

THE  
PENTAGON LABYRINTH:  
10 SHORT ESSAYS TO HELP YOU  
THROUGH IT



FROM 10 PENTAGON INSIDERS,  
RETIRED MILITARY OFFICERS AND SPECIALISTS  
WITH OVER 400 YEARS OF DEFENSE EXPERIENCE

STRAUS MILITARY REFORM PROJECT  
CENTER FOR DEFENSE INFORMATION

# The Pentagon Labyrinth

10 Short Essays to Help You Through It

From 10 Pentagon Insiders, Retired Military Officers and Specialists  
With Over 400 Years of Defense Experience

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# Preface

This handbook aims to help newcomers as well as seasoned observers learn how to grapple with the problems of national defense, using insights our authors have gleaned in the course of their more than 400 years of combined experience.

Each year, people are hired to address defense issues in the Pentagon, on Capitol Hill, in think tanks and throughout the media. Some of them will have experience in the armed forces; some have studied national security in universities, some have worked in the Pentagon or the defense industry. Many of them might consider a handbook for defense “newbies” to be beneath them, but few of them will have had the depth of experience across all the disciplines represented by the authors of this book: decades in military service, intelligence, weapons design, Pentagon defense management and analysis, weapons testing, journalism, military history and congressional staff work.

*The Pentagon Labyrinth* is intended to benefit defense professionals in the early stages of their career, but it very probably has some worthwhile lessons for people who have been working in national security for a long time. It is not just that the conventional defense wisdom (resting on clichés such as “American military technology gives us the winning edge”) is so often misinformed. It is also that experienced journalists, senior congressional staffers and seasoned Pentagon officials too often take in and pass on these bromides without thinking about their implications, intended or unintended. Examples abound:

- How many times does one read articles stating the cost of a weapon—the F-35 is a contemporary example—as described by a hired consultant for a manufacturer or an advocate from inside the Pentagon? That price tag is published as if it were authoritative; there’s not a hint that more objective sources would cite a very different figure. The handbook’s essay on journalism (“Penetrating the Pentagon” by George Wilson), as well as the one on costs, might help journalists reporting on weapons serve their readers better, and those essays might help readers more effectively identify the journalists they may want to read more, or less, from in the future.
- It is not just conventional wisdom but biblical text that the F-22 is a world class fighter aircraft; almost no one believes anything else. The ninth essay in this handbook (“Evaluating Weapons: Sorting the Good from the Bad” by Pierre Sprey) can start the reader on an adventure that leads to a very different conclusion.
- Herds of analysts, each with decades of experience inside the Washington Beltway, read with great seriousness the Pentagon’s

periodic “Quadrennial Defense Review” and opine on its contents—without appreciating that it is fundamentally a sham analysis of the Pentagon’s problems. The first essay here (“Why Is This Handbook Necessary?” by Chuck Spinney) will explain.

- Seasoned staffers on Capitol Hill have taken offense at the suggestion that senior Pentagon civilians and high ranking military officers would lie to them. Yet the Constitution’s system of checks and balances and the separation of powers in our federal government were conceived on just that premise: that interested factions in the Pentagon bureaucracy could—and do—go to great lengths not only to mask what is going on inside DOD but actively to present an alternate picture. The essay “Congressional Oversight: Willing and Able or Willing to Enable?” seeks to explain further.

The authors respectfully submit that even those who consider themselves expert in Pentagon matters can find something useful to learn in this handbook. Indeed, all of us who are the authors here have—simply by reading each other’s essays.

The format of *The Pentagon Labyrinth* may be a little different from what most readers are accustomed to. Each section is a brief essay, not a chapter. We have tried to make these short and readable, rather than dry academic exercises. The footnotes are at the bottom of each page, not only to show sources but also to provide explanations and some additional, thought-provoking references to allow the interested reader to probe more deeply. The footnote links in electronic copies of *The Pentagon Labyrinth* should come to readers as active links. For the hard copy we have tried to make the footnoted URLs easy to transcribe.

The handbook ends with a list of suggested readings, contributed by the authors. These readings are what we believe to be unusually informative documents that provide valuable further insights into the defense problems introduced in each essay. Many of the references are hard to find elsewhere; some have never been published before, even on the Internet; a few of them are of historic significance—even if they have been hard to impossible to find up to now.

We have also created two Web sites for the entire text of this handbook and the informational materials. Items not previously available on the Internet were scanned to be electronically available for this handbook. These include selections of the works of Chuck Spinney and Pierre Sprey that are not otherwise accessible, a classic article by Dr. Thomas Amlie on the vulnerability of radar, unpublished Pentagon reports and other hard-to-find, invaluable materials. Download any of the essays or other materials at the Web sites for the Straus Military Reform Project of the Center for Defense information (at <http://www.cdi.org/program/index.cfm?programid=37>, or [www.cdi.org/smrp](http://www.cdi.org/smrp))

and for the Project on Government Oversight (POGO) (at <http://dnipogo.org/labyrinth/>).

We expressly encourage you to download the handbook. The Center for Defense Information copyrighted the material for technical reasons, but the copyright will not be enforced against anyone who downloads the files of *The Pentagon Labyrinth* and who makes our text available without charge to anyone else. In fact, we encourage you to circulate the handbook liberally, or even to create your own Web page for it.

As you read this handbook, you will surely come across passages you will disagree with. If you find yourself saying “That can’t be true!”—or something pithier—we encourage you to delve into the sources for that passage. If the available sources don’t answer your doubts, contact the author and ask him to explain further or to provide you with more material. The email address of each author is listed on the first page of the section titled “Suggested Contacts, Readings and Web Sites.” This was done specifically because our authors are seriously committed to the aim of this handbook: helping the reader think more clearly about defense problems.

The handbook follows a logical order. We start with Chuck Spinney’s “Why Is This Handbook Necessary?” to address the underlying moral, intellectual and physical decay that besets our armed forces. The next four essays address how to approach “people” issues, overwhelmingly the most important ingredient of any successful military force. Col. Chet Richards’ sixth essay addresses the next most important ingredient: “ideas” and the deficiencies in our strategic thinking. The last four essays address how to tackle our all-too-painful physical problems: money and budgets, weapons, testing and the buying of weapons. On the other hand, the handbook can be read in any order that interests you; each essay is self-standing.

Though each essay is also short, we hope they stimulate a continuing stream of new insights as you dig into the materials provided and use them to expand your contacts with the informed and ethical people we hope you will find based on your experience with *The Pentagon Labyrinth*.

Winslow T. Wheeler, Editor

*The Pentagon Labyrinth* aims to help both newcomers and seasoned observers learn how to grapple with the problems of national defense. Intended for readers who are frustrated with the superficial nature of the debate on national security, this handbook takes advantage of the insights of ten unique professionals, each with decades of experience in the armed services, the Pentagon bureaucracy, Congress, the intelligence community, military history, journalism and other disciplines. The short but provocative essays will help you to:

- identify the decay—moral, mental and physical—in America’s defenses,
- understand the various “tribes” that run bureaucratic life in the Pentagon,
- appreciate what too many defense journalists are not doing, but should,
- conduct first rate national security oversight instead of second rate theater,
- separate careerists from ethical professionals in senior military and civilian ranks,
- learn to critique strategies, distinguishing the useful from the agenda-driven,
- recognize the pervasive influence of money in defense decision-making,
- unravel the budget games the Pentagon and Congress love to play,
- understand how to sort good weapons from bad—and avoid high cost failures, and
- reform the failed defense procurement system without changing a single law.

The handbook ends with lists of contacts, readings and Web sites carefully selected to facilitate further understanding of the above, and more.

