

INTRODUCTION

ON JULY 22, 2004, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, also known as the 9/11 Commission, issued its final report. In many respects, it is an exceptional product—well written, authoritative, and admirably nonpartisan. It is nonetheless a curiously myopic study. In the preface to their report, the commission members describe their mandate as “looking backward in order to look forward,” yet the report rarely looks back much further than the mid-1980s.¹ In spite of the fact that the report recognizes the need for substantive reform of the US national security bureaucracy, no attempt is made to help readers to understand why these institutions were created, or how they have evolved. Perhaps as a consequence of this ahistorical perspective, the specific recommendations of the 9/11 Commission are relatively modest and adjustive—an exercise in gardening rather than architecture.²

The 9/11 Commission is not alone in this regard. Virtually all of the current proposals for institutional reform focus on a particular cluster of agencies involved in related activities, such as intelligence gathering or homeland security, rather than on the national security bureaucracy as a comprehensive system of interdependent institutions. Indeed, the evolving debates about reform of portions of the national security system bear little resemblance to the wide-ranging discussions that led to the creation of that system in the period after World War II. This book is designed to introduce readers to those discussions. My focus is upon the 1947 National Security Act, the single omnibus bill that created all of the leading institutions of the US national security bureaucracy, except for the Department of State. The National Security Act is arguably the second most important piece of legislation in modern American history—surpassed only by the 1964 Civil Rights Act. But while there are hundreds of books written about the political and social controversies surrounding the 1964 legislation, there is still no comprehensive record of the disputes and compromises that shaped the 1947 National Security Act.

This is especially strange since the early Cold War period has been the subject of so much insightful analysis. Indispensable historical studies such as Melvin Leffler’s *A Preponderance of Power*, richly detailed biographies such as David McCullough’s *Truman*, and definitive memoirs such as Dean Acheson’s *Present at the Creation* do an excellent job of informing readers about the domestic and international environ-

2 INTRODUCTION

ments in 1947, but they do not focus on the debates that culminated in the passage of the legislation.³ I attribute this to the understandable preoccupation with the various crises and confrontations that crowded the headlines during this period. It can be argued, however, that none of the well-known events of the immediate postwar era—not the passage of the Marshall Plan, not the declaration of the Truman Doctrine, not even Kennan’s dispatch of his “Long Telegram”—was as significant as the 1947 National Security Act in determining both the direction of American foreign policy and the future of American society.

I would be remiss, however, if I gave readers the impression that there are no available studies that place a special emphasis on the 1947 Act. Three books in particular deserve special mention. The first is Michael Hogan’s essential history of the Truman era, *A Cross of Iron*.⁴ Professor Hogan weaves references to the 1947 legislation throughout his narrative. He also provides, in chapter 2 of his book, an excellent introduction to many of the key players and issues in the postwar struggle over institutional reform.

Both Professor Hogan and I seek to demonstrate how a national security ideology was articulated and institutionalized by the framers of the 1947 National Security Act. We nonetheless differ, to some extent, in our views about the genesis of that ideology. At the core of Hogan’s history is a struggle that is played out during the early Cold War period between the proponents of national security and the defenders of “traditional values” of anti-statism and anti-militarism. My study finds the roots of the national security ideology in America’s prewar and wartime experience, and places a much greater emphasis upon Pearl Harbor as a turning point in modern American history. John Gaddis has observed that “surprise attacks tend to sweep away old conceptions of national security and what it takes to achieve it.”⁵ My book goes even further, arguing that Pearl Harbor redefined for most Americans both the nature of international relations and the responsibilities of their government toward its citizens. It quite literally changed the way Americans thought about time and space, with attendant implications for the way they thought about their own vulnerability. The fact that America could be directly attacked from a distance of nearly 4,000 miles did not just “sweep away old conceptions of national security”; it *established* the concept of national security as the unchallengeable standard against which all future foreign policy decisions were to be made.

