

**The Undergraduate Journal of Social Sciences Presents:**

**Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson (Ret.)**

*Former Chief of Staff to Secretary of State Colin Powell*

PART II of the UJSS Editorial Series on the  
Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex

*Colonel Lawrence B. Wilkerson visited West Point to address cadets studying International Relations. Colonel Wilkerson discussed the lack of strategic consideration in American Foreign Policy, the value of perspective when considering grand strategy, Iraq and Afghanistan, the global financial crisis, and the “strategic choice” facing the United States that would be codified in the 2010 defense budget.*

*Following his formal remarks, Colonel Wilkerson elaborated on his thoughts in an exclusive interview with the UJSS, discussing policymaking in the United States and the Congressional-Military-Industrial complex.*

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*UJSS: Sir, you have expressed concern over the shortsightedness of American policymaking. This limited strategic view has been attributed to political agendas that limit their consideration to the next election cycle. Is this system dangerous? How can this lack of strategic foresight be mitigated?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** While I don't agree that it is dangerous I do agree that it has its danger points, not the least of which are the transitions between administrations. Enemies, if you will, understand how uncoordinated some things are during transitions and could take advantage of that. It usually takes us now, depending on the administration, anywhere from a month to one year to get going. That is a long time if you think about it. I've watched two administrations up close.

First, the George H. W. Bush administration which came out of the Reagan administration: indeed he (the President) had been Vice President for eight years, so it should have been smooth but wasn't. It takes a long time for everyone to get in place; he didn't even have a Secretary of Defense because of John Tower's inability to get approved. The other one is the Democrat, William Jefferson Clinton, and I watched them take a year, a full year, before they were running on all cylinders.

That is a long period of danger, a long period of disconcerting policy development. So there are danger points, but I don't think that the danger points outweigh the successes which have been created by this system, that we are able to transition without bloodshed, without bullets in the streets, and so forth. We go from leader, to leader, to leader, without any great turmoil or upheaval. I *do* think that we could do it better. I think that the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century demand that we do it better.

This means that we need a new approval process, that we need a president to come in with his slate already developed and when he takes the oath of office, his slate within thirty days is approved or disapproved. We need to have ministerial-level people approved with lacquerty. We need transition teams to come in immediately after elections and begin to find out what it is to do this work at this level, especially if it is a change in parties. We need to have a whole lot smoother, more streamlined confirmation process, the learning curve must be a lot less steep, we need to have a better and shorter transition period from one president to another, from one department head to another, and a bureaucracy within that that is extremely competent and that is able to carry on through transitions. We need a better education and training system for the civilians that work in the bureaucracy, interagency groups, a system that is equivalent to that which the military has developed, to educate people throughout their career.

*UJSS: With these transition periods and shifts in ideology between parties, how can a consistent strategy be established?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** Continuity on main lines, main issues, can be established and can continue if you have some kind of overarching strategy that guides you. The strategy here that should guide every president is, I think, non-ideological. It is a strategy of realism, moving to protect American interests where American interests need to be protected. It is discarding of the ideological trappings that sometimes derail these sorts of things and that cause the greatest divisions when you have transitions. Interestingly though, when you look over our short history, you find that even though that ideological division comes in, ultimately, the policy comes back to conform with the previous administration after a couple of years of learning. Why can't we mesh out that learning and get smarter a whole lot quicker. This way those policies that should be continued are continued, and those policies that need change because they are clearly failing, are changed.

*UJSS: Let's transition now to the Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex. Does Secretary Robert Gate's defense budget proposal for 2010 reflect a break from the influence of the Complex? Will this result in a more pragmatic strategy based on the needs of the military and not the input of congress and defense contractors?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** I hate to speak for Secretary Gates, but I think a part of his thinking has to be not only the objective that he sees for the future, a shift to small wars as opposed to big wars, but also an attempt to take on the Military-Industrial-Congressional Complex which has become simply dysfunctional. Let's just look at what they do now.

First, they produce shoddy products that don't meet costs, that don't meet production dates, that don't meet the needs of the troops in the field. Second, since the end of the Cold War, the defense contractors have become immensely smaller than they were during that time. You have several that you can always name, like Lockheed, Boeing, Raytheon, etc. These often wind up being primary and subsidiary contractors of one another. This is what one would call a monopoly, [and] I think that this leads to some of the cost overrun and the shoddy products.

