

Andras Szalai
PhD Candidate
Department of Political Science
Central European University

**A Sole Group of ‘Superscientists’ -
Explaining RAND’s Role in the Cold War US Military Bureaucracy 1946-1962**

Paper Proposal for the 2009 Annual Doctoral Conference

Keywords: history of science, RAND, defense rationalists, nuclear strategy, bureaucratic politics

The relative success of civilian expert employment for the construction of military policies during WWII and also of the methods used (most notably operations research) led to a postwar proliferation of advisory committees, both in the US government and in the private sector. Many decision makers thought at that time that science would be a crucial element of US superiority and therefore must be given full governmental support. The military was also quick to react to the trend – all branches of the US military created or maintained their own OR-based groups after the war.

The Air Force's Project RAND stood out from both the general postwar science policy framework and the institutional framework of nuclear policy planning. It was a product of the strategic uncertainty introduced by the atomic bomb – the military not having real life experience with nuclear warfare had to rely on the theoretical simulations of civilian scientists to answer questions of national defense. In 1948, soon after its creation RAND established itself as a nonprofit advisory corporation but remained an exclusive contractor of the Air Force. What made RAND so unique and seemingly so successful in strategy innovation were its independence, the Air Force's *laissez-faire* attitude towards RAND's projects and the casual, inspiring interdisciplinary environment of the institution, as emphasized by many former RAND scientists.

Given the sheer number of volumes written on the success of RAND analysts and their theories, but also their generally positive accounts of RAND employees about RAND's university-like atmosphere, it is puzzling that RAND remained a fairly unique (Air Force) institution within the US military. If RAND was so successful as a policy innovator for its patron and it was so successful due to its organizational structure, it is curious that other branches of the military – most notably the Navy – did not adapt RAND's institutional blueprint, neither as a help to construct their own strategies, nor to support their arguments in the bureaucratic struggle for budgets.

This paper aims to answer the question *why RAND remained unique in the US military*. It will rely on the toolkit of bureaucratic politics and organizational studies to highlight the exact role of RAND as an institution in the policymaking process, and also in the bureaucratic debates on the control over atomic weapons and nuclear strategies in the 1946-1962 period using available primary sources and up-to-date secondary literature. As a conclusion, it urges a serious reinterpretation of RAND's influence on the policymaking process and claims that the influence can rather be interpreted as discursive – while actual political influence for the defense rationalists only came about with the Kennedy administration.