Chapter 8

THE MCNAMARA ERA

The assassination of President Kennedy on November 22, 1963, shook the Joint Chiefs as much as the country at large and left a void that the new President, Lyndon B. Johnson, moved quickly to fill. To reassure the Nation and to promote stability, he pledged continuity between his administration and Kennedy's. "I felt from the very first day in office," he recalled, "that I had to carry on for President Kennedy. I considered myself the caretaker of both his people and his policies."[1] One of those who stayed on was Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. The dominant figure at the Pentagon before Kennedy's death, McNamara would exercise even more power and authority during Johnson's Presidency.

By the time Johnson became President, the Joint Chiefs were grudgingly coming to terms with McNamara's policies and methods. Under Kennedy, McNamara had firmly established his authority, using it to carry out two major revolutions within the department—one, to redesign the military strategy and Armed Forces of the United States to achieve greater flexibility and effectiveness; the second, to install new methods of analysis and decisionmaking in the areas of planning, management, and acquisition.[2] Like Kennedy, McNamara grew to be skeptical of JCS advice and once characterized the Joint Chiefs as "a miserable organization" hamstrung by collegial and parochial interests.[3] For analytical support, he established his own group of advisors known as the "whiz kids," made up predominantly of young and eager civilians who routinely checked and double-checked the programmatic recommendations of the military Services and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Out of this process emerged both a new approach to solving defense problems and a significant expansion of the power and authority vested in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

THE MCNAMARA SYSTEM

By late 1963, when the Johnson administration assumed office, McNamara had largely accomplished what he initially set out to do—transform the Department of Defense into a more tightly knit and efficient organization. The original impetus for these changes lay in the increased defense spending during the final years of the Eisenhower administration in response to Sputnik and the perceived Soviet lead in missile technology. To cope with these issues, Eisenhower had backed away from the rigid budget

ceilings he had imposed earlier and began accepting increases in military spending that soon threatened to get out of hand. Further additions to defense spending at the outset of the Kennedy administration exacerbated the situation. In assessing the underlying causes of the problem, McNamara and his staff identified two principal culprits: a compliant Congress, which was prone to overspend on defense programs; and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, whose elaborate but ineffectual strategic planning process had failed to apply the necessary discipline in determining military requirements, curb excessive expenditures, and eliminate unnecessary duplication in Service programs. Though there was not much McNamara could do to reform Congress, he used his newly minted authority under the 1958 amendments to the National Security Act to bring defense planning and programming under his direct control.

The system McNamara imposed during the first 2 years of the Kennedy administration came into effect with limited consultation between the Secretary's office and the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kennedy wanted a more robust defense posture, which he expected McNamara to achieve, in part, through better management. At the heart of McNamara's reforms was the use of computer modeling techniques known as "systems analysis," which the Secretary and his staff used to develop 5-year projections of military spending based on "program packages" in various functional areas such as strategic nuclear forces, general purpose forces, continental defense, and airlift and sealift forces. The organizing mechanism was the planning, programming, budgeting system (PPBS), a sophisticated decisionmaking apparatus for integrating Service requirements and national objectives. Recommendations to the President took the form of draft Presidential memorandums (DPMs) detailing force levels and their funding for the upcoming fiscal year and projections for the next 4 years. Initially in 1961, McNamara submitted two DPMs for the President's consideration; by 1968, when he stepped down, he was submitting 16.[4]

Through refinements to the Joint Program for Planning, the JCS had tried, with mixed success, to develop something similar in the 1950s. The focus of the JCS effort had been the Joint Strategic Objectives Plan (JSOP), a mid-range projection of military requirements.[5] When the Joint Chiefs adopted the JSOP format in the early 1950s, they envisioned it serving as a statement of integrated requirements that would be updated annually to assist in smoothing out the ups and down of the budget cycle. But because of disagreements over basic strategy—especially the relative balance between strategic and general purpose capabilities—the Services were constantly at odds over force-level recommendations, known in JCS parlance as "force tabs." By the end of the decade, the Joint Chiefs had given up trying to produce an integrated plan and had turned the JSOP into a compilation of unilateral Service estimates, organized in no particular order of priority, as their projection of future needs. Invariably, these estimates exceeded available funding.[6]

As a rule, McNamara and his staff paid little serious attention to the JSOP, which they and other critics of the JCS system dismissed as a "wish list." In the spring of 1962, McNamara introduced an alternative means of calculating requirements known as the Five-Year Defense Program (FYDP), a mission-oriented projection of future costs and manpower. To justify the estimates in the FYDP, the Office of the Secretary of Defense prepared a lengthy and detailed analysis known as the Secretary's "posture statement." Under Lemnitzer's leadership, the Joint Chiefs sought more generalized guidance and supported the adoption of a broad basic policy paper, similar to those generated under the Truman and Eisenhower administrations. However, after General Maxwell Taylor's arrival as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, the JCS position changed. Finding little practical value in such papers, Taylor prevailed in getting the project cancelled.[7] In January 1963, President Kennedy confirmed that the project was dead and indicated that the Secretary's posture statement, along with other "major policy statements" by senior officials, would constitute the country's basic national security policy.[8]

McNamara hoped that, using his posture statement as guidance, the Joint Chiefs would turn the JSOP into "a primary vehicle for obtaining the decisions on force structure necessary for validating the ensuing budget."[9] The first Chairman to take up the task was General Taylor, whose efforts yielded mixed results. Knowing how intractable the JCS system could be, Taylor had no illusions and told Joint Staff officers assigned to preparing the JSOP that reaching a consensus on the rationale for force requirements was imperative, no matter how difficult the task. As a first step, he ordered the JSOP redesigned to incorporate some of the same supporting rationales as in the Secretary's DPMs. But even though there was some progress toward harmonizing Service interests, neither he nor his successor, General Earle G. Wheeler, USA, could ever totally eliminate Service "splits" and present the Secretary with a fully integrated statement of military requirements. On the contrary, instead of going down, the number of splits went up, from 13 in 1962 to 43 in 1963 and 47 a year later.[10] From the mid-1960s on, with Wheeler in charge and attention focused on meeting requirements in Vietnam, the Joint Chiefs lost interest in trying to reform the JSOP and left it as it was—a compilation of Service estimates in no particular order of priority that routinely averaged 25 to 35 percent above authorized levels.[11]

RECONFIGURING THE STRATEGIC FORCE POSTURE

McNamara's most ambitious reforms were in reconfiguring the size and composition of the strategic nuclear deterrent. Kennedy wanted a more flexible force posture with less emphasis on nuclear retaliation, but he had also campaigned for the Presidency on claims that the United States had fallen behind the Soviet Union in

ICBMs. Though McNamara suspected soon after taking office that the infamous "missile gap" was overstated, it was not until August–September 1961 that Kennedy came to a similar view.[12] In consequence, during the administration's early months, McNamara was under heavy pressure from the White House to make "quick fixes" to bolster strategic forces that would shore up the defense posture. Paying little attention to the slow-moving Joint Chiefs, he turned to his systems analysis experts to produce the program he needed. Drawing heavily on work done earlier at the RAND Corporation and in the Weapons Systems Evaluation Group, McNamara and his staff promptly assembled a list of remedial measures—acceleration of the Polaris missile submarine program, increased production of Minuteman ICBMs, and improved alert measures for portions of the manned-bomber fleet.[13] To help offset the cost of these improvements, McNamara accelerated the phase-out of older systems (notably the Atlas and Titan I ICBMs, the Snark intercontinental cruise missile, and the B–47 bomber, long the work horse of the Strategic Air Command) and ordered a closer look at several other high-profile programs. Most prominent among the latter was the B–70 supersonic bomber, the planned follow-on to the B–52, which McNamara canceled over strenuous objections from Air Force Chief of Staff General Curtis E. LeMay.[14]

McNamara was concerned that "some in the U.S. Air Force" were striving under the massive retaliation doctrine for nothing less than a first-strike capability that would completely disarm the Soviet Union.[15] Persuaded that such a force posture was neither sound nor practicable, he asked the Joint Chiefs to develop a "doctrine" ending reliance on massive retaliation and establishing in its place a set of controlled responses allowing for pauses to negotiate an end to nuclear exchanges.[16] The JCS cautioned that acquiring the requisite capabilities would be expensive; in April 1961 they added a further caveat that to pursue the matter at the present time could "gravely weaken" nuclear deterrence.[17] These replies seem only to have whetted McNamara's interest all the more, and for the next several years he and the Joint Chiefs engaged in a running battle to redefine U.S. strategic doctrine. Much of the conflict centered on the particulars of the SIOP—the Single Integrated Operational Plan for nuclear retaliation against the Sino-Soviet bloc—but there were also broader considerations affecting the worldwide disposition of forces and the design and acquisition of new weapons systems. By the time all was said and done, the United States had adopted a new principle as the basis for its nuclear strategy. Known as "assured destruction," the new concept rested on a "triad" of land-based ICBMs, submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs), and long-range bombers.

