

II. Secretaries of Defense

The National Security Act of 1947, PL 80-253, 26 July 1947, which provided for a National Military Establishment, established the position of secretary of defense. Implementation of the act began on 17 September 1947 with the swearing in of the first secretary of defense.

The amendments of 1949, PL 81-216, 10 August 1949, established the Department of Defense (the NME of 1947) as an *executive* department, headed by a secretary of defense, with three *military* departments whose secretaries would separately administer their departments under the "direction, authority, and control" of the secretary of defense. The amendments specifically gave the secretary of defense the authority to perform any function vested in him, or with the assistance of any officials or organizations of the department. The amendments set up two new positions--a deputy secretary and a comptroller with the rank of assistant secretary. Three assistant secretaries, one of whom was the comptroller, were to perform duties as prescribed by the secretary, replacing the three special assistants created by the 1947 act.

The 1949 amendments also established an Armed Forces Policy Council (AFPC) to advise the secretary on broad policies regarding the armed forces. The secretary of defense served as chairman, with the power of decision. Members of the AFPC were the secretary; the deputy secretary; the secretaries of the Army, Navy, and Air Force; the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and the uniformed heads of the three military services. The AFPC took the place of the War Council created by the National Security Act of 1947.

The Committee on Department of Defense Organization, usually referred to by the name of its chairman, Nelson A. Rockefeller, issued a report to the secretary of defense on 11 April 1953. It included a legal opinion regarding the power and authority of the secretary, holding that the National Security Act, as amended, granted the secretary of defense "supreme power and authority to run the affairs of the Department and all its organizations and agencies." The legal opinion further emphasized the secretary's authority: "The Secretaries of the military departments, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, all officers and agencies and all other personnel of the Department are 'under' the Secretary of Defense. Congress has delegated to the Secretary of Defense not only all the authority and power normally given the head of an executive department, but Congress has, in addition, expressly given the Secretary of Defense even greater power when it made the Secretary of Defense 'the principal Assistant to the President in all matters relating to the Department of Defense.'"

Reorganization Plan No. 6, 30 June 1953, transferred the functions of the Munitions Board, the Research and Development Board, the Defense Supply Management Agency, and the director of installations to the secretary. The Reorganization Plan added six new assistant secretaries and a general counsel.

PL 85-599, the Defense Reorganization Act of 1958, 6 August 1958, gave the secretary the authority to provide for "more effective, efficient, and economical administration and operation and to eliminate duplication."

Executive Order 10952, 20 July 1961, assigned civil defense functions to the secretary, but subsequently they were transferred elsewhere.

Unified and specified commands are responsible to the president and the secretary of defense for accomplishing assigned military missions within the operational chain of command from the president to the secretary of defense to the commands.

The secretary of defense is the principal defense policy adviser to the president and is responsible for the formulation of general defense policy and policy related to all matters of direct and primary concern to the Department of Defense, and for the execution of approved policy. The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) is the principal staff element of the secretary in the exercise of policy development, planning, resource management, fiscal, and program evaluation responsibilities.

JAMES V. FORRESTAL. Born 15 February 1892. Except for serving briefly during World War I in the U.S. Navy, was with Dillon, Read and Company from 1916 until 1940. Under secretary of the Navy, 1940-1944, and secretary of the Navy, 1944-1947. On 17 September 1947 took the oath of office as the first secretary of defense, a position he kept until 28 March 1949. Died less than two months after leaving office, on 22 May 1949.

- LOUIS A. JOHNSON. Born 10 January 1891. Active service with the U.S. Army in France during World War I. Subsequently was a partner in the law firm of Steptoe and Johnson. Helped to found the American Legion and was its national commander in 1932-1933. Served as assistant secretary of war from June 1937 until July 1940. On 28 March 1949 sworn in as secretary of defense and served until 19 September 1950. Returned to law practice. Died on 24 April 1966.
- GEORGE C. MARSHALL. Born 31 December 1880. Commissioned in the U.S. Army in 1902 and rose to chief of staff in September 1939, serving throughout World War II until November 1945. Secretary of state from 1947 to 1949. President of the American Red Cross, 1949-1950. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 21 September 1950. His appointment required a special congressional waiver because the National Security Act prohibited a military officer from serving as secretary if he had been on active duty within the previous 10 years. Served until 12 September 1951. Died on 16 October 1959.
- ROBERT A. LOVETT. Born 14 September 1895. A Navy pilot in World War I with service overseas. Joined Brown Brothers Harriman and Co., eventually becoming a partner. Served as a special assistant to the secretary of war beginning in December 1940 and then as assistant secretary of war for air from April 1941 to December 1945. Under secretary of state from July 1947 to January 1949, and deputy secretary of defense, 4 October 1950 to 16 September 1951. Succeeded Marshall as secretary of defense on 17 September 1951, served until 20 January 1953. Returned to Brown Brothers Harriman and Co. Died on 7 May 1986.
- CHARLES E. WILSON. Born 18 July 1890. An electrical engineer, joined General Motors Corporation in 1919 and became president in 1941. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 28 January 1953 and served until 8 October 1957. Died on 26 September 1961.
- NEIL H. McELROY. Born 30 October 1904. Employed by Procter and Gamble from 1925, served as president from 1948 to 1957. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 9 October 1957 and resigned on 1 December 1959. Became chairman of the board at Procter and Gamble. Died on 30 November 1972.
- THOMAS S. GATES, JR. Born 10 April 1906. U.S. Navy during World War II, participating in campaigns in Europe and the Pacific. Associated with Drexel and Co., 1925-1953. Appointed under secretary of the Navy in October 1953, secretary of the Navy on 1 April 1957, and deputy secretary of defense 8 June 1959. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 2 December 1959 and served until 20 January 1961. Joined Morgan and Company, becoming president in 1962. Died on 25 March 1983.
- ROBERT S. McNAMARA. Born 9 June 1916. Entered the U.S. Army Air Forces in 1943 and served until 1946. Held various offices in the Ford Motor Co., including president and director, from 1946 to 1961. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 21 January 1961 and served until 29 February 1968. President of the World Bank, 1968-1981.
- CLARK M. CLIFFORD. Born 25 December 1906. U.S. Navy during World War II and after, from 1944 to 1946, with assignment as naval aide to the president. Subsequently served as special counsel to the president from 1946 until 1950. Became a partner in the law firm of Clifford and Miller in 1950. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 1 March 1968 and served until 20 January 1969. Returned to law practice. Died on 10 October 1998.