The lessons of Pearl Harbor were central to the postwar debates about the need for a global military presence backed up by the threat of nuclear retaliation. Under these circumstances, the priority at the end of the war was the development and maintenance of what Melvyn

Leffler has described as “a strategic frontier” from which the United States would be able to take “‘timely’ offensive action against the adversary’s capacity and will to wage war.”⁶ Of special significance for this study, the lessons of Pearl Harbor also guided efforts to reform the procedures for gathering and sharing intelligence, coordinating the activities of military and civilian advisers, and harnessing the nation’s economic and scientific resources in the name of preparedness. Finally, Pearl Harbor convinced the American people that preparing for the next sneak attack was everybody’s business, all the time, at home and abroad. In the jargon of contemporary constructivist scholarship, America has been “securitized” ever since.⁷

Viewed from this perspective, postwar debates that culminated in the passage of the 1947 National Security Act were not so much a struggle between two competing philosophies, as Michael Hogan argues, as a dialogue about how best to adjust American values and interests to the non-negotiable demands of national security. Pearl Harbor had such a powerful effect on the thinking of the participants in this dialogue that we are justified in calling the network of institutions created by the 1947 Act the “Pearl Harbor system.”

The second study that deserves mention at the start of this book is Aaron Friedberg’s *In the Shadow of the Garrison State*.⁸ Professor Friedberg shares with Michael Hogan an interest in the question: “Why didn’t America become a garrison state after World War II?” Friedberg provides rich historical and theoretical insights about efforts before and after World War II to harness the American economy to the demands of the state. His arguments were of special value to me as I sought, in Chapter 5 of this volume, to develop my own explanations for the rise and fall of the National Security Resources Board (NSRB). The NSRB was envisioned by some of the framers of the 1947 National Security Act as one of the most important pillars of the new Pearl Harbor system. Professor Friedberg’s book helped me to understand why it did not survive the intense bureaucratic struggles that took place during the Truman era.

I also owe an intellectual debt to Professor Amy Zegart for the many insights that I have taken away from her book *Flawed by Design*.⁹ This book comes closest to mine in its focus upon the 1947 National Security Act. Drawing upon, and then going beyond, insights from the new institutionalist literature, Professor Zegart stresses the importance of the bargains struck during the formulation of the 1947 National Security Act in determining the trajectories of the major national security agencies for the next five decades. Her emphasis on the evolution of three components of the national security bureaucracy—the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Central Intelligence Agency, and the National Secu-

4 INTRODUCTION

rity Council—distinguishes her study from mine, which discusses all of the agencies created by the 1947 legislation. We also differ in terms of time frame. Professor Zegart surveys the entire period from the end of World War II to the 1990s, whereas my study extends from 1937 to 1960.

The most important difference between Professor Zegart's study and this volume is that she is more inclined than I am to downplay the role of interest groups and, in particular, Congress during the formative period of the National Security Act. Indeed, her claims regarding the limited importance of these actors in the formulation of national security legislation is fundamental to her revisions of theories associated with the new institutionalist literature. My study treats these actors as more or less determinative depending on the issues involved and the interests engaged. One reason for our disagreement on this important point is that she does not focus upon the monumental disputes associated with the Truman administration's efforts to unify the armed services, or on the subsequent development of the Department of Defense—two related issues that were greatly influenced by Congress. Nor does Professor Zegart discuss in any detail the creation, development, and ultimate failure of the NSRB, an agency whose activities inevitably engaged numerous economic and political interests in the name of national security.

What all three of the above-mentioned studies have in common with this book is an emphasis upon what Professor Friedberg calls the "interior dimension of American grand strategy."¹⁰ In this sense, they are all responses to demands by students of international relations for more empirical research on the circumstances under which "conceptions of self and interest" that guide a nation's foreign policy become institutionalized.¹¹ One reason why there are still very few studies of the genesis of a nation's foreign policy institutions is the traditional historiographic problem of infinite regression (e.g., should a study of the ideational and institutional elements of German *Weltpolitik* begin with Bismarck's arrival in 1862 or his removal in 1890?). From time to time, however, history provides us with a relatively unambiguous starting point for a particular story. The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor is one such event. This book will identify the defining elements of the Pearl Harbor system, by recourse to the debates that took place between 1937 and the passage of the 1947 National Security Act. The participants in these debates were, in the truest sense, "present at the creation" of an entirely new approach to American foreign policy.¹²

THE PEARL HARBOR SYSTEM

Chapter 1 of this study takes readers back to 1937 and introduces them to a small group of policymakers and scholars who had come to the conclusion that America's approach to international affairs was dangerously naïve and unsustainable. My focus in this section is on Franklin Roosevelt's efforts to prepare the nation for war without running afoul of the pervasive national mood of isolationism. I also introduce readers to some of the people who were recruited by Roosevelt between 1937 and 1941 to assist him in his "preparedness campaign." Some of these individuals—George Marshall, Dean Acheson, James Forrestal, Vannevar Bush—would continue after the war to play important roles in the creation and initial operation of the new network of national security institutions.