Assured destruction was part massive retaliation and part controlled response. As McNamara described it to President Johnson in December 1963, assured

destruction was "our ability to destroy, after a well planned and executed Soviet surprise attack on our Strategic Nuclear Forces, the Soviet government and military controls, plus a large percentage of their population and economy (e.g., 30 percent of their population, 50 percent of their industrial capacity, and 150 of their cities)." Damage beyond those levels, McNamara believed, would be gratuitous and not cost-effective.[18] McNamara would have preferred a more controlled and measured execution of strategic options, and on two occasions—at a closed meeting of the NATO ministers in Athens early in 1962 and publicly at Ann Arbor, Michigan, that spring—he lofted the trial balloon of a "counterforce/no-cities" doctrine that downplayed attacks on urban-industrial areas in favor of retaliation against high-priority politico-military targets. Yet the counterforce doctrine, as McNamara conceived it, failed to catch on. Considered impractical by the Joint Chiefs, it received an even cooler reception in Europe, where many leaders viewed it as weakening deterrence by relieving the Soviets of the threat of wholesale nuclear destruction.[19] Khrushchev, for his part, suspected a ruse. Upon learning of the Ann Arbor speech, he thought McNamara was trying to conceal a secret expansion of America's nuclear arsenal.[20]

JCS skepticism rested on the high demands that the counterforce/no-cities doctrine would place on strategic assets. Except for LeMay, a die-hard proponent of massive retaliation, the Joint Chiefs were amenable to adding flexibility to the SIOP and to strategic plans in general.[21] But they insisted on firm assurances of having the time and money to make the necessary changes in plans and force structure. To execute something as complex as the no-cities strategy, the JCS estimated, would involve expanded requirements for weapons and supporting command, control, communications, and intelligence (C3I) that would necessitate funding well above current and foreseeable levels. Though McNamara and his systems analysts routinely picked apart the JCS numbers, they were never able to overcome the chiefs' fundamental argument that it would take an unstinting dedication of resources extended over a period of years, if not decades, to achieve reasonable confidence of success. In consequence, McNamara gave up on seeking sweeping revisions in the SIOP and settled for piecemeal changes resulting in the gradual introduction of greater flexibility and more selective targeting options.[22]

To meet the Secretary's targeting requirements, the Commander in Chief, Strategic Air Command (CINCSAC), General Thomas S. Power, estimated that SAC would need 10,000 ICBMs by the end of the decade.[23] Favoring quantity over quality, Power wanted as many weapons as possible with which to threaten the Soviets.[24] Taking a more reserved approach, the Joint Chiefs recommended between 1,350 and 2,000 deployed ICBMs.[25] Comparing JCS estimates with the intelligence

on existing and projected Soviet capabilities, McNamara concluded that the decisive factor was the number of targetable bombs and warheads, not delivery vehicles. Operating on this premise, he persuaded President Johnson to accept the eventual leveling-off of strategic programs at 41 ballistic missile submarines with a total of 656 launchers, 1,054 ICBMs, and approximately 600 long-range (B–52) bombers. According to those familiar with McNamara's thinking, the numbers he chose were arbitrary, but to give them greater credibility he paired them with the concept of assured destruction.[26]

Air Force leaders, who were most directly affected by the new force structure, were dismayed and openly critical. Having struggled for years to gain a decisive advantage over the Soviet Union, they saw their efforts coming to naught. As one later put it, McNamara and his OSD staff "did not understand what had been created and handed to them. SAC was about at its peak. We had, not supremacy, but complete nuclear superiority over the Soviets."[27] Yet to McNamara, nuclear superiority was an ephemeral thing, perhaps attainable for a short while but difficult if not impossible to perpetuate without an open-ended commitment of resources. Convinced that neither side could ever "win" a nuclear war, he opted for lesser capabilities, which he thought would do more to save money, promote deterrence, and achieve a stable strategic environment in the long run.

The impact of these decisions extended well beyond restructuring the strategic deterrent. First, it ended the Joint Chiefs' exclusive monopoly on strategic nuclear planning, a function they had exercised without serious challenge as one of their statutory responsibilities since World War II. Henceforth, insofar as basic policy and targeting doctrine were concerned, strategic nuclear planning became a shared responsibility of the JCS and civilian analysts in OSD. Only the actual preparation of SIOP remained firmly under JCS control. Second, it brought about a reordering of spending priorities that dramatically reshaped both the military budget and the Pentagon's claim on resources. From consuming nearly 27 percent of defense spending when the Kennedy administration took office in 1961, strategic forces declined to slightly over 9 percent by the end of the decade. During this same time, national defense (comprising the Department of Defense and related security programs) dropped from 9.1 percent of the country's gross national product, to 7.8 percent. McNamara hoped that, out of the savings realized from cuts in strategic programs, he could bolster conventional capabilities. Yet the demands of the Vietnam War and competition for funds from President Johnson's "Great Society" and other civilian-sector programs disrupted his plans. As a result, spending on general purpose forces increased only slightly over the decade, from 33 percent to just under 37 percent of the military budget.[28]

Still, when McNamara was finished, the country's defense posture was vastly different from when he became Secretary. Most notably, strategic doctrine placed less emphasis on carrying out preemptive attacks than at any time since the end of World War II. In terms of size, composition, and destructive power, U.S. strategic nuclear forces functioned largely as a second-strike deterrent geared toward inflicting punishing retaliation. Meanwhile, as the United States was reining in its strategic programs, the Soviet strategic buildup was starting to surge with the deployment of a second generation of ICBMs (see below). In consequence, by the early 1970s the two sides had reached approximate parity in strategic nuclear power. With the United States then preoccupied in Vietnam, the loss of strategic superiority was barely noticed at the time other than by the Joint Chiefs, a few astute Members of Congress, and a small coterie of academics and strategic analysts. But from that point on, the Joint Chiefs' confidence in being able to confront and deal with the Soviets would never be the same.

NATO AND FLEXIBLE RESPONSE

The quest for greater choice and flexibility that drove the Joint Chiefs to accept changes in U.S. strategic doctrine also inspired the Kennedy and Johnson administrations to seek a reordering of military priorities in Europe. During the 1961 Berlin crisis, President Kennedy had set great store in a nonnuclear buildup, both to impress upon the Soviets the seriousness of Western resolve and to expand the range of plausible military options to lessen the need for early recourse to nuclear weapons. But he had had trouble explaining to the Joint Chiefs and to the European Allies what he wanted to do and how. While flexible response was well formed in theory, it was less refined in practice. As a deterrent, its reliability and effectiveness were untested. In contrast, the concept of nuclear deterrence was widely known and accepted, and while it entailed great risks, it was also far more affordable to Europeans than a conventional defense, since the United States shouldered most of the costs of nuclear forces. Despite its ominous implications and potential dangers, a nuclear-oriented defense posture continued to enjoy strong support in Europe.