So what he [Gates] is trying to do is to kind of break out of that and make more contractors interested in defense work on more and smaller projects than the F-22 fighter or the latest navy destroyer. He's trying to get things like the mine resistant armor vehicles that are more relevant to small wars, while at the same time trying to get more diversified, trying to break up the defense industry and make it smaller and more competitive, building better products for less money, rather than the Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex we have today. I would hasten to add that I think his greatest opponent is Congress. There are Congressmen like John Murtha and Duncan Hunter and others who are so enwrapped in this system that their very existence virtually depends on these companies.

*UJSS: How does the Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex tie in with the “crisis du jour” decision making in the U.S. Government, does it exacerbate this problem?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** If you take Lockheed Martin, I am not picking on Lockheed, I have some good friends that work there, and make Lockheed Martin's share price go from twenty-six dollars, as it was in January of 2003, to one hundred plus dollars, as it was two years into the war, you would be naïve to say that it doesn't have an impact. Now did George Bush or Dick Cheney pick up the phone and say “we are going to war Lockheed, do you like it?” No, that doesn't happen. But there are influences and those influences are the Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex.

*UJSS: What are some ways in which the U.S. government, legislature and executive, could be reformed to impart greater strategic thinking?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** First of all, you need to have people who think that way, like Carl Vincent, Sam Nunn, Sam Rayburn, and Daniel Patrick Moynihan, people that can divorce themselves from the day and think about the future. The secret here with national security is to pull some of these kinds of people out of daily routines and make a joint oversight committee, give them oversight in a holistic way over the House and Senate. Once they have “mastered their portfolio,” if you will, give them appropriations authority for all of the accounts that fall under national security: DOD, Department of Homeland Security, State Department, a number of isolated accounts now that would be brought together and dealt with in a strategic way. [The thought process would be] “How does this contribute to our strategic objectives?” Right now, [Congress thinks] “how does this contribute to my home county?” “I am going to build this in my home county because they need money and jobs.” “I don't care whether it has a relationship with national security.” You need people up there thinking about national security. This is going to be tough because you are telling people with lots of pork to hand out that they won't be able to give out anymore.

*UJSS: In a previous interview with UJSS, Ambassador Robert Hutchings, suggested a strategic intelligence think tank within or subordinate to the National Security Council. Why would or why wouldn't this be effective?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** Of course this exists in the military. There is an attempt at this in the policy planning staff at the State Department; George Kennan and George Marshall set it up. It does not [do its job] that often because it gets pulled into the *crisis du jour*, it gets pulled into the

tactical considerations of the day. But, this could be another strategic thinking apparatus within the government. I admit it would not be a bad idea to have a subcommittee of this [notional] joint national security committee in Congress that would do this too, that would craft, in conjunction with the White House, State Department, and Defense Department, the document that eventually becomes the National Security Strategy.

*UJSS: In your experience, advising at the highest levels, is it your view that procurement drives policy? Or vice versa?*

**Col. Wilkerson:** I think that the principle impetus [of the Congressional-Military-Industrial Complex] is that policy drives procurement. I do think that, particularly now with six or seven big contractors which often collude on big weapons systems, that procurement has a tendency, through its weight in dollars alone, to push policy. That is frightening. That is scary. I also think that the military today has a tendency to push policy. As a case in point, when the combat command in Hawaii, Pacific Command, starts challenging China's South China Sea economic zone. This is the military influencing policy with respect to our biggest strategic relationship in the world. While you may say, "the President ordered that," I can say, having been at the point of the spear a couple of times myself, the President was surprised when he found out that an aircraft carrier or battle group was in a certain place at a certain time. So, the military has its own way of pushing policy. At a recent brief, the Navy War College came down to Washington to explain a recent change in Navy thinking. The Navy has decided that the Atlantic is a backwater and that the Indian Ocean is the new place for them to sail. I asked the question: "who talked to the President about this?" "Does the Secretary of Defense know that the Navy has made this decision?" Of course these guys were from Newport, a strategic studies group, but the Navy has decided that it is out of the Atlantic and in the Indian. Ok, that is a major strategic decision. I hope someone knows about that.

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