I also introduce readers to one academic: Professor Edward Pendleton Herring of Harvard. Prior to World War II, no one was more articulate than Herring in identifying fundamental problems in the existing system for foreign and defense policymaking, and no one was more visionary than Herring in his description of an alternative system. During the 1930s, Herring had drawn upon insights from political science and from the relatively new field of public administration in order to develop three related arguments. First, authoritarian regimes were gaining enormous economic and political advantages over democracies by their exploitation of modern technologies of communication and transportation. Second, management science could help America to replicate the efficiencies of totalitarian governments without doing violence to our democratic values. Third, in order for the United States to become competitive, however, it would have to break free of the grip of special interests that had a stranglehold on both the American economy and the American political system. In 1936, Herring developed this last argument in a book entitled *Public Administration and the Public Interest*, in which he argued that the central problem of our time was "the need for promoting a purpose of the state over and above the purposes of the medley of interests that compose it."¹³

Shortly before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Herring published another important book, *The Impact of War*, which was designed to alert Americans to the immediate and overriding "purpose of the state." It was the first attempt by any American scholar to develop, in a systematic and sustained way, the *concept* of national security. Herring argued that technological developments (most notably, air power) and political developments (the global spread of totalitarian regimes) had converged to present the United States with an unprecedented threat,

6 INTRODUCTION

which demanded new procedures for the formulation and management of its foreign and defense policies. The first step toward a more competitive system was to “give thought to the possibility of adapting our governmental institutions to the maintenance of a powerful military force as part of the normal structure of our society.”¹⁴ Herring recognized that this idea would be strongly resisted by many Americans, due to their “persistent suspicion of militarism.” But he was encouraged that “by a strange paradox, the most practicable means of approaching this goal today is under the urgency of the red spurs of war.”¹⁵ He also claimed that even after the national emergency was over, the United States would need to remain militarily strong and constantly on guard, since “the Roman phalanx was a necessary preliminary to the *Pax Romana*.”¹⁶

Pearl Harbor confirmed for virtually all Americans the wisdom of Herring’s prewar arguments. It also established the concept of national security as the standard against which all future foreign policies would be judged.

National security required all Americans to adopt a completely new attitude about their safety. An editorial in the *Washington Post* concluded that “the real villain” in the story of Pearl Harbor “was the bureaucratic mind.”¹⁷ Changing the way that all citizens thought about security was essential for America’s long-term safety. Herring put it this way in 1941: “The happiest future we could envisage in this troubled world is our nation so aroused and unified by the threats from abroad that we could appear too strong for any nation to dare attack.”¹⁸ Following Pearl Harbor, few people questioned Herring’s theory of deterrence, although policymakers would continue to debate issues of resource management and prioritization.¹⁹

Before Washington could turn its attention to the challenge of deterring the next Pearl Harbor, however, it needed to win the war. This is the focus of Chapter 2 of this book. America’s experiences with the management of World War II provided policymakers with valuable tests of institutions and procedures for civilian-military cooperation, intelligence sharing, and interservice policy coordination. America’s primary ally, Great Britain, played an especially important role in providing Washington with institutional models. World War II also provided some negative lessons for postwar planners. America’s experience with the supply side of the war effort convinced most experts that, contrary to prewar expectations, loosely administered capitalism outperformed centrally controlled systems for economic management. The challenge was to find an approach to postwar planning that would ensure a high level of preparedness without imposing undue restraints

on American business and without crippling America's dynamic research and development sector.