At the outset of the 1960s, NATO strategy (MC 14/2) rested on the Eisenhower era concept of massive retaliation and made no allowance for trying to defend Europe by fighting a large-scale conventional war.[29] The product of painstaking negotiation and delicate compromise, MC 14/2 embodied the "trip wire" theory, under which the primary function of conventional forces was to delay a Warsaw Pact invasion until NATO could mount a nuclear response. Some of the nuclear weapons at NATO's disposal were British, in accordance with a pledge made by Prime

Minister Clement R. Attlee in December 1950 dedicating his country's nuclear arsenal (once it came into being) to NATO.[30] But the bulk of the Alliance's atomic capabilities consisted of American bombs, warheads, and delivery systems assigned and/or deployed to Europe under bilateral agreements with the host countries and targeted by SACEUR in collaboration with the Joint Strategic Target Planning Staff in Omaha.[31] At the time, the United States still had Thor IRBMs in the United Kingdom and Jupiter MRBMs in Italy and Turkey. While the missiles were in the operational hands of the host governments, their warheads were under a "dual key" system, according to which the United States and the host country shared custody and control.[32] Looking beyond the current situation, General Lauris Norstad, USAF, who served as SACEUR until 1962, and his successor, General Lyman Lemnitzer, USA, both subscribed to the view that NATO should eventually have its own organic nuclear capability. With this end in view, the United States had come up with the idea of a multilateral nuclear force (MLF) in the late 1950s.[33]

Under the revised (flexible response) strategy that McNamara proposed, the trip wire would give way to a conventional defense as far forward as possible to meet and defeat Soviet aggression near the point of attack. McNamara could see no practical application for tactical nuclear weapons and lacked confidence in using them without risking escalation to a full-scale nuclear exchange. Rather than relying on tactical nuclear weapons, he stressed the security NATO enjoyed under the protective "umbrella" of the U.S. strategic deterrent, a concept known as "extended deterrence." But with U.S. policy and doctrine in flux, European leaders wanted more concrete assurances of nuclear support. Hence their continuing interest, now stronger than ever, in achieving something along the lines of the MLF. On both sides of the Atlantic, military planners continued to believe that tactical nuclear weapons were NATO's first line of defense and that selective use of atomic firepower, even though it might heighten risk, would not necessarily result in total war. Weighing one thing against another, the Joint Chiefs urged McNamara to move cautiously in making changes in NATO's strategy and defense posture and to observe "a proper balance between nuclear and non-nuclear forces."[34]

Had this been the Truman or Eisenhower administration, there probably would have been an in-depth interagency study, with detailed inputs from the Joint Chiefs and other agencies, coordinated through the NSC, to develop a master plan of action. But neither President Kennedy nor those close to him, including McNamara, had the patience for what they considered the tedious consensus-building and hair-splitting staff work of the past. As usual, McNamara paid less attention to professional military advice than to his civilian systems analysts. First up for review was the Soviet Order of Battle. Using computerized models, OSD analysts concluded

that it was practically impossible for the Soviet economy to train, equip, and sustain, along with other forces, 175 front-line divisions, the benchmark figure applied by Western intelligence since the late 1940s for "sizing" the Soviet army. Applying different methods, the CIA reached a similar conclusion. Based on a reexamination of evidence accumulated over the past decade, the CIA calculated that instead of 175 divisions, the Soviets had closer to 140, with at least half at reduced strength, some no more than cadres. Persuaded that previous estimates had exaggerated the Soviet threat, McNamara became convinced that with modest increases in Alliance spending (about $8.5 billion spread over 5 years) and technical improvements, NATO could carry out a "forward strategy" and hold its own in a conventional confrontation with the Warsaw Pact.[35]

While McNamara had some valid points, he and his staff presented their arguments clumsily to the Europeans. In so doing they antagonized the NATO allies and made them more resistant than ever to change. As a result, the Europeans became suspicious of the Kennedy administration's whole approach to nuclear deterrence, from its contemplated shift at the strategic level to a counterforce/no-cities doctrine, to its proposed curbs on theater and tactical weapons.[36] What most European political leaders and military planners wanted was more nuclear support, not less, and greater control over the assets at hand in case the United States reneged on its commitments. McNamara, conversely, was set on limiting both.

THE SKYBOLT AFFAIR

Throughout the debate over Europe's nuclear future, the Joint Chiefs found themselves increasingly marginalized as McNamara and his whiz kids took matters more and more into their own hands. While it was one thing for the JCS to be ignored, it was quite another to have a majority recommendation blatantly overruled as happened with the "Skybolt" program, which McNamara decided to cancel in November 1962. Initiated under Eisenhower, Skybolt was a strategic air-to-surface ballistic missile being developed by the Air Force in collaboration with the British, who planned to use it to prolong the active service life of their obsolescent Vulcan bombers. Late in 1959, seizing on an offer from Washington to codevelop Skybolt, the British shelved a similar program ("Blue Streak"), which they had been pursuing on their own.[37] With a planned range of over 1,000 miles, Skybolt's mission was to carry out stand-off attacks against targets inside the Soviet Union. By the end of the Eisenhower administration, however, technical problems and rapidly escalating costs threatened the program's future. Aware that these issues could scuttle Skybolt, President Kennedy saw an opportunity to pressure the British into phasing out their

nuclear deterrent, in keeping with the administration's policy of curbing nuclear proliferation. In April 1961, he authorized McNamara to explore such a possibility if the missile failed to measure up.[38] McNamara continued to nurse the project along, but in August 1962 both the OSD Comptroller, Charles J. Hitch, and the Director of Defense Research and Engineering, Harold Brown, advised McNamara to terminate Skybolt. From the technical data laid before him, McNamara concluded that Skybolt was "a pile of junk."[39]

Despite his growing skepticism concerning Skybolt, McNamara hedged a final decision on the program's future. On November 8, he told the British ambassador that the United States was "reconsidering" the program, but conveyed the impression that any action was conditional upon the receipt of JCS views.[40] As part of their annual review of the Secretary's budget submission, the Joint Chiefs weighed in with a split recommendation. Insisting that Skybolt was necessary to maintain a "clear margin of superiority," the Service chiefs unanimously favored retaining the program. However, the Chairman, General Taylor, disagreed. The newest member of the JCS, Taylor had no vested interests to protect and felt that he could view the situation more objectively. Terming Skybolt "a relatively marginal program," he shared the prevailing view in OSD that the money could be better spent on other systems.[41]

In the past, upon receiving a split recommendation, the Secretary of Defense invariably sided with the majority or sought a compromise. But in this case, Taylor's lone dissent prevailed. While taken on technical and cost-effectiveness grounds, McNamara's decision to cancel Skybolt nevertheless had strong geopolitical overtones. Without Skybolt, McNamara knew that the only readily available alternative the British had was the Blue Steel Mk I, an air-launched missile with limited range and penetration capabilities. Lacking a more up-to-date and effective system, Britain's entire nuclear weapons program would face an uncertain future.[42] In early December, McNamara flew to London and presented British Minister of Defence Peter Thorneycroft with three options—continue Skybolt as a solely British program, adopt a less capable U.S. weapon, the "Hound Dog," or participate in whatever arrangements emerged from ongoing discussions to create an MLF. Lurking in the background was a fourth possibility—British acquisition of Polaris technology. But to McNamara's surprise, Thorneycroft did not raise it. In fact, the British Ministry of Defence had explored this option earlier but considered it too costly and incompatible with Britain's overall weapons and shipbuilding program.[43]

Just before Christmas, at a mini-summit between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Harold Macmillan at Nassau, a solution emerged. In preparation for the meeting, Taylor asked McNamara whether he should attend to assure the

availability of a senior military advisor should the need arise. McNamara told the Chairman to stay home since "substantive discussions" appeared unlikely.[44] Whether McNamara simply misread the situation or was purposefully excluding the CJCS is unclear. Yet even if Taylor had been there, the outcome doubtless would have been the same. Conceding that Skybolt was a lost cause, Macmillan agreed that acquiring Polaris was the only choice that made sense if Britain were to remain a strategic nuclear power. While the British would supply their own nuclear warheads, the boats and missiles would conform to U.S. design. The decision was technically without prejudice to the future of the UK's independent deterrent, but it came with strings attached that severely limited British freedom of action. Most constraining of all was the requirement that all forces acquired by the UK under the agreement be "assigned and targeted" as part of a NATO nuclear force in keeping with current practice. Only if Britain's "supreme national interests" were at stake could it withdraw its Polaris boats from NATO command and control.[45]

DEMISE OF THE MLF

Over the long run, the Nassau agreement probably created more problems than it solved. Not only did it show the Kennedy administration backtracking from its declared policy of curbing nuclear proliferation; it also resurrected the notion of a U.S.-UK "special relationship," which the French, Germans, and other Europeans resented. In fact, the close links forged between Washington and London in World War II were long gone. But by agreeing to share some of its most sensitive military technology with the British—technology to which no other Alliance member had comparable access—the Kennedy administration had left itself vulnerable to charges of favoritism.

