

The Packard Commission, formally known as the President's Blue Ribbon Commission on Defense Management, was established by President Ronald Reagan in 1985. The commission was named after its chairman, David Packard, co-founder of Hewlett-Packard. The primary aim of the commission was to review and make recommendations on the procurement processes, organizational structure, and decision-making processes of the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD).

President Reagan created the commission amidst concerns about inefficiencies in defense procurement, particularly following a series of high-profile cases of perceived overspending on basic materials.

Detailed Findings of the Packard Commission:

1. Procurement Challenges:

- The commission identified excessive layers of management, each adding its own requirements and specifications, resulting in increased costs and delays.
- The defense acquisition process was seen as overly complex, leading to notable inefficiencies and an inability to get advanced technology to the warfighter quickly.
- They found that oversight was more focused on process and compliance rather than outcomes and performance.

2. Organizational Structure:

- The commission observed fragmented decision-making due to the existing organizational structure.
- There was a lack of integrated strategic planning and budgeting, which made it hard to align departmental priorities.

3. Operational Concerns:

- The military services (Army, Navy, Air Force, etc.) had a tendency to operate in silos, leading to redundancies and a lack of joint operational planning.

Key Recommendations in Detail:

1. Simplifying Acquisition:

- Streamlining the acquisition process by reducing unnecessary regulations and procedures.
- Encouraging competition in defense contracting to improve quality and reduce costs.
- Emphasizing prototyping and incremental development to get technology to the field faster.

2. Organizational Changes:

- Establishment of a Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff to strengthen joint military operations and decision-making. This position would play a pivotal role in coordinating activities across the military branches.

- Creation of a Deputy Secretary of Defense for Acquisition to centralize and prioritize the acquisition function within the DoD.

3. Operational Integration:

- Encourage the integration of operations across the military services. This was a push towards "jointness," meaning the different branches would train, plan, and operate together more closely.
- This recommendation aimed to reduce redundancies and improve the effectiveness of military operations.

4. Improved Budgeting and Strategic Planning:

- Aligning the DoD's budgetary process with its strategic goals, ensuring that funding decisions matched the department's long-term priorities.
- Implementing multi-year budgeting to bring more predictability and stability to the defense budget.

Legacy and Further Impacts:

- 1. Goldwater-Nichols Act:** Many of the commission's recommendations were codified in the Goldwater-Nichols Department of Defense Reorganization Act of 1986. This legislation reworked the command structure of the U.S. military and brought significant reforms, particularly in promoting joint operations.
- 2. Shift in Defense Acquisition:** Post-commission, there was a noticeable shift in the defense acquisition strategy, moving away from a compliance-focused approach to a performance-focused approach.
- 3. Joint Operations:** The emphasis on "jointness" led to a transformation in U.S. military operations, with different branches of the military cooperating more closely in planning and executing missions.

Overall, the Packard Commission's influence was profound, leading to structural, operational, and procurement reforms that have shaped the U.S. defense establishment for decades.