On 16 January 1953, just days before their terms in office expired, Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett presented Deputy Secretary William Foster with the certificate of appreciation, the Defense Department's highest civilian honor at that time. (National Archives)*



*Deputy Secretary of Defense William Foster (seated, far right) and Secretary of Defense Robert Lovett (seated, 2nd from right) pose with incoming members of the Eisenhower administration, Secretary of Defense-designate Charles Wilson (seated 2nd from left) and Deputy Secretary of Defense-designate Roger Kyes (seated, left). Secretary of the Navy-designate and future Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Anderson is standing between Wilson and Lovett. (OSD Historical Office)*

<sup>42</sup> "Seoul Said to Lack All-Front Force," *New York Times*, 24 Oct 1952; Minutes of Press Conference held by the Honorable William C. Foster, Deputy Secretary of Defense, 10 Nov 1952, folder Foster-DepSec, box 17, Biographical Files, OSD/HO; Poole, *JCS and National Policy*, 210–220; Foster interview, 27 Feb 1974, 20; Condit, *The Test of War*, 214–215.



The deputy secretary of defense post emerged from the secretary's need to have a subordinate who shared the burdens of overseeing the Department of Defense. The statutory language describing the deputy's duties was purposefully vague to permit the secretary of defense to task him with specific areas of responsibility. In the first four years after the deputy's position came into existence, however, there seemed to be little consistency in the deputy's role in the Pentagon. The first three deputies ultimately immersed themselves in areas in which they had the greatest expertise. Over time, as the burdens on the secretary of defense increased, the deputy secretary assumed greater importance within the defense establishment.<sup>43</sup>

### About the Author

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### About the Editor

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<sup>43</sup> SC 415784-S, Record Group 319-A, Army Signal Corps Still Photographs, folder Foster, William C., NARA II.

Foster's stint in the government was not over after the end of the Truman administration. In 1961, President John F. Kennedy appointed him the first director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency, a position he held until 1969. He died in 1984.





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