Earlier, anticipating that problems of this sort might arise, the Kennedy White House had endorsed a variation on the theme of a NATO-wide multilateral force. The original MLF concept of the late 1950s had the strong personal imprint of the Supreme Allied Commander, General Lauris Norstad, who envisioned a mix of land- and sea-based medium-range ballistic missiles to replace aging aircraft and the obsolescent Thor and Jupiter missiles in the United Kingdom, Italy, and Turkey.[46] Had Norstad's conception of the MLF prevailed, NATO would have become, in effect, the fourth nuclear power, alongside the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union. But with the advent of the Kennedy administration, Norstad's vision faded almost immediately. Determined to reduce nuclear proliferation, President Kennedy discouraged the creation of an autonomous nuclear force under NATO and proposed in May 1961 that NATO concentrate on

strengthening its conventional forces rather than its nuclear posture. To minimize the risk, he reaffirmed an offer made by President Eisenhower that the United States would dedicate five U.S. Polaris submarines to NATO and move toward the next stage—the creation of a full-blown MLF—"once NATO's nonnuclear goals have been achieved."[47]

Though McNamara and the Joint Chiefs saw no compelling military need for the MLF, they went along with the idea largely in deference to the enthusiastic backing it had among Kennedy loyalists in the State Department. To this group, the MLF was a crucial component of the President's "Grand Design" for European political, military, and economic integration, and another step toward eventually achieving European union. The Pentagon's main contribution was to push the concept in the direction of a predominantly, if not exclusively, sea-based system to expedite the project and to minimize costs through the use of existing technologies. The proposed force would comprise 25 surface vessels armed with 200 Polaris A–3 missiles, manned by multinational crews and funded collectively by contributions from NATO members. Costs would be limited to 1 to 5 percent of a nation's military budget. Though SACEUR would have operational command and control of the ships and their missiles, the United States would retain custody of the warheads and exercise ultimate veto power over their use. Many Europeans disparaged these arrangements as being not much better than the current system.[48]

The Kennedy administration's recasting of the MLF concept encountered no strong objections from the JCS. Lukewarm toward the MLF from the start, the chiefs supported it as long as it posed no excessive drain on American resources and caused no major diversion of assets from SAC or other major commands. Their most serious concerns had to do with the composition of the force. Siding with Norstad, they repeatedly urged McNamara to include mobile land-based MRBMs in the MLF, along with Polaris. More accurate and reliable than sea-based missiles, land-based MRBMs would give NATO a broader range of capabilities and options and help dissuade the FRG and others from developing independent nuclear capabilities outside of NATO.[49] McNamara, however, believed that a European land-based missile force would drive up costs and duplicate functions already assigned to U.S. strategic forces. Still, in deference to growing pressures, he agreed to think about it and acknowledged to NATO leaders in May 1962 that a land-based MRBM might be acceptable to the United States under the right conditions.[50]

Despite efforts by Washington to come up with an acceptable plan, European opponents of the MLF, led by the French, continued to make headway. Turning their back to a multilateral solution, the French remained focused on acquiring an independent nuclear *force de frappe*. A low-key affair for much of the 1950s, the

French nuclear program grew out of theoretical studies dating from 1951 and gathered momentum quickly in the aftermath of the Suez affair when the United States failed to support Britain, France, and Israel in their attack on Egypt. Convinced that the Americans were capricious friends, the French sought a "trigger" that was certain to bring U.S. nuclear power to bear regardless of American policy. Denied American assistance, France pursued collaboration with Italy and West Germany. With the return to power of General Charles de Gaulle in 1958, this brief partnership ended and France embarked on unilateral development. In February 1960, France detonated its first atomic explosion, a plutonium bomb, in the Sahara desert. At first, the French relied on air-delivered weapons using Mirage IV bombers. But as the 1960s progressed, they expanded their arsenal to include silo-based IRBMs and submarine-launched ballistic missiles.[51]

For de Gaulle, the force de frappe was part of a larger effort to restore France's faded power, glory, and international prestige. Leader of the Free French in World War II, de Gaulle had emerged from his wartime experience feeling that the British and Americans had slighted him. According to diplomatic historian Erin R. Mahan, de Gaulle carried "a smoldering animosity toward *les Anglo-Saxons*" practically his entire adult life.[52] Dismissing the MLF as "a web of liaisons," he opposed any measure that did not give France a veto over the use of nuclear weapons. In place of the MLF, he wanted a tripartite (Anglo-French-American) directorate, with each country having an equal voice in decisions on when and where to use nuclear weapons. After the Nassau conference, he became convinced that NATO was in the hands of an Anglo-Saxon cabal and redoubled his efforts to assure France its independence in foreign and defense affairs, a process leading eventually to the announcement in February 1966 that French forces would cease to operate under NATO's integrated command.

Never excessively strong to begin with, the momentum behind the MLF slowed to a crawl in the face of unrelenting French resistance and the lukewarm support of other NATO members. Scrambling to salvage what he could, President Kennedy sent veteran diplomat Livingston Merchant to Europe in the spring of 1963 to mobilize British and West German support for the beleaguered MLF. Despite Merchant's upbeat reports, he achieved no major breakthroughs.[53] About the same time, under pressure from McNamara, the Joint Chiefs offered a tepid endorsement of the MLF, not for its military value (which they assessed as negligible) but as a brake on nuclear proliferation. The chiefs' support, however, made little difference. By the time of Kennedy's assassination, the MLF was practically moribund, the victim of its own muddled objectives and shortcomings and waning interest on both sides of the Atlantic.[54]

Learning from his predecessor's experience, President Johnson distanced himself from the MLF and never seriously pursued it.[55] Nevertheless, on the off chance that there might be a revival of the idea, McNamara asked the Joint Chiefs in the summer of 1964 for a fresh analysis of the MLF's command and control procedures, with particular attention given to the prevention of an unauthorized or accidental detonation. McNamara wanted to reassure anxious Members of Congress that a "pilot project" involving a NATO crew operating a U.S. guided-missile destroyer, USS *Claude V. Ricketts*, would not compromise the custody and control of any U.S. nuclear weapons.[56] But even though the Navy rated the *Ricketts* experiment a success, it failed to generate any appreciable renewed support for the MLF. Dropped from further discussion at NATO meetings, the MLF passed into the history books sometime in late 1964 or early 1965, with the exact date of its obsequy still unknown.

A NEW NATO STRATEGY: MC 14/3

Following the MLF's demise, the Johnson administration sought other arrangements for nuclear sharing and coordination. The JCS wanted to explore closer cooperation through military channels between U.S. and French nuclear forces, with the goal of eventually integrating the force de frappe into NATO.[57] But as it became apparent that Paris was determined to pursue an independent course, not only in nuclear affairs but in all aspects of military planning, the United States dropped efforts to placate de Gaulle and refocused on strengthening neglected ties with the FRG and other NATO members. Meanwhile, with McNamara in the forefront, the Johnson administration continued to push for formal adoption of a forward defense strategy resting on flexible response. The upshot during 1966–1967 was the creation of a new high-level consultative body, the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG), to guide the Alliance in nuclear matters, and a reconfiguration of basic NATO strategy around a new policy directive (MC 14/3) that finally brought the era of massive retaliation to a close.

Overshadowing these accomplishments was a perceptible diminution of American power and influence within the Alliance, accelerated by the American preoccupation with Vietnam and the attendant diversion of resources. Unable to give NATO the time and attention accorded it in the past, the Johnson administration struggled to preserve U.S. leadership. The most serious challenger remained de Gaulle, whose assault on the U.S. dollar and unrelenting criticisms of American foreign policy left the Alliance in tension and disarray until February 1966, when France announced the withdrawal of the last of its forces from NATO command.