During the last stages of the Second World War, the Washington policy community began to prepare for an intensely divisive battle over the construction of a completely new network of institutions. It is important to note the extent to which this was uncharted territory for all the participants. What they were attempting to imagine had no counterpart in American history during periods of peace. It is not surprising, under these circumstances, that these individuals frequently relied upon metaphors and analogies—citing “gestapos,” “automatons,” “monstrosities,” “men on horseback,” and “Prussian General Staffs”—to make their arguments. It should also come as no surprise that these references were usually vague and often inaccurate, since they were chosen more for their emotional impact than for their descriptive value.

The most important analogy for most participants was, of course, the Japanese “sneak attack” on Pearl Harbor. The initial round of hearings on institutional reform took place while the Joint Committee Hearings on the Investigation of the Pearl Harbor Attack were in full swing. The final report of the Pearl Harbor hearings, issued on July 20, 1946, ran to twenty-three volumes and 25,000 pages. Its findings were never far from the minds of the framers of the 1947 National Security Act.

Pearl Harbor provided four specific lessons for postwar planners. First, the United States needed new machinery for collecting and interpreting information regarding potential enemies, before those enemies acquired the ability to “sucker-punch” us. Second, Washington needed to provide military leaders with a permanent and influential role in the formulation of peacetime foreign and security policy. Third, policymakers needed to ensure that both interservice cooperation and civilian-military cooperation would be as seamless as possible. Finally, America needed new procedures for harnessing the energies of its factories and its scientific laboratories in support of national security.

The fact that policymakers agreed on the need for institutional reforms did not make it any easier for them to agree upon the details. Chapters 3 and 4 introduce readers to the two factions whose competing visions of institutional reform tended to dominate the postwar debates. Chapter 3 focuses on the efforts by Harry Truman, George Marshall, and the Army leadership to convince Congress and the American people that unification of the armed services was the *sine qua non* for an effective national security system. Chapter 4 focuses on the campaign by James Forrestal and the Navy to oppose Truman's campaign for armed forces unification, at the risk of being accused of insubordination. This chapter also discusses the alternative vision of national

8 INTRODUCTION

security policymaking proposed by Ferdinand Eberstadt and his Unification Study Group. Their report was to serve as a key point of reference for the framers of the 1947 National Security Act. It also provided the Navy with the ammunition that it needed for a counterattack against the proponents of armed forces unification.

The battle over institutional reform dragged on for three years, and closure was only achieved when the primary sponsor of the legislation, President Harry Truman, accepted defeat on major elements of his plan. When the intense bureaucratic and political infighting finally ended, almost no one was satisfied with the compromise legislation that was signed into law on July 26, 1947. Kenneth Royall, the incoming Secretary of the Army, predicted that the Act “will not save money, will not be efficient, and will not prevent interservice rivalry.”²⁰ Many commentators complained that the legislation had failed to accomplish its most important task—complete unification of the armed services. Most participants in the debates nonetheless believed that they had accomplished something significant.

In fact, the scope and ambition of the 1947 National Security Act was astonishing. It created a National Military Establishment, which became the Department of Defense in 1949. It gave the Air Force an independent status and provided the Joint Chiefs of Staff with statutory identity. It established the National Security Council (NSC), the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), and a cluster of lesser-known institutions, including the National Security Resources Board, the Munitions Board, and the Research and Development Board. In accordance with the lessons of Pearl Harbor, the legislation created

- new machinery for both the collection and coordination of peacetime intelligence;
- new mechanisms for civilian-military dialogue;
- new, albeit feeble, institutions designed to encourage cooperation among the separate military branches; and
- new procedures for mobilizing and managing the nation’s economic and scientific resources.

Of course, no one could predict what would happen when the Pearl Harbor system began to operate. On the day that the legislation passed the House, *The New York Times* concluded, “The measure was conceded to be experimental. It was agreed that it might require refinement later, as dictated by trial operation.”²¹ It would take a little over a decade for the key agencies of the national security bureaucracy to establish their institutional identities within Washington. In one case (the National Security Resources Board), a campaign of bureaucratic empire-building backfired, and the agency did not survive. In two other cases (the

Munitions Board and the Research and Development Board), the agencies created by the 1947 legislation were either not strong enough or not agile enough to endure the intense bureaucratic competition that characterized the initial shake-out period. The reasons for the premature demise of each of these agencies are analyzed in Chapter 5 of this study. In the case of the National Military Establishment (NME), attempts were made to correct serious defects in the initial legislation by means of successive amendments (in 1949 and 1958) and revisions (most notably, Reorganization Plan no. 6 in 1953). The transition from the NME to the Department of Defense, and the development of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, are the subjects of Chapter 6 in this volume. Finally, the efforts by Truman and Eisenhower to adapt the NSC and the CIA to their personal preferences and management styles, and their attempts to resist interference by Congress in the administration of these agencies, are discussed in Chapter 7 of this volume.

