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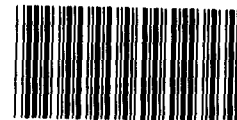
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STATEMENT OF  
CHARLES A. BOWSHER  
COMPTROLLER GENERAL OF THE UNITED STATES  
BEFORE THE  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON LEGISLATION AND NATIONAL SECURITY  
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS  
ON  
OPERATIONS OF THE MILITARY SERVICES'  
SENIOR SCIENTIFIC ADVISORY COMMITTEES

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss our report to you on the operations of the three senior scientific advisory committees of the military services: The Army Science Board, the Air Force Scientific Advisory Board, and the Naval Research Advisory Committee. You also requested that we review the operations of the Department of Defense's (DOD's) Defense Science Board (DSB). When we began our work, we learned that the board's chairman had requested DOD's Inspector General to review the board's operations. It was then agreed that we would limit our review to the military services' scientific advisory committees. I understand that Inspector General Sherick will also be discussing his report with you today.

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The senior scientific advisory committees were established to provide independent advice and information to the military departments. Their functions range from providing broad policy advice to providing specific technical recommendations for solving particular problems. The committees conduct their work primarily through ad hoc panels or task forces which perform specific tasks or undertake specific studies.

We found that in establishing their panels, the services do not always document the identification and resolution of panel members' potential conflicts of interest or their efforts to achieve balanced panel representation. In addition, they do not always announce panel meetings or prepare detailed minutes of panel activities as required. We believe that the services could better assure the appearance, as well as the fact, of panel independence and objectivity by (1) documenting potential conflict-of-interest determinations when individuals are selected as panel members, (2) documenting the steps followed in selecting panel members, and (3) announcing all meetings in advance and preparing detailed minutes of all meetings. These conclusions are similar to those of the Inspector General regarding the operations of the Defense Science Board.

Although the committees and panels perform similar work, their operating procedures differ. Several of these differences stem from the fact that, in operating their committees and panels, the Army and Air Force are guided by (1) legislation and

regulations dealing with conflict of interest and (2) the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The Navy, on the other hand, is guided by these laws and regulations in operating its committee but does not believe its panels are subject to such requirements.

I would now like to briefly respond to questions raised in your request.

You asked us to determine if members of advisory committees appear to have conflicts of interest. Our review of available financial disclosure statements for 117 members of 18 service panels showed that 32, or 27 percent, were employed by or had financial interests (stocks or consulting fees) in organizations with contracts in areas that could be affected by panel recommendations. By reviewing employment affiliations of Navy panel members who were not required to submit financial disclosure statements, we identified two members from six panels who had similar appearances of conflicts. We did not, however, determine whether panel decisions did, in fact, affect any of the financial interests.

Although the services have procedures for reviewing financial disclosure statements when individuals are appointed to committees, these procedures do not require documenting the identification or resolution of potential conflicts of interest when members are assigned to panels. The Army and Air Force

have a two-stage process for reviewing science committee members' disclosure statements. A first review occurs when members are appointed to the full committee and a second review occurs when members are assigned to a panel. While the first review requires that the financial disclosure statements be signed by the reviewing officials to show that the review was completed, the second review requires no such documentation. Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether the second review identified or resolved potential conflicts as they related to individuals' membership on specific panels.

Naval Research Advisory Committee members are required to submit financial disclosure statements so a determination can be made if the member has a financial interest in Navy contractors. Naval Research Advisory Committee panel members who are not committee members do not submit financial disclosure statements because they are considered to be employees of Catholic University. Catholic University has a grant to provide administrative support to the panels. The other services consider panel members to be special Government employees who are required to file financial disclosure statements.

You also asked us to determine if all relevant points of view are represented in the advisory groups and their panels. We could not make this determination because of the diversity of the topics reviewed by the scientific advisory committees. We did, however, look at the steps the services took to comply with

the Federal Advisory Committee Act requirements that (1) panel membership be fairly balanced in terms of representative points of view and functions to be performed, (2) panel advice and recommendations not be inappropriately influenced by the appointing authority, and (3) the committees and panels have procedures for announcing and preparing minutes for meetings.

The General Services Administration, which provides guidance for implementing the act, defines balance as having committee membership represent a cross section of interested persons and groups with demonstrated professional or personal qualifications or experience to contribute to the functions and tasks to be performed. DOD Directive 5105.18, which implements the act, does not address the issue of balance. Army and Air Force implementing regulations require that efforts be made to include individuals representing different points of view and different types of employment. The Navy does not have written procedures to address the issue of balanced representation.

The services attempt to achieve balanced representation through their selection of panel members. Army Science Board panel members are usually selected by one or more of three individuals--the board chairman, the board executive director, or the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of the Army for Research, Development, and Acquisition. While panel chairs are responsible for selecting Air Force Science Board panel members, we were informed that the executive secretary of the board

played a significant role in the selection processes for three of the six panels we reviewed. The Naval Research Advisory Committee chairman selects panel members based on his personal knowledge of the professional reputations and affiliations of the people asked to serve. Of the 18 service panels we reviewed, only one Army panel documented the factors considered in selecting members.

We found that panel advice and recommendations could appear to be inappropriately influenced by the participation of service personnel in panel decisionmaking. For example, military personnel participated in writing and/or formulating decisions in two Army panels and one Air Force panel. Four of the six Navy panels we reviewed included DOD/Navy employees from the Navy command affected by the panel's work. These employees participated in the panel's decisionmaking process. We believe that military views and perspectives are essential to panel information gathering and deliberations. However, since panels are established to provide independent advice, the use of military personnel in panel decisionmaking could lead to questions about how "independent" such advice is. One approach to balance the needs for panel awareness of the military perspective and panel independence would be to have military personnel serve only as advisors or briefers instead of participants in panel decisionmaking.

The Federal Advisory Committee Act requires that advisory committees publish notices of meetings in the Federal Register and prepare detailed minutes of meetings. We found that notices were not published for 13 of 55 Army and Air Force panel meetings. Detailed minutes were not prepared for 19 of 32 Army panel meetings. Although minutes were prepared for all of the Air Force panel meetings, we did not believe they were sufficiently detailed to meet the act's criteria. The Naval Research Advisory Committee did not publish notices or prepare minutes for any panel meetings because it does not consider its panels subject to the act.

You also asked us to determine the extent to which the same individuals participate in multiple advisory groups or panels within DOD. We analyzed the membership of 133 panels established by the Defense Science Board and the 3 services' scientific advisory committees during calendar year 1978 through 1982 and found that 164--or about 15 percent--of 1,049 individuals served on more than one advisory panel.

Finally, you asked that we determine the full cost of the scientific advisory committees. The services identified some costs including compensation, travel and per diem allowances for board members and personnel serving as support staff. For fiscal year 1982, these costs were \$482,000, \$622,538, and \$203,235 for the Army, Air Force, and Navy, respectively. The

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services did not, however, identify such costs as compensation and travel expenses for DOD personnel who attended panel meetings as members, briefers, or advisors.

In addition, Air Force officials advised us that the cost of using aircraft to transport committee members to meetings is not included as part of the committee's annual costs. We were advised that the Army and Navy science advisory committees do not use military planes to transport members to committee meetings.

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This concludes my prepared statement. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.