By any measure, de Gaulle's decision to secede from the NATO military structure (the first and only defection of its kind until Greece withdrew its forces in 1974 over the Cyprus issue) was a severe blow to Alliance solidarity and to American prestige. Summarily evicted from its facilities in France, NATO's weighty military and civilian bureaucracy had to scramble to find new offices and headquarters. Though relocating to Belgium proved less difficult than the Joint Chiefs expected, it was still a major disruption that left the Alliance dependent in the short term on hastily organized and largely untested lines of support and communication.[58]

The erosion of the American presence in Europe was especially apparent from the shrinking size and quality of the U.S. forces committed to NATO. As of the mid-1960s, just as the Vietnam buildup was beginning, the United States had almost 5 Army divisions, 3 regimental combat teams, and 28 combat air squadrons assigned to Europe. But because of rising costs, the French drain on U.S. gold reserves, and growing requirements in Southeast Asia, it was only a matter of time before the United States reassessed its military role in Europe. The Joint Chiefs invariably opposed cutbacks in U.S. forces. Arguing that it would weaken NATO's defenses, they saw any lessening of the U.S. presence as setting a poor example and making it harder for the United States to elicit troop contributions from the European Allies. As time passed, however, and as the requirements for Vietnam grew, the chiefs' position became increasingly untenable. The solution pushed by McNamara and his systems analysts was "dual-basing"—the prepositioning of supplies and equipment in Europe and the rotation of selected units between there and the United States. Initially opposed to the idea, the JCS became more amenable when Presidential preferences for McNamara's approach left them no choice. The near-term practical results were a 10 percent troop reduction and the withdrawal from Europe of two combat brigades of the 24th Mechanized Division and three tactical air squadrons. Pleading financial difficulties, the British, Dutch, and Belgians soon followed suit with similar troop reductions.[59]

Pressures on the force structure complicated the work of NATO planners in translating flexible response into concrete plans. Once skeptical of the whole idea, the Joint Chiefs had gradually come to accept it as long as it did not rule out recourse to nuclear weapons should a defense with conventional firepower falter.[60] Accordingly, throughout the 1960s, the Joint Chiefs continued to stockpile tactical-sized nuclear weapons and delivery systems in Europe. By the end of the decade, the nuclear arsenal earmarked for NATO had doubled in size to more than 7,000 bombs and warheads.[61] At the same time, because of overriding priorities in Vietnam, U.S. reserves available to NATO declined drastically. In 1961 when Kennedy and McNamara began talking about flexible response, the United States had a

strategic reserve force of one infantry and two airborne divisions earmarked for immediate deployment to Europe. By 1968, the NATO-committed reserve was down to two airborne brigades available by M+30 and one airborne, one mechanized, and two infantry brigades by M+60. Time and again, from the mid-1960s on, the Joint Chiefs urged a call-up of Reservists and an increase in Active-duty strength to overcome the shortfall. For fiscal and political reasons, President Johnson turned them down.[62]

Meanwhile, efforts to achieve a nonnuclear defense continued to meet strong resistance from NATO's European members. The most difficult to convince (once the French took themselves out of the debate by withdrawing from NATO's Military Committee in 1966) were the West Germans, who feared that flexible response would increase the risk of a conventional conflict. Clinging to the defense doctrines of the 1950s, West German military leaders contended that threatening the Soviets with the early use of nuclear weapons constituted "the very nature of the strategy of deterrence." Operating on this premise, they insisted that nuclear weapons continued to be "the most significant political instrument for the defense of NATO Europe."[63] But under persistent American pressure, their resistance gradually wore down, paving the way for NATO planners to reconcile differences and adopt the new flexible response strategy in December 1967.

A tribute to McNamara's hard work and determination, MC 14/3 was the most far-reaching revision of NATO strategy since adoption of the original strategic concept in 1950. Ending primary reliance on nuclear weapons, it mandated an initial defense "as far forward as is necessary and possible," supported by "sufficient ground, sea and air forces in a high state of readiness." While MC 14/3 did not dictate exclusive reliance on conventional arms, it clearly stated that the "first objective" should be to "counter the aggression without escalation."[64] In interpreting these instructions, the rule of thumb for Alliance planners was that NATO should be capable of mounting sustained conventional operations for up to 30 days.[65] According to Sir Michael Quinlan, Britain's leading nuclear strategist and a key participant in the debate leading up to the adoption of MC 14/3, one of the purposes behind the new strategy was to send a clear signal to the Soviets. "We rightly believed," Quinlan later related, "[that] Soviet Intelligence would obtain accounts of the policy discussions that had taken place behind closed doors, so we tried to ensure that two key messages got through to Moscow—first, NATO had faced up to the tough issues of nuclear use; and second, NATO would not take provocative or hasty action."[66]

A companion document—MC 48/3—dealt with implementation measures. Framed in broad language, MC 48/3 called for improved intelligence, coordination, readiness, and logistical support to increase NATO's capacity for flexibility in

response to aggression. Unlike earlier exhortations, however, this one fell mostly on deaf ears and remained unapproved in NATO's military committee system for the next several years.[67] A more accurate barometer of NATO sentiment was the Harmel Report, adopted in conjunction with MC 14/3. Named for Belgian Foreign Minister Pierre Harmel, the chairman of the committee that produced it, the report addressed "future tasks which face the Alliance" and reflected a distinctly European perspective in urging a dual policy of defense and détente. As part of this process, it suggested exploring confidence-building measures to improve East-West relations and stepped up efforts toward arms control and disarmament. "Military security and a policy of détente," the report argued, "are not contradictory but complementary." Given the overall tenor of the Harmel panel's findings, it was clear that, while the European Allies accepted flexible response in principle, they viewed it as a less than credible form of deterrence unless accompanied by a fundamental change in the East-West political climate. Before proceeding much further in implementing flexible response, they wanted to explore relaxing tensions and improving relations with the Soviet bloc.[68]

Whether flexible response would reduce the dangers of a nuclear war never ceased to be a hotly contested issue. With the United States preoccupied in Vietnam and with many European Allies skeptical of the American commitment, the link between the security of NATO territory and nuclear weapons was as strong and as close as ever, the adoption of MC 14/3 notwithstanding. Acknowledging as much, McNamara told President Johnson that, despite "years of effort," NATO still had a long way to go "to deal successfully with any kind of nonnuclear attack without using nuclear weapons ourselves." Concurring with this assessment, the Joint Chiefs continued to see no other choice than "early selective employment of nuclear weapons" to counter even a limited Warsaw Pact attack. An agreed concept on paper, flexible response still had a long way to go before becoming an attainable objective on the battlefield.[69]

THE DAMAGE LIMITATION DEBATE

NATO's adoption of flexible response marked a major turning point in Alliance strategy. In theory, it moved away from dependence on massive retaliation and, by positing a broader range of conventional responses, lessened the dangers of a nuclear war in Europe. But by the mid-1960s, the larger and more urgent problem facing the Joint Chiefs and other Western military planners was the relentless expansion of the Soviet ICBM force. As these deployments continued, they threatened to negate the U.S. advantage in strategic nuclear power and, with it, the concept of extended

deterrence on which transatlantic security ultimately rested. With their own strategic force levels effectively frozen, the JCS sought qualitative enhancements to U.S. capabilities, largely in two areas. One was a new system of multiple independently targetable reentry vehicles, or MIRVs, which enhanced the capabilities of a single long-range missile by increasing the number of warheads it could carry. The other was the advent of improved interceptors and tracking radars for ballistic missile defense, which made an American ABM a more credible and attractive option for countering the growing Soviet missile force. Out of the debate over these issues, summarily referred to by the Joint Chiefs as "damage limitation" measures, emerged not only a series of fateful decisions affecting refinements in the strategic posture, but also a new realm of negotiations with the Soviets—the Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT).

MIRV appealed to McNamara and the JCS alike, but for different reasons. For the Joint Chiefs, MIRV was a way of upgrading strategic capabilities while staying within the limits of the programmed missile force, which the Secretary of Defense had capped at 1,054 ICBMs and 41 ballistic missile submarines. For McNamara, it was a convenient way of fending off JCS requests for new systems—an advanced manned strategic bomber (the AMSA, later the B–1) to replace the obsolescent B–52 and a larger, more powerful ICBM (the MX)—on the grounds that, with MIRV factored in, programmed delivery systems would more than satisfy targeting requirements. As McNamara saw it, in other words, MIRV enhanced the Services' capabilities, but it was also a mechanism for imposing restraint on the acquisition process.

