

5. THE CONCEPT OF WEAPON CENTERS

It has been recommended by the Office of the DDR&E that the Military Departments seriously consider the establishment of large weapon centers, each embracing a broadly conceived technical program concentrated on a particular military problem area associated with general-purpose warfare. Whereas in most cases the Services' in-house RDT&E competence in a given mission—ASW, for example—is now spread among many laboratories at numerous geographic locations, the weapon-center concept would draw these varied strengths together and unite them in a single comprehensive technical team. In effect the weapon center would be a project-oriented applied laboratory in which there would be continuous mission-discipline interaction. The establishment of a weapon center could result in (1) the elimination of laboratories that are marginal with respect to either competence or size and (2) a consolidation of interests.

It should be emphasized that, while the weapon-center concept is one possible aid toward achieving R&D effectiveness, it is by no means a necessary requirement for a successful program. Other factors—technical management, personnel policies, financial management, etc.—are of at least equal importance in determining the effectiveness of in-house efforts.

There appears to be considerable variation in the willingness of the Services to plan for the establishment of weapon centers. The Navy and the Army now have some mission-oriented laboratories in which a number of actual developments are carried on by Government engineers. The Air Force laboratories, on the other hand, are organized on the basis of technology areas. If there is a lack of enthusiasm for new centers, it is partially owing to the many organizational changes in the past few years and to the feeling that concentration on making the present system work better by examining new management approaches would result in more progress.

The Task Force believes, however, that the establishment of weapon (-systems) centers is a good concept for long-range planning, since it provides an opportunity to combine in-house resources in order to work more directly and effectively on critical military problems.