A VISIT WITH DR. HERRING

Pendleton Herring played a unique and important role in the story of the 1947 National Security Act. His scholarly writings prior to World War II helped to introduce academics and policymakers to the concept of national security. He also played an active part in the management of the war effort, applying his theories of public administration to problems of supply and interagency coordination as a consultant to the Army and Navy. As chairman of the Committee of Records of War Administration, Herring supervised the publication of *The United States at War*, the official administrative history of the Second World War. This survey of the activities of 158 wartime agencies provided Herring with the opportunity to look closely at practical tests of interservice and civilian-military coordination. It also served as a valuable resource for the participants in the postwar debates over institutional reform.

Herring also contributed in a more direct way to these debates. In June 1945, he joined Ferdinand Eberstadt and a team of about thirty other experts in a Navy-sponsored study of postwar institutional reform that became the primary reference for the framers of the 1947 National Security Act. Following the completion of the Eberstadt Report, Herring resigned from the Harvard faculty and turned his energies to an entirely new challenge. He became the Secretary of the United Nations Atomic Energy Commission, working with Bernard Baruch and others to hammer out an agreement for the international control of nuclear power. Herring then moved into the rapidly grow-

10 INTRODUCTION

ing community of philanthropic and scholarly foundations. In 1948, he became the president of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), a position that he was to retain for the next two decades.

It was in his capacity as president of the SSRC that Herring was to directly confront one of the worst aspects of the national security system that he had been instrumental in creating. In 1954 he testified before the Reece Committee on Tax-Exempt Foundations, which had been created to find links between the major foundations and the world Communist conspiracy. As the only witness who was allowed to testify on behalf of the foundations, Herring gave a spirited defense of the record, and the loyalty, of the leading foundations. Without claiming credit for the outcome, Herring noted in his annual report for the SSRC that during his testimony, “a dispute arose among members of the Committee which was followed by cancellation of all further public hearings.”²²

It was Herring’s role in the creation of the postwar national security bureaucracy that led me to his door in 1998. But I was also anxious to get to know him as a person, for it seemed to me that he personified America’s “rise to globalism” from the late 1930s to the end of the 1960s.²³ Prior to World War II, he had been one of the first people to make the case for a new way of thinking about America’s place in the world—based on the concept of national security rather than on the time-honored concept of national interest. During the war, and in the immediate postwar era, he helped to identify the key premises and institutions of a new policymaking system built around the concept of national security. But he also worked with the United Nations in an attempt to mitigate the most dangerous aspects of the evolving bipolar international situation. Finally, Herring found himself on the wrong side of the logic of national security during the Reece Committee hearings, as one of many targets of McCarthyism.

By the time that I visited Herring in his home in Princeton, New Jersey, I was well along in my archival research relating to the creation of the US national security bureaucracy, and I had come across references to him on several occasions. In preparation for my visit, I had read Herring’s books and made a visit to the Harvard archives to look for information about his years as a teacher. But interviews are tricky, and one can never adequately prepare for such meetings. Dr. Herring and his wife Jill made my task exceptionally easy and enjoyable. Both were in excellent health. When I commented on the fact that he was not wearing glasses at 95, Herring responded that he had no problem reading, but he could not follow the small scrolling messages on the bottom of his TV screen. I assured him that he was better off. I was

particularly pleased to discover that Pen Herring still had an impressive memory for events that took place over five decades ago. He brought me straight back to 1945 (“a terribly hot summer in Washington . . .”), and then further back, to the period just prior to World War II, when it seemed that the entire world was on the verge of being crushed by the relentless forces of totalitarianism. . . .