Proposals for deploying multiple warheads on a missile dated from the late 1950s. The earliest missile that actually incorporated a multiple warhead design was the Navy's Polaris A–3, first tested in 1962 and declared operational aboard submarines 2 years later. Capable of carrying three 200 kiloton warheads, the A–3 employed a system of multiple reentry vehicles (MRVs) that, instead of being independently targeted, applied a "shotgun" pattern against a single target. Since SLBMs were less accurate and reliable than land-based ICBMs, targeting planners in Omaha generally held them in reserve for follow-on attacks against "soft" targets like troop concentrations and urban-industrial facilities.[70]

Fully developed MIRV systems came along later, emerging from design studies done by the Air Force's Ballistic Systems Division in the early 1960s and the Navy's Special Projects Office. More sophisticated and versatile than the A–3, a MIRVed reentry vehicle (known as a "bus") could attack several separate targets simultaneously or one target redundantly. The Joint Chiefs considered it imperative to develop a submarine-launched MIRV missile (the Poseidon), and indicated

that they would also welcome MIRVed versions of the Minuteman ICBM (known as Minuteman III), which the Air Force planned to deploy in the late 1960s.[71] To increase the versatility and effectiveness of programmed forces, the JCS sought and obtained penetration aids, improvements in command and control, and increased missile accuracy. However, they were unsuccessful in persuading McNamara to accept higher-yield warheads and other qualitative improvements that would have further boosted counterforce potential by threatening "hardened" targets like Soviet missile silos and command bunkers. Although McNamara conceded that these measures would limit damage to the United States, he refused to embrace damage-limitation as his overriding priority.[72]

McNamara believed that were he to accept the full range of the Joint Chiefs' proposed enhancements and make damage limitation a high-priority objective, he would be signaling to the Soviets that the United States was striving for a first-strike capability. The result, he feared, would destabilize relations with Moscow and increase the risk of a Soviet preemptive attack in a crisis. Thus, as plans and preparations for MIRV deployment went forward, McNamara continued to think in terms of assured destruction. For Poseidon, he rejected a counterforce MIRV package consisting of warheads in the three-megaton range, and opted instead for the C–3 reentry vehicle, which could deliver a large number of relatively small warheads and was best suited for urban-industrial attacks. He likewise insisted that the Air Force's Minuteman III use a three-warhead "light" version of the MK–12 RV, a configuration the Air Force considered best suited for attacking soft targets, rather than the MK–12 "heavy" design (also known as the MK–17), which could have delivered a larger payload.[73]

Unable to make much headway with McNamara in configuring offensive forces for damage-limitation purposes, the Joint Chiefs eyed recent advances in ballistic missile defense technology to help achieve their goals. By 1965, the JCS had changed their minds about ABM and now embraced it as an essential strategic requirement in the JSOP, their annual mid-range estimate of military programs.[74] What sparked the shift in the JCS position is not clear. British historian Lawrence Freedman explains it as a reaction within the military to McNamara's policies, a feeling that the time had come to challenge his whole strategic philosophy.[75] Morton H. Halperin, who served on McNamara's staff, remembered it more as the product of tradeoffs between the Services and bureaucratic politics.[76] Personalities also played a part. As Air Force Chief of Staff, LeMay had never had much confidence in ABM being able to cope with a large-scale enemy attack. Preferring to invest in offensive weapons, LeMay had probably done as much as anyone other than McNamara to block JCS endorsement of the ABM program. However, his

successor, General John P. McConnell, USAF, who joined the JCS in February 1965, was more open-minded and flexible on the missile defense issue.[77] Also, with Taylor's departure in July 1964 to become Ambassador to South Vietnam and General Earle G. Wheeler's appointment as Chairman, the JCS were again under "one of their own," in whom they had greater confidence to present their views and argue their case with the Secretary and the President.

Whatever their motivations, the Joint Chiefs had a strong incentive, based on intelligence reports, to review and change their position on missile defense. From about 50 ICBM launchers in mid-1962 and a handful of ballistic missile submarines, Soviet capabilities had increased to an estimated strength to 350–400 ICBMs and 36 ballistic missile submarines by the mid-1960s. As part of this buildup, the Soviets had phased out their first generation SS–6 ICBMs, and were proceeding posthaste with the deployment of a more effective and easier-to-use second generation (the SS–7, the SS–9, and the SS–11). Though about 40 percent of the Soviet ICBM force remained above ground in "soft" configurations, all new deployments were in hardened underground silos. The Intelligence Community projected Soviet capabilities of approximately a thousand ICBM launchers by the end of the decade (equal in number to the programmed U.S. deployment) and 40–50 ballistic missile submarines.[78]

No less unsettling was evidence that the Soviets were pursuing a well-defined ballistic missile defense R&D program, which could complicate U.S. targeting and reduce the attainment of assured destruction goals. Like the Soviet ICBM program a few years earlier, Soviet BMD development had become a source of intense controversy within the Intelligence Community. The Army and Air Force saw the Soviets engaged in a massive BMD effort, while the CIA, State Department, National Security Agency, and Naval Intelligence reserved judgment.[79] Under study were the characteristics and capabilities of three known systems: one around Leningrad, apparently started as an air-defense system, which the Soviets suddenly dismantled in 1964 prior to completion; a second, known as the "Tallinn Line," also for air defense with discernible ABM capabilities; and a third, known as "Galosh," the most advanced and sophisticated, under construction around Moscow. All three exhibited design features seen at the Soviet ABM development and test center at Shary Sagan.[80]

Worried that the Moscow system might give the Soviets a critical advantage, the Joint Chiefs recommended in early December 1966 that Secretary McNamara and President Johnson begin full-scale ABM production and deployment without delay.[81] The ABM the Joint Chiefs proposed to field was the Nike-X, successor to the Army's earlier Nike-Zeus, which offered initial protection for up to 25 American cities. In contrast to the point defense concept used in Nike-Zeus, Nike-X was

a layered defense with area-wide applications. Employing the basic Zeus missile (later renamed Spartan) for long-range interception, it would use a second interceptor, the Sprint, to destroy whatever leaked through the first line of defense. The principal advantage of Nike-X over any of its predecessors was its phased array radar, a major breakthrough in battle management pioneered by the Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA; later, the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) under a set of studies known as Project Defender. Faster and more accurate than the manually operated Nike-Zeus radar system, phased array radar used solid-state electronics and high-capacity computers to process large amounts of data quickly, track multiple reentry vehicles, and guide interceptor missiles to their targets all at the same time. While there were still serious "bugs" in the system, not the least of which was its limited capacity to distinguish decoys from real warheads, Nike-X seemed a giant stride toward more effective missile defense.[82]

Nike-X had originally been McNamara's idea, an outgrowth of his efforts during the Kennedy administration to find a more reliable and cost-effective alternative to Nike-Zeus.[83] But as he drifted away from the counterforce/no-cities doctrine and became increasingly committed to the assured destruction concept, he lost interest in pursuing strategic defense and related damage-limitation options such as civil defense.[84] "It is our ability to destroy an attacker," he argued, ". . . that provides the deterrent, not our ability to partially limit damage to ourselves."[85] For advice, he turned to scientists who opposed the whole notion of ABM and contractors who doubted whether Nike-X was sufficiently advanced for deployment.[86] Contrary assessments, like the 1964 Betts Report, an internal DOD study that endorsed missile defense as both feasible and compatible with the preservation of mutual nuclear deterrence, had no apparent impact on his thinking.[87] Indeed, McNamara became firmly convinced that the pursuit of BMD by both sides was provocative and destabilizing and that it represented an open-ended invitation to a costly escalation of the arms race. He seemed to feel also that the responsibility for showing restraint fell more on the United States than the Soviet Union. "Were we to deploy a heavy ABM system throughout the United States," he maintained, "the Soviets would clearly be strongly motivated to so increase their offensive capability as to cancel out our defensive advantage."[88]

The showdown over Nike-X came during the final markup of the FY 1968 defense budget in early December 1966, shortly after the JCS recommended proceeding with deployment. By now, the Moscow "Galosh" ABM was public knowledge, and there was growing support for missile defense among key Democrats in Congress. Among these were some of the President's closest friends, including Senators Richard Russell, Jr., Henry M. Jackson, and John C. Stennis, whose continuing

cooperation the White House needed in the face of mounting opposition to the administration's Vietnam policies.[89] While the President shared McNamara's concerns over an expensive and dangerous arms race with the Soviets, he leaned toward the JCS position that the time had come to settle the ABM debate.