- MELVIN R. LAIRD. Born 1 September 1922. U.S. Navy from 1942 until 1946. Congressman from Wisconsin, 1953-1969. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 22 January 1969 and served until 29 January 1973. Became adviser to the president from June 1973 to February 1974, and then became senior counselor to *Reader's Digest*.
- ELLIOT L. RICHARDSON. Born 20 July 1920. U.S. Army in World War II, 1942-1945. Assistant secretary of health, education, and welfare, 1957-1959. Lieutenant governor of Massachusetts, 1965-1967. Under secretary of state, 1969-1970. Secretary of HEW, 1970-1973. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 30 January 1973 and served until 24 May 1973. Then became U.S. attorney general on 25 May 1973, served until October 1973. Died on 31 December 1999.
- JAMES R. SCHLESINGER. Born 15 February 1929. With Rand Corporation from 1963 to 1967. Assistant director of the Bureau of the Budget in 1969. Assistant director of the Office of Management and Budget, 1970-1971. Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission, 1971-1973. Director of the Central Intelligence Agency in 1973. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 2 July 1973 and served until 19 November 1975. Subsequently, first secretary of the new Department of Energy, October 1977 until July 1979.
- DONALD H. RUMSFELD. Born 9 July 1932. U.S. Navy aviator and flight instructor in the 1950s. Member of Congress from Illinois, 1963-1969. Assistant and counselor to President Nixon in 1969. Director of the Office of Economic Opportunity and director of the Cost of Living Council. U.S. ambassador to NATO from 1973 to 1974. Assistant to President Ford in 1974-1975, serving as director of the White House Office of Operations. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 20 November 1975 and served until 20 January 1977. Subsequently chief executive officer of G.D. Searle and Company.
- HAROLD BROWN. Born 19 September 1927. Staff member, Lawrence Livermore Laboratory, 1952-1960, president, 1960-1961. Director of defense research and engineering, 1961-1965. Secretary of the Air Force, 1965 to 1969. President of the California Institute of Technology, 1969-1977. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 21 January 1977 and served until 20 January 1981. Joined the Johns Hopkins University School of Advanced International Studies.
- CASPAR W. WEINBERGER. Born 18 August 1917. During World War II served in the U.S. Army and became a member of General MacArthur's intelligence staff. Director of the Office of Management and Budget, 1972-1973. Secretary of health, education, and welfare from 1973 to 1975. General counsel, vice president, and director of the Bechtel Corporation from 1975 to 1981. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 21 January 1981 and served until 23 November 1987.
- FRANK C. CARLUCCI. Born 18 October 1930. U.S. Navy, 1952-1954. Director, Office of Economic Opportunity, 1970-1972. Under secretary of health, education, and welfare, 1972-1974. Ambassador to Portugal, 1975-1978. Deputy director of the CIA, 1978-1981. Deputy secretary of defense, 1981-1982. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 23 November 1987, served until 20 January 1989. (Deputy Secretary of Defense William H. Taft served as acting secretary of defense from 20 January 1989 until 21 March 1989).
- RICHARD B. CHENEY. Born 30 January 1941. Special assistant to the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, 1969-1970. Deputy to the presidential counselor, 1970-1971. Assistant director of operations of the Cost of Living Council, 1971-1973. Assistant to the president, 1975-1977. Elected to Congress from Wyoming in 1978 and served until March 1989. Took office as secretary of defense on 21 March 1989 and served until 20 January 1993.

LESLIE (LES) ASPIN. Born 21 July 1938. U.S. Army, 1966-1968. Taught economics at Marquette University, 1968-1970. Member from Wisconsin of U.S. House of Representatives, 1971-1993. *Chairman, House Armed Services Committee*, 1985-1993. Secretary of defense, 20 January 1993-3 February 1994. Died on 21 May 1995.

WILLIAM J. PERRY. Born 11 October 1927. U.S. Army, 1946-1947. Mathematician. Director, Sylvania/GTE Defense Electronic Laboratories, 1954-1964. President of ESL Inc, 1964-1977. Director of defense research and engineering, April-October 1977. Under secretary of defense for research and engineering, October 1977-January 1981. Director, Stanford University Center for International Security and Arms Control, 1989-1993. Deputy secretary of defense, March 1993-February 1994. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 3 February 1994 and served until 24 January 1997.

WILLIAM S. COHEN. Born 28 August 1940. A practicing lawyer, he served as mayor of Bangor, Maine, 1971-1972. Member of the U.S. House of Representatives, 1973-1979, and of the U.S. Senate, 1979-1997. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 24 January 1997 and served until 20 January 2001.

DONALD H. RUMSFELD. See previous entry, page 9. Served as chief executive officer, G. D. Searle & Co., 1977-1985. In private business, 1985-1990. Chairman and chief executive officer, General Instrument Corporation, 1990-1993. In private business, 1993-2001. Sworn in as secretary of defense on 20 January 2001.