Matters reached a head at a budget review meeting attended by McNamara, the Joint Chiefs, and the President in Austin, Texas, on December 6, 1966. Though aware that the decision could go either way, the JCS had good reason to be confident that the momentum was moving in their favor. Taking steps to outmaneuver them, McNamara offered a compromise that consisted of two components—a token deployment of Nike-X in the mid-1970s against an as-yet nonexistent (but expected) Chinese ICBM threat, to show the Soviets and critics alike that the administration was serious about missile defense, in tandem with exploratory talks to see if Kremlin leaders would be interested in a negotiated "freeze" on future ABMs. The deal was too good for Johnson to pass up. Not only would it confirm the administration's determination to respond to an increasingly dangerous situation, it would also save money at a time when the costs for the Vietnam War were becoming onerous. Above all, both elements of the compromise would shore up the President's image as a peacemaker. Making no secret of their disappointment, the Joint Chiefs acquiesced.[90]

The President's decision proved neither firm nor final. Returning to Washington, he met in early January 1967 with a group of distinguished scientists who convinced him (apparently without much difficulty) that even a limited ABM deployment would accelerate the arms race, undermine the chances for arms control, and be "extremely dangerous."[91] Johnson accepted the scientists' advice and in his budget message to Congress toward the end of the month he announced his intention to continue "intensive development" of Nike-X, but to hold production and deployment in abeyance pending exploratory talks with the Soviets to curb or freeze ABMs.[92]

Whether the talks with the Soviets would be productive remained to be seen. Until then, arms control negotiations involving the United States and the Soviet Union had yielded only two agreements—the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty negotiated under Kennedy, and a pending Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), with key clauses still in draft form. Doubtful whether the NPT would significantly improve U.S. security, the JCS hoped the administration would not "aggressively pursue" it.[93] In the case of the proposed freeze on ABMs, as with practically all other arms control matters, the Joint Chiefs' uppermost concern was the adequacy and effectiveness of verification measures. To avoid any misunderstanding of their position, they notified McNamara that they would resist "any proposal" that might

foreclose deployment of missile defenses or prevent planned improvements to offensive forces.[94]

Seeking a breakthrough, President Johnson and Secretary McNamara arranged a meeting with Soviet Premier Alexei N. Kosygin at Glassboro, New Jersey, in late June 1967, while Kosygin was in the United States addressing the UN General Assembly. A showy, impromptu affair, the Glassboro summit benefited from none of the detailed staff work and prior exchanges that might have narrowed differences and paved the way for an agreement. Neither side brought along any senior military representatives. Despite a vigorous presentation of his views, McNamara failed to convince Kosygin that a freeze on ABM deployments was in the best interests of all concerned. By stressing curbs on missile defense, he apparently misled Kosygin into believing that the United States was indifferent toward restraints on offensive arms. McNamara and Johnson rushed to assure Kosygin that this was not so. But the damage was irremeable. As McNamara recalled the scene, Kosygin "absolutely erupted." Turning red in the face, he pounded the table. "Defense is moral," he declared, "offense is immoral." Concluding that the Soviet leader probably lacked the authority to make a deal, Johnson and McNamara shrugged off their disappointment and returned to Washington empty-handed.[95]

SENTINEL AND THE SEEDS OF SALT

If it accomplished nothing else, the Glassboro summit confirmed that the administration had no choice but to move ahead on ABM. Indeed, once Kosygin rejected American overtures for a freeze, deployment by the United States became virtually certain. In addition to the Soviet threat, there was now the danger posed by the Communist Chinese, who had detonated a thermonuclear device the week before the Glassboro summit. Speculation was rife that even if the administration opted against a "heavy" ABM aimed against the Soviets, it would still deploy a "thin" defense against the Chinese.[96] A heated debate developed in Congress, while at the Pentagon the Joint Chiefs put renewed pressure on McNamara to lift the prohibition on deployment and approve the heavy system they had recommended earlier. The JCS rarely prioritized military or Service programs. But in this instance, they told McNamara that they could think of "no other action . . . more necessary" to the Nation's security than full production and deployment of Nike-X. Not only would a firm decision remove all doubt about American resolve, they maintained, but also it "would either stimulate Soviet participation in meaningful negotiations or disclose their lack of serious interest in this matter." Here in a nutshell was the conundrum of Cold War arms control: to convince the other side to curb or eliminate

weapons, one had first to demonstrate one's readiness to bear the risk and expense of acquiring them, if only to see them later negotiated away as a bargaining chip.[97]

With the JCS and powerful figures in Congress pushing for deployment, McNamara launched a feverish search for a credible alternative. Above all, he wanted to preserve the arms control option and avoid giving the Soviets an excuse to increase their offensive arsenal. For budgetary planning purposes, he notified the JCS in early August 1967 that he was still leaning toward a limited ballistic missile defense to deal with the emerging Chinese threat and, as a bonus, to provide a small degree of protection for Minuteman missile fields.[98] The JCS did not doubt the potential threat posed by the Chinese, but they saw that threat as rather remote and could find no urgent need for the protection of missile fields, given the imperfect accuracy of Soviet missiles and the hardness of U.S. silos. They continued to believe that the first order of business should be a full-scale nationwide ABM deployment.[99] As far as McNamara was concerned, however, the matter was closed. In a well publicized speech in San Francisco on September 18, 1967, he confirmed that the United States was going ahead with a limited ABM deployment aimed against Communist China rather than the Soviet Union. While this was a volte-face from his previous position on missile defense, McNamara insisted that his strategic objectives were unchanged and that preserving assured destruction ("the very essence of the whole deterrence concept") remained his paramount concern.[100]

Attempting to put the best possible interpretation on the Secretary's decision, the Joint Chiefs treated it not as the beginning of the end for ABM, but as the end of the beginning.[101] Nonetheless, ABM faced an uncertain future and over the ensuing year it remained the subject of intense legislative debate, diplomatic maneuvering, and Pentagon infighting. As he was leaving office in February 1968, McNamara was still cautioning against an anti-Soviet ABM and insisting that assured destruction constituted the only reliable and effective form of deterrence. Skeptical, the Joint Chiefs in April 1968 urged McNamara's successor, Clark M. Clifford, and his deputy, Paul H. Nitze, to approve a nationwide ABM system (now dubbed Sentinel) for full deployment by FY77. Their efforts, however, were no more successful with Clifford and Nitze than they had been with McNamara.[102] Even though the Army began acquiring Sentinel deployment sites during this time, it remained to be seen whether the incoming Nixon administration would carry the program forward.[103]

As the Johnson Presidency drew to a close, it was increasingly likely that the fate of ABM would be decided at the negotiating table, as McNamara had hoped. Though the Glassboro summit had failed to achieve a breakthrough, behind-the-scenes talks held afterwards in conjunction with the final negotiation of the NPT yielded broad agreement between Washington and Moscow that the time was ripe to address larger arms controls issues. On July 1, 1968, in conjunction with the

signing of the NPT, the two sides announced their intention to discuss limiting offensive and defensive strategic weapons systems.[104] The date and place of these talks were about to be announced when, on August 20, Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia, crushing that country's nascent democracy and causing the Johnson administration to postpone arms control negotiations indefinitely. But as the Nixon administration was taking office on January 20, 1969, the Soviet Foreign Ministry expressed renewed interest in limitations on strategic arms. The long-anticipated SALT negotiations were soon to begin.

For the Joint Chiefs, as for others in the military establishment, McNamara's departure and the end of the Johnson administration constituted a watershed. In the corridors of the Pentagon it was said that the history of the Defense Department fell into two periods—before McNamara and after. Not only did the administrative and managerial reforms he instituted reshape Pentagon business practices; they also had profound effects in the areas of weapons procurement, force structure, and military doctrine. More than any other Secretary of Defense, he fundamentally transformed the way the country thought about and approached armed conflict. Prior to McNamara, the decisions affecting the force structure, its composition, and the strategic concepts under which it operated had been largely in the hands of military professionals—the Joint Chiefs of Staff—who worked under broad guidance from the President, the Secretary of Defense, and the National Security Council. But during McNamara's tenure, such decisions became a joint function of the JCS organization and analysts in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, with the latter often having the final word. Combined with the handling and political repercussions of the war in Vietnam, the net effect was a dramatically reduced role and influence for the military in national security affairs, to a level not seen since the 1930s.

NOTES

1 Lyndon Baines Johnson, *The Vantage Point: Perspectives of the Presidency, 1963–1969* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), 19.

2 William W. Kaufmann, *The McNamara Strategy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1964), 2–3.

3 Interview with Stephen Ailes by Maurice Matloff, June 6, 1986, 22–23, OSD Oral History Collection, OSD Historical Office.

4 Alain C. Enthoven and K. Wayne Smith, *How Much Is Enough? Shaping the Defense Program, 1961–1969* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 54.

5 Report, J-5 to JCS, May 29, 1959, "Joint Program for Planning," JCS 2089/13. Limited to 3 years at first, the JCS extended the timeframe of the JSOP to 5 years because, by the late 1950s, that was about the length of time it took to develop and field a new weapon. In the mid-1960s, it was extended to 8 to make it more comprehensive.

6 See Memo, JCS to SECDEF, June 6, 1958, "JSOP for July 1, 1962," JCS 2143/78; and Byron R. Fairchild and Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1957–1960* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, 2000), 37–42.

7 Walter S. Poole, *The Joint Chiefs of Staff and National Policy, 1961–1964* (Washington, DC: Office of Joint History, Office of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2011), 20–23.

8 Lawrence S. Kaplan, Ronald D. Landa, and Edward J. Drea, *The McNamara Ascendancy, 1961–1965* (Washington, DC: OSD Historical Office, 2006), 296–297. From FY72 on, the term "posture statement" applied to the annual threat assessment submitted to Congress by the CJCS.

9 CM-109-62 to DJS, November 14, 1962, "Planning Directive for Reorienting JSOP-68," JCS 2143/177.

10 JCS Decision Statistics, 1958–1982, JCS "Splits" folder, JHO 14-003.

11 Walter S. Poole, *The Evolution of the Joint Strategic Planning System, 1947–1989* (Washington, DC: Historical Division, Joint Secretariat, Joint Staff, 1989), 7–8; Enthoven and Smith, 94–95.

12 See Lawrence Freedman, *U.S. Intelligence and the Soviet Strategic Threat*, 2d ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986), 73, 205 fn. 36.

13 Memo, SECDEF to SecArmy et al., February 10, 1961, "Military Budgets and National Security Policy," JCS 1800/401; Letter, McNamara to Kennedy, February 20, 1961, *FRUS, 1961–63*, VIII, 35–48.

14 Memo, SECDEF to Director BoB, March 10, 1961, "Revisions to Defense FY 1962 Budget," *FRUS, 1961–63*, VIII, 56–65.

15 Robert S. McNamara, *Blundering into Disaster* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1987), 51.

16 Item No. 2, "Projects Within the Dept of Defense Assigned 8 March 1961," enclosure to Memo, SECDEF to Secretaries Military Departments et al., March 8, 1961, JCS 2101/413.

17 JCSM-153-61 to SECDEF, March 11, 1961, "Foreign Policy Considerations Bearing on the U.S. Defense Posture," JCS 2101/412; CM-190-61 to SECDEF, April 18, 1961, "Doctrine on Thermonuclear Attack," JCS 1899/640.

18 DPM, December 6, 1963, "Recommended FY 1965–1969 Strategic Retaliatory Forces," *FRUS, 1961–63*, VIII, 549. See also Edward J. Drea, *McNamara, Clifford, and the Burdens of Vietnam, 1965–69* (Washington, DC: Historical Office, Office of the Secretary of Defense, 2011), 347.

19 See Kaplan et al., 305–309; and Janne E. Nolan, *Guardians of the Arsenal: The Politics of Nuclear Strategy* (New York: Basic Books, 1989), 74–77.

20 Aleksandr Fursenko and Timothy Naftali, *Khrushchev's Cold War: The Inside Story of an American Adversary* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 442.

21 See JCSM-252-61, April 18, 1961, "Doctrine on Thermonuclear Attack," JCS 1899/640.

22 Desmond Ball, "The Development of the SIOP, 1960–1983," in Desmond Ball and Jeffrey Richelson, eds., *Strategic Nuclear Targeting* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 57–70; David Alan Rosenberg, "U.S. Nuclear Strategy: Theory and Practice," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (March 1987), 23–26; and Kaplan et al., 310–311, 316–319.

23 McNamara Interview in Michael Charlton, *From Deterrence to Defense: The Inside Story of Strategic Policy* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987), 9–10. The 10,000 missile figure was apparently Powers' personal estimate and had no official Air Force standing.

24 Bernard C. Nalty, "USAF Ballistic Missile Programs, 1962–1964" (Study Prepared for the USAF Historical Division Liaison Office, April 1966), 10–11.

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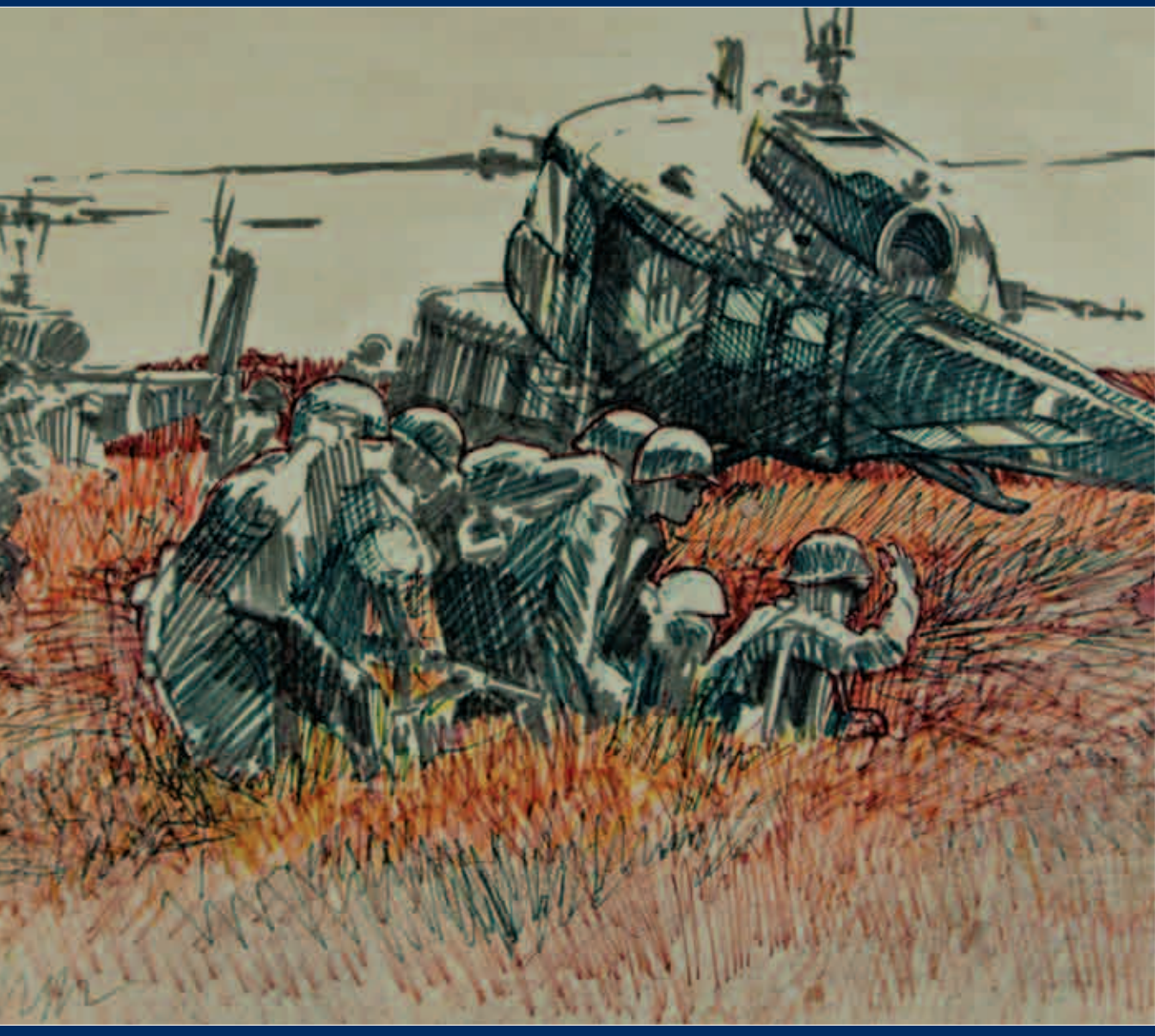

Chopper Pick Up, by Brian H. Clark (Courtesy of the Center of Military History)